

# Unlocking Potential: **Human-Centered Design** in Higher Education

Exploring the benefits of a Deep Understanding of  
Human Behaviour and Culture in Academia

**Kishan Rama**  
**UPX 2025**



# Kishan Rama 🤘

Sports Media

Broadcast & Streaming

Digital Banking

Online Shopping

Throughout my career, one truth has become increasingly clear:

**People aren't pixels !**

By understanding the behaviors, needs, and 'culture' of our community, we can create more effective, engaging and equitable experiences for everyone.



# Are we really **feeling** our users?

Different types of learners require inclusive design



Are our systems truly inclusive?  
Risks of one-size-fits-all solutions.

# Go Beyond & Embrace Human-Centered Design

We can create designs that are not only beautiful and usable but also culturally relevant and socially impactful ✨



# Usability **MythBusters** in Academia

These myths lead to decisions that don't serve our community and prevent us from leveraging the power of technology in education.





# **Myth #1:** **"If you build it - they will come"**

Reality: Functionality is nothing without adoption.

Poor UX wastes investment.



” If you build it, they will come”

The screenshot shows the Supersport website's TV Guide interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Supersport logo and links for Football, Rugby, Cricket, Tennis, Golf, and Motorsport. Below this, there are filters for 'All Sports' and 'All Channels', along with a 'Live only' toggle. The main content is organized into sections: 'On Now' featuring Arsenal v West Ham, 'The High Press', Chelsea v Liverpool, and C Vigo v A Madrid; 'Live and upcoming' featuring EFC 128, Int Friendly '25: ENG v WAL, and FIFA WC Qualifiers; and a 'Football' section at the bottom. Each event card includes a logo, title, and time.

The screenshot shows the Supersport mobile app interface. At the top, it displays 'HIGHLIGHTS, VIDEO AND MUCH MORE!'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'Sport, Team, Tournament'. A row of icons represents various sports and teams: Arsenal, Springboks, ATP Tour, Champions League, and Premier League. The main content area features a large image of a football player (Mane) with the headline 'Mane sinks Chelsea, Son hits four in Spurs rout' and a sub-headline 'A day ago'. The bottom of the screen shows a 'Premier League' category header.



# **Myth #2:** **"Our users are all tech-savvy"**

Reality: Assume minimal expertise.  
Complexity is a barrier for everyone.



# “Users are all tech-savvy”

**My Bank Accounts**

Transact | Insure | Search | Download | Print

Andile, this is just for you!

- Pre-Approved: You qualify for a temporary loan of R4000! no forms, no fuss!
- Pre-Approved: Increase your credit limit! get it now!
- Pre-Approved: Take up an Overdraft of R3700.00 no paperwork!

**Day To Day**

Account Name	Account Number	Balance	Available Balance	
Savings Pocket	62378898377	R 130.48	R 130.48	Transfers   Statements   More
Gold Credit Card	490136*****1000	-2000	13000	Transfers   Pay   Statements   More
Gold Cheque	62176334820	R 3410.58	R 3410.58	Transfers   Pay   Statements   More
<b>Total</b>		<b>1541.06</b>	<b>16410.58</b>	

+ Add a day to day account

**Rewards**

Account Name	Account Number	Balance	Available Balance
aBucks Account	80015262431	eB 2,180.00	eB 2,180.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,180.00</b>	<b>2,180.00</b>

76% 10:11

FNB

There's no better time to start banking from your pocket.

#RealHelp

Search the FNB App...

- Login
- Apply now
- Buy
- Messages
- Payments
- Transfers
- Cards
- eBucks
- navigate life
- Insurance
- Geo Payments

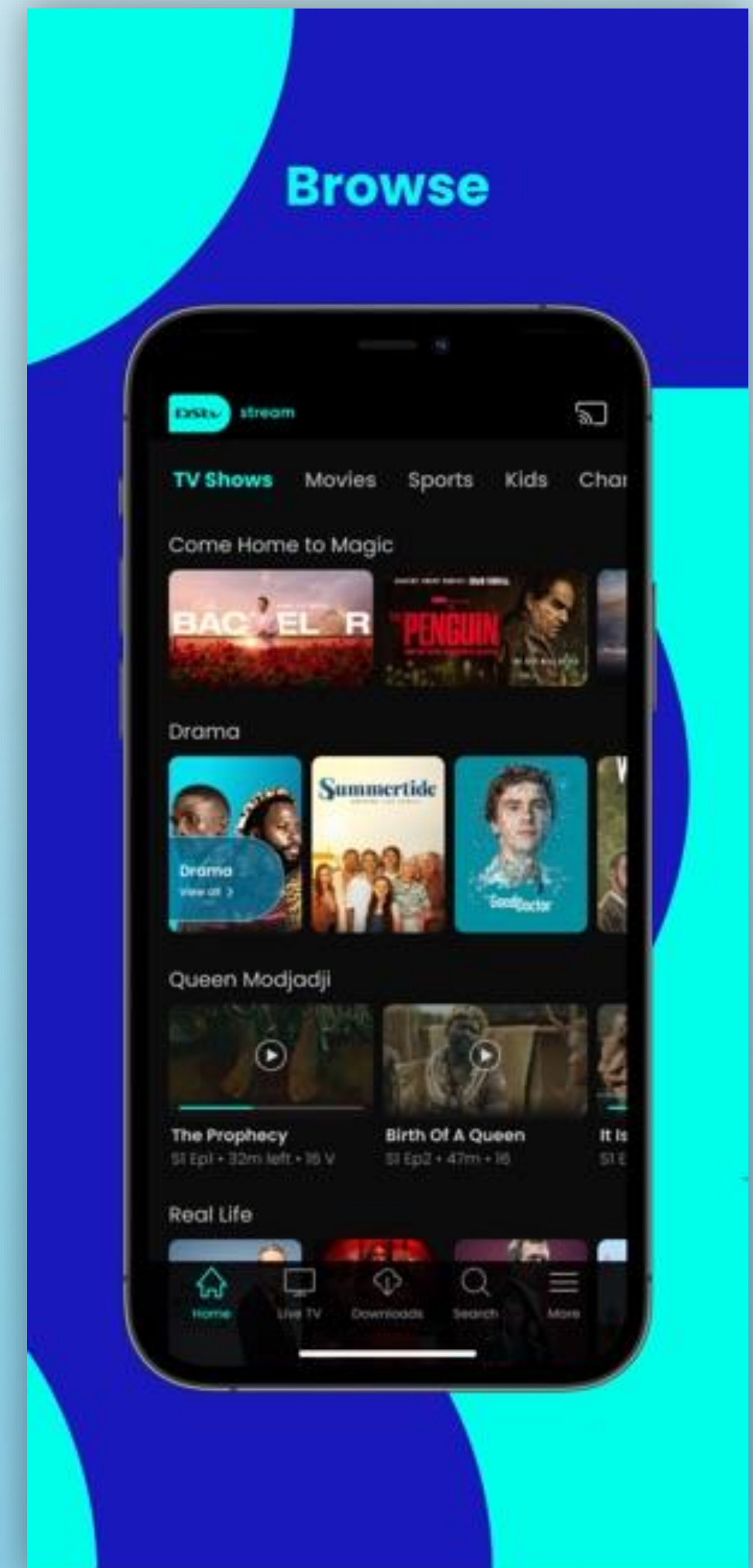
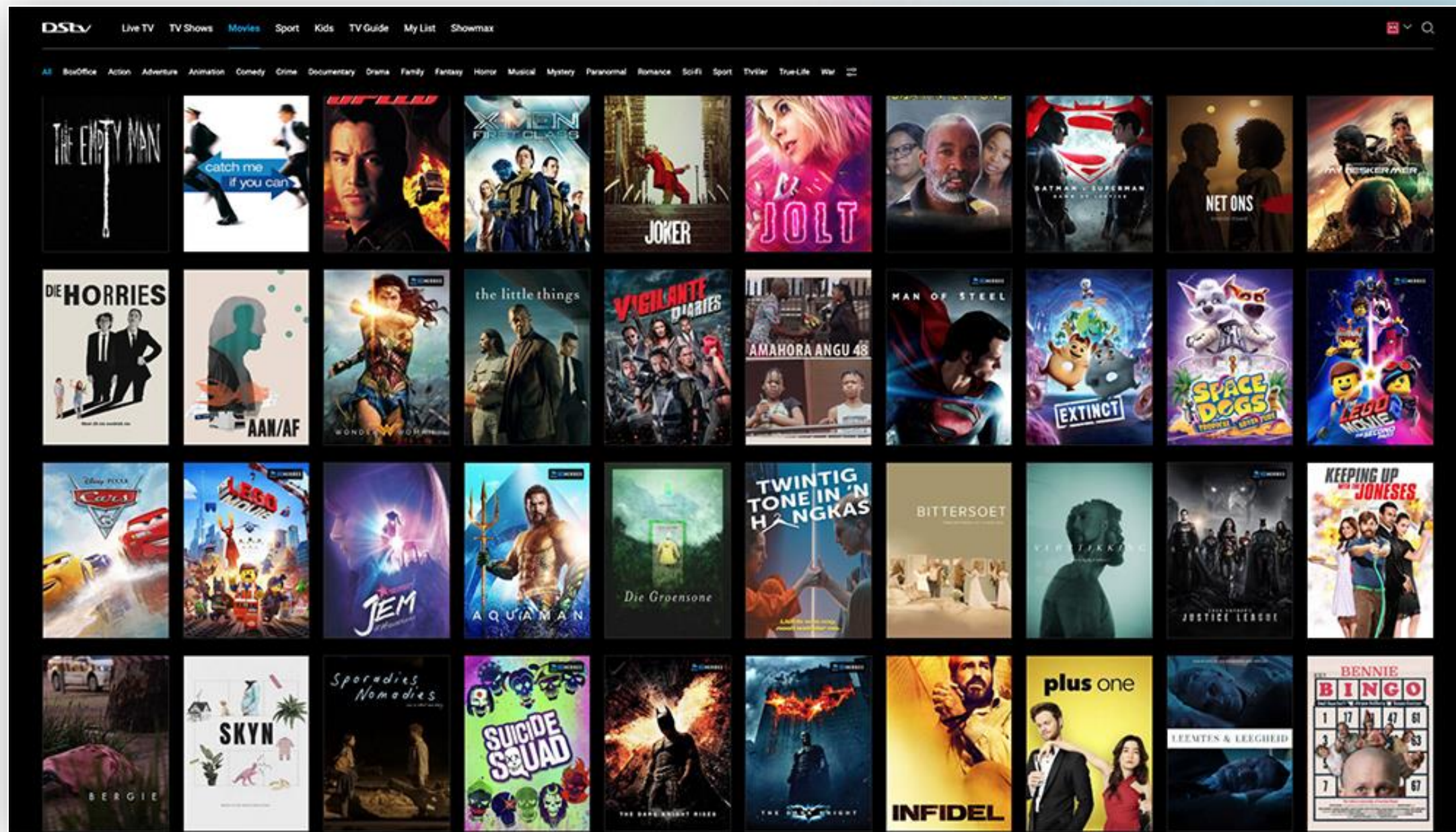


