ENGL 7010: Technical and Professional Communication: Issues and Approaches

Dr. Stewart Whittemore

Fall 2016

Usability Report

Keywords - Theory/research: usability and accessibility

According to Flavián et al., usability considers the following factors: (1) Ease of understanding the structure of a website, its functions, interface, and the contents that can be observed by the user; (2) Simplicity of use of the website in its initial stages; (3) Speed with which the users can find what they are looking for; (4) Perceived ease of site navigation in terms of time required and action necessary in order to obtain the desired results; and (5) Ability of the user to control what they are doing, and where they are, at any given moment (p. 2). During my previous job role as an associate editor, I frequently found it challenging to locate and comprehend mandatory formatting instructions on journal websites. This affected my editing speed as it consumed most of my time in just finding the exact instructions by navigating from page to page. From these ordeals, I learned that website designers need to have a clear and deep understanding of user requirements and needs in order to create meaningful and valuable user experiences. In addition, designers should consider the time factor so that users can speedily achieve their task. This motivated me to select as an individual research project a usability test to examine the user-friendliness of three journal websites from the standpoint of locating formatting guidelines and understanding instructions in the formatting template.

The purpose of this usability project was to highlight and report usability problems and recommendations for improvement to journal website developers. I created an expert usability review for the websites using the ten heuristics designed by Jacob Nielsen, which also helped me see new usability problems in the websites. The benefit of heuristic evaluation is that it helps designers find important classes of problems that are not always found with user testing (Pinelle et al, 2008). For example, the heuristic parameter of "Flexibility and efficiency of use" made me think whether having multiple links to a single page was a factor of flexibility or an issue of confusion for users. Further, through the user test, I observed that the participants in the test did not fully understand some of the technical information related to formatting papers because of their meagre experience in using advanced Microsoft Word functions for formatting. Moreover, some of the terminology on the websites was misleading, and participants had to go back and forth to locate what they were looking for. Thus, instructions on the websites should be credible, valuable, and comprehensible such that the websites adequately communicate how users are required to navigate and utilize the website.

The most challenging part in this project was explaining this complicated problem of locating formatting instructions through a report. However, visual appeals of screenshots of the

webpages and graphs aided in making the report comprehensible. Additionally, I also included comments from the participants, which were recorded when they were performing the test, for the audience to better understand the usability problem. Thus, I believe I was able to precisely delineate evident usability problems on these websites through my usability testing report.

References

Flavián, C., Guinalíu, M., & Gurrea, R. (2006). The role played by perceived usability, satisfaction and consumer trust on website loyalty. *Information & management*, 43(1), 1-14.

Pinelle, D., Wong, N., & Stach, T. (2008). Heuristic evaluation for games: usability principles for video game design. In *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1453-1462.