Sai Siddartha Maram

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Education

Ph.D., University of California, Santa Cruz, USA – Human Computer Interaction — August 2021 – May 2026

B.E. in Computer Engineering, Thapar University, Punjab, India — August 2016 – May 2020

Work Experience

UX Research Intern, Microsoft, USA — June 2025 – September 2025

- Conducted semi-structured interviews with Xbox researchers to identify that usability signals were being lost in unmoderated playtests. Engineered an **agentic UX workflow** (OpenAI/Power Automate) that surfaces critical gameplay moments, allowing the team to **scale qualitative analysis across entire playtest cohorts**.
- Recognized that repetitive thematic coding was consuming 40% of research time. **Conducted co-design sessions with Xbox researchers** to design and develop a human-in-the-loop approach towards thematic coding; architected **AURA Canvas** (an LLM-based tool) to automate this process, freeing up **5 hours per study** for higher-level synthesis.
- Conducted playtests to validate core game mechanics for **Halo, Call of Duty, and Perfect Dark** by orchestrating a **mixed-methods framework**; piloted experimental **LLM-moderated interviews** to capture qualitative rationale at scale, triangulating these insights with weighted survey data to robustly prioritize features.

UX Research Intern, Microsoft, USA — June 2024 – September 2024

- Revealed through **13 usability studies** that **redundant feature sets** across Xbox and Family Safety apps created "navigation loops" that confused parents; evidence drove the decision to **consolidate 3 features**.
- Uncovered that parental control "safety flags" were often buried in monthly reports; deployed an **LLM-based sentiment pipeline** to surface high-risk interactions instantly, shifting the safety strategy from **reactive auditing to real-time triage**.
- Found that parents struggle to enforce screen limits without **positive reinforcement mechanisms**; shifted the product roadmap from purely restrictive controls to **reward-based habit building** based on co-design sessions.

UX Research Intern, Meta, USA — June 2022 – September 2022

- Conducted co-design sessions to identify Gen-Z desire for **synchronous shared experiences** (e.g., listening to music together) within asynchronous feeds; validated and helped ideate social features like Spotify Connect which now serve **millions of users**.
- Uncovered that users view sports content not just as entertainment, but as a **critical mechanism for discovering and connecting with friends**; utilized this insight to drive the strategy for **Facebook Sports Cards** (e.g., NFL), a live feature now actively facilitating community connections.

UX Researcher, GUII Lab, USA — June 2021 – June 2024

- Deployed **LLM embeddings** (Gemini/OpenAI) to conduct a large-scale semantic analysis of **Reddit discourse**, successfully mapping the distinct ways **religious communities discuss videogames** versus how **gaming communities discuss religion** (Published: **CHI Play'24**, Best Paper **DIS'25**).
- Established that current game design frameworks lack a vocabulary for **cultural representation**; created a **design taxonomy** derived from 10 stakeholder interviews to help developers avoid cultural stereotypes (Published: **CSCW'23, CHI'22, FDG'23, ICEC'22**).
- Identified **8 distinct reflection strategies** that students use when interacting with AI tutors, informing a new department-wide curriculum on **LLM-based learning** (Published: **ACM CHI '23**).

Skills

Research Methods: User Interviews, Game User Research, User Journeys, Card Sorting, Diary Studies, Thematic Analysis, Grounded Theory, Participatory Design, Co-Design, Usability Testing, Information Architecture, Surveys, Statistical Analysis

Tools & Technologies: Figma, NVivo, Dscout, Qualtrics, Atlas, Python (Advanced), SQL (Advanced), R, HTML, Databricks, Unity, CSS, JavaScript, ML/LLMs, MCPs