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MEDdesign: Hidden Problems Because of Personality Traits



Today I am writing my first blog post ever in the name, Veryday. After more than 40 years of creating innovative, functional and inspiring design solutions based on deep insights into what people really need, feel and desire, Ergonomidesign is now Veryday.

Designing for better emotional experiences of medical devices or services, puts a new set of demands on the designer. In respect to this, I would like to illuminate a hidden problem concerning the fundamental data that many designs are based upon.

More and more effort is spent on research, trying to understand the different needs and desires users have when interacting with products and services. This is a part of companies increasing focus on shifting into a more user-centric approach.

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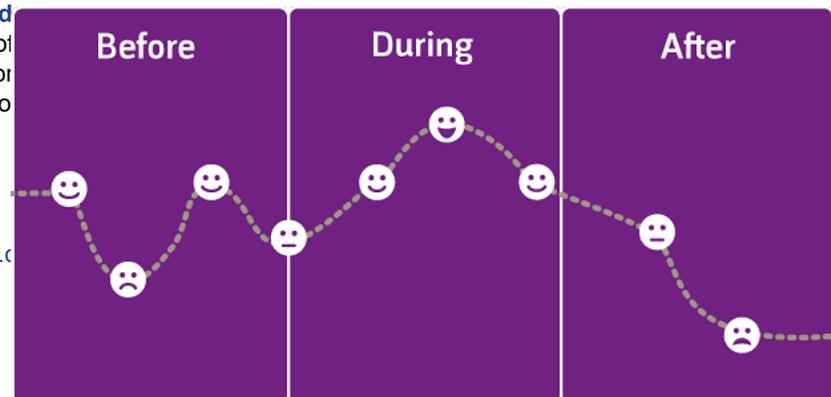


Fig. 1: Emotional Experience Mapping, one of the methods to research emotional aspects of user interaction

Our focused efforts on physical, cognitive as well as emotional aspects of the design of products, services and experiences has made me discover a hidden problem in the field of user research—all types of users allow us to interact with them!

A key to understand the emotional relationship between a product or service and a user, is to find the tacit knowledge and latent needs of the user, done by a range of qualitative as well as quantitative methods. In these methods, the user is observed, interviewed, co-created with etc and hence given a

chance to express their tacit knowledge and latent needs.



As a result of this, more and more focus is put on the interaction with users during the research phase. However, a problem that is often overlooked arises when so much relies on the meeting with the user. Most people know that recruiting the right participants is the foundation for fruitful user research. Your

research results are only as good as the participants involved. But the fact is that a lot of the participants turn you down.

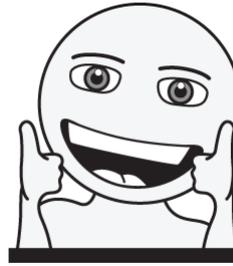
No matter how much effort you put into recruiting the correct users in terms of gender, income, profession, culture etc, representative, well-spoken, and thoughtful research participants that can provide invaluable feedback are sometimes difficult to recruit.

At Veryday we started to look closer at the participants that declined, and found several relationships with extrinsic factors e.g. time available, level of incentive etc. But what really caught our eyes were intrinsic factors, people's personality traits. In short, the type of personality you are will make you more or less willing to participate in design research. The result: design researchers potentially miss a lot of important input from the types of personalities that does not like to participate.

I will continue this line of discussion soon, but first I would like to introduce the Big Five personality framework. Design psychologists are interested in what differentiates one person from another and why we behave the way we do e.g. like or dislike a specific product. Personality research relies on quantifiable data which can be used to examine what people are like. This is where the Big Five play an important role.

The Big Five was originally derived in the 1970s by two independent research teams who took slightly different routes at arriving at the same results: most human personality traits can be boiled down into five broad dimensions of personality traits, regardless of language or culture. In scientific circles, the Big Five is now the most widely accepted and used model of personality. The five traits are:

1. **Openness to experience** – (inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious). Appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and variety of experience. Openness reflects the degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and variety.
2. **Conscientiousness** – (efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless). A tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, and aim for achievement; planned rather than spontaneous behavior; organized, and dependable.
3. **Extraversion** – (outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved). Energy, positive emotions, surgency, assertiveness, sociability and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others, and talkativeness.
4. **Agreeableness** – (friendly/compassionate vs. cold/unkind). A tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.
5. **Emotional stability** – (sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident). The tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability.



Emotional unstable persons will be over-excluded in user studies and extrovert people will be over-included in user studies

Certain types of personality profiles are less keen to participate in research activities i.e. cautious, reserved and nervous traits (illustrated by the figure to the left). Therefore, biasing research findings towards the profiles that are more than happy to participate i.e. curious, efficient, outgoing, friendly and confident (illustrated by the figure to the right). If you do not watch out, this bias means a narrower knowledge base of the users, resulting in fewer insights. Fewer and biased insights are obviously a risk factor in design and development processes.

(Veryday has introduced Very5, a tool to ensure that all personalities are handled equally and contribute to a much more rich insight base that better reflects reality).

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