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User Study Report

Date of User Study Session: [December 15, 2021]

Location of the Session: [Groningen, Netherlands]

Prepared for: [Digital Humanities: Tools and Methods course]

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Introduction

The aim of this document is to present and describe the findings of the user study conducted in the context of the course Digital Humanities: Tools and Methods.

The participant was one of the students of the MA Media Studies course, a group of representative users matching the user profile. The participant did not receive any compensation or remuneration. The name of the participant will remain unknown. The participant also accepted to take part in the user study to be recorded following the Thinking Aloud Protocols.

Motivation

Firstly, the primary aim is to develop an exploratory search task using the CLARIAH Media Suite. The task shall also be performed by one of the students (creation of a case scenario where the user will perform naturally). Findings and recommendations will be shared.

Exploratory search task: *How has colonialism impacted Dutch culture (paintings, songs, writing works, not only)?*

Research Method

This user study applied qualitative research and a mixture of both attitudinal and behavioral approaches. A combination of an interview and usability in-person (lab) testing (the participant was brought into the lab, one-on-one with a researcher, and given an exploratory search task) in combination with the Think Aloud Protocol (the procedure in which the participant verbalizes his/her thoughts while performing a task). These methods allow us to build a deep understanding of users' behavior and interaction with the particular software in use. It involves collecting non-numerical data.

Progress Flow

In the beginning, the researcher approached the participant. The former directed some questions to the latter regarding his/her studies program, the course, tasks, and course assignments. The participant gave a short overview and presented the keywords which could be used for the visual exhibition in which he/she is working on. Before the researcher asked the participant to perform the exploratory search task, the former directed more specific questions regarding the level of engagement with the Media Suite, its advantages and constraints, and a comparison with a second platform that the participant is using. The participant responded that: 'YouTube has a broader database while Media Suite is limited to what is uploaded in the platform. However, Media Suite has access to collections and archives that YouTube has not'. The individual session lasted approximately a quarter of an hour.

After the last task was completed, the researcher asked the participant to provide a brief assessment of the Media Suite platform responding to:

- How easy it was to find the information starting from the home page.
- What is the difference between the resulting outcome of the Media Suite and YouTube.

Results

When the user received the exploratory search task, he/she immediately opened the Media Suite. Starting from the home page, he/she quickly directed the cursor to the navigation menu and selected the 'Search' below the Tools tab. The quick action of choosing an option with the information given from the user that she/he had used once for a pre-master program and one more time before this session, showed that the navigation in the tools of MS is easy and the level of usability is not low. One error¹ was detected at the beginning. The user did not sign in using his/her credential. This action may prevent the platform from revealing and presenting all the possible results and combinations of information.

Then, the user was directed to the 'Sound and Vision Archive - Radio' collection by default. The user took a minute to think about the relevant keywords matching the topic of the task. A brief thought flow was described. The user (a Dutch-speaking user) mentioned the following:

- Colonialism
- The Netherlands
- Culture

An interesting fact is that the user did not mention anything about the collection where he/she was performing the task. It seemed like the search bar was a general search engine of the site. It is wise to note that the session was in-person, in a crowded lab environment with a timeslot registered at 15 minutes. A combination of these factors may have challenged the user.

The 'colonialism' was the first keyword typed. The user was not satisfied with the outcome. Then, the user suddenly mentioned 'I know why I cannot find it. I am typing it in English! I will try in Dutch now'. Thenceforth, the search was changed from the English language to Dutch. First the 'kolonialisme' was typed and then 'Nederland' within the same collection. Afterward, the user started using the supported by the platform operators such as 'AND', '*', '" ... "'. The user seemed very familiarized with the use of these operators.

The search outcome did not fully satisfy the user. Then, the user mentioned 'I will use another collection'. The user was aware of the wide range of collections. The user has performed an iterative process of the same keywords (plus the keyword 'cultuur') and

¹ For the purpose of this user study, as an error is defined 'a non-critical error which does not prevent successful completion of the scenario'.

a combination of them using the operators within the 'Oral History' and 'Newspaper' collections.

