

MADDIE UMALI

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH | INSIGHTS UX RESEARCH | STRATEGY

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Experienced qualitative and UX researcher passionate about uncovering the “why” behind human behavior and turning insights into strategy. I lead empathy-driven, end-to-end research that informs product, brand, and customer experience decisions. Skilled at partnering with teams and clients, I ensure every project is grounded in rigorous, human-centered research and brought to life through clear, compelling storytelling. I bring curiosity, collaboration, and leadership to every project—thriving in fast-paced environments where research drives impact.

SKILLS

- Qualitative and UX research
- Insight development
- Vendor management
- Research scoping and proposal development
- Budget management
- Thought leadership
- Storytelling and presenting
- Pitching

NOTEWORTHY CLIENTS

- Sherwin-Williams
- Intel
- Ford
- PepsiCo
- U.S. Navy

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Forrester CX Certification
- Ascend Leadership Program for rising AAPI leaders in advertising
- David Ogilvy Award, Silver
- ARF Young Professional & Mentor

EDUCATION

University of Kansas
Bachelor of Science in Journalism

- Dual track in Strategic Communications and News & Information, Minor in Human Sexuality

EXPERIENCE

VML

Director, Research & Experience Strategy

Jan 2023-Present

- Translate business needs into clear research strategies by partnering closely with both client stakeholders (research, product management, and marketing leads) and internal teams (strategy, design, and account management) to ensure research aligns to key objectives and drives decision-making.
- Lead end-to-end research initiatives—from scoping and study design through execution, synthesis, and delivery—focusing on qualitative methods to uncover deep human insights that clarify complex challenges and unlock strategic opportunities.
- Build and manage flexible research teams across client accounts, executing in-house studies while also overseeing external research vendors, including vendor selection, scoping, budgeting, and timeline management to ensure smooth and timely delivery.
- Craft compelling, insight-driven narratives that connect data to business and brand implications—enabling storytelling that activates insights across product, marketing, and creative workstreams.
- Serve as part of client leadership teams, helping shape strategic vision, resource planning, and team structure, while ensuring research is integrated into broader brand, customer, and go-to-market initiatives.
- Lead and mentor a team of researchers and strategists, fostering an inclusive, growth-minded culture rooted in empathy, curiosity, and excellence.

Associate Director, Research

Nov 2021- Jan 2023

- Supported the development and execution of end-to-end research initiatives—partnering with senior team members, clients, and cross-functional teams to translate business questions into actionable insights that informed brand, product, and customer experience strategies.

Senior Strategist, Research

May 2021 - Nov 2021

Strategist, Research & Brand Planning

Oct 2018 - May 2021

Assoc. Strategist, Brand Planning

Aug 2017 - Oct 2018

Strategy Intern, Brand Planning

June 2017- Aug 2017