STATE OF
USER RESEARCH
IN AFRICA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

STATE OF USER RESEARCH IN AFRICA

DALAL AK JAMM*

*Welcome in Wolof

ABOUT YUX

Launched in may 2016 in Senegal, YUX is a pan-African research and design company whose mission is to create with African users, digital products and services adapted to their diversity. We are now a team of 35 full-time researchers & designers based in Dakar, Abidjan, Accra, Lagos and Kigali. Let's chat at **yux.design**

To make user research accessible and let companies take it into their own hands, we have built LOOKA, a SaaS platform that enables them to run face-to-face interviews in 17 countries with our network of 150 trained researchers. Get started at **getlooka.com**

Thanks to all our partners who took the time to design products for Africa

FACEBOOK

Square

orange

MTN

airtel

MIT

TOTAL

microcred

AIICO

GSMA

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

UNESCO

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WFP

TOUCH

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WorldCover

Affinity

paydunya

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

IFC

WHY THIS STUDY? ↘ ....

The field of user experience (UX) design is booming in Africa, pulled by the rapid digital transformation of companies and the digitization of international development or humanitarian programs, both targeting a fast-growing and now connected population.

As UX grows and more people join the movement, we felt it was about time to get some data about what the domain looks like;

• Are companies maturing in their approach to design?
• What tools and practices do they use?
• Where do designers, researchers and product managers face the most challenges?

Like most of the work we do at YUX, we focused in this study on *user research* because we think it's crucial and often overlooked when we talk about building services adapted to specific populations and needs.

Important: This is not a study on the UX industry, in ways that try to understand the number of professionals, their salaries, etc. (even though it would be a great one to do —maybe soon), but rather the summary of the tools, methods, and challenges people across the continent experience conducting user research.

We want to help researchers, product managers, and designers learn from their peers, improve their practices, and tell their boss: "let's go talk to some users"!

Limitations: most of the respondents to this study are practicing or interested in user research, so these data are naturally not representative of all African organizations.

This is our first year publishing this report and the first of its kind in Africa. It's not perfect yet, but we are excited to get the conversation started. So join the movement, and give us feedback.

Enjoy!

WHO PARTICIPATED?

METHODOLOGY & PARTICIPANTS ↘

QUALITATIVE

22

In-Depth Interviews

We conducted semi-directive interviews with UX designers, UX researchers, product managers and owners, scrum masters from startups, and large companies in our network. We also spoke to some of our survey participants. They live and work in Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana.

We had 1 facilitator and 1 note taker for each 45 to 60 min interview. All notes were taken on Notion and then analyzed using Miro. We analyzed these insights using affinity mapping, then visualized them on an experience map inspired by some phases of the typical UX design process steps. Finally, we made a focus on the recurring issues, adding some quotes from our interview participants.

QUANTITATIVE

129

Survey Responses

Thanks to our community partners across the continent, we reached out to design practitioners in various organizations via social media, emails, Slack and WhatsApp groups.

We got 129 responses from 18 countries, with 100 valid responses after screening.

This report highlights the primary insights from the survey responses, but we also added the most relevant comparisons we could find for some of the questions.
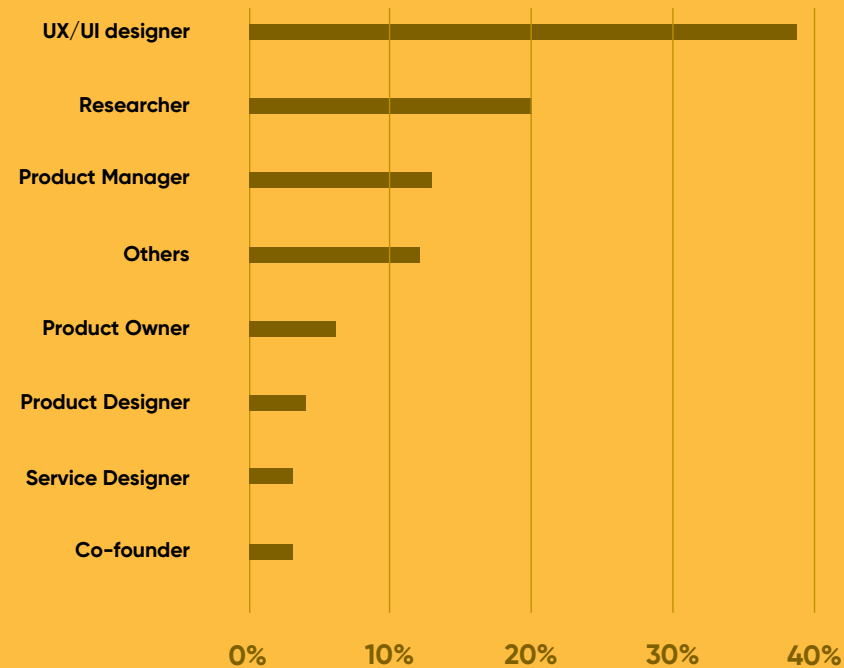
WHO PARTICIPATED? From 100 survey respondents
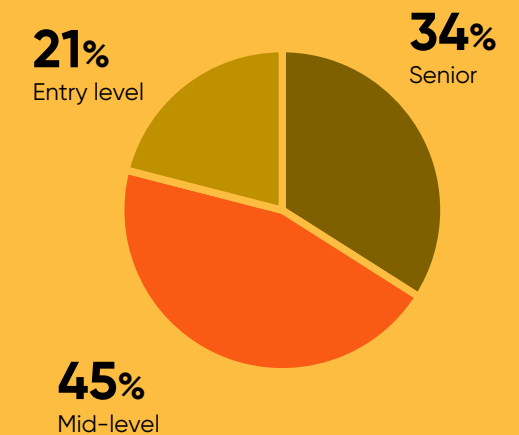
Where do you live?

What's your role?

Role	
UX/UI designer	
Researcher	
Product Manager	
Others	
Product Owner	
Product Designer	
Service Designer	
Co-founder	

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

We received responses describing various roles including
Developer, Growth Managers and Graphic Designers.

What's your level of experience?

21% Entry level
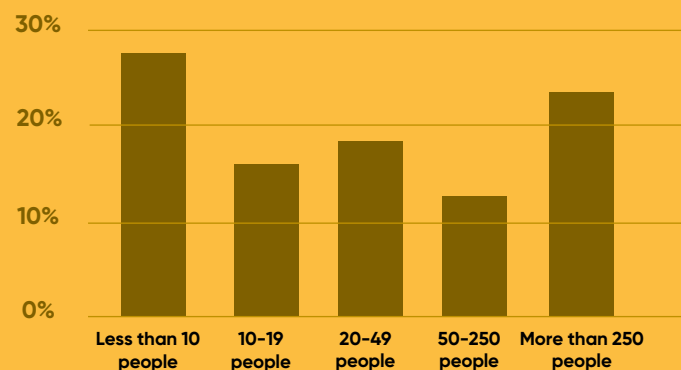
34% Senior

45% Mid-level

WHO PARTICIPATED? From 100 survey respondents

How do you describe your organization?

