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CSC 4720: Human-Computer Interaction

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Assignment 2: Research Audience or Problem Space

Many individuals want to pursue their talents within the creative, digital field but feel hesitant due to the unintuitive interfaces of modern art programs such as Adobe Creative Cloud applications. How can the user interfaces of these programs be improved to lessen the steep learning curve?

Firstly, I had an interest in this particular topic, because growing up, I have always had an interest in craft and illustration. My work was primarily done on paper which would eventually turn yellow, and any medium I used would eventually fade. Even worse, I only had one copy. I decided to begin digitalizing my artwork. However, I found the user interfaces of art programs very user unfriendly, and I know I was not the only person who felt this way. This problem space is relevant to users of all backgrounds and experience levels. In class, when I had declared my thesis, I had asked for class participation from everyone in the room. I asked two simple questions: "How many of you know how to you use Photoshop?" and "How many of you want to learn Photoshop?". In response to the former question, I counted only five students out of a classroom of approximately fifty had their hands raised. When asked the latter, essentially the entire class raised their hands. Of course, everyone who had their hands raised may have their own reasons for not yet learning the program. However, two main possible reasons why would be that (1) they did not want to pay for Adobe CC's subscription service or (2) have not had the time to learn. Even then, if they managed to get past these two walls, their downfall would most

likely be that it was too difficult to learn without proper instruction. Now to put this into perspective, this is a classroom full of tech-savvy, young adults. Most of them are majoring in Computer Science. If this market group has the desire but is unable to bring themselves to learn Photoshop, what about other market groups? What about those who are not nearly as technically experienced?

Secondly, I specifically mention Adobe Creative Cloud products in regard to my project, because they are currently the leading industry standard. Consequently, alternative art applications such as GIMP and Clip Studio attempt to mimic Adobe products and their interfaces. And while Adobe has been pushing out software updates to aid users in navigating around their product, the results have proven ineffective. *Facts Catalogue*, a website dedicated to collection of interesting facts, has an article written about Patrick Hines, an artist who exclusively works in MS Paint because he finds Photoshop too complex (Facts Catalogue 2017). Now while I believe this to be an extreme case, and that it has become part of his aesthetic, it made me open up MS Paint on my own machine and compare the two programs. After comparing the two, I was able to come up with a couple of ideas on how to improve Photoshop's user interface.

To provide an example, all Microsoft applications have their tool bars neatly positioned at the top of their application. I would greatly personally prefer this in an application, whether it be when working with images in portrait mode or landscape. A horizontal, top-positioned tool bar will take up less space and will not take my view away from the image. Currently, Photoshop only provides a vertical toolbar which can be dragged anywhere around the screen. A wonderful possible feature to Photoshop would be to allow the user to choose their preferences from a

vertical or horizontal tool bar and have it "snap" into the position it needs to be. In addition, Microsoft applications also have tabs on their tool bars which allows the user to easily navigate and find appropriate tool needed. Allen Hsu, a writer for UX Collective and Prototypr, provides a well-written, article expressing even more specific areas of Photoshop that can be improved upon in terms of user interface and user experience (Allen Hsu 2017).

At the moment, there are currently no concrete solutions to this problem. Even those who claim that Photoshop is "not hard" have spent hours, days, weeks, months, and years to achieve the level of experience that they are currently at. It seems like the best advice that experts provide is just to suck it up. Geoff Blake is an entrepreneur who creates a living by educating consumers on business tactics, web applications, and Adobe Photoshop. In his article, "*Is Photoshop Hard to Use*", he states *"…in my day-to-day work, I use less than 15% of its capabilities."* (Geoff Blake 2019) This statement closely aligns with a few other nameless articles that I have read while conducting my research. Some believe that there is no purpose for so much functionality within one application if we are not to use all of it anyways. Previously-mentioned, Allen Hsu proposes an ambitious solution at the end of his article, "*Once Adobe streamlined its UX/UI, Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign will end up somehow similar. Likely, two or all of them can be combined into one.*" (Allen Hsu) To put it simply, he believes that it's possible for Adobe, with their extensive resources, to combine Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign all into one application. This was an interesting proposition that sparked lightbulbs for me. However, I would take the opposite approach. Adobe has already created Photoshop, a clunky, overtuned application whose core functionality is to be an image editing tool to be a one-in-all tool for all sorts of artistic creation. Illustrator and InDesign are unlike Photoshop in that they are well-defined applications with functionalities that make them specific to their purpose.

Also, with the newest release of Adobe XD, Photoshop is no longer needed to create wireframes and prototypes for websites. Therefore, I believe the best solution would be to remove some of the functionality out of Photoshop. In doing this, it will declutter a significant amount of the user interface and also allow consumers to better understand the application.

References

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