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# Towards a Shared Definition of User Experience

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**Abstract**

User experience (UX) is still an elusive notion with many different definitions, despite some recent attempts to develop a unified view on UX. The lack of a shared definition of UX not only confuses or even misleads customers of a product/service but also undermines the effectiveness of researching, managing and teaching UX. Diverse ideas have been generated in scientific activities that aim to develop a common understanding about the meaning and scope of UX. It is plausible, with sound methodologies, to converge these divergences, driving the UX community closer to a common definition and integrated views of UX. This SIG tackles this challenge by systematically assembling a set of existing definitions and viewpoints of UX and collecting opinions on them from known UX experts/researchers and general CHI'08 attendees.

**Keywords**

User experience, Definition, Usability

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

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### Introduction

It is an intriguing phenomenon that the notion User Experience (UX) has been widely disseminated and speedily accepted in the HCI community, however, without it being clearly defined or well understood. The immense interest in UX in academia and industry can be attributed to the fact that HCI researchers and practitioners have become well aware of the limitations of the traditional usability framework, which focuses primarily on user cognition and user performance in human-technology interactions. In contrast, UX highlights non-utilitarian aspects of such interactions, shifting the focus to user affect and sensation. Hence, UX is seen as *something* desirable, though what exactly *something* means remains open and debatable. In recent years, conferences, workshops, forums, and similar activities aiming to better understand UX and to develop a unified view on UX have been held (e.g., [3, 7]). One obvious outcome of these activities is a number of diverse definitions and viewpoints on UX, but a shared definition of UX is still lacking. Interestingly, some authors tend to eschew defining UX, while elaborating the significance of designing (for) UX and obstacles to attaining it. The compelling question is: Why is it so challenging to reach a common definition of UX?

We recognize several critical uses of a UX definition: (i) It facilitates scientific discourses, especially when scholars from multiple disciplines are involved; otherwise, communication breakdowns are bound to occur; (ii) It enables managing practical applications of UX, which needs to be operationalized and evaluated against measurements; (iii) It helps the teaching of the term with the fundamental understanding about its nature and scope.

There are several reasons why it is hard to get a universal definition of UX. First, UX is associated with a broad range of fuzzy and dynamic concepts, including emotional, affective, experiential, hedonic, and aesthetic variables. Typical examples of so-called elemental attributes of UX like fun, pleasure, pride, joy, surprise, and intimacy are but a subset of a growing list of human values [2]. Inclusion and exclusion of particular values or attributes seem arbitrary, depending on the author's background and interest. Second, the unit of analysis for UX is too malleable, ranging from a single aspect of an individual end-user's interaction with a standalone application to all aspects of multiple end-users' interactions with the company and the merging of the services of multiple disciplines [11]. Third, the landscape of UX research is fragmented and complicated by diverse theoretical models with different foci such as emotion, affect, experience, value, pleasure, beauty, etc. [e.g. 4, 6, 9, 12].

While reaching a shared definition is not a panacea for resolving a number of problems pertaining to UX, it serves as an initial and crucial step towards an integrated framework of UX.

### Main Goal and Objectives

As pointed out in the foregoing discussion, there exist a number of definitions and viewpoints of UX. They are disintegrated and scattered in different forms and contexts. It is the high time to harmonize this fragmentation and to consolidate this pool of loose knowledge - the main goal of this SIG. To attain it, the workshop aims to collect ratings, comments, and suggestions on different definitions and viewpoints on UX. Target groups are known UX experts/researchers, the SIG participants and the plenum of CHI'08. The

quantitative and qualitative data thus collected can help us gain deeper understanding of UX and enable us to get closer to a unified UX definition.

### SIG organization

The format of this SIG is structured as well as open. It is structured as it systematically sets a stage which presents prevalent UX ideas. It is open as any person interested can play a role, contributing their voices and actions.

### Pre-SIG Activities

The first challenge to be tackled by the SIG organizers is to prepare a questionnaire, which consists of two parts: a set of five UX definitions (Table 1) and a list of 20 statements on UX (Table 2). Both parts are derived from the UX literature. Specifically, the definitions will be selected based on how well they are accepted (i.e. citation frequency) in different domains (e.g., industry [10], research [5], design [8], or general public [13]), and the statements will be condensed from the arguments recurrently addressed. Respondents will first be asked to comment on the given definitions, select one they prefer and explain why, and they can even propose a new one. Then they will be asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale to what extent they agree (or disagree) with each of the UX statements. Free-text comments on the statements will be encouraged and new statements can be proposed. Prior to CHI'08, the questionnaire (a web-based electronic version) will be administered via email to known UX experts, researchers, and practitioners, and to the participants of three CHI'08 workshops on UX and value. Data thus collected will be analyzed before CHI'08. During CHI'08, the paper version of the questionnaire will be distributed openly to all CHI'08 attendees and

responses will be gathered with collection boxes at the conference venue. We aim to gather altogether more than 100 responses.

**Table 1:** Sample User Experience definitions

- Alben [1]: All the aspects of how people use an interactive product: the way it feels in their hands, how well they understand how it works, how they feel about it while they're using it, how well it serves their purposes, and how well it fits into the entire context in which they are using it.
- Wikipedia [13]: User experience is a term used to describe the overall experience and satisfaction a user has when using a product or system.
- Nielsen-Norman Group [10]: All aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, its services, and its products.
- Mäkelä & Fulton Suri [8]: A result of motivated action in a certain context.
- Hassenzahl & Tractinsky [5]: A consequence of a user's internal state (predispositions, expectations, needs, motivation, mood, etc.), the characteristics of the designed system (e.g. complexity, purpose, usability, functionality, etc.) and the context (or the environment) within which the interaction occurs (e.g. organisational/social setting, meaningfulness of the activity, voluntariness of use, etc.)

NB: The above list is just a small sample of existing UX definitions, exemplifying the large variations such definitions exhibit. They vary in length, scope and granularity (from the crude mention about motivated action to detailed descriptions with examples about users' psychological states and systems' features).

**Table 2:** Sample statements about UX

1. UX is an emergent field without a formal body of knowledge
  2. UX is a term that is elusive to grasp
  3. UX is a momentary feeling a user has *while* interacting with a system
  4. UX is an attitude towards a system
  5. UX is an emotional bonding with a system
  6. Expectations determine user experience
  7. UX is a value
  8. We cannot design user experience, but we can design *for* user experience
  9. Usability is subsumed by UX
  10. UX is best viewed in terms of marketing
- NB: The final list will consist of 20 statements.

**In-SIG Activities**

Results of the questionnaire (data collected before CHI'08) will be presented and discussed in the SIG session. The SIG participants will be asked to compare and contrast the five UX definitions, and to review the UX statements receiving mostly medium ratings, which are supposedly controversial. New UX definitions and statements will get special attention in the SIG.

**Post-SIG Activities**

All the participants will be invited to join the MAUSE-SIG-UX of the international project COST294-MAUSE (<http://www.cost294.org/>) focusing on usability. Meanwhile the SIG organizers will analyze the responses from CHI'08 general attendees (paper version) and pose the findings on the website. The initial taskforce of the MAUSE-SIG-UX is to sustain the effort of this SIG to formulate a shared UX definition based on all the results obtained from the efforts of this SIG.

In the spirit of openness, the resulted definition will be posted to Wikipedia and Citizendium. These Internet sites are increasingly popular information sources and gain worldwide attention. We also aim for an article in a scientific publication about the rationale behind the proposed UX definition.

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