4% Product and Service based company

8.1% Not for profit

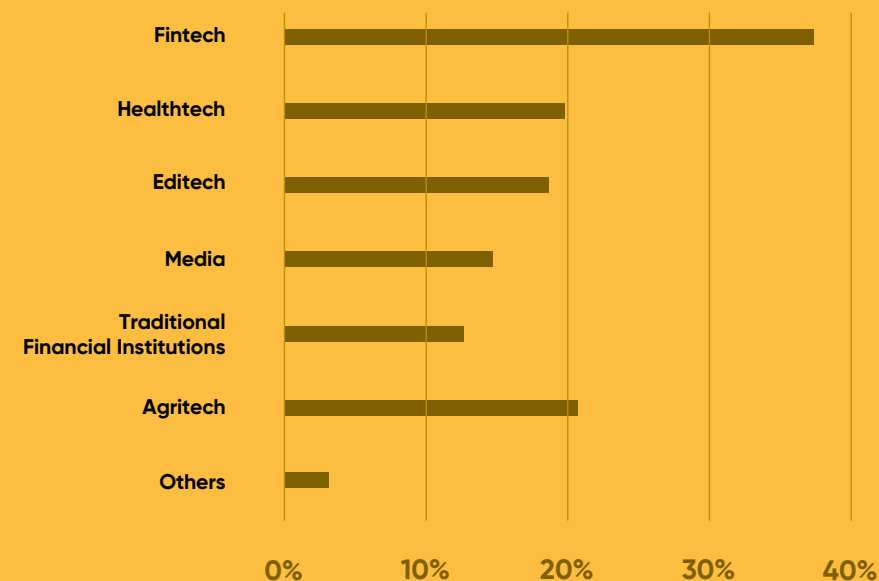**38.4%** Service based company

40.5% Product based company
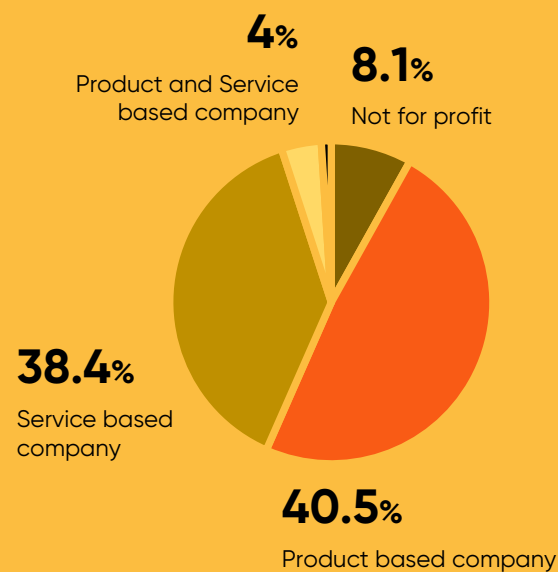
Quite a large number of service-based companies or agencies are involved to some extent in user research.

What's the size of your organization?

30%

20%

10%

0%

Less than 10 people | 10-19 people | 20-49 people | 50-250 people | More than 250 people

Not only startups are interested in the state of user research!

How would you describe the sector you work in?

Fintech
Healthtech
Editech
Media
Traditional Financial Institutions
Agritech
Others

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

We received responses from a broad range of sectors (20+) including e-Governance, wildlife conservation, Consulting and eCommerce.
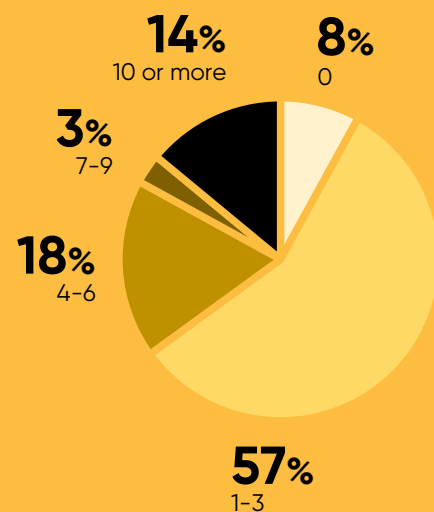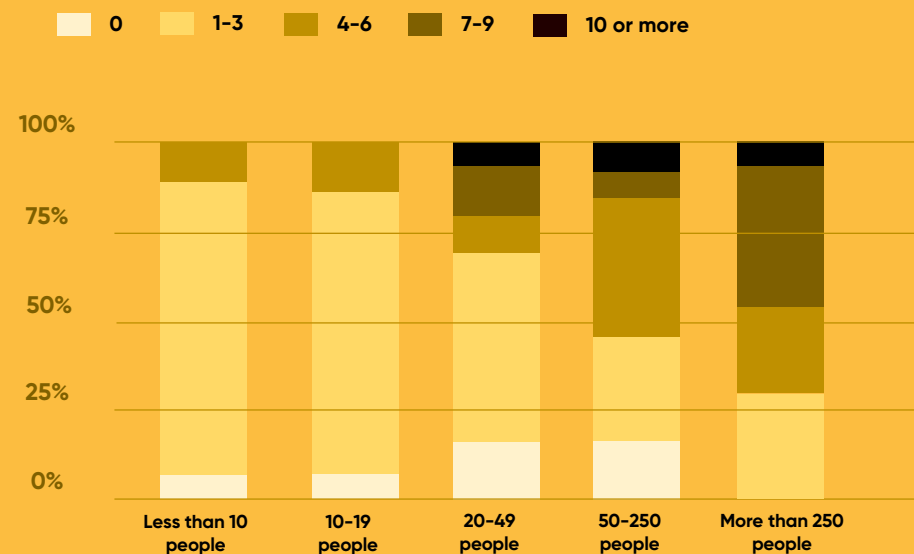
WHO HANDLES USER RESEARCH?

WHO HANDLES USER RESEARCH? From 100 survey respondents

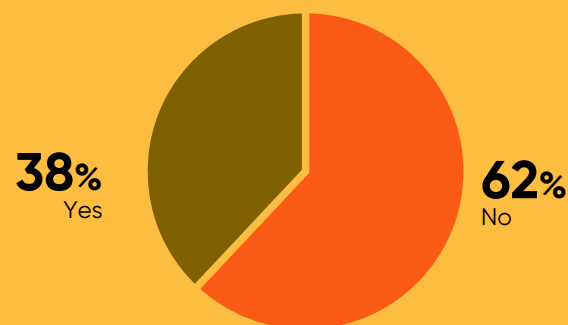### How many UX Designers work full-time at your company?

