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**Abstract**

Bridging the gap between user experience research and design in industry  
An analysis of two common communication tools: personas and scenarios

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User experience (UX) research in the design of technology products utilizes human-centered design (HCD) methods to summarize and explain pertinent information about end users to designers. However, UX researchers cannot effectively communicate the needs and goals of users if designers do not find UX research (a) easy to integrate into design processes and (b) perceive it as contributing valuable information that helps them create better designs. Personas and scenarios are examples of HCD summarizations/communication tools employed by UX research.

Personas are archetypal characters that represent a group of users who share common goals, attitudes and behaviors when interacting with a product or service. A scenario is a story describing a character using a product/service. In this investigation, scenarios were not explored as artifacts apart from personas; instead, the scenarios that were employed described personas interacting with a product/service.

Specifically, this investigation asked are personas (with scenarios) perceived as usable, useful and effective summarizations of UX research by designers; in other words, do they meet the positive claims made of them in the literature and avoid criticisms and concerns? In addition, what should UX researchers strive to understand about designers to maximize understanding of end users; in other words, can personas (with scenarios) be made more useful/usable?

This was studied, in part, by using personas (with scenarios) that represented mobile users in Kyrgyzstan. This user population represented an example of an audience with whom local designers (from Seattle, Washington) would have minimal familiarity. As technology expands to new audiences, the chances to encounter unfamiliar users will increase; this lack of familiarity amplifies the importance of useful/usable UX research.

Key findings included: (a) personas (with scenarios) were effective in helping designers focus on specific users and facilitating communication regarding the users; (b) personas were less successful at helping designers empathize or avoid ill-informed assumptions about users; and (c) several designer attributes appeared to be associated with persona effectiveness, including professional experience level. Disambiguating variables that contribute to the utility of personas (with scenarios) will help better the communication between UX research and design in industry, ultimately leading to better end user experiences.