Azadeh Forghani, PhD

Senior User Researcher | AI & Human-Centred Design | Product Strategy

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SUMMARY

Senior user researcher with a PhD in Human-Computer Interaction and 7+ years leading qualitative and mixed-methods research at Microsoft, Unity Technologies, and early-stage startups. Led research on Microsoft Copilot and role-based AI strategies, investigating human-AI interaction and responsible AI use at scale. Skilled at translating complex user needs into actionable product strategy, partnering closely with PMs, designers, and engineers to shape roadmaps for products used by millions. Brings a distinctive research foundation in participatory, human-centred methods, spanning AI, social gaming, Trust & Safety, health, and designing for children and families.

EDUCATION

PhD, Human-Computer Interaction — Simon Fraser University, Canada

Designing and evaluating technology with and for young children and families

MSc, Software Engineering — Azad University

BSc, Software Engineering — Ferdowsi University of Mashhad

CORE SKILLS

AI & Human-AI Interaction Research • Mixed-Methods Research (Qual + Quant) • Product Strategy & Roadmapping • User Testing & Prototyping • Participatory & Co-Design • Responsible AI Research • Trust & Safety Research (Toxicity & Content Moderation) • Cross-Functional Collaboration • Stakeholder Communication • Design Thinking • Emerging Technologies • Mentorship & Team Development • Cross-Domain Product Research (AI, Health, Gaming, Creator Space, Productivity, Family & Children, Older Adults, Travel)

EXPERIENCE

Senior User Researcher — AI & Copilot

Microsoft, USA · Jan 2026 – Jul 2026

- Led qualitative and mixed-methods research on Microsoft Copilot and AI agents, investigating user needs, AI boundaries, responsible use, and human-AI interaction across diverse populations and roles.
- Studied how Copilot and AI agents create value across 9 role clusters, conducting interviews and a diary study, and synthesizing findings into role profiles and a cross-role AI value index that gave leadership an evidence-based framework for AI strategy. Surfaced adoption risks leadership hadn't yet seen.
- Led a study mapping AI-tooling friction in the design workflow, building an AI suitability matrix and prototyping the top recommendation with a UX engineer.
- Collaborated with product, design, and responsible AI teams to align research findings with organizational strategy and decision-making.

Independent Research & Innovation Consultant

Self-Employed · Dec 2024 – Dec 2025

- Providing consulting, mentorship, and UX research — including primary research engagements and expert product reviews — across multiple industries such as technology, travel, education, and social impact, guiding early-stage product decisions.
- Conducting qualitative research with guests and business owners for an East African luxury travel business, researching market segmentation and translating findings into a guest-experience application concept.
- Education & Technology project (Big Life Kenya, rural Kenya): leading a mobile computer training program co-designed with children and teachers, applying Design Thinking and Social Impact Assessment through focus groups and field research — bridging HCI methods with real-world educational impact in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Senior User Researcher — Social Gaming, Creator Tools & Trust and Safety

Unity Technologies, Canada · Jan 2022 – Feb 2024

- Led generative and evaluative research for 6 product teams across Unity's consumer org., driving early-stage discovery and evidence-based decision-making that shaped strategy, roadmaps, personas, and user journeys for gamers and content creators.
- Conducted research across game genres and modding communities to inform product and platform decisions for Unity's creator ecosystem.
- Identified content moderation and toxicity as an unsolved, industry-wide risk and secured VP-level budget to research it — translating findings into Unity's Trust & Safety framework and content moderation strategy, and elevating research as an ongoing company-wide practice.
- Strengthened the research function through mentorship, hiring committees, and research operations — advocating for and promoting a research-driven culture company-wide.

User Experience Research Consultant — Digital Health

HealthQB, Canada · Feb 2020 – Jan 2022

- Secured grant funding and partnered with health and marketing teams to reach people managing chronic pain and mental health conditions, as well as the clinicians who treat them.
- Led generative research with target user groups, combining interviews, surveys, and an audio diary study to guide product strategy, MVP development, and design for a wearable device and companion app.
- Delivered user personas and a journey map that directly shaped new features, including a progress tracker, daily score, and flexible reminders, reducing drop-off.

User Research Specialist — Consumer Tech & Productivity Tools

Microsoft, USA · Dec 2020 – Jul 2021

- Applied rapid, iterative research methods across 10+ first-party Windows teams, conducting usability, concept, and discovery research ahead of the Windows 11 launch to evaluate new features for products used by millions globally.
- Evaluated new Windows productivity features, including Focus Sessions and Microsoft To Do integration, informing decisions on what shipped, changed, or was cut before launch.
- Led research for the Microsoft Store, including facilitating alignment between Search and Advertising teams on the Store's first-ever ad integration.

User Research Lead — Digital Health Circle

Digital Health Circle — National Innovation Hub, Canada · Sep 2019 – Sep 2020

- Advised digital health start-ups on research design, methodology, and evidence generation, co-developing a digital health innovation framework adopted as hub-wide strategy.

PhD Research Intern — Children, Families & Digital Supervision

Google, USA · Jun – Oct 2015

- Designed and led an ethically sensitive field study with children and parents, an area of specialization from PhD research, approved by Google's internal ethics board, to understand family dynamics and digital supervision practices.
- Conducted in-home interviews, observations, and co-design sessions with families across the San Francisco Bay Area as part of the pre-launch research for Google's Family Link app.

PhD Research Intern — Remote Communication & Collaboration

Microsoft Research, USA · Jun – Sep 2013

- Led a multi-phase user research study on media sharing during video calls, extending PhD research on remote communication, using interviews, observations, surveys, and lab testing.
- Designed a functional MVP for Skype based on research findings, then evaluated it through a lab study; contributed to a peer-reviewed publication and an internal technical report.

Human-Centred Design Researcher — Children & Families, Sharing Experience Remotely

Simon Fraser University, Canada · Jan 2012 – Jan 2019

- Conducted PhD research in User-Centred Design and HCI, focusing on domestic and social computing, designing technologies for family communication, remote collaboration, and remote outdoor experiences.
- Led a multi-year research project on how to design for young children to connect with relatives over distance, combining generative and formative research to design a fully functional prototype, then evaluating it in the field with young children, grandparents, and parents.
- Taught HCI methods, design thinking, and field research practices, and mentored junior researchers and students.
- Produced 20+ peer-reviewed publications in top Human-Computer Interaction and Design venues on child-computer interaction, intergenerational design, family technology, and collaborative technology.

PUBLICATIONS

20+ peer-reviewed publications in HCI, child-computer interaction, and family technology. Full list: ACM Digital Library.

MENTORSHIP & COMMUNITY

Research and Design Collaborator

Design for Good in Collaboration with UNESCO · Oct 2026 – Present

- Designing ways for teachers to bring mental health support and AI-enabled teaching into their classrooms, for UNESCO's design challenge.

Research & Development Mentor

Simon Fraser University & ADPList · Sep 2018 – Present

- Mentored graduate students and early-career researchers in participatory design, inclusive methods, and ethical practice, providing structured coaching across project scoping, methodology, dissemination, and publication.

Peer Reviewer — HCI, Design & UX

CHI, CSCW, IDC, GROUP · 2014 – Present

- Reviewed submissions on child-computer interaction, co-design, and social computing for top-tier HCI venues.