14% 10 or more

8% 0

3% 7-9

18% 4-6

57% 1-3

COMPARISON

Bigger organizations have a larger team of UX designers

0   1-3   4-6   7-9   10 or more

100%

75%

50%

25%

0%

Less than 10 people | 10-19 people | 20-49 people | 50-250 people | More than 250 people

Large organizations have a much bigger team of UX designers, with 42% of 250+ staff companies having at least 10 designers.

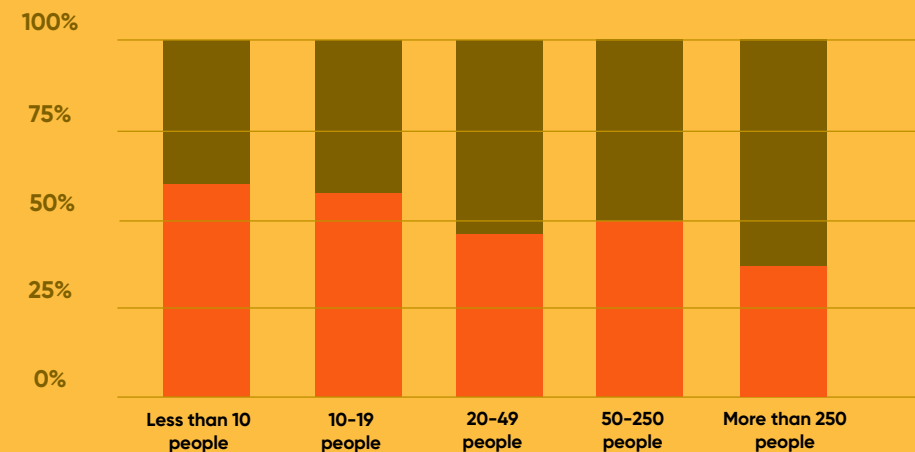## WHO HANDLES USER RESEARCH? From 100 survey respondents

Are there any UX researchers working full-time at your company?

COMPARISON

Smaller-sized organizations have fewer UX researchers

■ No   ■ Yes

38% Yes

62% No

100%
75%
50%
25%
0%

Less than 10 people | 10-19 people | 20-49 people | 50-250 people | More than 250 people
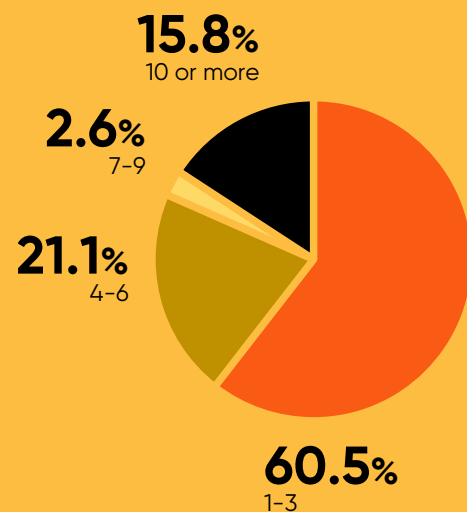
As expected, smaller-sized companies have fewer UX researchers than larger ones. This is probably due to companies' design maturity and hiring capacity - having a preference for hiring a full-stack UX designer first before having specialized teams. However, almost **1 out of 3 companies with 10 people or less have a UX researcher in the team.**
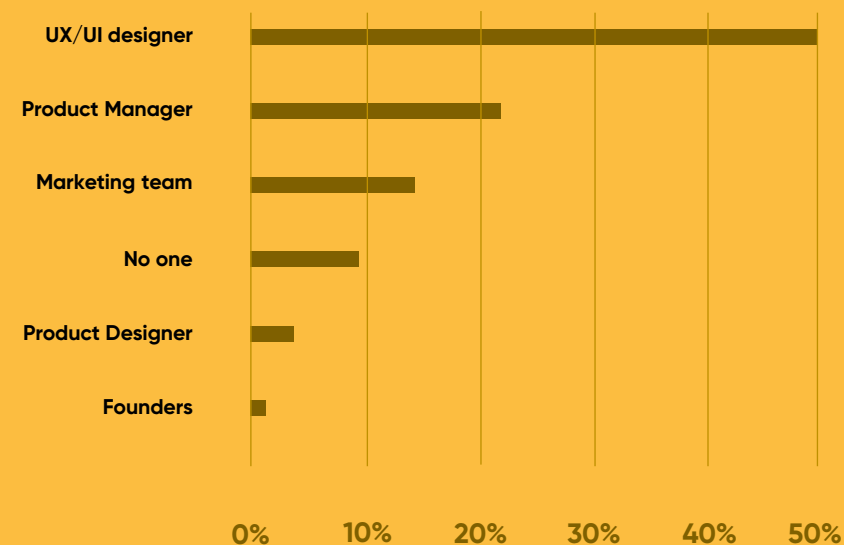
WHO HANDLES USER RESEARCH? From 38 respondents with UX researchers on the team and 62 without

How many UX Researchers work full-time at your company?

15.8%
10 or more

2.6%
7-9

21.1%
4-6

60.5%
1-3

For organizations without UX Researchers, who conducts research?

