**Immagine che contiene testo, Carattere, Elementi grafici, logo

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**Master’s Degree in Computer Science**

**Academic year 2023/2024**

**WEB INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

Usability analysis of

**<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/>**

website



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Period of analysis: *January-February 2024*

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# **1 Introduction**

Over the years Internet has become a powerful and useful tool able to connect information from different sources and providing it to everyone. The number of websites is consistently increasing day by day due to the high demand for information and services, but this information is not always simple to get.

There are many examples of websites with great purposes but badly designed which increase the users’ computational effort and make the navigation experience heavy. For all these reasons it’s important to study the usability of websites, a concept remarked in the following definition.

“Web usability is the discipline that studies how to design and then create a usable website.

A website is usable if it is easy to access and navigate, and if it satisfies the information needs of its users.”

The aim of the document is to analyse a real website to understand if it respects the usability principles that are so much important in the modern web. In this case the analysis is based on the Rotten Tomatoes website; for this study just the desktop version has been taken into consideration.

# **2 Rotten Tomatoes**

This section presents the Rotten Tomatoes website in terms of its purposes and share of information. It is also discussed about the choice of its apparently strange name and its SERP positioning.

## **2.1 What is Rotten Tomatoes?**

Rotten Tomatoes is a popular American review website for film and television. The website compiles reviews and ratings from critics and audiences to provide a consensus score for movies and TV shows.

The Tomato meter is the primary metric used by Rotten Tomatoes to represent the percentage of positive reviews given by critics.

In addition to the Tomato meter, Rotten Tomatoes also provides an Audience Score, which reflects the percentage of audience members who enjoyed the movie or TV show.

Rotten Tomatoes is presented as a useful tool for measure the overall reception of a film or TV show.

## **2.2 Domain name**

On average, the name of a website increases users’ satisfaction by 10% - 20%; so, a website name must be chosen appropriately, following some rules.

Even if “rottentomatoes.com” seems to be a strange domain name for a website, it works because it respects the main principles of a good name:

* it is short and so, it is easy to memorize and write;
* it is unique;
* it is formed by real words (“*rotten*” and “*tomatoes*”);
* it sounds well;
* it takes the “.com”, which is the top-level domain that a site can use.

An interesting fact is related to the origin of this name. The name "Rotten Tomatoes" is a reference to the tradition of throwing rotten tomatoes at a stage performer who delivers a poor performance.

Beyond these considerations it is also true that the name doesn’t represent the content of the site, probably because the website relies on its fame through the television community. Anyway, a general user, who does not know Rotten Tomatoes, cannot understand that it is a review website for film and television.

## **2.3 SERP positioning**

To study the SERP (Search Engine Results Page) positioning of the Rotten Tomatoes website it has been used the online and freely available tool: <https://ahrefs.com/serp-checker> which simulates search engines behaviour over given keywords in different countries. For this test the selected country was “United States” since there have been considered, as possible searches, also the single words “***rotten***” and “***tomatoes***” which are common English/American terms not necessarily related to this website.

Several tests have been conducted over more specific and less specific keywords and the observed results are interesting. For instance, searching for the specific name “**rotten tomatoes**” returns the website in first position; nothing surprising since the website has been searched by its own name.

If the website is searched just by “***rotten***” (**Figure 1**), which is a common English word, the website is yet in the first position, also higher than the vocabulary definition for that word, this shows the power of the site indexing.

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Carattere, numero

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Figure 1: SERP overview for "rotten" (22/01/2024)

If the website is searched just by “***tomatoes***” (which is again a common English word) the website is in sixth position; not bad since the website has been searched by just a common word.

Then the website has been searched with other keywords that represent the content provided by Rotten Tomatoes website. These searched keywords (with the relative position in SERP) were:

* “***film reviews***”: 2nd
* “***TV show reviews***”: 3rd
* “***best film***”: 3rd
* “***latest movies***”: 4th
* “***most popular TV shows***”: 8th
* “***matrix reloaded***”: 5th (tested with a real movie name)
* “***the big bang theory***”: 8th (tested with a real movie name)
* “***movies in theaters***”: 5th
* all the tried combinations with the keyword “***news***” never returned the website in the top ten of SERP.

Overall, the website is well indexed in the SERP and more time the website holds these positions more users’ flow it has.

# **3 Homepage**

There is a parallelism between a shop and a website, both tries to impress people by showing what they offer in their big windows.

A shop fails if it is not able to capture the curiosity of potential customers and so its flow is not great. This is similar on what happens on the web.

The homepage of a good website should attract people, it’s the window of the shop and if the first visit goes not so well the website has failed and users’ return rate goes down. This is the reason why the homepage is so important for websites.

This section critically analyses the homepage of Rotten Tomatoes website (**Figure 2**) considering different usability factors.

