

How the User is Produced as an Episteme in UX Research?

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Over almost the last 60 years, the ‘User’ has been constantly (re)defined, coming along with the shifts in design. After the shift from HCI to interface design. Now, designing experiences for users is the new paradigm in the field, or better said, a new episteme, a new regime of knowledge. Nevertheless, users’ knowledge seems to be commodified now.

The user as a concept can be thought of as someone - and sometimes as something - passive, neutral, objectified, reduced to patterns, powerless; for instance, as a mere operator or as cultural dope. What is then a user and what differentiates it from a persona, people or an actor? Aren’t there also personas, humans or actors using a specific service or product? What does this term stand for and what implications has this abstracted concept of the user?

For my research, situated in Argentina, I use the actor-network-theory, and combine it with Bourdieu’s and Latour’s theories. Regarding the methodology: In order to describe design as a social practice and, more specifically, to uncover how the user is constructed and represented, I employ two qualitative methodologies: interviews with UX designers and discourse analysis of designers’ online communities.

With the findings, this thesis aims to unpack the epistemologies and the notions subscribed to the users and contribute within a sociological approach to the understanding of the process of the construction of the user in the capitalist system.