UX/UI designer
Product Manager
Marketing team
No one
Product Designer
Founders

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Marketing and sales teams are very involved in conducting research in Africa. For more context on this, see page 24 describing insights from our qualitative interviews. We also recommend founders _read this article_ and be more involved in research!
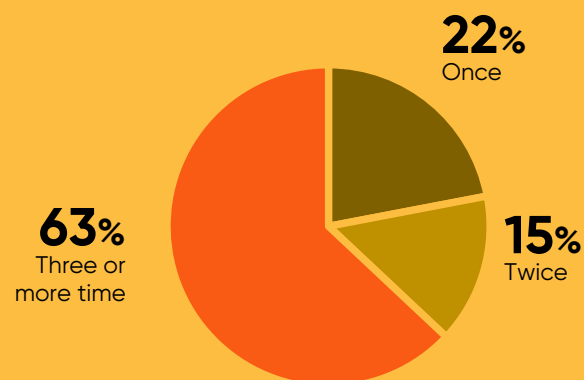
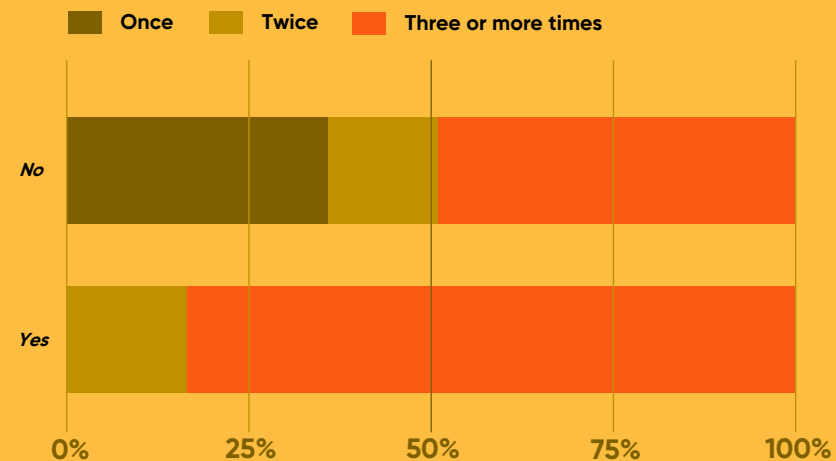# HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE?

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 38 respondents with UX researchers on the team and 62 without

How often is research conducted?

22%
Once

15%
Twice

63%
Three or
more time

How often is research conducted in organizations versus do you have a UX researcher on the team?

■ Once   ■ Twice   ■ Three or more times

No

Yes

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

Having a UX researcher on the team is impactful! Indeed, companies without UX researcher do not conduct research as often as companies with at least one.
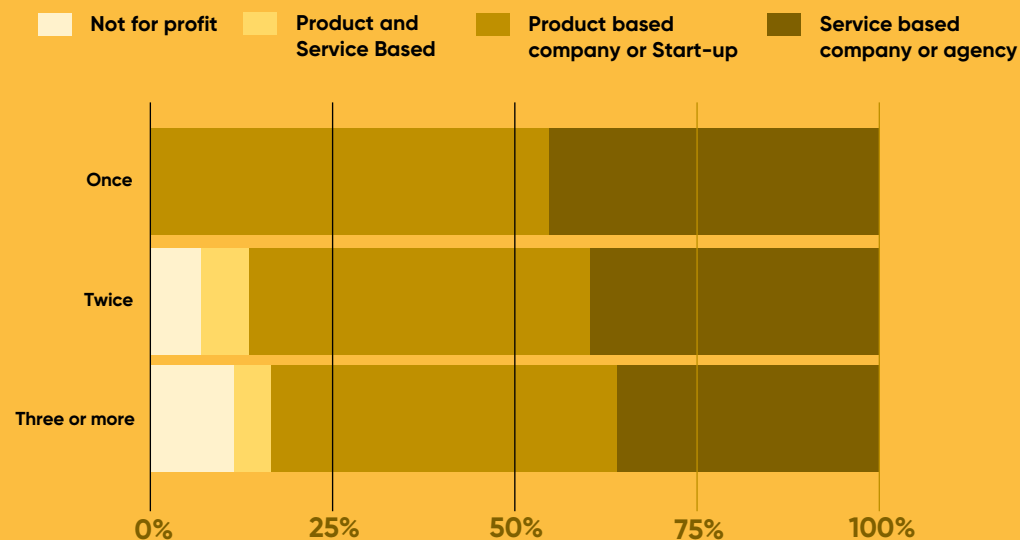
HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 38 respondents with UX researchers on the team and 62 without

### How often is research conducted versus the organization type?

Legend:
- Not for profit
- Product and Service Based
- Product based company or Start-up
- Service based company or agency

Not many of our survey respondents work with non-profits. Based on the distribution of responses we received, they do research more regularly than other types of organizations.

COMPARISON

How often is research conducted across different-sized organizations?

Legend:
- Less than 10 people
- 10-19 people
- 20-49 people
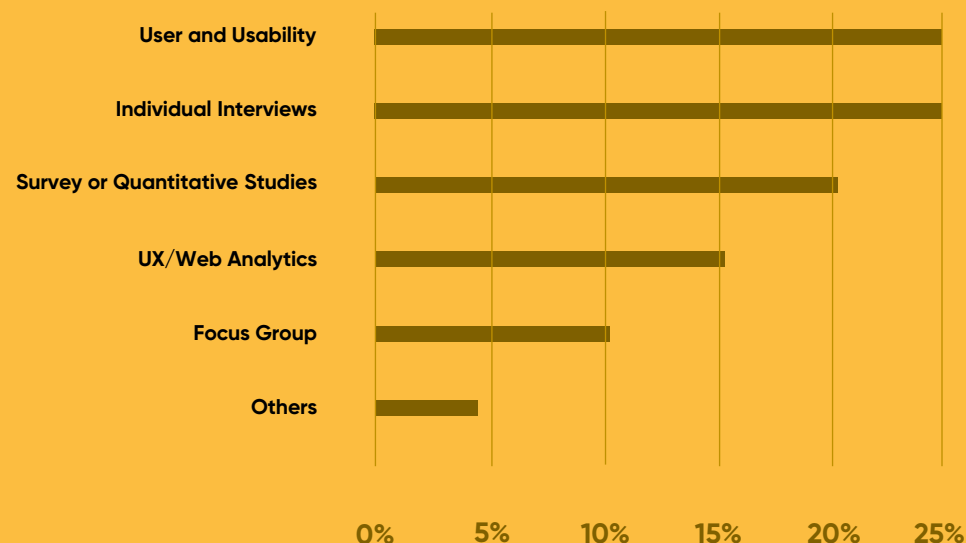- 50-250 people
- More than 250 people
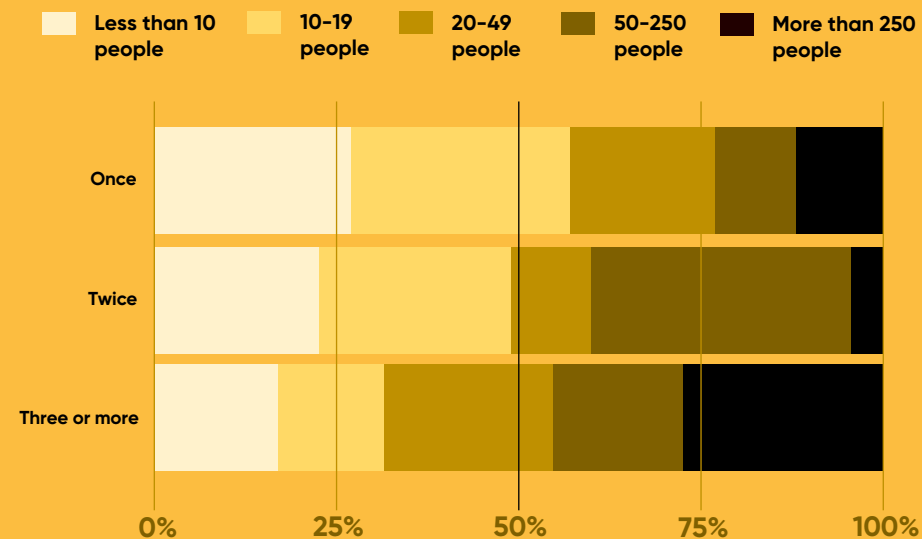
Larger organizations run user research more often than smaller ones. This could be counter-intuitive thinking of how startups are usually more agile and iterative in their process.

