



Amplifying Voices in UX: Balancing Design and User Needs in Technical Communication

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In *Amplifying Voices in UX*, Amber L. Lancaster and Carie S. Tucker King argue that TPC needs to move beyond the localization of the area and acknowledge diverse audiences that are secondary or tertiary and may not fit most of the local users. This edited collection includes authors offering diverse perspectives and scholarship who study, design, and practice in the field and challenge the TPC audience, both administrators and instructors, to embrace equilibriUX and seek to improve balance and engagement of cultural uniqueness in often controversial content when developing new programs and instructional materials. The editors organize the book into three parts: Part 1: Pedagogical Topics, Part 2: Rhetoric of Health and Medicine Topics, and Part 3: Equity, Access, and Social Justice Topics. Technical communication scholars connect their essays within the

model of equilibriUX by discussing imbalances among designers, localization, and UX (User eXperience) where the struggle for technical and professional communication (TPC) and social justice are prevalent.

Part One: Pedagogical Topics

Part 1 provides methods, materials, and examples for TPC instructors and administrative designers to incorporate greater quality and equality in UX practices and course design. Jason Tham and Rob Grace (Chapter 1) discuss the exigence of including empathy for stakeholders and users while teaching. They especially hit the core of equilibriUX when they demonstrate how to use empathy in UX design, teaching with service learning, and being more stakeholder-centered rather than focusing on client-centeredness.

Jessica Lee & Sushil Oswal (Chapter 2) include a five-point pedagogical framework on teaching students accessibility and usability through UX (p. 51–54). Kristin Bennett (Chapter 3) addresses connections among UX, universal design (UD), and centering disability justice to promote goals of autonomy in online learning spaces and independence for users.

Philip B. Gallagher & Marci J. Gallagher (Chapter 4) bring awareness to the lack of design justice for blind or low-vision users because TPC uses videos and other visual aids so often. They discuss Charles Kostentick’s (1989) visual language matrix as a tool for working with visual language by learning “familiarity with [how] to communicate [a visual’s] intended meaning” (Kostenick p. 36 as cited by Gallagher & Gallagher on p. 118) and then suggest three parts in design rethinking. Lastly, K. Alex Ilyasova and Jamie May (Chapter 5) suggest seven steps on how to include empathy in UX and how to teach students the skill of empathy.

Part Two: Rhetoric of Health and Medicine Topics

King’s experience in the medical field brings an enriching perspective to this section of the book. Over the last few decades, the field of rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) has increasingly made a strong presence in technical communication and health humanities (Melençon et al., 2020) (e.g. patient experience design and healthcare team collaboration and communication), and Part 2 demonstrates how equilibriUX can continue to improve health and medicine communication processes via critical analysis, expansive research, and intentional user redesign.

Keshab Raj Acharya (Chapter 6) shares findings from a case study about usability issues in global localization with the medical app, mHealth, that was designed for the Global North but is also used in the Global South. This study demonstrates equilibriUX as the author discusses the need to be aware of secondary and tertiary audiences of the same region, yet different from the original region. Felicia Chong and Tammy Rice-Bailey (Chapter 7) discuss readability and design issues for advance directives and provides a list of recommendations for improving form design (p. 216). Mallory Henderson (Chapter 8) writes about her experience as a patient-user and a researcher working with TPC health resources and participants' "lived experience and worlds (ecologies) surrounding patient-users" (p. 254).

Part 2 continues with Brett Oppegaard and Michael K. Rabby's (Chapter 9) study on audio description for the blind, deafblind, or low-vision addressing the issue of social exclusion to the marginalized and multiple intersectional dimensions of impaired users. Furthermore, Oppegaard and Rabby demonstrate what readers of this chapter can learn about equilibriUX and multi-perspectival UX and design. Hua Wang (Chapter 10) concludes Part 2 by discussing another Global North medical app, BabyTree, and its localized usability for Chinese pregnant women.

Part Three: Equity, Access, and Social Justice Topics

Lastly, Part 3 covers a compilation of various social justice problems that are occurring throughout the field of TPC and how they are being addressed through research with an equilibriUX lens. Amy Hodges, Tim Ponce, Johansen Quijano, Bethany Shaffer, and Vince Sosko (Chapter 11) address design justice—the relationship between power and design and challenges TPC to rethink, as Emma Rose (2016) argues, how knowledge and knowing inform design. Hodges et al. provide a list of design justice principles, for example, Principle 1: "We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems" (p. 329).

In Chapter 12, Emma Harris, Ruby Mendoza, and Emily L.W. Bowers posit that TPC should "strive to avoid oppression" (p. 357) and discuss the dynamics of oppression: interpersonal, structural, and institutional (p. 358). EquilibriUX can occur through transformative institutional change. Sarah Beth Hopton, Laura Becker, Max Rünzel, and James T. Wilkes (Chapter 13) provide seven steps for non-discrimination by design from the findings of an extensive study conducted on women beekeepers living in Lebanon. In addition, Hopton et al. discuss the term "glocalization" and define it as "the concept of

designing for groups of users who share some local concerns and needs for design but in slightly larger (i.e.) more global context” (p. 398). To finalize Part 3, Lin Dong and Elizabeth Topping (Chapter 14) argue that “technology is gendered” (p. 411) and through a feminist lens, critically analyze the rideshare app, DiDi (like Uber or Lyft in the US), in China and its subtle ways of reinforcing sexism. The authors end with suggestions for feminist UX practice.

One of the strengths of Part 3 is that the diversity in topics represented in the chapters demonstrate ways in which equilibriUX can expose places where designs have left marginalized users feeling oppressed and further excluded. For example, Hodges et al. speak directly to instructors and administrators regarding a unique perspective in course design and training programs to mitigate social justice imbalance for both instructors and students.

Conclusion

Lancaster and King’s edited collection, *Amplifying Voices in UX*, provides an invaluable resource for TPC scholars, administrators, and instructors by introducing the concept of equilibriUX. Instructors and emerging scholars may find Part 1 the most useful, because it provides ideas for design thinking and how to address wicked problems.

Lancaster and Tucker King demonstrate how equilibriUX can and should be utilized through the following research sites:

- Direct classroom instruction
- Course and program design, especially those working with UX, UD, and disability justice components
- Globally, through technical user apps and the localization of the Global North and South
- Accessibility in medical and legal document design
- Considering lived experiences and world ecologies for user resources

Although the experience and knowledge in health and medicine are evident, Part 2 may seem disjointed at first glance, but that disjointedness contributes to the point of the collection: Multiple voices aren’t going to sound completely cohesive and coherent, and that is why we need equilibriUX. The thread of applying equilibriUX to technical communication research and practice connects throughout the book.

Lancaster and King add to the TPC conversation by claiming that achieving equilibriUX requires technical communicators to design and develop technologies in ways that

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account for their own expertise and cultural competence *and* that of the user and calls to “extend UX design practices beyond translating and tailoring for local users to broader global users, while considering the diversity of user uniqueness, customization desires, all stakeholders, and social needs” (p. xiii).

References

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