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Three Column Website Layout vs. Grid Website Layout: An Eye Tracking Study

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Abstract

Research studies have suggested that web viewers scan websites following the F-shaped pattern starting from the top left hand side and moving towards the bottom part of the website. However, this claim is yet to be investigated carefully. The current paper reports on an eye tracking experiment conducted to compare the influence of two popular website layouts, i.e. the three column layout and the grid layout, on information search behavior, user attention and perceived usability. Sixteen participants were recruited and instructed to complete two information search tasks of varying complexity on each layout. The eye tracking metrics showed that the participants did not strictly follow the F-shaped scanning pattern. The column layout exhibited an extensive reading pattern and larger fixation densities than the grid layout. The search tasks seem to inhibit the effects of saliency and visual objects, including pictures and banner adverts, on visual attention. Moreover, participants found the search targets faster in the column layout and favored the column layout over the grid layout. Organizing content within column based web layouts expedites online reading and creates a positive user experience.

Keywords

Eye tracking   Fixation   Visual attention   Column layout   Grid layout   Perceived usability
Perceived aesthetics

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