

# Towards Consolidating the UX Knowledge

Xiaolu Bai

Department of Psychological Sciences, Purdue University

## Background

The field of user experience (UX) is joined by practitioners and researchers from a wide range of disciplines. This field keeps growing with neither a standardized definition [1] nor a coherent body of knowledge. Hence, UX professionals are still in the phase of consolidating UX knowledge and delineating the boundaries between UX and other related fields such as graphic design and web design. In this project, I examine a group of UX professionals' online communication practices around UX knowledge in the "/r/userexperience/" subreddit.

## Objective

The research goal is to find out the types of knowledge that UX professionals discussed as they attempted to define what belongs to UX knowledge or not. The results can help understand the places where UX professionals pushed or defended boundaries with the ultimate purpose of consolidating a body of UX knowledge.

## Methods

Analysis of online interaction have previously been beneficial in documenting learning and knowledge sharing in other fields such as education [2]. UX practitioners' online discussion could provide a way of understanding UX practice. 387 threads were analyzed on Reddit which are under the categories of UX knowledge, UX critique, and project advice. The goal was to find out threads that people have obvious disagreement, and categorized the them into different aspects.

## Results

Overall, few disagreements were observed among the threads, indicating that the UX field might be in the phase of absorbing knowledge from multiple related disciplines. However, controversial threads did appear in three major categories:

### 1. Is a specific feature is user friendly:

*Title:* Newsletter pop-ups, we've all had enough!

*Comment:* they work decently well and I think that most users that weren't going to sign up anyway are used to them and just ignore them.

### 2. Is a skill is necessary for UX:

*Title:* Should a UX designer have skills to draw and/or illustrate?

*Comment 1:* Freehand drawing skill is important in conjunction with wireframe and interface sketches, it indicates strong but relevant illustration skills

*Comment 2:* No important. There's plenty of software to help with that

### 3. How to define UX:

*Title:* How do you define UX?

*Comment 1:* Customer experience.

*Comment 2:* CX is not UX.

*Comment 3:* Also, if UX is inside of CX, then UX must be a part of CX. Simple logic. So you can view UX as CX.

*Comment 4:* "UX must be a part of CX" - Yes. "So you can view UX as CX" - No. Apparently not so simple. The icing on a cake is part of the cake - but it cannot be viewed as the cake.

## Conclusion

I found that most controversies occurred around three themes: a specific feature, a skill, and the definition of UX. Previous research suggested UX design was dynamic, context-dependent and subjective [3]. Although there were still controversies on the definition, the threads showed that UX had a clearer boundary than it used to be. It also suggests that the designers' community is still at the phase of bringing in all sorts of knowledge together and people are trying to define boundaries of UX design by talking about specific things.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my very great appreciation to Dr. Colin Gray and Dr. Yubo Kou for their valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development this work. I would also like to extend my thanks to Discovery Park Undergraduate Research Internship (DURI) Program

## Reference

- [1] Lallemand, C., Gronier, G., & Koenig, V. (2015). User experience: A concept without consensus? Exploring practitioners' perspectives through an international survey. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 43, 35–48. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.10.048
- [2] Gray, C. M., & Howard, C. D. (2014). Designerly Talk in Non-Pedagogical Social Spaces. *Journal of Learning Design*, 7(1). doi:10.5204/jld.v7i1.153
- [3] Law, E. L., Roto, V., Hassenzahl, M., Vermeeren, A. P., & Kort, J. (2009). Understanding, scoping and defining user experience. *Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI 09*. doi:10.1145/1518701.1518813