

Effects of Empathy Priming on Idea Generation

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Abstract : The user-centered design (UCD) approach has led to an increased interest in empathy within the product development process. Designers have explored several empathetic methods and tools such as personas, empathy maps, journey maps, user needs statements and user scenarios to capture and visualize users' needs. The goal of these tools is not only to generate a deeper and shared understanding of user needs but also to become a point of reference for subsequent decision making, brainstorming and concept evaluation tasks. The purpose of this study is to measure the effect of empathy priming on divergent brainstorming tasks. This study compares the effects of three empathy tools, personas, empathy maps and user needs statements, on ideation fluency and originality of ideas during brainstorming tasks. In a three-between-subjects experimental design study, sixty product design students were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: persona, empathy maps and user needs statements. A one-way, between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a statistically significant difference in empathy priming on fluency and originality of ideas. Participants in the persona group showed higher ideation fluency and generated a greater number of original ideas compared to the other groups. The results show that participants in the user need statement group to generate a greater number of feasible and relevant ideas. The study also aims to understand how formatting and visualization of empathy tools impact divergent brainstorming tasks. Participants were interviewed to understand how different visualizations of users' needs (personas, empathy maps and user needs statements) facilitated idea generation during brainstorming tasks. Implications for design education are discussed.

Keywords : empathy, persona, priming, Design research

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