# Myth #3: "Accessibility is a special request."

Reality: Accessibility is a fundamental requirement.  
It is legal, ethical, and improves usability for all users.



# "There's an average user."



# The Cost of Assumptions

Projects based on incorrect assumptions are

**"5 x MORE LIKELY TO FAIL"**



**The cost of these assumptions is significant.**

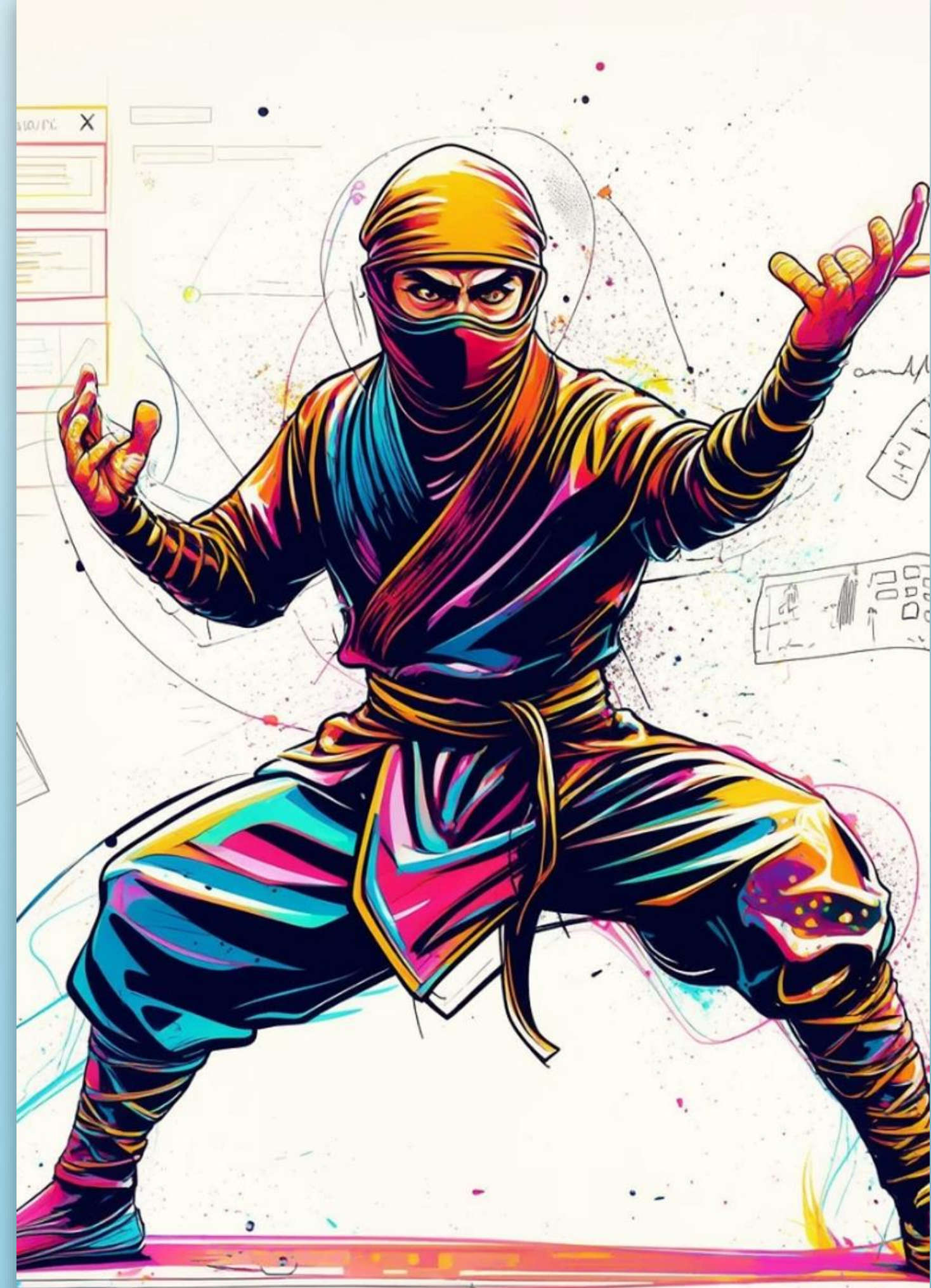
These can be damaging, and they come with a real cost to our institutions.

70% of online businesses fail because of bad usability.

# UX Kung Fu: Tools for **Low-Resource** Ninjas ☐

Practical tools and techniques for achieving high-quality UX outcomes  
Got a tight budget? No worries!

Low-resource testing methods can still yield great results.