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 38 respondents with UX researchers on the team and 62 without
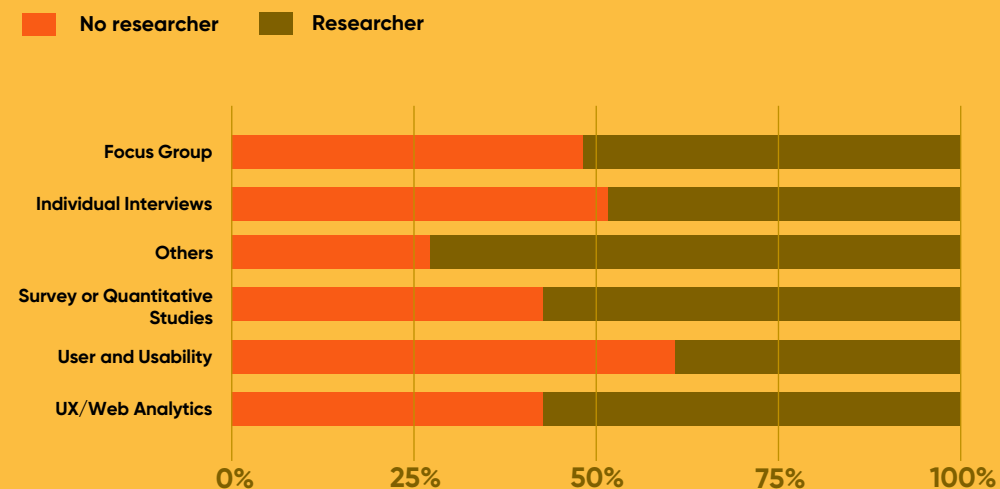
What type of research do you conduct? *(Multi-choice)*

Chart: What type of research do you conduct?
- User and Usability ~25%
- Individual Interviews ~24%
- Survey or Quantitative Studies ~20%
- UX/Web Analytics ~15%
- Focus Group ~10%
- Others ~4%

Most organizations use a qualitative and quantitative approach to user research, with a slight preference for the former.

COMPARISON

What type of research is conducted in organizations with or without UX researchers?

■ No researcher   ■ Researcher

Chart: What type of research is conducted in organizations with or without UX researchers?
- Focus Group
- Individual Interviews
- Others
- Survey or Quantitative Studies
- User and Usability
- UX/Web Analytics

Organizations with user researchers use a much broader range of research methods. The other significant difference lies in user tests, which is a favorite for organizations without in-house researchers. That's interesting because it is quite hard to do testing properly.

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 38 respondents with UX researchers on the team and 62 without

### What type of research is conducted in organizations versus the frequency of research?

COMPARISON

What type of research is conducted versus the type of organization?
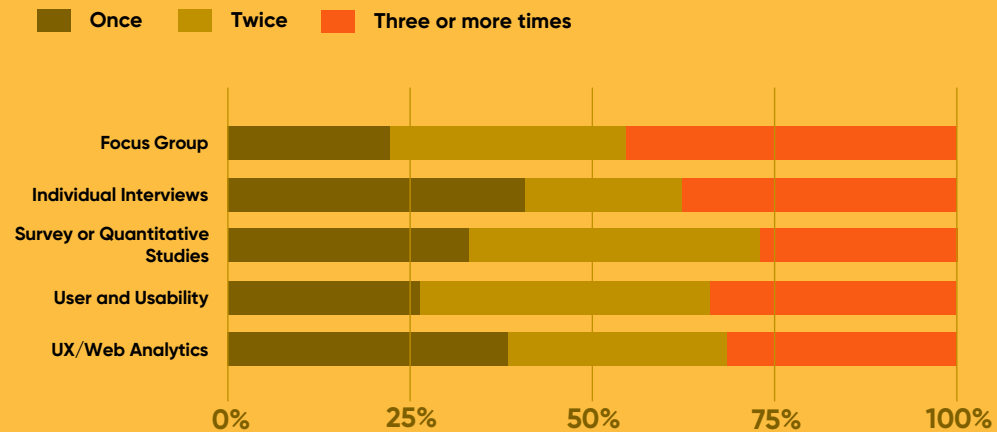
Focus groups are liked by companies running research regularly. That is a little surprising for us because we find them less and less relevant to draw user insights due to various cultural sensitivities that hold people from sharing insights publicly.
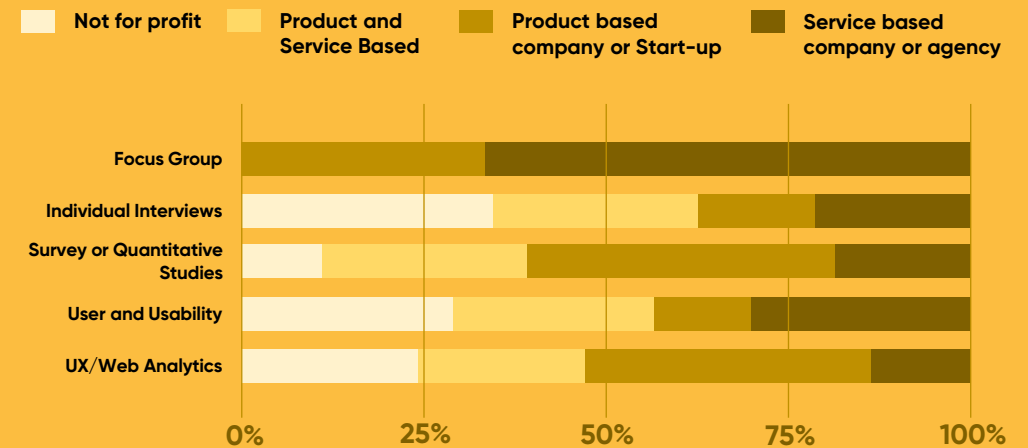
From our data, non-profits don't do focus groups. This may be linked to some of the sensitive topics they sometimes deal with. Likewise, non-profits are the least interested in quantitative studies.