No use of the facets, workspace, bookmarks, or any project-related features was done by the user. In addition, only the 'Search' tool was used.

When the search exploratory search task was completed, the task moved to the YouTube platform. The user typed 'impact of colonialism on Dutch culture' and mentioned 'These are the things that I couldn't find on the MS'.

Overall, the user completed the task independently within the time frame. The user gathered and utilized three different keywords and a combination of them. A wide range of topics was revealed. The user, as a Dutch-speaking person, was able to scan and read the information provided by the MS platform. The user navigated easily within the home page and made basic use of the feature. As mentioned, no filter features, advanced search, and project-related features were used. The user, even during the existing circumstances (crowded lab location and a specific time frame), seemed to enjoy the task, expressing exclamations and expressions of excitement. There were some moments of silence, but the participants' thought flow and pathway were clear.

Generally, the thought flow between the contributor of this study and the user's exploration task presents some similarities. On the one hand, many of the keywords and combinations used were the same. In addition, the assumption was that MS is a platform that provides access to a very specific type of information. In that vein, the search query should be very directed to the categories and type of information that MS provides. A helpful suggestion to future users will be to be informed about the content (data science with media collections), the mission of the MS as well as its cooperation with institutes in the Netherlands.

On the other hand, the former utilized a broader number of collections, filters/facets, bookmarks, and other features and tools of the MS. The time spent was different, as the approaches followed. The user searched for the topic with a specific focus to 'cultuur' and 'Nederland', whereas the contributor to 'colonialism' and the impact on Dutch without eliminating the search to the Netherlands.

Findings & Recommendations

The journey of this user research reveals several insights for the user study and the contributors' exploratory search task. First, none of them succeeded in using and exploring all the collections of the MS. Second, both seemed to be familiarized at the very beginning with the information architecture of the site and the navigation to the search 'tool'. Third, one of the most fascinating facts is that they both started from the same research question and home page, but the assumptions, directions, and approaches formed ended up quite differently. In addition, both showed spasmodic movements and 'unorganized' clicks during their exploration.

One interesting observation was that the user seemed to form an opinion about the collections and content of the information provided by the MS during the performance of the task. The user only remained to the basic use and features of the

platform. No action was made for any advanced functionality. On the contrary, when the contributor used advanced features, the process became more complicated. The more advanced the task, the lowest the level of usability.

General assumptions:

- a) Each new user must first perform a quick look at the mission of MS and the content provided.
- b) Each new user may first be directed to the 'Learn' and 'Help' links to the navigation menu to explore all the features and functionalities of the MS.
- c) 'Accessibility' of the MS is a simple and quick task.
- d) 'Usability' of the platform is easy and pleasant when limited to the basic tasks for a new user. When the tasks become complicated, the user can be confused and overwhelmed.
- e) 'Findability' of data becomes easier for the user when the user has an understanding of what kind of question he/she wants to make and has a structured way to request it from the platform.
- f) 'Search' seemed to be the most frequent tool in use, whereas 'Inspect' and 'Compare' require a proficient user and a specific orientation.
- g) Users need to spend a lot of time, especially when they do not have an advanced level of information technology efficiency, to learn how to use and manage (for example the use of 'Workspace') the platform.
- h) Users do not make appropriate use of the platform to keep track of where they were on the site.
- i) The platform is responding to the need and the motivation of a proficient user with a background in Media, Humanities, and Social Studies.
- j) The site is well organized and user-friendly concerning the home page, presentation, layout and visual design, navigation, links and terminology, content, and accessibility.

Assumptions for the User:

- a) The user completed the exploratory search task without experiencing any problem within the time frame.
- b) The user seemed to easily navigate through the home page and utilize the 'Search' tool. High level of usability for simple tasks.
- c) The user does not make frequent use of the MS.
- d) The user found the YouTube exploration easier than the MS.
- e) The user had to spend some time to find data to respond to our specific research question. A long-phrase keyword could not be supported by the platform. Many different search tasks had to be performed to collect information.