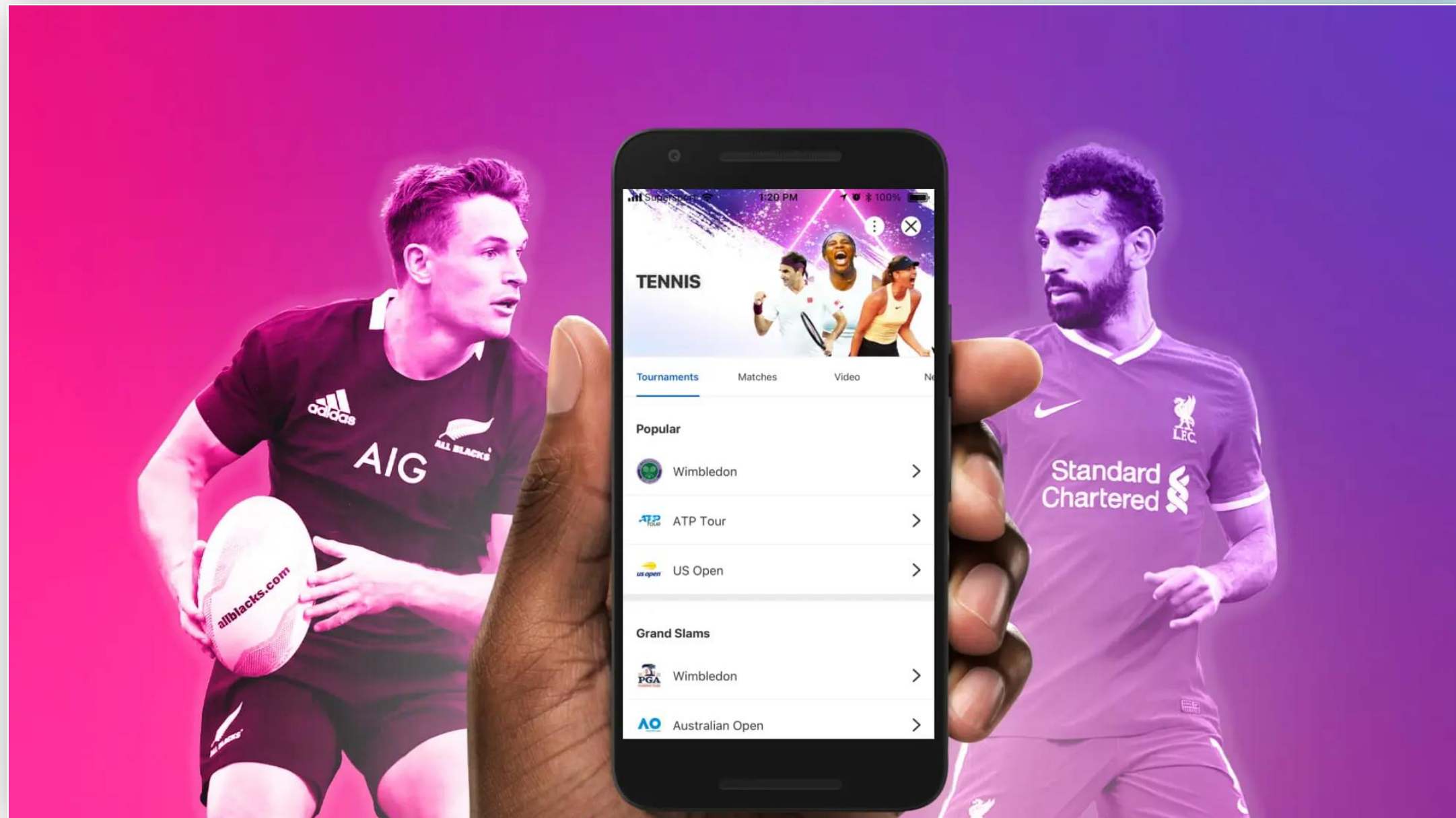


# 1. Lean Research

Big Impact, Small Budget.  
Go Where Your Users Are.  
Contextual Enquiries.



