

An Usability Design Approach of Tailored Visualizations for Mobile Applications

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Wien, 1. Mai 2018

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Kurzfassung

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Abstract

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Introduction

In the age of social media, where information is tailored to users' interests, preferences and state of education, the question arises how to integrate this phenomenon into common mobile applications. Especially when it comes to education and behaviour change an adaption of the user interface to various requirements might be useful.

This thesis investigates whether tailoring the interface of a mobile application to different needs is useful. The needs are gathered into user groups, in order to limit the amount of possibilities.

1.1 Motivating Scenario

This thesis is written in cooperation with Siemens AG Austria, within the research project that deals with the Seestadt in Aspern. The Seestadt is one of the biggest city development projects in Europe ¹. The Aspern Smart City Research GmbH & Co KG ² (ASCR) is an exclusive technology partner of Siemens AG. The Aspern project has the overall goal of finding smarter solutions for energy consumption with the help of smart grids, power supplies, building systems, intelligent power grids, and information and communication technologies (ICT) interacting in an optimal manner. The ASCR infrastructure manages the data coming from smart grids and smart buildings such as temperature, energy consumption, water consumption, power demand as well as external data sources such as weather, city events, energy market, traffic reports etc. [PDE15] In total 1.5 million values are measured per day. The create something useful out of this amount of big data is a big task. ³

¹<https://www.aspern-seestadt.at/> Accessed 10.01.2018

²<http://www.ascr.at/> Accessed 10.01.2018

³<http://www.report.at/index.php/energie/wirtschaft-a-politik/item/91884-lebendes-stadtlabor> Accessed 10.01.2018

Take, for example, an application that informs you about your electricity consumption. What can be assumed, is that the user wants an easy-to-use application which shows the power consumption in an understandable way. The problem that we observed is that the majority of users lack the feeling for the size of one kilowatt hour. The same can be witnessed when it comes to CO₂ emission. The unit of kilograms of CO₂ is an information that mostly only experts can grasp and can relate to.

In the field of software development the interaction with the user is important, including the consideration of a user's knowledge. Numerous applications aim at motivating the user to save energy or CO₂ but neglect the incomprehensibility of units of measurements one does not deal with on a daily basis. The sense of trying to motivate the user to save energy by displaying the electricity consumption in kilowatt hours, might have less impact than setting it at least in relation to an average consumption of electricity or even visualizing it with a gamification approach. On the other hand, for someone who is easy on these types of measurement a visualization with colours or graphs might be too much.

1.2 Problem Statement

So the problem we, this thesis is written in cooperation with Siemens AG Austria, are facing is to develop a mobile application that is beneficial for all types of users, starting from users who do not have a feeling for kilowatt hours or kilograms of CO₂ up to users having a great affinity for electricity and carbon-dioxide emission.

To address this bandwidth of user knowledge and visualization possibilities, this thesis investigates the usefulness of tailoring a mobile application to a users knowledge. Furthermore design principles and criteria that shall help front-end developer, usability engineers as well as software architects to develop applications customized to a users level of knowledge shall be investigated.

We evaluate different types of users and their preferred way of gathering information. Ranging from the ones who show only interest in their overall behaviour, meaning if they are better or worse than the average, over others, who want to know their power consumption more detailed but still can't grasp the measurement of one kilowatt hour, up to users, who are deep into the topic and are keen on extensive figures.

1.3 Aim of the work

The overall goal of this thesis is to identify the benefits or even drawbacks of providing a user interface in a mobile application with various possibilities of presenting information to switch between. We want to investigate if a user makes use of different visualizations or the presented way is excepted and therefore an adaptation of the user to the application takes place.

This thesis contributes (1) a prototype of a mobile application aiming at increasing CO₂ awareness with the help of customized visualizations and (2) a catalogue of criteria of

design principles for tailoring visualizations containing information of consumption data. This thesis aims at finding an answer to the following central research questions:

What are the effects on knowledge acquisition in mobile applications when providing visualizations tailored to users' knowledge?

The central research question can be answered after having found a solution to the sub-questions:

(a) What are the characteristics of a user group with the same state of knowledge? In order to answer this research question we first conduct a literature review in the area, followed by a user survey detecting the state of knowledge in the field of electricity units of measurements, i.e. the size of one kilowatt hour, one kilogram of CO₂. These findings will help in identifying groups and their characteristics.

(b) Which criteria do questions have to meet, that shall identify the type of a user? The findings of the sub-research question (a) will have an influence on the questionnaire needed for defining which group a user can be assigned to. This questionnaire will be the first contact point in the mobile application.

(c) What are the design possibilities when it comes to tailoring interfaces to a users' state of knowledge in the scope of electricity consumption data? This question can be answered by conducting a literature review and considering the characteristics of a user group.

