Book Review

Alberto Ferreira

Universal UX Design: Building Multicultural User Experience

—Reviewed by R. Jason Pinkerton

Index Terms—Design, internationalization, localization.

In Universal UX Design: Building Multicultural User Experience, A. Ferreira builds a case for designers, marketers, and stakeholders in the global marketplace to incorporate multicultural and international considerations into all aspects of their products and services. The book demonstrates the long-term benefits of internationalization, and it provides useful information about cultural and technological trends across all continents. In addition, Ferreira offers practical advice on aspects of localization that should be brought into research and design. Employing anecdotal observations about a variety of cultures and a small variety of case studies, the author largely succeeds in his endeavor to bring greater consideration for international concerns to the fore of user-experience (UX) design.

In Part I, which consists of three chapters, Ferreira explores the concept of universal design as proposed by the Council of Europe in 2001 and 2007. According to the Council, design and research should be internationally and socially inclusive because technology itself moves beyond borders and social constructs.

In Chapter 1, the author demonstrates that the relationship with the product is important regardless of locale. Even if a product meets basic usability criteria, not meeting the cultural, geopolitical, or linguistic norms of a single group can detrimentally impact UX. Ferreira explodes the myth that lesser developed regions of the world, such as parts of Latin America or Africa, do not utilize technology to as great a degree as more developed countries. By way of example, he demonstrates how smartphone usage penetrated these markets and how ubiquitous computing exists in communities once stereotyped as lacking communication infrastructure.

In Chapter 2, the author shows that as technology has lowered barriers so that these areas can catch up and compete, there is a greater need for design that speaks to a diverse global population. The book discusses how a brand might improve its standing within a foreign market if the company first researches local culture and then designs its products accordingly. Rather than simply waiting for late-stage, error-prone translation, these local considerations should be kept in mind as the product is designed and built from the ground up.

Part I concludes with Chapter 3, which argues for the use of Agile globalization within this design process. The Agile approach emphasizes adaptability, which renders it a useful methodology in a world where borders and cultural trends shift amidst geopolitical struggles.

The two chapters in Part II focus on globalization and describe how national and cultural identity informs a user's expectations and understandings of design and marketing.

Chapter 4 begins with a digital tour across the world, visiting each continent to discuss the technological infrastructure, pervasiveness, and influence upon lifestyle and communication. These forays are brief in scope but helpful, as they often reveal underlying cultural behaviors regarding technology. Each exploration features helpful graphs and tables that serve to illustrate how ubiquitous technology has become in each region.
such as the penetration of Facebook in South America or the number of individual purchases made through the internet in different European countries. The chapter establishes a broad framework and rehearses the status of communication and technical development that distinguish each country. Ferreira then takes a closer look at how culture informs perceptions of design and marketing communication.

In Chapter 5, Ferreira describes cultures on a spectrum between two poles: the analytical nature of Western society and the holistic approach of Eastern society. The chapter describes how both sides view the aesthetics of a product differently. He then fragments these societies further, analyzing how traditional and nontraditional values within those cultures can affect how users approach a product and how cultural values affect the way consumers absorb advertising as well. Marketers may wish to take special note of this chapter because the author illustrates how innovators who introduce new technology to a culture will create their own prototypes inspired by unique cultural experiences, thus revealing an opportunity for a new market. However, Ferreira warns that marketers should beware of stereotypes as they enter a market, and they should distrust generalizations about what will appeal to local consumers because they may differ from a marketer’s expectations about their own home country. To avoid these, research is essential.

The three chapters that comprise Part III itemize a variety of linguistic, communication technology, and cultural assumptions that affect product design. The chapters also recommend research methodologies to understand the variations.

In Chapter 6, Ferreira provides practical advice on how to frame communication so that it appeals to multiple cultures. He stresses the importance of understanding the target audience, using simplicity in communication style, and considering the dialect and manner of translation for the market that the product will enter. To that end, he recommends careful attention to the design of user interfaces and the method of user input that international consumers might use.

Chapter 7 examines how users’ experiences of their own cultures affect what they expect from the aesthetics of a product and what they might expect from its output. Ferreira illustrates how these styles and preferences vary by comparing web pages and input devices side by side. In this way, readers can see for themselves how these items differ, and they can observe how the design of a product or service should be adjusted with these factors in mind.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Ferreira examines cultural norms and shows how colors, gestures, and even iconography can be interpreted differently as a result of local custom. With that fact in mind, UX designers must approach user research carefully. Ferreira recommends ethnographic studies, focus groups, and surveys to help build personae that inform product design.

Overall, Ferreira’s work serves as a strong argument for marketers and designers to incorporate internationalization into an organization’s design philosophy so that its products will benefit from the start. However, the book only demonstrates the need for internationalization; it rarely offers suggestions on how to address a large variety of needs at once. Nevertheless, *Universal UX Design* has merit. Given its emphasis on product design for international markets, the book can serve as supplemental reading for graduate courses in UX design and technical marketing.