# Contextual Inquiry - Lite

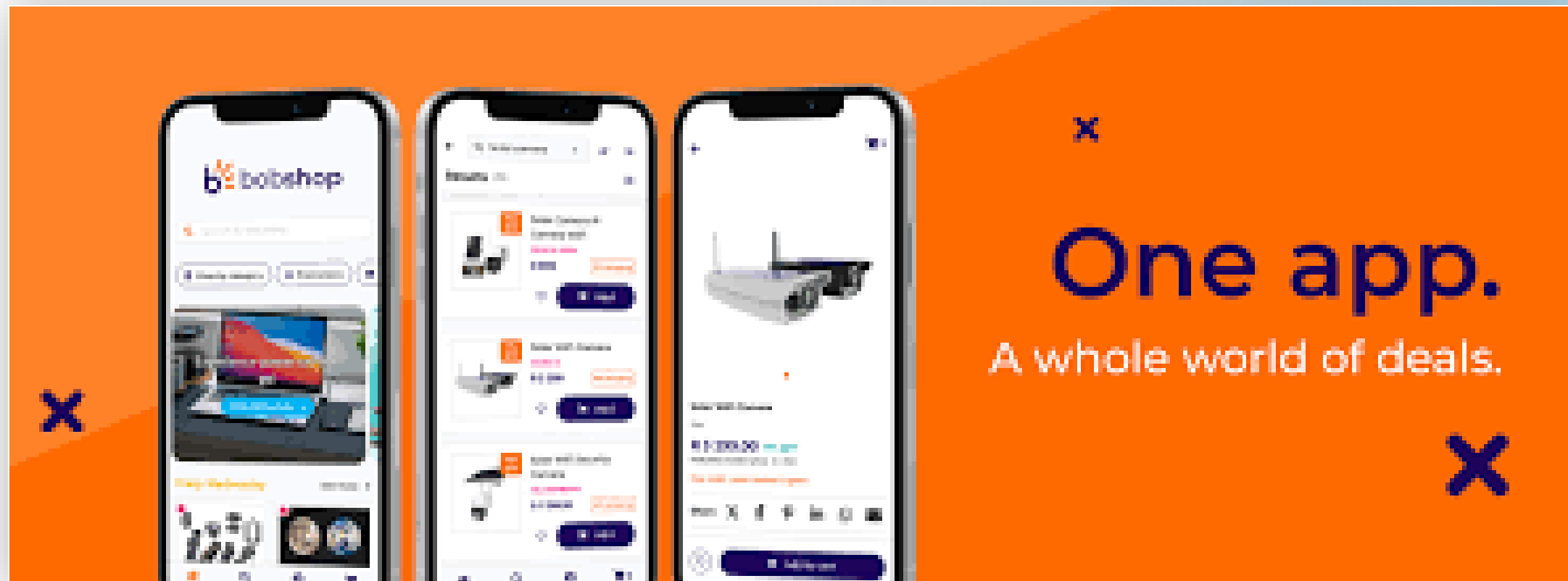


## 2. Participatory Design

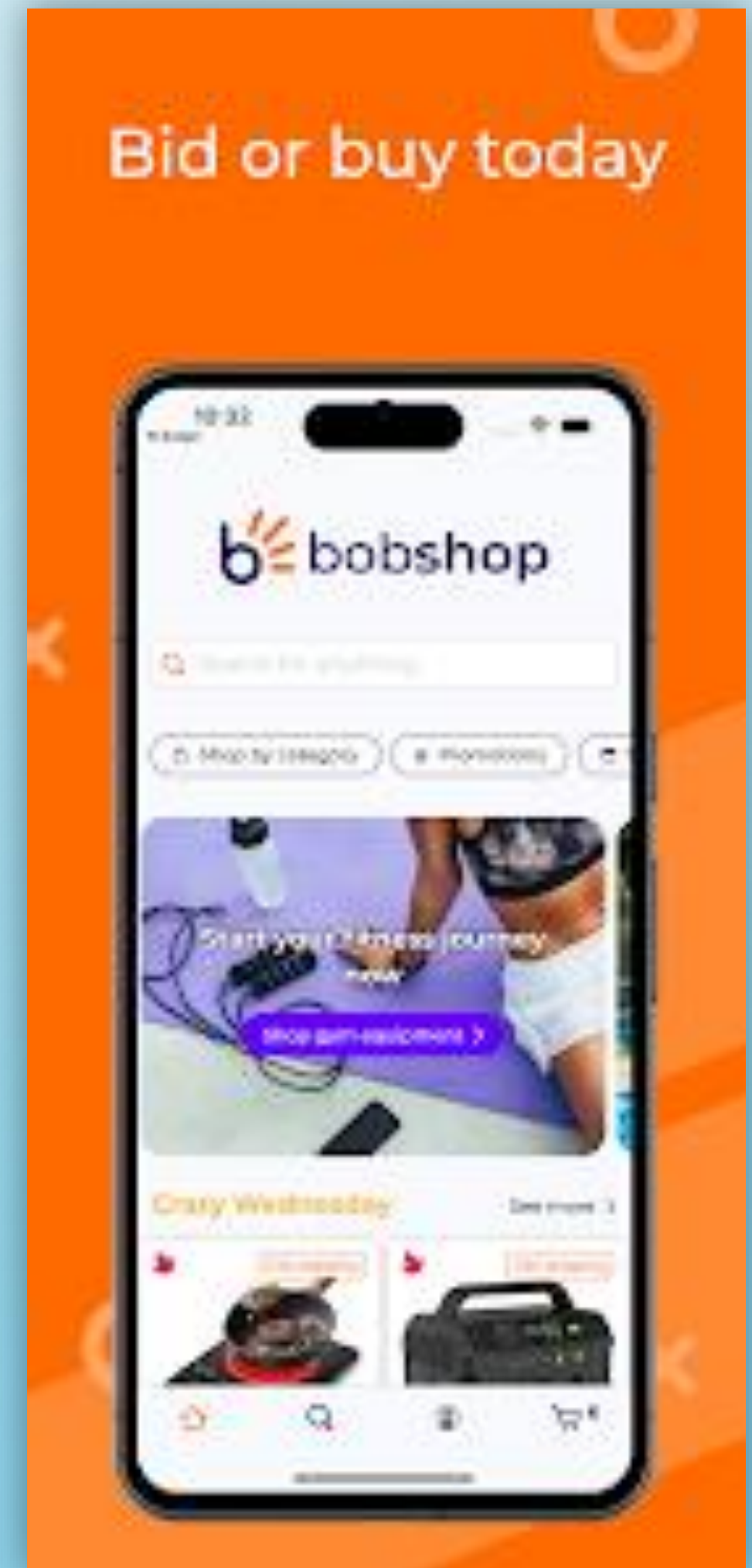
Turn your users into co-designers!  
Co-Creating with the University Community