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 100 survey respondents
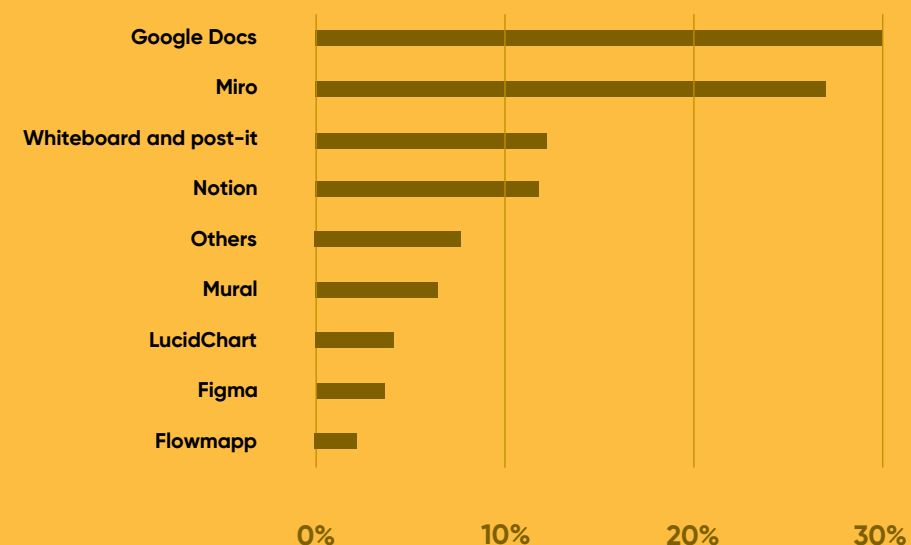
What tools do you use for <u>research</u>?
(Multi-choice)

Tool	Value
Google Forms	~46%
Calendly	~16%
Typeform	~13%
Notion	~13%
Others	~10%
Doodle	~3%
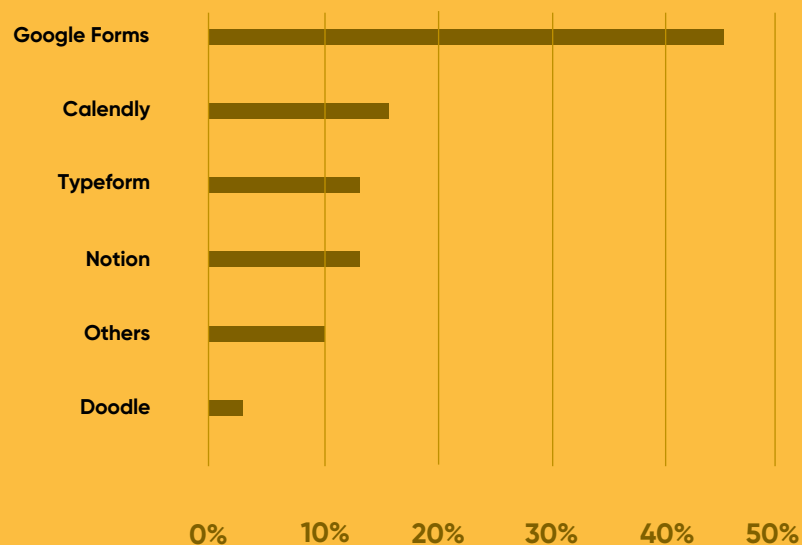
Google form takes the lead; wow! Also we were surprised to see that Whatsapp is not used as much for research, notably diary studies. Naturally, Notion is fast-establishing its leadership amongst African UX researchers too.

What tools do you use for <u>collaboration</u>?
(Multi-choice)

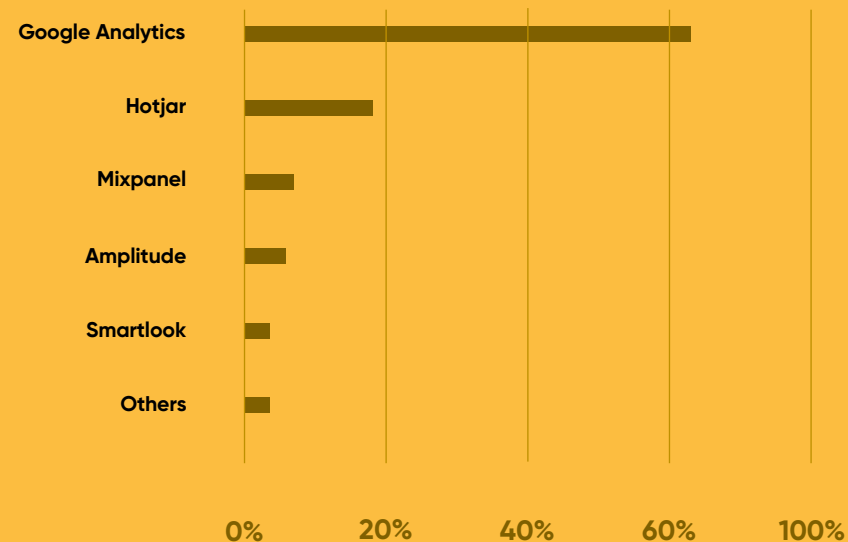| Tool	Value
Google Docs	~30%
Miro	~27%
Whiteboard and post-it	~12%
Notion	~12%
Others	~8%
Mural	~6%
LucidChart	~4%
Figma	~4%
Flowmapp	~2%

Along with Google Docs, Miro saved us during the pandemic but interestingly, 30% of us still use the good 'ol whiteboards and sticky notes! The "others" category includes Zoom, Dropbox, Excel, Framer and Clickup.

