CULTURAL PROBE

WHAT

- Cultural probes are an alternative means of collecting information to better understand people.
- They usually come in the form of a toolkit that provides participants with a means for self-expression. The toolkit could include a map, postcard, camera, diary, stickers, etc.
- Cultural probes allow participants to self-reflect while interacting with the toolkit in order to generate ideas and surface values, hopes and dreams.
- They prompt participants to self-report on their daily activities, how they interact with their world, and how they live their lives.
- Cultural probes help participants explore an issue through abstraction and accommodate ambiguity.

WHY

- Cultural probes help researchers uncover what participants are thinking. They surface deep-seated values, hopes and dreams.
- Cultural probes are appropriate when you need to gather information from users and wish to avoid inadvertently influencing their response.

PHASE
Exploration

LENGTH
1 day to 1-2 weeks

STEPS

1. Write a research question.

2. Identify a group you would like to study based on your research goals.

3. Design a kit of materials that help participants describe their ideas or feelings on your selected research question. Kits may include disposable cameras, maps, stickers, postcards or notebooks. Include material for expression.

4. Deliver the toolkit (in person, by mail or email) with instructions to participants and allow them to interact with the kit at their own pace.

5. Alone, the participant interacts with the toolkit, following the instructions provided by the researcher and completing the tasks within the kit at his or her own pace.

6. Once completed, participants explain their results either through a written or recorded statement.

7. Collect the completed cultural probes and analyze the results.

8. Optional feedback: After analyzing the results, you may want to meet with the participants, individually or as a group, to better understand the inspirations that were sparked as a result of the materials in the tool kit.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

http://infodesign.com.au/usabilityresources/culturalprobes/
http://designresearchtechniques.com/casestudies/cultural-probes/

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