# Community Design Councils

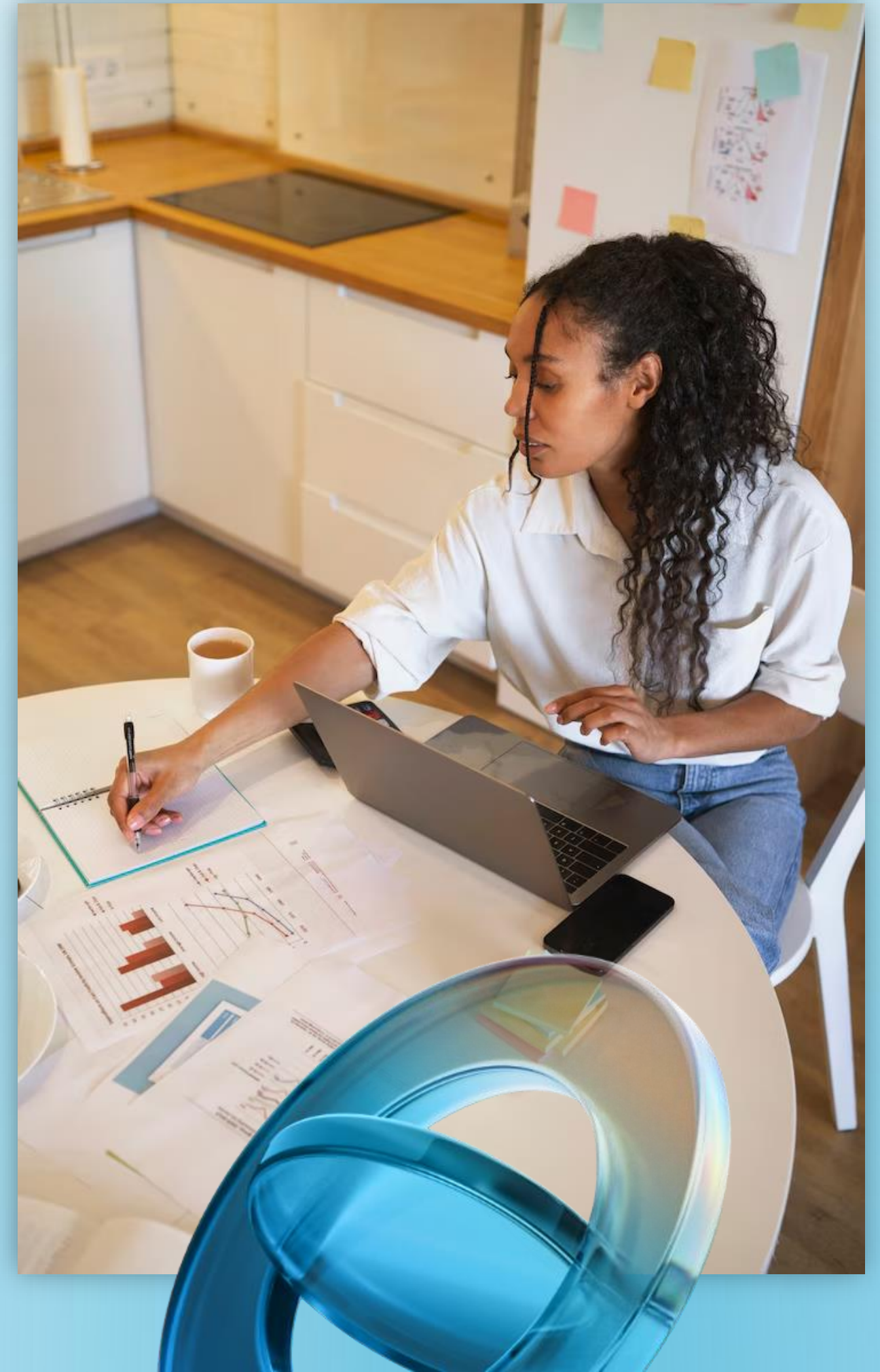


**One app.**  
A whole world of deals.

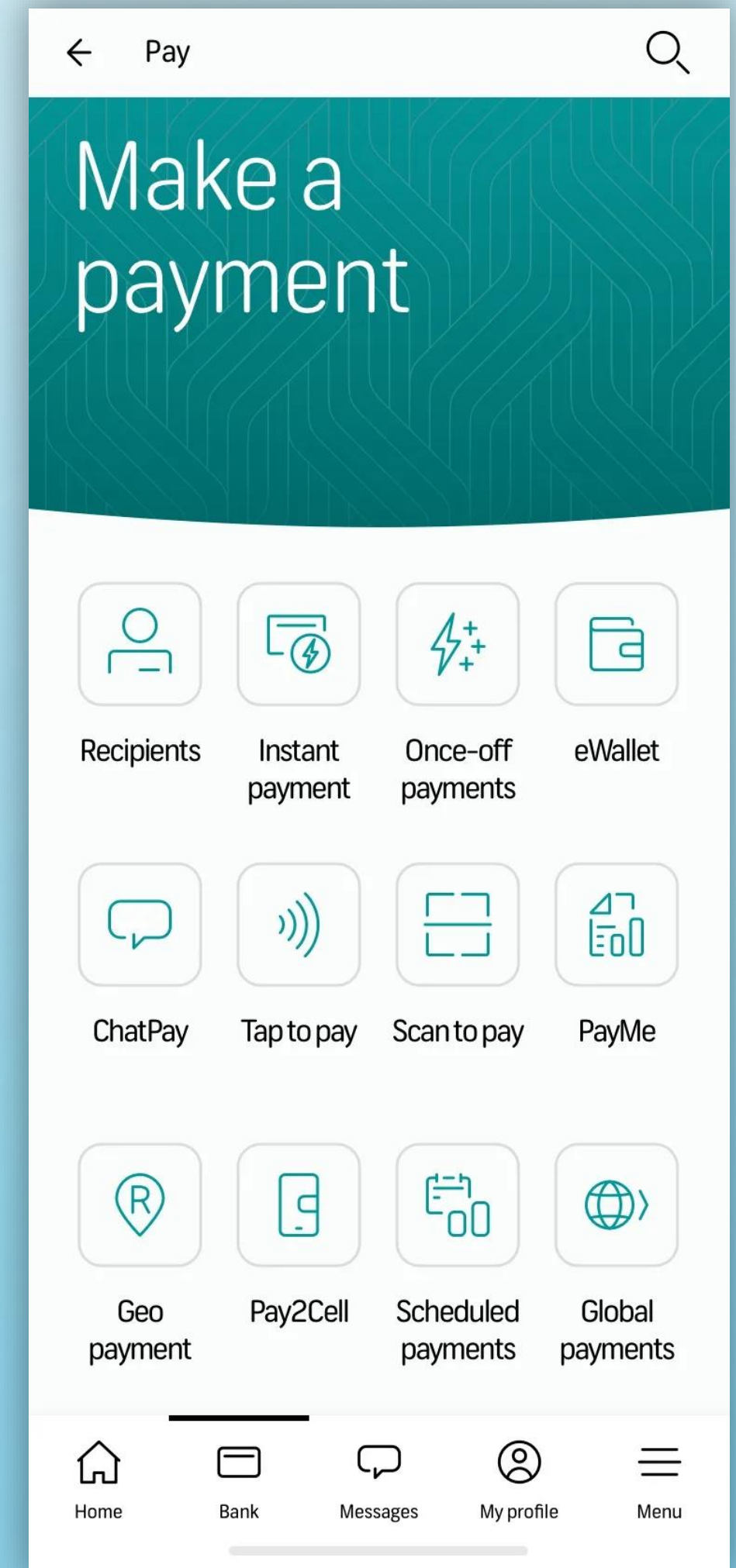
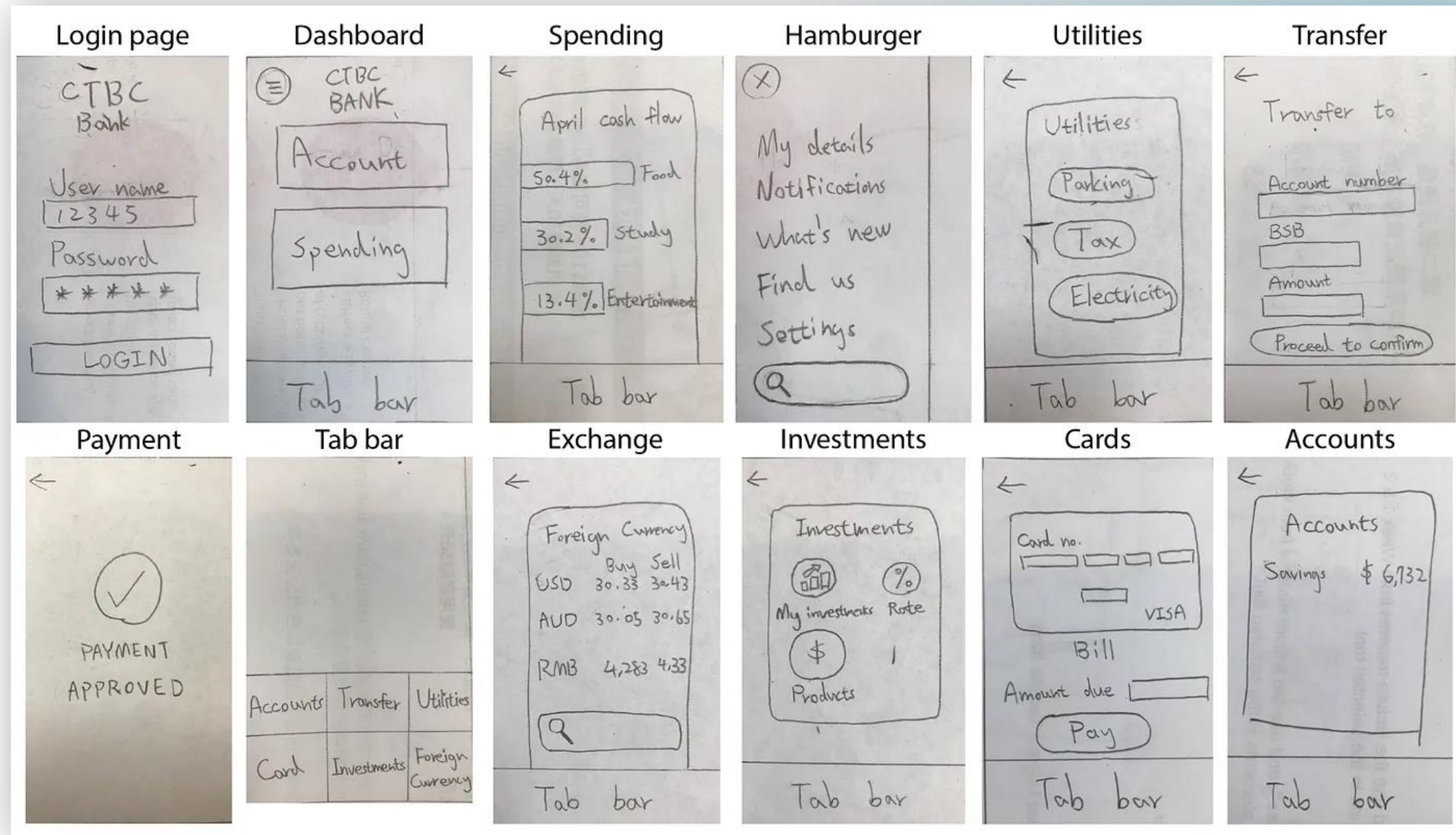


# 3. Paper Prototyping

Don't underestimate the power of paper!  
Use paper prototypes to iterate rapidly.



# Paper Prototyping



# Missed Connections: **Accessibility** Fails & Wins

It's not just a "nice-to-have" – it's a must-have.