(d) Do the characteristics of user groups correlate with the users' preferred type of visualization? The results elicited for research question a) are the foundation for defining the correlation between groups of users and their preferred type of visualization. Assuming the favourite type of visualization is the most used one, allows to identify the preferred type of visualization by analysing the log files.

(e) Does a user switch between various screens showing the same information represented in different ways? We answer this by looking at the log files and also by observing the interaction with the mobile application in the usability tests.

1.4 Methodological Approach

In order to fulfill the research questions the methodological approach comprises the following steps:

1. Literature Review

The first step is to dive into the topic of usability engineering, especially different forms of visualizations and graphical user interfaces in the scope of mobile applications. That implies a research about paper prototyping, usability testing in the

mobile context as well as user classification and carbon dioxide awareness. The goal is to get an insight of all relevant aspects which will serve as foundation for the following steps.

2. **Comparative analysis of alternatives and comparison of existing approaches**

In this step, the market and competition analysis which was done when the problem arose will be done in more depth. The questions that shall be answered in this steps are the following.

- Which applications are there within the topics of energy saving and CO2 awareness?
- Which approaches and visualizations do these applications make use of to increase awareness?
- How do these applications handle the users' level of education concerning energy units of measurements, such as kWh?

3. **Elicitation of requirements with Paper Prototyping**

The second step is to do "Paper Prototyping" in order to elicit the requirements for the graphical user interfaces and overall for the CO2 awareness app. According to [Lan04] the numerous benefits of early usability studies are vastly superior. It may seem low-tech, but conducting usability tests at this step show what users really expect on a quite detailed level which gives maximum feedback for minimum effort [Wei03].

At first a group of people containing at least one user for each user type will be put together. Next, hand-sketched drafts will be drawn, showing the app with menus, dialog boxes, notifications and buttons. Then, different tasks that can be done with the app shall be defined. These tasks are then conducted by the users. The feedback from the users show what they expect from the app which is of great value for the implementation later on [Sny03].

4. **Architectural Design of the CO2 awareness mobile application**

The insights from the previous steps will influence the architecture and the designs of the CO2 awareness mobile application. With focus on design and usability an architectural design will be developed including a development plan. At this step, the different data resources for the computation of the personal CO2 emission, such as power consumption, water consumption, nutrition lifestyle, transportation habits, size of the living space, place of living, family situation etc. must be considered.

The app shall be usable for all users but will be particularly useful for inhabitants of the Aspern Seestadt in Vienna, as we have a database for the dwellers of the student dorm, the schoolhouse and one residential building. This data comes from the Aspern Smart City Research⁴ (ASCR) project where Siemens plays an essential role in collaboration research.

⁴<http://www.ascr.at/>. Accessed 9.11.2017

5. Technical Implementation of the CO2 awareness mobile application

According to the architecture description from step 4 the mobile application will be implemented using an agile software development process and a fully native approach targeting Android Devices.

6. Usability Tests

In order to avoid distorting of the research results the graphical user interface will be tested empirically with 4-5 usability tests, that means the usability is accessed by testing the interface with real users [Nie94b].

7. User study

The design of the user study will follow the seminal guidelines for conducting case study research in software engineering as proposed by Runeson et al. [RHRR12]. The target group will consist of at least one user for each type of energy user. The study protocol will follow the check-lists for reading and reviewing case studies from Höst and Runeson [HR07].

8. Evaluation

In this step the developed mobile app will be empirically evaluated against a valuation model in a user study to identify the success of the research. The evaluation model comprises of numerous Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). An extraction of these KPIs is listed in the following:

- a) More than 50 % of all the users using the app state that the possibility of switching between different ways to display the information is useful
- b) More than 50 % state, that they are more aware of what to do to avoid CO2 than before using the app
- c) More than 50 % of the users state that they understand and get a feeling of how much CO2 they are producing

1.5 Structure of the work

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides an overview of related work where the main approaches of tailoring user interfaces are discussed. This chapter is concluded by a comparison with the existing approaches.

State of the Art

In the following sections the theoretical background for the topics that this thesis deals with will be presented. In particular, usability engineering especially different forms of visualizations and graphical user interfaces in the scope of mobile applications. That implies a research about paper prototyping, usability testing in the mobile context as well as user classification for the definition of user groups and carbon dioxide awareness in general. Finally, we will have a look on existing approaches, such as serious games and a comparative analysis of alternatives.

2.1 Usability engineering

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines usability as the "Extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use" [Bev98]. This definition comprises three measurable attributes which are the following:

- **Effectiveness:** Accuracy and completeness with which users achieve specified goals.
- **Efficiency:** Resources expended in relation to the accuracy and completeness with which users achieve goals.
- **Satisfaction:** Freedom from discomfort, and positive attitudes towards the use of the product.