Immagine che contiene testo, Viso umano, schermata, persona

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Figure 2: Homepage

## **3.1 Informative axes**

The informative axes provide a way to understand if the main information is clearly presented in the homepage of websites.

In fact, users try to extract this information from the homepage of a new website and if they are not able to get it, they generally prefer to go away. If a user chooses to stay or not only depends on how simple the page is to read.

The informative axes are six: WHERE, WHO, WHY, WHAT, WHEN and HOW. Each of the following sections critically analyse each of them.

### **3.1.1 WHERE did the user arrive?**

There are several voices in the menu, section titles and news (visible in **Figure 2**) which remarked that a user is arrived in a website that talks about movies and TV shows. This is good because a user can easily understand in which kind of website he is.

A user should also be conscious about his relative position on the website and it’s for this reason that a breadcrumb should always be present. In the homepage there is no breadcrumb, this could be acceptable since the homepage represents the first page of a website but in the deep linking scenario this is crucially important. In the internal pages analysis this fact has been considered deeply.

### **3.1.2 WHO is behind the website?**

Knowing the author of a website increases the users trust factor and this is not a superficial element, websites must consider it.

In the first part of the homepage (**Figure 2**), apparently, there are no information about the authors of the site. Actually, there is a voice that contains this information, which is the top right link “What’s the Tomatometer?”; a bad choice because new users, that never really heard about Rotten Tomatoes, cannot know what the “tomatometer” is. Since the time is limited and precious, users do not try to get the WHO axis by a link that seems to not represent what they are looking for. Common users try to get this information searching in other zones of the homepage and, if the homepage is scrolled until the end, the WHO axis is placed in the footer (**Figure 3**).

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Carattere

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Figure 3: Footer component

The highlighted box in **Figure 3** shows where the WHO axis is exactly placed, in the footer on the voice “About Rotten Tomatoes”.

Typically, new users scroll the homepage by 23% of its size so they will never arrive to this information which is badly placed.

It is also possible to note that clicking on that link a user arrives exactly in the same page of the link “What is the Tomatometer?” placed at the beginning of the homepage and previously discussed. In fact, this link points to another section of the same page of “About Rotten Tomatoes” link.

Apparently, authors give more importance to make clear which is their measure of judgment instead of explaining who Rotten Tomatoes is. This behaviour can be related to the fame of the website, but this in fact disadvantages new users.

### **3.1.3 WHY should the user stay?**

A well-designed homepage should persuade new users to stay in the website by showing them the advantages they would obtain continuing the navigation in the website.

Watching the homepage with and without scrolling this information seems to be missing. The homepage provides different ways to get information about movies, TV shows and news about them but there is no written motivation by which a user should stay on the website. Again, this can be related to the fame of Rotten Tomatoes and so authors may think it is not necessary to explain, for instance, why their movies/TV reviews are the best ones. In fact, this disadvantages new users, who never heard about Rotten Tomatoes, since they do not have any reason to stay.

### **3.1.4 WHAT does the site offer?**

From the homepage (**Figure 2**), particularly from the menu placed in the top part of the page, it is clear what the website is offering to users. Rotten Tomatoes provides information about movies, TV shows and news related to the cinema world.

Beyond the menu (which is deeper discussed in **3.2 Menu**), the WHAT axis can be also recovered by the main section titles of the homepage (“New & Upcoming movies in theatres”, “Popular streaming movies”, “New TV this week” and so on) and by the latest news carousel placed on the left.

Users who stay on the website will be able to know about the past and upcoming movies, TV shows and all the latest news.

### **3.1.5 WHEN? Is the website up to date?**

A user should always be able to understand if a website is up to date or not. The WHEN axis gives an answer to this question: a website should always provide latest news/contents.

Immagine che contiene testo, Viso umano, persona, vestiti

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Figure 4: Homepage news section

The homepage provides two different ways to get the WHEN axis by:

* an entire part of the homepage itself (**Figure 4**) that show to users the latest news uploaded on the website. The single news is formed by an image, a title and a blurb (a small summary of the news itself); all these parts are clickable and, if clicked, redirect user to the relative article page where he can get more information about the selected news.
* the menu voice “NEWS” which redirect users to the dedicated news section of the website.

### **3.1.6 HOW does the user arrive where he wants?**

A user should always be able to easily navigate on the website and collect all the information provided by the website itself.

All the Rotten Tomatoes reachable pages are provided by the top menu which a user can use to easily move on the website.

There is also a search functionality which users can use to obtain information in a simpler and fast way. The search functionality provided by Rotten Tomatoes can find information about movies, TV and celebrities without searching manually for them; the search-bar, if provided, highly reduces the users’ computational effort to obtain information and for this it’s really appreciated tool. The search functionality is deeper discussed in **3.3 Searching**.