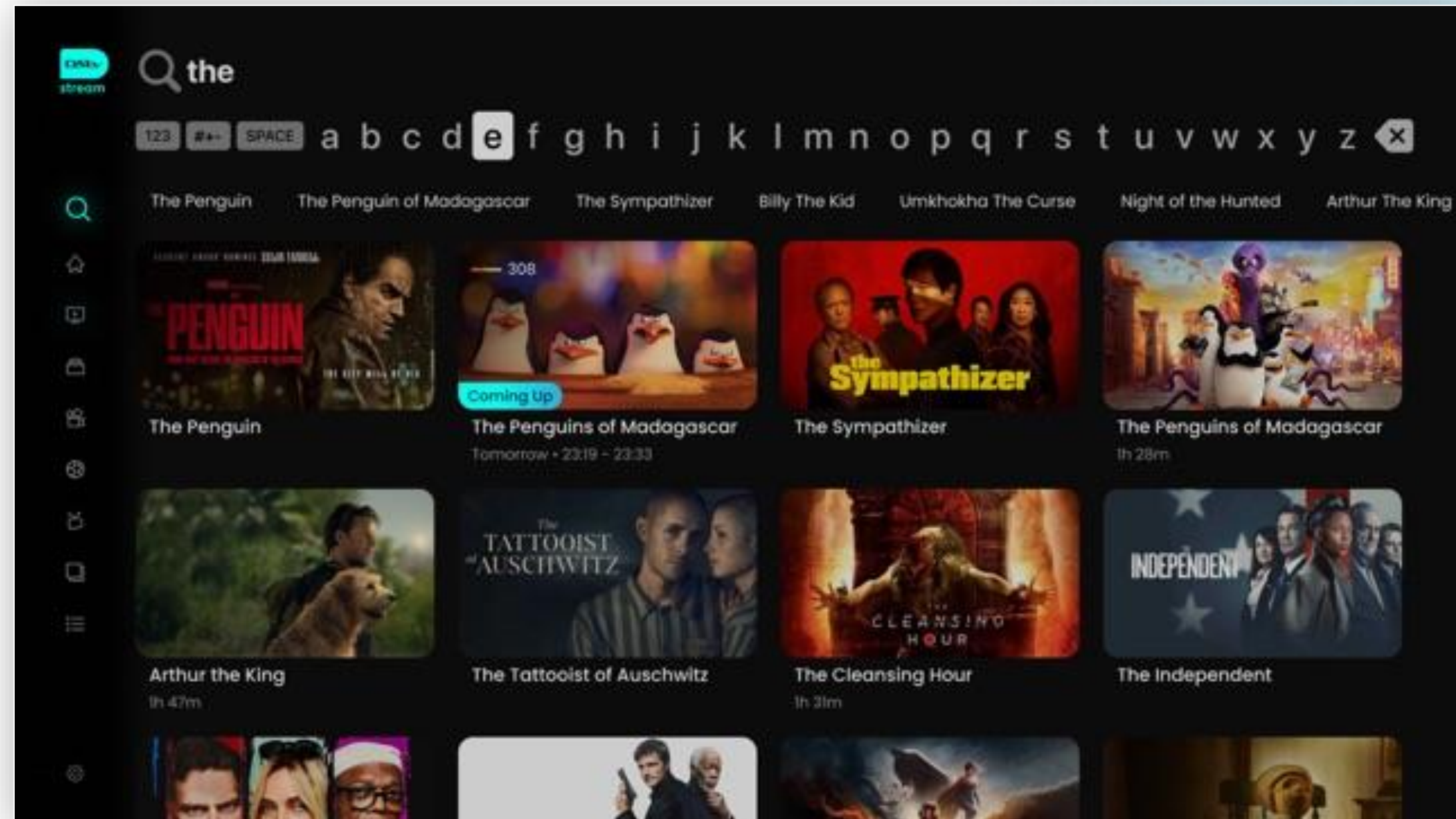
# Connectivity

Accessibility Matters



## Missed Connections

By broadening our understanding of accessibility beyond conventional disability accommodations, we can uncover tremendous value for both users and businesses



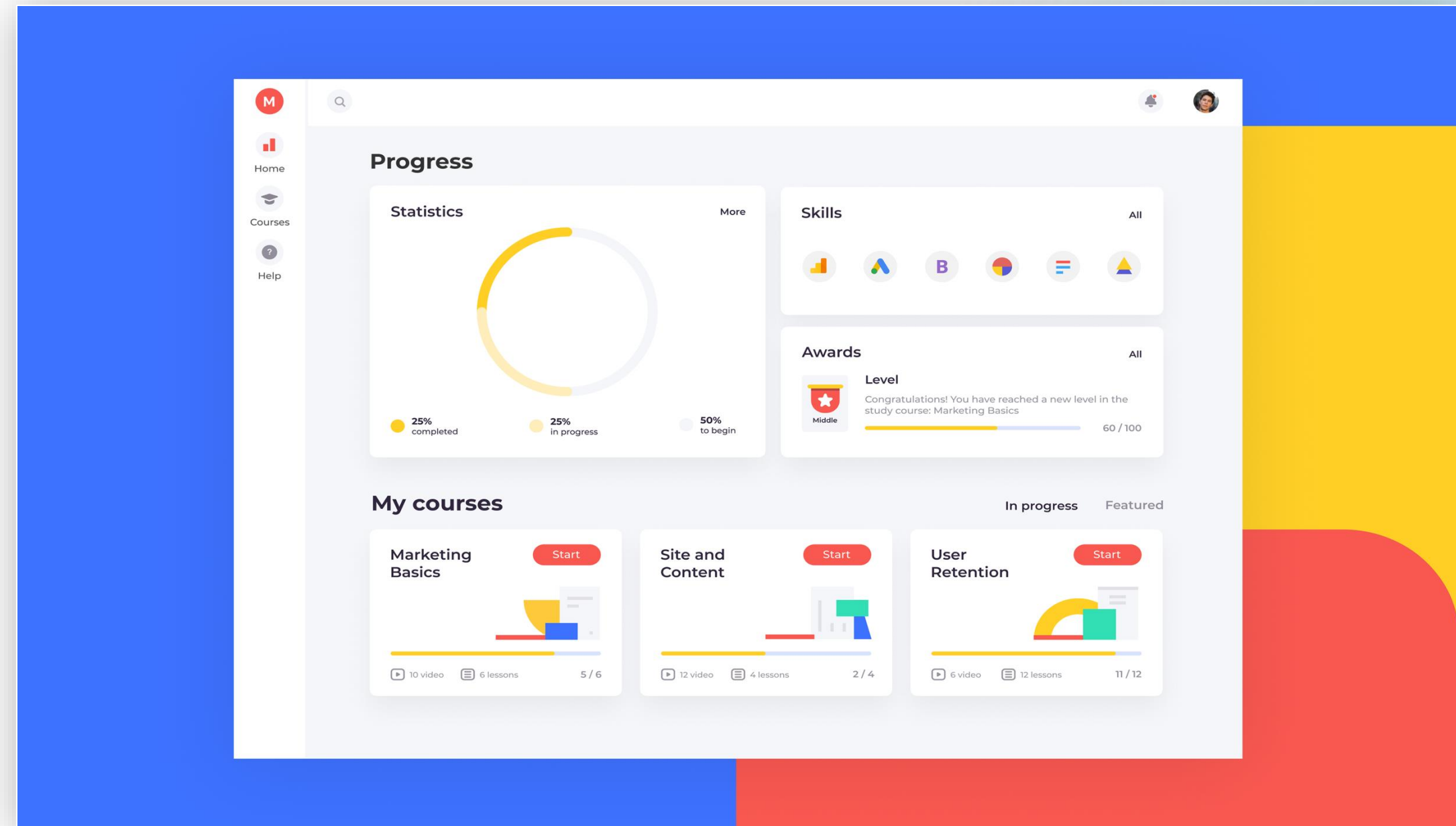
# Colour Contrast

Accessibility Matters



## Missed Connections

Designing for users with visual impairments requires careful consideration of color contrast, font sizes, and screen reader compatibility