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 100 survey respondents

What tools do you use for <u>analytics</u>?
(Multi-choice)

Tool	
Google Analytics	▇▇▇▇ (~63%)
Hotjar	▇ (~18%)
Mixpanel	▍ (~7%)
Amplitude	▍ (~6%)
Smartlook	▏ (~4%)
Others	▏ (~4%)

0%   20%   40%   60%   100%

What tools do you use for <u>UI design</u>?
(Multi-choice)

Tool	
Figma	▇▇▇▇ (~42%)
Adobe XD	▇▇ (~24%)
Sketch	▇ (~17%)
Invision	▍ (~10%)
Others	▎ (~5%)
Framer	▏ (~1%)

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Another Google product in the lead. Does the accessibility of Google products play a role in this? Also it will be interesting to follow the evolution of Mixpanel and Amplitude over the years as they seem more suited for stakeholders engagement around analytics.
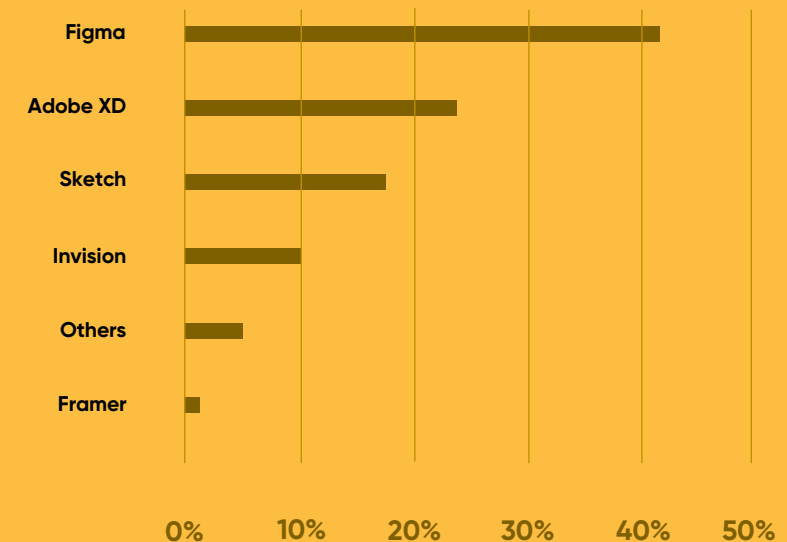
Good job by the Friends of Figma communities on the continent! In 2018, our team bought 10 MacBook's because Sketch could only work on that! It is interesting to see how Figma has played a role in making UI design more accessible in Africa.

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 100 survey respondents + 22 in-depth interviews

What stage of the design process do you think needs tools adapted for the African context?

User Research / Discovery
(25 mentions)

Testing
(12 mentions)

Prototyping
(4 mentions)

"I struggle with the research bit, especially recruiting and getting genuine input from participants."

"A tool that can describe specific markets/audiences alongside their cultures, lifestyles, potentials needs and wants, demographics etc."

"The idea would be to have methodologies and tools that are specific to the African context during fieldwork."

"Currently, offerings can't transcribe local dialects, and even in English, it's expensive to get transcriptions for audio files."

"I do a lot of benchmarking on other African apps, but there is no platform for that or enough African UX case studies."

"Synchronous qualitative research. Zoom can be unreliable, and we often have to fall back to chat. We're working on making that more seamless so that we can detect if someone has slow internet and use a chat solution instead of zoom."

"Tools that can help participants share as freely without intimidation of tools and languages

"Sometimes you have to collect information from people in communities where smartphone ownership is low or have good enough internet connection to do online surveys. We are testing audio surveys with illiterate populations as well as SMS and WhatsApp based surveys."

HOW IS USER RESEARCH DONE? From 100 survey respondents + 22 in-depth interviews

What stage of the design process do you think needs tools adapted for the African context?

"The interface design phase, due to unstable internet connection and power outages."

"The prototyping phase because it is the part where the user interacts with the actual solution. In my opinion, this stage should be contextualized as much as possible."

"Visual design, e.g. a repository of stock photos and icons fit for Africans."

"I think prototyping and testing. Most times, you take back the designs to your users, but they are in remote areas without power or internet connection. Some of these tools are not as friendly in offline mode or have no offline mode at all."
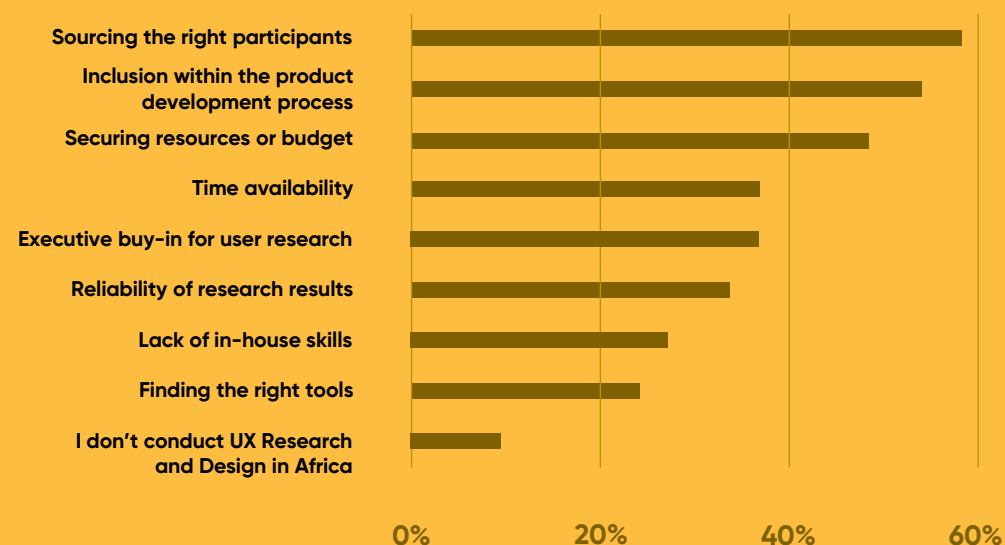
User Research / Discovery
(25 mentions)

Prototyping
(4 mentions)

Testing
(12 mentions)

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING?

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? From 100 survey respondents

What challenges do you face conducting **user research**?
(Multi-choice)

Sourcing the right participants
Inclusion within the product development process
Securing resources or budget
Time availability
Executive buy-in for user research
Reliability of research results
Lack of in-house skills
Finding the right tools
I don't conduct UX Research and Design in Africa

0%   20%   40%   60%

Our respondents' most prominent challenge is sourcing the right participants, with more than half (**58%**) choosing that as a challenge.

Interestingly, most other challenges point to internal factors rather than external ones: inclusion within the product development process (**54%**), securing resources (**48%**), time availability (**38%**) and getting executive buying (**38%**).

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING?
Overview of research challenges and opportunities
– from 22 in-depth interviews

Areas	USER RESEARCH	UX ANALYTICS	PROTOTYPING	USER TESTING	CROSS-TEAM COLLABORATION
Frustration level	🙁	😐	😃	🙁	😐
Issues	• Deciding on what tool is right • Recruiting participants (numbers & reliability) • Giving incentives in some cases skew responses • Internet and network issues for remote research • Getting leadership buy-in for research	• Don't have time to run quantitative research because we need instant feedback	• Designing to capture affordances for users who aren't as tech savvy e.g older Africans	• Getting users at ease with testing platform and digital tools • Quantitative user testing platforms don't cater to the African demographic and are expensive	• Onboarding leadership and managers onto new tools
Opportunities (as brainstormed by our team)	• A participant profiling platform adapted to the diversity of African users • More tools for face to face survey with trained researchers	• Data hub with macro data accessible to all • More sensitization on the value / visualization tools for qualitative insights	• Prototyping tool for USSD menu and SMS	• Need for tools with a shallow learning curve to onboard users for test	• Simplified and more collaborative tools to involve management • Increase story-telling and storyboard skills of researchers and designers

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? From 22 in-depth interviews

1 **Participant recruitment - a tale as old as time?**

Participant recruitment for research is a tale as old as time - getting people to show up, reliable participants, tech literacy, security, cultural contexts, finding a diverse set of participants and difficulty conducting remote research in lower-income areas.