The ISO standard outlines also identifies three factors that should be considered when evaluating usability:

- **User:** Person who interacts with the product.
- **Goal:** Intended outcome.
- **Context of use:** Users, tasks, equipment (hardware, software and materials), and the physical and social environments in which a product is used.

The above factors possibly have an impact on the overall design of the product and influence how the user interacts with the system [HFD13]. Nielsen [Nie94b] identified five attributes of usability and factors having an impact on how the user interacts with a system. In addition to the above ones Nielsen [Nie94a] states:

- **Learnability:** The user should get work done rapidly which is possible if the system is easy to use.
- **Efficiency:** Once the user has learned to operate with the system, the productivity level is at a high level.
- **Memorability:** In case a user does not use the system in a longer period it should nevertheless be easy remembered without having to learn everything all over again.
- **Errors:** When using the system the users make few errors and are able to return and recover easily after an error. Further, catastrophic errors must not occur.
- **Satisfaction:** The system is highly accepted as the user has positive attitudes towards the system and it is pleasant to use.

The focus on usability and interaction between human and hand-held electronic devices has its origin within the emergence of mobile devices. The approach of Nielsen, mentioned above, was expanded with the scope of mobile applications by Zhang and Adipat [ZA05] who highlighted a number of issues by the advent of mobile devices. The issues contain the *mobile context, connectivity, small screen, different display resolution, limited processing capability and power and data entry methods*.

Harisson et al. [HFD13] introduced a PACMAD (People At the Centre of Mobile Application Development) model which extends the theories of usability with more aspects of mobile devices, such as *user task* and *context of use*.

Beka [Dek16] discusses how data-driven approaches are tools for mobile app design. A relevant field mentioned is interaction mining, that captures the static part, such as layouts and visual details, as well as the dynamic part, like user flows and motion details, of app design.

Tailoring and personalizing the content to the potential needs, interests, usage context or other factors is outlined by [OKH09] in the context of a Persuasive System. They studied how a persuasive system must be designed with tailored and personalized content

to maximize the change in the user's behaviour. Although the outcome on the behaviour change is not relevant, the findings on the tailor aspects are highly interesting for the proposed thesis.

2.2 Elicitation of requirements with Paper Prototyping

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2.3 user classification

Weiss [Wei03] discussed the balance of ease of use compared with the ease of learning. A huge emphasis is laid on the first, and according to Weiss, the most important step in the design and development process, the understanding of the audience. The purpose of the audience definition is to describe the target group, its' traits and ranges.

2.4 Usability Tests

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Carbon dioxide awareness

[MGM⁺17]

2.7 Existing approaches

2.8 Comparative analysis of alternatives and comparison of existing approaches

In this step, the market and competition analysis which was done when the problem arose will be done in more depth. The questions that shall be answered in this steps are the following.

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- Which approaches and visualizations do these applications make use of to increase awareness?
- How do these applications handle the users' level of education concerning energy units of measurements, such as kWh?

2.9 Serious games

The Energy Piggy Bank - A Serious Game for Energy Conservation

Serious games are games that educate, train, and inform

Serious games are gaining importance recently. These games aim at behavior change and education.

Hedin et al. [BLWM17] describe a serious game that shall help people learn more about their energy consumption. They designed the game according to the taxonomy of Bartles Player Types that constitute of four Types having different motivation for playing games.

They also evaluated the behaviour

self-assessed future behaviour change

The outcome of the work is a strong correlation between self-assessed future behavior change and perceived value/usefulness of the application independent of the player type.

Bartle Player Types

Serious games have attracted much attention recently and are used to in an engaging way support for example education and behavior change. In this paper, we present a serious game designed for helping people learn about their own energy consumption and to support behavior change towards more sustainable energy habits. We have designed the game for all the four Bartle Player Types, a taxonomy used to identify different motivations for playing games. Engagement of the participants has been evaluated using the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, and we have measured self-assessed future behavior change. We found a statistically significant positive correlation between self-assessed future behavior change and perceived value/usefulness of the application independent of player type. Our study indicates the player type “Achievers” might perform better using this type of application and find it more enjoyable, but that it can be useful for learning energy conserving behavior independent of player type

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distribution, 5

Glossary

editor A text editor is a type of program used for editing plain text files.. 5

Acronyms

CTAN Comprehensive TeX Archive Network. 11

FAQ Frequently Asked Questions. 11

PDF Portable Document Format. 6, 10, 11, 15

SVN Subversion. 10

WYSIWYG What You See Is What You Get. 9

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