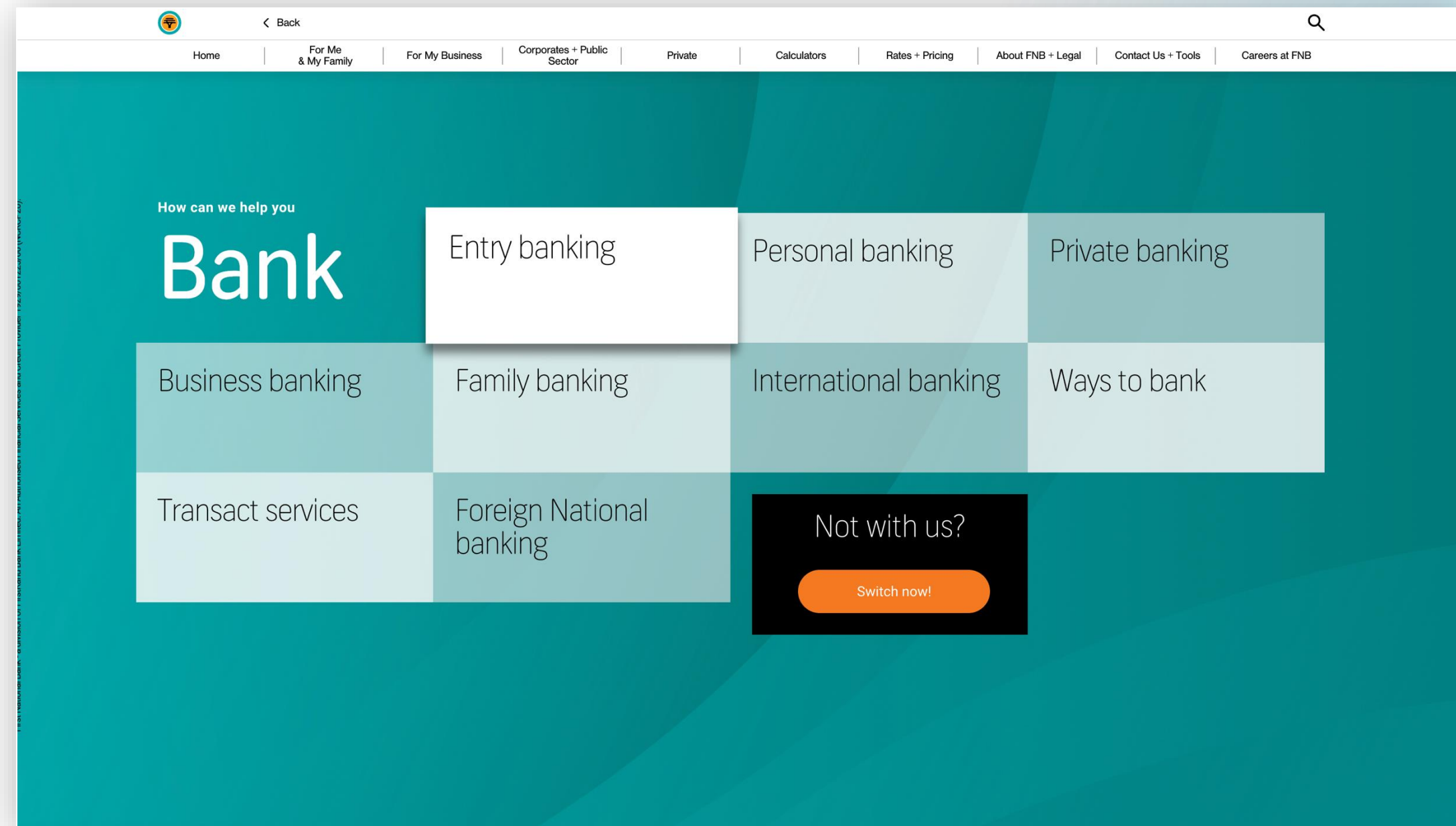
# Progressive Disclosure

Accessibility Matters



## Missed Connections

Designing for users with different mental models, literacy levels, and information processing styles represents the next frontier in inclusive UX design



Accessibility Matters

**Let's make accessibility a priority, **not**  
**an afterthought!****

**Let's think outside the box and create  
truly inclusive experiences.**





# Hacking the **Human** Mind

Behavioral Science for UX Success

Here's a mind-bender: users spend 6+ hours daily on digital stuff.  
That's 6 hours your UX can delight or drive nuts!

# Loss Aversion

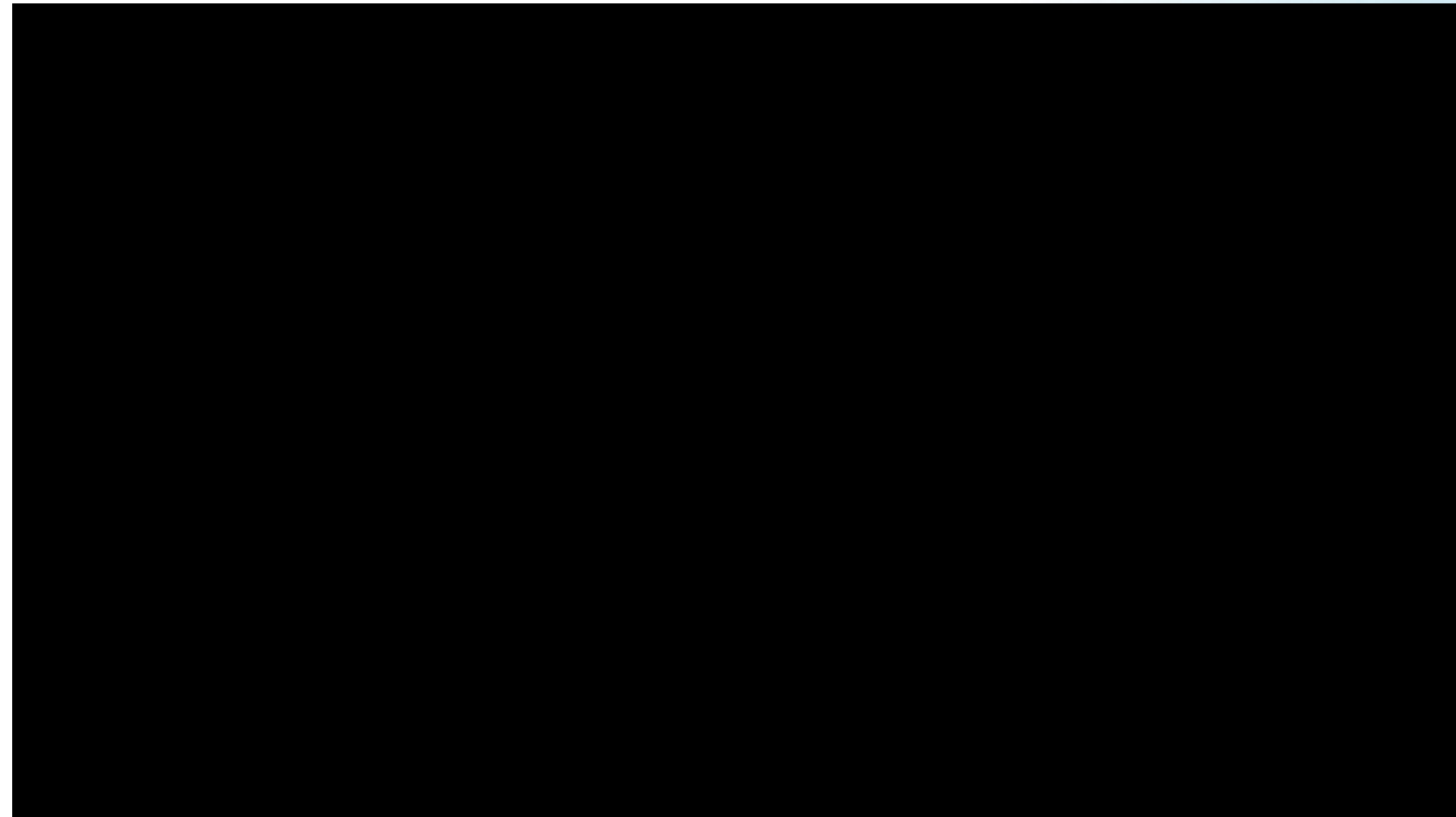
Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

People hate losing more than they love gaining.

Use this to your advantage!