## **3.2 Menu**

The purpose of a menu is to show to users all the possible destinations, all the reachable webpages of the website which a user can visit to collect different information.

Rotten Tomatoes provides a menu which is placed in the top part of the homepage, as show in **Figure 5**. The menu is correctly placed since it is immediately visible from users who land on the website.

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Sito Web, Pagina Web

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Figure 5: Menu

The menu is formed by five voices: “Movies”, “TV Shows”, “Shop”, “News” and “Showtimes”. Each menu voice represents one of the five macro areas of the website, then each area is a collection of pages related to the higher level of the tree shape of the website.

Excluding the menu voices “Shop” and “Showtimes”, if a user points the mouse cursor over one of the other menu voices a new area is displayed, as shown in **Figure 5**. This kind of sub-menu shows a small preview of the contents provided by the menu link on which the user is landed with the mouse cursor.

This is implementation is interesting because a user can get a preview of other webpages contents before visiting them and, eventually, he can directly visit deeper pages provided by this new sub-menu.

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Sito Web, Pagina Web

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Figure 6: Usability problem in the menu

Anyway, this sub-menu has a usability problem that can annoying users. In fact, if a user is interested in one of the links provided by this new menu he follows the fastest path (represented by the red lines in **Figure 6**) to reach what he wants. In this way the links positioned on the centre/right area has no problem (normal red lines) but the more left positioned links are never reached (dashed red lines) because the sub-menu will close itself.

This happens because, to keep the sub-menu opened, the user should move down the mouse cursor until he reaches the beginning of the new menu area and then, if he remains inside this area, he can follow whatever direction he wants to reach the links.

This behaviour increases users’ computational effort to use the menu and it is known that users prefer easy things, represented by the red line paths already discussed before.

Another aspect badly handed is related to the “SHOWTIMES” menu voice, which enables users to book cinema tickets. This feature is only available in the United States so users who try to access to that feature outside the United States will see an error page that tell them about the problem. This is not good because user expectations are broken and if a functionality is available in just few countries, it must appear just on users who navigate in those countries!

## **3.3 Searching**

As already mentioned before, Rotten Tomatoes provides a search functionality which is much appreciated by users because they can collect information just searching for what they want without go through many pages. The search-bar is well placed in the top part of the homepage (**Figure 2**), in this way it is immediately visible by incoming users.

Anyway, it is possible to observe that the search-bar does not respect the web standard which corresponds to “search” label on the left and a search button (typically an icon) on the right. In fact, the search button on the left, as in this case, creates a delay of 2 seconds and on the web every second is precious. For this reason, the choice of design used here is not so effective.

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Sito Web, Pagina Web

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Figure 7: Search functionality

In particular, the functionality provided in the homepage enables users to search for movies, TV shows and actor/actress. While the user is typing on the search-bar there are displayed partial results corresponding to what the user has digited until that moment; this is appreciated since it helps users to find what they are looking for. So, users can click on the suggested links (both image and text are clickable) or they can press the search button to search what they want.

A curious observation is that the search functionality is available in every page which is appreciated by users because they can use it wherever they are, but the search-bar design and behaviour is not equal in all the Rotten Tomatoes webpages. In fact, the provided search-bar in the “NEWS” page and all its subpages is completely different, as it shows the **Figure 8**.

Immagine che contiene testo, schermata, Carattere, logo

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Figure 8: Search functionality of NEWS section

As it is possible to observe, this other search-bar respects the web standard compared to previous discussed version provided in all the other pages that are not under the NEWS area.

On the other hand, this second version does not provide any suggested link with partial information digited and this is bad: it has an upgraded design but a downgraded behaviour. The main question about this choice is just “why?”. There is no valid reason to provide the same functionality which is presented in different ways and with a different behaviour. This only confuses and disorientates users. A really bad choice of implementation.

The output page provided by the search functionality is discussed in **4.5 Search results** as it has been considered as an internal page to analyse deeply.

## **3.4 Attention map**

## **3.5 Navigation**

## **3.6 Text**

## **3.7 Visual metaphors**

# **4. Internal pages**

## **4.1 Movies**

### **4.1.1 Informative axes**

### **4.1.2 Structure**

### **4.1.3 Visual metaphors**

## **4.2 TV shows**

### **4.2.1 Informative axes**

### **4.2.2 Structure**

### **4.2.3 Visual metaphors**

## **4.3 More trivia**

### **4.3.1 Informative axes**

### **4.3.2 Structure**

## **4.4 News**

### **4.4.1 Informative axes**

### **4.4.2 Structure**

## **4.5 Search results**

### **4.5.1 Informative axes**

### **4.5.2 Structure**

## **4.6 Handle of 404 error**

### **4.6.1 Informative axes**

### **4.6.2 Structure**

# **5. Final evaluation**