Recommendation

- **Take time and invest in good participant profiling**

"It is more challenging for B2B products. Small business owners are careful to share information about their businesses due to cultural context and state of security."

- UX Researcher, Nigeria

"A few participants (not more than 20% usually) give unreliable answers because their only motivation for showing up is the incentives."

- Lead Designer, Nigeria

"Sometimes, people don't show up at all. Or show up and they are not prepared."

- Lead Designer, Nigeria

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? Qualitative interviews with 22 interviewees

2 **Getting executive buy-in**

Finding the right tools for research has always been a challenge; however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become a greater priority to adopt practical tools for research.

Recommendation

- Sensitize decision-makers on the value of research by showing case studies and involving them in fieldwork

- Simplified and more collaborative tools to involve management

"Research is new to the company and a big challenge is mapping out and defining what the research process should look like exactly."

– UX Designer, Kenya

"The quantity of interviews poses a problem when we do research: the internal stakeholders don't trust small numbers because they are not at ease with the qualitative approach."

– Product Owner, Senegal

"Having conflicts with stakeholders on what needs to be done (frequency and severity) can be unproductive."

– Lead Designer, Rwanda

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? Qualitative interviews with 22 interviewees

3 **Onboarding users on research tools and platform?**

With little extensive and foundational research, there is a significant focus on functionality over the experience—this deprioritization of research results in designs that are not well thought-through. This deprioritization of research makes getting buy-in to prioritize research a huge problem.

Recommendation

- **Use collaborative tools so that anyone in your team can have access and play with your research insights and data**

"Ethnographic studies have not been possible due to the effect of the pandemic. We're considering adopting tools that will ease our remote research process in the future."

- Service Designer, Uganda

"There are no tools like Otter.AI for instance, that can transcribe voices with African accents into text."

- UX Researcher, Nigeria

"People's engagement with technology varies greatly. There are inequalities in tech savviness across different income-brackets."

- Lead Designer, Rwanda

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? Qualitative interviews with 22 interviewees

4

Resources, resources - are they available?

The most common resource constraints researchers face are funds, time, knowledge and experience and, more recently, COVID.

Recommendation

- **Find ways to make research cost and time effective using accessible tools that suit your context**

"Incorporating design thinking into our product development process has created a new skill and knowledge gap within our organization. We are working to ensure the team have this skill and train our people to gain mastery."

- Innovation Lead, Nigeria

"Sometimes, research experiments are not well designed and timing is a bit long. This slows our research down."

- Lead Researcher, Uganda

"It's hard to get payment from the company for tools. So pay with my own means and test them out before recommending it internally."

- UX/UI Designer, Ghana

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? Qualitative interviews with 22 interviewees

5 **Getting data on diverse local context(s)**

The language barrier, knowledge gap of the different cultural contexts to consider (especially researching products that have scaled continent-wide), and insufficient documentation on design conventions are huge challenges.

Recommendation

- **More documentation - writing and sharing best practices and cultural nuances to consider while researching.**

"Each country has its specificities, and there aren't enough resources on UX Research in Africa"

- Product Manager, Senegal

" Sometimes the right data is not available to make key decisions. For companies looking to scale, information about specific markets are either completely private, or not available at all."

- Product Analyst, Mauritius

"There are not many resources online that includes the view of older Africans and the design conventions they follow interacting with online products."

- UX/UI Designer, Ghana

WHY IS USER RESEARCH CHALLENGING? Qualitative interviews with 22 interviewees

6 **Listening to users? Sales team to the rescue!**

Working with the marketing and sales team (or agents) to conduct research are innovative ways design teams in Africa are approaching research. Often, the customers (especially from lower-income communities) are already comfortable speaking to the sales team and readily open up. This allows them to share their feedback unreservedly with the sales team member they are already familiar with. However, the challenge this poses is that there is no way to verify insights gotten from the sales team.

Recommendation

- **Train more teammates, notably in the sales or field teams to support you in research**

"While the UX designers leads research, the sales team members interact with merchants to collect feedback from customers. That's fast but we have no means to verify the quality of their insights."

- UX Designer, Kenya

"There are debates around feature needs with customer success team - they don't see the long term vision."

- UX Designer, Ghana

"Sometimes, for research, we work with our field agents who are in direct contact with our end users to get feedback as they easily speak to them."

- UX Designer, Ghana

CONCLUSIONS & LOOKING FORWARD

USER RESEARCH IS GETTING DEMOCRATIZED, BUT IT'S STILL IN ITS EARLY DAYS. ↘

As we have seen, user research in Africa is still at its dawn. Most of the people we interviewed expressed some difficulties conducting research, such as :

1. Participant recruitment
2. Getting management buy-in
3. Finding practical tools for the African context
4. Time and resource constraints for research
5. Data and knowledge of varied local contexts: the lack of public data to conduct secondary research.
6. Sales team and field agents acting as researchers

We were also surprised to see the simplicity of the tools people use mainly for research like google form, google slide, or WhatsApp to a lesser extent. Our qualitative insights point to the struggle with researching in areas where language is a barrier, lack of well-adapted tools for the African context, particularly to address research in rural areas with power issues and areas where people aren't as tech-savvy.

Some good products address some of these challenges, like *Kimoyo Insights* or *LOOKA*, but there is a huge opportunity to build more UX research products.

Also, some of us are making great efforts to train more UX researchers like the Nairobi *Design Institute* or our own *YUX Academy*.

Here are our recommendations for how UX practitioners can move research forward in Africa:

1. Take time and invest in good participant profiling
2. Sensitize decision-makers on the value of research by showing case studies and involving them in fieldwork
3. Use collaborative tools so that anyone in your team can have access and play with your research insights and data
4. Train more teammates, notably in the sales or field teams to support you in research
5. Find ways to make research cost and time effective using accessible tools that suit your context

But don't worry, you're not alone! The entire team at YUX, our community partners, and more local design agencies are here to support you wherever you are on this continent!

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