# Loss Aversion

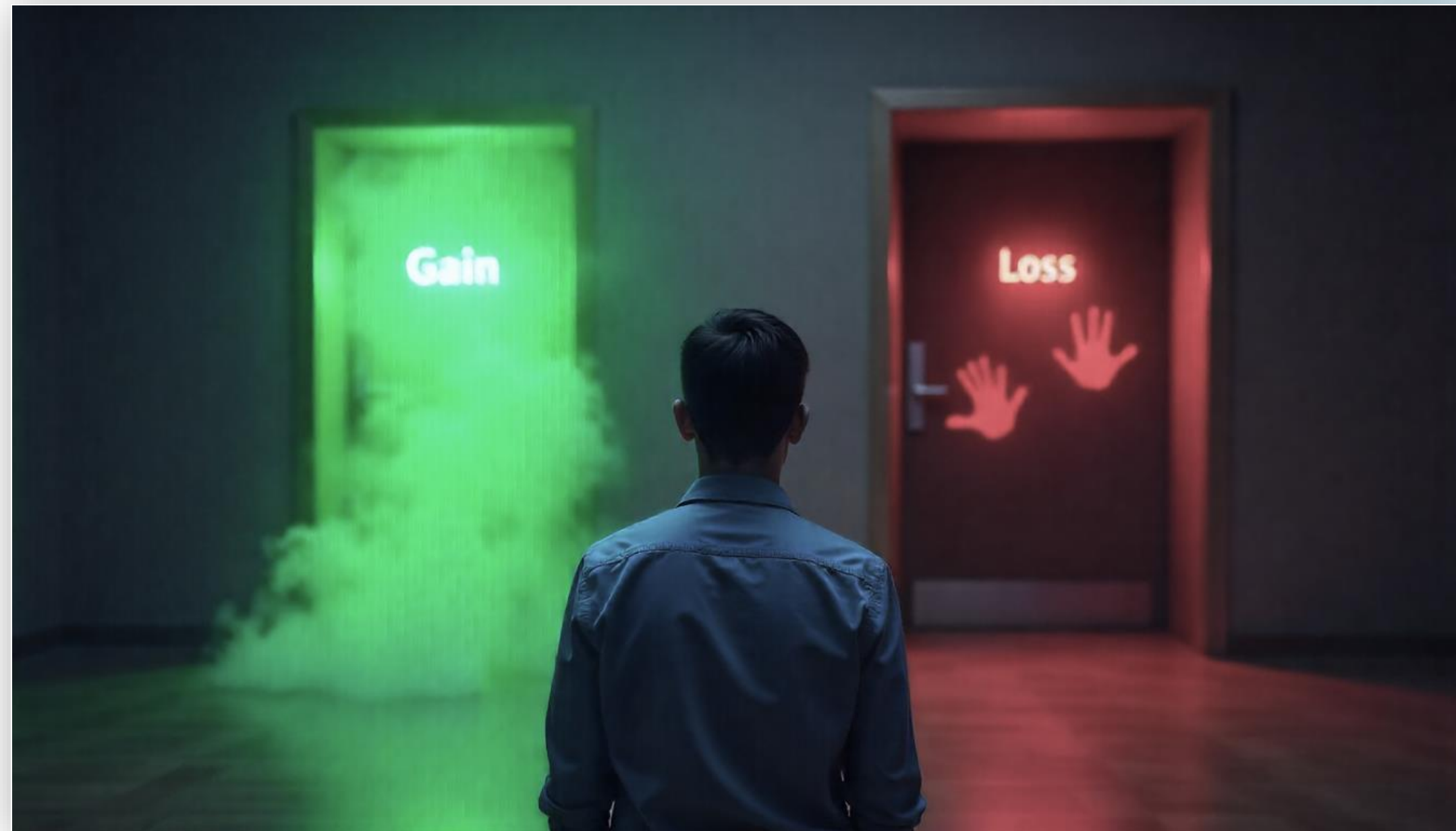
Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

People hate losing more than they love gaining.

Use this to your advantage!



# Social Proof

Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

We're all influenced by what others do.

Show users what's popular!



# Social Proof

Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

We're all influenced by what others do.

Show users what's popular!



# Power of Defaults

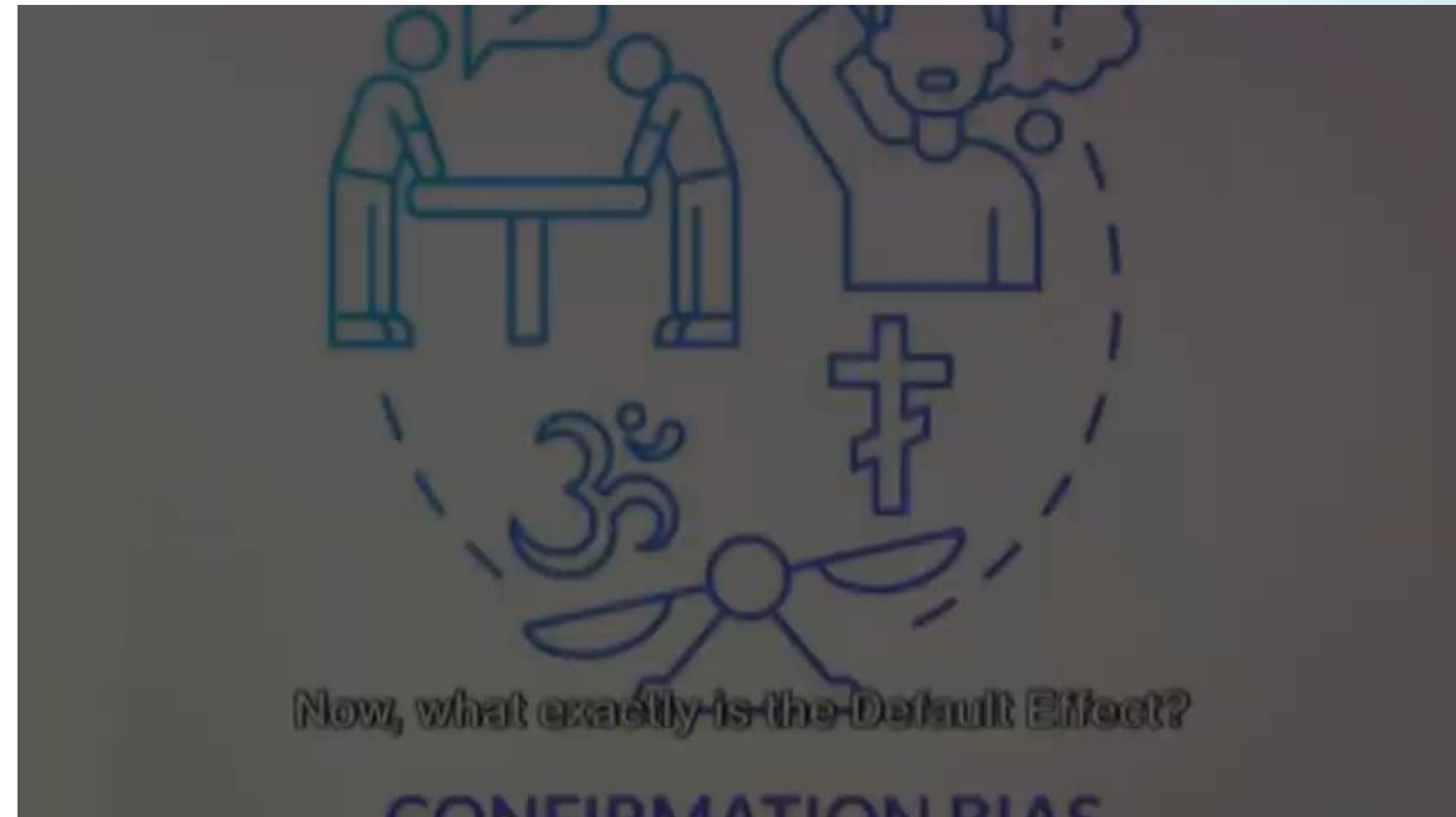
Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

People tend to stick with the default option.

Make sure your defaults are user-friendly!



# Power of Defaults

Behavioral Science for UX Success



## Hacking the Human Mind

People tend to stick with the default option.

Make sure your defaults are user-friendly!

### Frequency

- Daily
- Every 4 hours
- Every 12 hours
- Custom

Default

Default

Option1

Option2

Option3



### Embrace **Research**

Talk to real users and understand their needs.



### Get **Creative**

Use low-resource techniques to create amazing UX.



### Harness **Behavioral Science**

Use insights to create mind-blowing UX designs.



### Prioritise **Accessibility**

Design for everyone, regardless of their abilities.

# Thank You. 🙏

Please connect & together, we can build a UX community that creates truly transformative digital experiences for people.



Kishan Rama

UP X 2025