User-Created Persona: Personas beyond the Global North

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Abstract

A literature survey confirms the persona artefact in HCI (1)is widely used in technology design communication; (2.1)suffers large scantiness on experiential research (2.2)of special acuteness beyond the Global North; and that (3)created in Participatory Design (PD) persona (3.1)fulfils many benefits agreed in literature, while (3.2)it enables imaginaries to repurpose its appreciation, making, and evaluation by stimulating democratic, empowering fair values in technological enterprises by means of User-Created Persona (UCP). On the above, this paper seeks to bring expertise and different perceptions to exploring theoretical, methodological, and relational issues about laypeople across cultures creating and validating personas themselves. The aim, hence, is to find out synergies and collaborations across borders to search and better understand forms, entities and shapes that personas may take in locales across mental and physical borders.

Author Keywords

Personas; User-Created Persona; Participatory Design; Cross-Cultural Design; Micro-Cultures; Design Methods

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Persona Benefits & Challenges

Benefits: (1)to create a grounded understanding of the targeted users; (2)provide early design requirements from the users; (3)introduce and/or reinforce design thinking during the process; (4)encourage a shared vision of users' needs towards efficiency; (5)provide focus on users' goals, needs, requirements and traits; (6)depict dimensions of the ecosystems where people function; (7)complement other methods like PD and scenario; (8)facilitate communication amid partakers; (9)seduce designers to empathizing with users, and (10)enable social and political natures of design to the surface.

Challenges: (a) lack of use of grounded user-data; (b) paucity of empirical research, (c) especially in sites outside of the Global North; (d) lack of agreement on definition, and (e) absence of users' involvement during all design processes.

Introduction

Persona is a communicational artefact originally created in the Global North [7], and functioning as surrogate of a group of people with common goals, aptitudes and traits when interacting with technological services or products [16]. As such persona gravitates within the User-Centred Design (UCD) philosophy, meaning it is presented, thought-of, and created by professional designers based on the partial involvement of some of the people a given technology is or will be intended for. Following this approach, persona is usually represented by means of a name, a picture and a written narrative. Its accredited plasticity, nonetheless, provides room for other ways of depicting it such as by using video [12]. Result of its elasticity, persona currently possesses a pervasive utilisation and support amid designers [13], which, nonetheless, sharply contrasts with the paucity in empirical persona research up-to-today [8, 9, 13]. Such pragmatic scarcity provokes scepticism among scholars and practitioners in its use in design decision-making [20]. Practical scantiness is greater in non-Western sites [15], where persona mainly gets created [1], used [16], and studied [18] following UCD techniques and cognitive understandings coming from the Global North. This is so despite Cultural Usability having now repeatedly proven predominant design approaches as unsuited in further settings [21]. Under this premise Nielsen [15] questions whether persona artefacts may also be taken and depicted differently in diverse cultural environments all across the globe. The anthropological and Participatory Design perspective proposed in this manuscript is positioned as an organic and intentional means of providing an active voice and the organic participation to laypeople [10] in figuring out representations of themselves towards technology designs, creations and utilisations.

Persona Benefits & Challenges Ahead

Stated in [2] a literature review on benefits commonly attributed to persona reveals ten vital advantages credited to it, while persona also confronts a set defies. Consequence of the above is the ongoing reluctance [20] and critical debate on persona needing to validate its accuracy methodologically [5]. This is due to often reports on designerly assumptions when constructing personas [8], openly intuitive accounts about users in decision-making [7], or issues of organisational decision and power dimensions [18] that, overall, endanger the core deeds assigned to persona.

Inter/Cross-Cultural Persona

Usability and User Experience (UX) methods, tools and techniques get influenced by their very originating culture, thus the data collected using them is bound to get polluted if deployed in sceneries afar [6]. The questioning, then, on whether persona may look alike in different locales [15] becomes paramount towards the scientific analysis and cataloguing of cross-cultural persona artefacts in HCI; the data they may express, then, and their physicality when experienced, conveyed and communicated across cultures are paramount factors to persona. In these regards, a partial review on cross-cultural personas can be extracted from [2], whereas there is an upcoming and more complete one in a paper by the same author at a forthcoming forum.

All in all, the above conception, creation and deployment of personas in cross-cultural locales pinpoints the regular, to us many times carelessly abusive, use of UCD persona as created in the Global North without reflecting on the assumptions this carries about in representing laypeople "out there".

User-Created Persona (UCP)

Current endeavours to facilitate the take-on, understanding and creation of UCP are being carried out together with rural and urban Namibians of four different ethnic groups, namely ovaHerero [2], Ovambo [3], ovaHimba [4] and Koi San [upcoming]. Such exercises and their outcomes thus-far have revealed cultural assumptions on persona representations that urge for an imminent reassessing of the way current persona artefacts convey needs, requirements, aspirations, motivations and user experiences of laypeople linked to cultures, traditions, contexts, needs, wants, understandings and drives too.

Persona Development Rationale within CHI

This proposal frames the evolution of HCI4D within PD practices inspired by [17], who in 1999 backed a shift from UCD into PD approaches to search and found new ways of rational, sensing and work. [17] argued the participatory experience as a set of methodologies as much as a mindset and an attitude about regular people having something to offer to the design process when given appropriate tools to express themselves. Further inspiration comes from CHI 2008 on the input of UCD4D & International Development in addressing design for locales often demoted by the Global North, as much as for people who within the very Global North that are relegated too by poverty or other barriers [19]. In 2016 using, stretching and [re]inventing apt means and contributions to global economic and community development means to applying *innovative techniques for engaging users in developing world contexts* [19]. To bring thus HCI4D to a next level of user-empowered design & international development, this proposal frames PD as methodology together with personas as the nucleus of User-Created Personas (UCP).

Plan of Action across Borders

Social Media are advantageous tools for laypeople to connect and engage as designers able to gather, assess and outline data to common aims such as creating personas. On the examples projected in the CfP of this workshop, this project proposes the following schemes:

1.- To study the use of Facebook and gender roles in South Africa vs. Namibia via the creation and deployment of thematic offerings empowering members from such geographical milieus to build UCP artefacts themselves by posting related themes, features, traits etc. in specific Facebook groups. Data is then picked-up, selected and re-constructed by users in a way that, tackling first, and progressively depicting gender roles and issues to do with the use of Facebook later, this can result in eliciting needs, requires, desires and ambitions regarding, for example, innovating further technologies and tactics to help tackling gender issues, and in a way users feel legit, respectful and coherent.

2.- The design of mobile-based reporting systems for targeted African-American citizens to report police brutality in Atlanta, Minneapolis, and New York. In this project UCP serves users of the systems to depict cases of violence, while the descriptions and representations of cases, victims, committers and other partakers can gradually become representational artefacts created by the users of the system. The creation of such personas aims to facilitate the progressive improvement of the system itself, while they also serve toward other related projects to help keeping the security and integrity of the participants involved in the project.

Both above will enable for people to stay connected, as to questions such as "What are common themes that

tie together different resource-constrained contexts?", an answer here proposed is the further discovery and magnifying of micro-cultures towards gathering findings in a taxonomy of big and small data readable by and to all participants through the use of the UCP proposed.

Acknowledgements

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