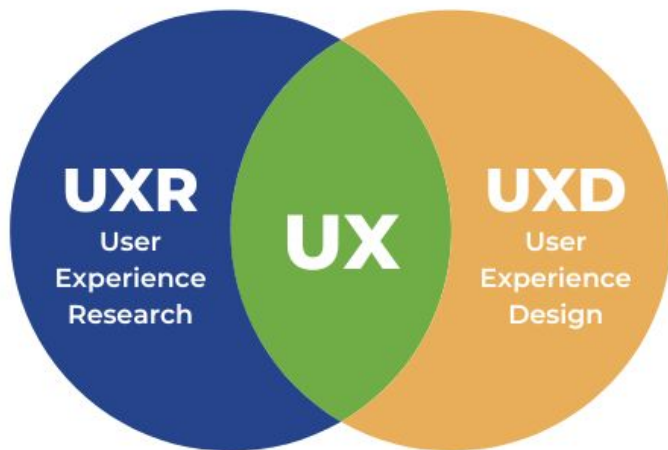


Anthropology Is a Superpower in User Experience

User experience (UX) is a field that captures the full range of interactions people have with technology and the physical environment. UX focuses on creating functional, inclusive, and engaging experiences. It includes the navigation of digital interface designs across devices including computers, cell phones, augmented and virtual reality environments, and vehicle interfaces, among others.



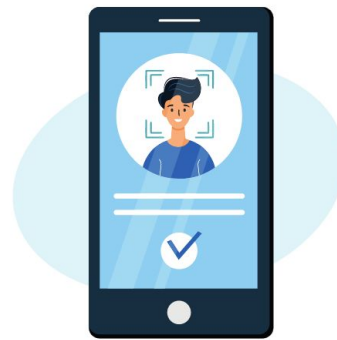
- UX researchers and designers collaborate closely through the entire design process. Researchers conduct the studies to inform the design. Designers create designs based on research findings.
- Anthropologists typically work as UX researchers, applying their data-gathering expertise and analysis skills. They offer insights to explain how people interact with technology in context.
- UX researchers influence the design of products, services, and experiences. They help guide the development of solutions that are not only functional and intuitive, but also resonate with the intended audience.
- UX researchers contribute to innovation and problem solving, which helps organizations create higher lifetime customer value, retain their users, reduce risk and cost, and achieve a competitive advantage.

Why are anthropologists valuable as UX researchers?

- Anthropologists are trained in effective interviewing skills; they require less UX manager time in getting “up to speed.”
- Anthropologists utilize participant observation as part of their ethnographic toolkit rather than solely relying on what users say.
- Ethics training positions anthropologists to safeguard user rights.
- By building rapport and understanding user viewpoints, anthropologists routinely empathize with user “pain points” (i.e., concerns, challenges) as they explore products or services.
- Anthropologists’ holistic perspective considers how overall user behavior, including thought processes and actions, affects reactions to products and services.
- Anthropologists’ iterative approach and reflexive orientation help reduce assumptions and biases.
- Anthropologists understand that digital interactions are part of wider contexts, such as being in a work environment.
- Collaboration with stakeholders and team members to co-create solutions is a UX norm.
- UX anthropologists showcase an important value of social science in industry.

Why is UXR important to people and organizations?

- **User Trust and Satisfaction:** UXR improves user engagement, satisfaction, and trust, thereby contributing to stronger relationships between organizations and their customers.
- **Ease of Use:** UXR ensures that functionality, usability, and accessibility are prioritized, making it easier for users to navigate and achieve their objectives (e.g., making a purchase, filling out an online form).
- **Reliability:** Effective UX signals that the site and organization are dependable and merit user time and resources, whereas poor UX (e.g., difficult navigation, suboptimal experience) can erode trust.
- **Emotional Connection:** UXR helps to design products that elicit positive emotions that people enjoy, which, in turn, fosters brand loyalty.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Cost/benefit analysis of design changes helps demonstrate the value of UXR and UXD. Investing in UXR limits the number of costly redesigns, enhances customer satisfaction, focuses on features users want, and positions the UX product for compliance and accessibility.
- **Evidence-Based Decision Making:** Case studies informed by UXR data and insights enable better strategic decisions.



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What are the types of questions UX researchers ask?

- **Exploratory:** At the beginning of the design process, these questions inform the direction of the project, such as, “What do stakeholders need to understand?”
- **Generative:** These questions help to identify what users find most important and what core tasks they want to accomplish.
- **Evaluative:** These questions and tasks help to assess a site’s usability and effectiveness. The aim is to ascertain how users navigate and “think out loud” when they are interacting with a site design and completing tasks.

Examples of strategic questions:

- How do users interact with the site design?
- What are the “pain points” and barriers that users encounter?
- How does interacting with the site make users feel?
- Does the site navigation align with user mental models of how to navigate the site?
- Which features do users find most important?
- Which design choice is preferable among several options?
- Does the design meet accessibility standards for people with disabilities?
- How does the design compare with those of competitor designs?

How is UXR done in work settings?

“Anthropology is a great frame to build a UX house on!”
— Beth Holland, UX Research Manager/Business Anthropologist

The anthropological toolkit offers a strong foundation for UXR. However, it is important to remember that UX is its own field. Anthropologists need to 1) learn UX terminology and UI (User Interface) design jargon, 2) become proficient in UX techniques, and 3) gain familiarity in commonly-used tools such as User Testing/UserZoom, Optimal Workshop, dscout, and Qualtrics.

A prominent framework for UX researchers is user-centered design, which involves users throughout the development process. Its goal is to ensure that the product, service, or experience is tailored to user needs and contexts. User-centered design encompasses a range of techniques, including:

- **Usability testing:** Studies of user interactions to evaluate effectiveness, ease of use, and overall user experience.
- **Concept testing:** Studies early in product development to obtain user feedback, insights, and preferences on design.
- **A/B testing:** A comparison test to determine which of two design choices provides a better user experience.
- **Eye tracking:** A study to understand user attention and behavior by analyzing how users explore a digital design visually.
- **Heat mapping:** A study collecting how users interact with a digital design by analyzing click, scrolling, and mouse actions; areas where users interact most on the screen are represented visually by warmer colors in contrast to cooler colors where they interact less.

Sources to help build your UXR knowledge

- Nielsen Norman Group: This site has valuable articles and video and is known for setting UX industry standards and best practices (e.g., usability heuristics). <https://www.nngroup.com>
- Pannafino, James and Patrick McNeil. (2017). *UX Methods: A Quick Guide to User Experience Research Methods*. CDUXP LLC.
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- Travis, David and Philip Hodgson. (2024). *Think Like a UX Researcher*. 2nd ed. CRC Press.



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