



Human-human Interaction in Interaction Design

A customer journey without human intervention is impossible

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Introduction

Interaction Design is a term coined by Bill Moggridge and Bill Verplank in the mid-1980s, and is basically a subject of study which deals with how humans interact with systems, services, products, and environments. Typically, a customer interacts with several touch points while making a buying decision. These touch points help building either a negative or a positive experience and it shapes up the customer journey.

A user willing to purchase a car has to go through a series of steps before he actually makes the purchase. In this entire journey, his friends/relatives/colleagues are the first interaction touch points who help him gather information on the car make, models, fuel efficiency, financial institutions offering low interest on car loans etc. Thereafter, he quickly moves on to online channels for a quick comparison of the data gathered.

While users pass through each of these interaction touch points, they rate the quality of the interaction and assign a score that gets recorded in

their brains. These scores are reserved and are used in the future while making a buying decision. John would prefer buying a printer of a particular brand even if he ends up paying the extra buck only because the after sales service he would get is better compared to other brands.

For each industry type the context varies, which further ascertains the degree of human intervention required in each touch point. For instance, in the healthcare industry it is only human-to-human interaction which forms the core to build trust, and tangible factors like latest equipment, accessibility, cost etc. do not even count. If the customer service of the hospital is poor, it will obliterate all the positives.

This article provides insights on why human-to-human interaction is a vital ingredient in building a positive experience in the entire journey and how can we shape up each touch point to build trust and confidence amongst users.



A typical experience map of a user who wants to buy a car

In the above diagram, we see that each touch point requires human intervention. Let's assume that the user has reached step 2 in the Product Discovery phase where the Call Center Agent could not give appropriate information which deflects him from moving to step 3.

Systems like IVR, chatbots, email scanners, websites with knowledge base reduce the cost of human intervention, but if these systems mal-function, a user lands interacting with a human being to resolve issues.

Shaping up a customer journey requires a magnified view of each interaction touch point, further reducing the bottlenecks by making each touch point smooth, user-friendly and enjoyable; after all, an excellent customer experience must last the entire journey.

Below are some of the ways which probably can make the journey smooth user-friendly and enjoyable.

A Research to Map Users' Mental Model

Mental Models are thought process of how this world works with a set of beliefs about how a system or a service works and how people interact with that system or service-based on their beliefs. It is formed out of intuition, incomplete facts, and past experience. As the economy progresses, the mental models that were once established become outdated. More often than not, we are inclined to think that that a fat guy eats a lot.

Customers carry with them a specific belief based on previous experience and approximations. These approximations are not concrete and may not hold true. Tackling complex users and mapping Mental Models into solutions requires a huge amount of user research.

Users accustomed with online channels already carry a set of Mental Models which have come through experience; for example a user would always try to find the 'Logout' tab on the top-right corner of the web page beside the username.

A meaningful conversation with users can give great insights into belief systems and ideas about how a product or service should be. In-store shopping experience, calling up customer care to get information, asking opinion from your acquaintance on kids' education, opens up the window for a face-to-face interaction where each human participant is different. These interactions can probably be made richer and effective

ensuring that the negative experiences are mitigated, while positive ones contribute to greater customer satisfaction.



Greetings

Imagine that a user enters a store looking for a product. A bad salesman may ignore him and may continue doing whatever he was doing, an average salesman may turn up and ask the customer if he needs help. On the other hand, an experienced salesman will smile and greet the customer on a friendly note, thereby making it obvious that he would feel obliged to help. This is human interaction at its best which can lead to a positive experience.



Problem Solving

Let's say that you're looking for a washing machine. You have a limited budget and you enter the store and ask the salesperson about washing machines. The average salesperson will show you washing machines that you might like or dislike, which further may not fit into your budget. An experienced salesperson might actually understand your need and show you washing machines of different brands tell you more about their features, and suggest you what best can fit in your budget, thereby addressing you very specific set of requirements.



Salesmen must have knowledge on product range

All salespersons must have knowledge of the products which are available in the store, so that they can take queries from customer and respond back to them effectively. Most customers do proper research prior to stepping into the shop and further validate if the data they gathered actually hold goods. If the salesman does not respond to customer queries, the customer might change his decision or might prefer moving to another store.



Salesmen must know where the product physically exists

One obvious Mental Model a customer may carry when he enters a brick and mortar store is to have access to some kind of a navigation mechanism which can guide him to find the product. As compared to the 'search' feature in website, for in-store shopping, we have visual cues and the on-the-floor salesman can guide us to what we need. A user would certainly rely on his skills as he considers him to be the best person to ask.



Effective Communication

Personalized interaction is more effective in closing a sale, customers prefer the experience of speaking to a human being face-to-face and seeing all angles of a product rather than blindly making a purchase. In this scenario, a salesman, or a call center agent has to communicate effectively with the customers and make them feel that they are valued.

Understanding Culture in Human Interaction

In the US, 'to go' implies 'I need the item to be packed'; in India, we say 'take away'.

Culture influences human perceptions; human belief systems and actions are largely shaped by social structures.

In a globalized business environment, culture influences interaction patterns. As a

practitioner, one should be aware of the conditions that lead to ineffective interaction and target training programs to bridge the gap.

Negative situations in the interaction between individuals from different cultures might be avoided, imagine a US salesperson selling technology to Japanese and failing repeatedly.

Globalization is leading to common standards of thinking and acting leaving the ethno-cultural differences. However, there are grey areas which should be looked into to reduce barriers to effective communication. Understanding cross-cultural difference can be leveraged to create a useful, usable, and appealing service design.

Empathetic Design

Research says that today's youth are less empathetic than 30 years ago. Today's generation is less likely to feel or show concerns for others and are worse at perceiving other people's thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

Each human being is different in terms of emotion and sentiment, morality, character, and religion.

Empathy can discover user's unmet need; it is a great tool for designers to discover a person's feelings and thoughts. Empathy requires a designer to observe, gain knowledge and further use the same in the design process.

Empathic research bank on ethnographic study through observation, interview, and conversation with real people, these studies reveals greater insights on 'what people say', since people often say something, while feeling something else about the experience.

Conclusion

Steve Jobs realized that humans have a natural tendency to stay isolated or just talk to people, who reciprocate them, but speak the private language to understand each other's problems. He proposed that in order to establish a creative environment, people from different cultures should come together and work in a collaborative environment. In order to promote unplanned collaboration and encounters, he urged everyone to share restrooms while redesigning the workplace for Pixar Studios.

Human interaction plays a key role in shaping up a customer journey; we do live in a parallel world created by ourselves, where we run after likes, followers, timelines and updates. But we should understand that regardless of how much social media we integrate into our lives, nothing can ever replace the smile, hug or a nod. Engaging customers on a personal level and winning them over meaningful conversations can build a positive customer experience.

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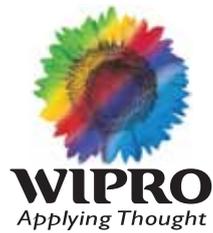
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