

You are here: Home / Terminology / The Difference (A...



The Difference (And Relationship) Between Usability And User Experience

By Justin Mifsud



After web site **accessibility**, "user experience" (abbreviated as UX) is probably the phrase that most people tend to confuse **usability** with. While the topic of the **difference between usability and user experience** has been discussed by various experts in the respective fields, I feel the need to write about it for two main reasons.

The first reason is that several posts I have encountered emphasize the distinction between these two terms, yet they fail to highlight the relationship that exists between **usability** and user experience. The second reason is that whilst most of the posts are similar in nature, I have found some minor, albeit very valid points scattered in various posts I have read. Therefore, the objective of this post is to discuss these two terms, whilst highlighting their differences and more importantly the relationship that exists between them in a clear, concise way.

The difference between **usability** and user experience

- ISO Definition: **Usability** is concerned with the "effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction with which specified users achieve specified goals in particular environments" (ISO 9241-11) [1] whilst user experience is concerned with "all aspects of the user's experience when interacting with the product, service, environment or facility" (ISO 9241-210) [2].

during and after using that web site. Thus, **usability** relates to the ease with which users can achieve their goals while interacting with a web site while user experience is concerned with the way users perceive their interaction with that web site [3]

- **Defined as a Process:** “User experience (UX) design is the process of creating products that provide meaningful and relevant experiences to users. This involves the design of the entire process of acquiring and integrating the product, including aspects of branding, design, **usability**, and function.” [8]
- **Defined as a Question:** **Usability** can be modeled as the question “Can the user accomplish their goal?” whilst user experience can be phrased as “Did the user have as delightful an experience as possible?” [4].
- **Defined as a Metaphor:** So as to illustrate the **contrast** between **usability** and user interface, experts have compared them to science (**usability**) vs. art (user experience) [5] and a freeway (**usability**) vs. a twisting mountain road (user experience) [6]. In essence, this metaphorical representation of these two terms focuses on defining something that is usable as functional, simple and requires less mental effort to use. Thus, a freeway is usable since it has no oncoming traffic, enables you to get from point A to point B in a fast manner and has consistent signage, hence requiring little learnability. In terms of **usability**, a freeway is highly usable but it is boring when assessed in terms of user experience. In **contrast**, something that focuses on user experience is depicted as highly emotional. Thus, a twisting mountain road is less usable but, because of its scenery, the smell of nature and the excitement of the climb, it conveys a pleasant user experience.
- **Resources Required:** **Usability** involves those employees who influence the user interface design of a web site whilst user experience requires the collective and seamless effort of employees from various departments including engineering, **marketing**, graphical and **industrial design** and interface design [7].
- **Impact:** Although user experience requires more effort to do well, its results have a better impact [4]. When done properly, user experience effectively enhances the relationship between the user and the brand. This is because “true user experience goes far beyond giving customers what they say they want, or providing checklist features” [7]
- **Effect on User Interface:** A usable user interface is one which is typically intuitive, simple or extremely learnable. A user interface whose aim is to create a positive user experience is one which is pleasing to the user. This does not mean that when the focus is on user experience, the user interface is not usable. To the contrary, user experience professionals typically hand over their designs to **usability** professionals so that they can validate them [5].

The relationship between **usability** and user experience

Usability is a narrower concept than user experience since it only focuses on goal achievement when using a web site. By **contrast**, user experience is a “consequence of the presentation, functionality, system performance, interactive behaviour, and assistive capabilities of the interactive system” [2]. This essentially means that user experience includes aspects such as **human factors**, design, ergonomics, HCI, **accessibility**, **marketing** as well as **usability**. An alternative way to look at this relationship is by subdividing user experience into utility, **usability**, **desirability** and brand experience. This is best illustrated by representing these sub

Want to learn more?

If you'd like to...

1. learn all the details of Usability Testing
2. get easy-to-use templates
3. learn how to properly quantify the usability of a system/service/product/app/etc
4. learn how to communicate the result to your management

... then consider to take the online course [Conducting Usability Testing](#).

If, on the other hand, you want to brush up on the basics of User Experience, then consider to take the [online course on User Experience](#). Good luck on your learning journey!

Referenced Work

1. International Organisation for Standardisation, 1998. ISO9241 Ergonomic, Part 11: Guidance on usability. Geneva, Switzerland.
2. Stewart, T., 2008. Usability or user experience – what's the difference ? [Online] Available at: [http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/2321-usability-or-user-experience-what-s-the-difference?](http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/2321-usability-or-user-experience-what-s-the-difference?utm_campaign=Skimlinks&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_source=cj)
3. UXgru, 2010. The Difference between Usability and User Experience [Online] Available at: <http://www.uxrevisions.com/user-experience-design/the-difference-between-usability-and-user-experience/18/>
4. Spool, J., 2007. The Difference between Usability and User Experience [Online] Available at: <http://www.uie.com/brainsparks/2007/03/16/the-difference-between-usability-and-user-experience/>
5. Owen, R.J., 2010. The Differences between Usability and User Experience [Online] Available at: <http://www.developria.com/2010/01/the-difference-between-usabili.html>
6. Baekdal, T., 2006. The Battle Between Usability and User-Experience [Online] Available at: <http://www.baekdal.com/articles/usability-vs-user-experience-battle>

8. The [Interaction Design](#) Foundation. What is User Experience/[UX Design](#)?
[Online] Available at: <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/ux-design>

Want to learn more?

Want to get an industry-recognized Course Certificate in UX Design, Design Thinking, UI Design, or another related design topic? [Online UX courses](#) from the Interaction Design Foundation can provide you with industry-relevant skills to advance your UX career. For example, [Design Thinking, Become a UX Designer from Scratch](#), [Conducting Usability Testing](#) or [User Research – Methods and Best Practices](#) are some of the most popular courses. Good luck on your learning journey!

(Lead image: [Depositphotos](#))

📁 Filed Under: Terminology

🏷️ Tagged With: Usability, User Experience

ABOUT JUSTIN MIFSUD

Justin is the founder of UsabilityGeek and has extensive experience with creating usable and memorable online experiences. He is primarily a consultant specialising in several core areas. Justin is also a visiting lecturer with the University of Hertfordshire and an expert reviewer at Smashing Magazine. You can reach out to him via his [LinkedIn Profile](#).

GET STARTED

Usability Geek is a blog that provides practical and useful insights into topics like Usability, User Experience (UX), Human Computer Interaction (HCI), Information Architecture (IA) and related fields.

[Read more about us](#)

[Become an Author at UsabilityGeek.com](#)

[Contact us](#)

POPULAR TOPICS

[Usability](#)

[Usability Guidelines](#)

[Usability Testing](#)

[User Experience](#)

[Design Tools & Software](#)

[Interface & Navigation](#)

[Mobile & Tablet](#)

[Writing For The Web](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Instagram](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Pinterest](#)