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Assignment 1105

Evaluate the Evaluator:

The *Mobile OS User Experience Shootout* from Pfeiffer Consulting

In this paper I will be looking at the usability study conducted by Pfieffer Consulting titled: *How iOS 7 Stacks Up: Smartphone OS User Experience Shootout*. This study analyzed in depth the new iOS 7 released for the iPhones. It looks at several usability metrics and compares them to the four leading competitors’ operating systems on the market. These include Android (Samsung), Windows 8, Blackberry 10, and the previous iOS, IOS 6. Each test was designed and measured non-technical user in mind for casual, non-professional use. The usability metrics that are tested for each operating system are cognitive load, efficiency, customization, and user experience friction. Pfeiffer says that the benchmarks being measured are “based on the Pfeiffer Consulting Methodology for User Experience Quantification”, which is a system that they developed to measure these usability metrics.

When studying the usability of a device, there are many usability metrics that can be used to test this. A usability metric is anything that tests how “usable” a system is. The goal is to quantitatively record how well a system performs its intended task. According to the International Standards Organization (ISO) standard 9241, the best usability metrics are effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction. According to Nielsen, there are five usability metrics, which are the most important. These are learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors, and satisfaction. Each of the metrics used in the Pfeiffer report can be directly connected to one of these five metrics.

The first metric, cognitive load, is “the sum of elements you need to get familiar with in order to use a device spontaneously and intuitively” (Pfeiffer). For this metric they counted the number of apps, widgets, icons, or any user interface element that is pre-installed into the system. These elements are things that the user must learn how to use. The assumption made by Pfeiffer is that the more of these elements that there are, the worse it is for the user because it means that they must learn more before they can use the device properly. This ties directly into the usability metric of learnability. It may be unfair, however, to give an OS a bad rating based solely on cognitive load. One OS may have more elements to learn than another, but if they are designed in such a way that they are more user-friendly then they might have a higher level of learnability. This is the reason why they must test multiple usability metrics and this is pointed out in their report.

For this test iOS 7 received a score of 40, meaning that there are 40 different elements that the user needs to learn. This tied with Windows Phone 8 at 40. Blackberry 1o received 53 and Android received the worst at 162. iOS 6 got a score of 32 however. This means that the new OS has implemented new elements into its system. Pfeiffer addresses this saying that “iOS 7 is slightly less streamlined than the previous version of iOS. This difference is due to the addition of the Control Center, a new user interface element with a new set of icons that were not present in iOS before.” This is an interesting feature to point out, however during the examination of iOS 6, they point out that it “lags behind in terms of ease of use functionally.” Although iOS 7 may have a worse score in terms of cognitive load, Pfeiffer seems to side with the point that even with that, it is still more functional.

The second metric, efficiency, was measured by analyzing “access to key settings, integration with notifications, multitasking, and camera access, among others” (Pfeiffer). The unit of measurement for this was a scale from 1 to 10 of how efficient they thought each OS was. They rated each system by the amount of options each system has and also “the ease of discovery for a non-technical user, as well as quality implementation” (Pfeiffer). Windows Phone 8 received a score of 4, Blackberry 10 received 5, and Android received 7. iOS 6 scored a 6 out of 10 and iOS 7 scored a 7 out of 10. The reason for iOS 7 scoring higher than iOS 6 is very similar to the analysis of the previous metric. iOS 7 is more efficient due to its new elements that were not in iOS 6. So although iOS 7 has a higher cognitive load, it does make the system more efficient. In order to balance these two metrics I think that it would have been good to include learnability as a usability metric, which would give a better overall understanding of how the cognitive load and efficiency play together.

The next metric, customization, measures how customizable each device is. Pfeiffer says that “consumer-level customization is one for the key user experience aspects of connected digital devices”, giving it a large amount of importance in their final reports. Customization is directly related to user satisfaction. The more that the user can customize his or her device to match their needs/preferences, the more satisfied they will be with that product.

For this test Windows Phone 8 received the lowest score of 2. Blackberry received 4 and Android received 7. iOS 7 got a score of 6 out of 10 and iOS 6 scored 5 out of 10. Again iOS 7 scored one point higher than its predecessor iOS 6. Pfeiffer says that “iOS 7 offers similar customization options as the previous release, but adds dynamic type support, as well as comprehensive accessibility options.”

The last metric, User Experience Friction (UXF), is described by Pfeiffer as “the bad stuff, the aspects of a device that can annoy you in a niggling way, or, in extreme cases, drive you crazy. Basically, UXF occurs whenever a device does not do what you expect it to do – or lacks a key feature that should be available.” User Experience Friction is directly related to the usability metric of errors and even efficiency.

For the final test Windows Phone 8 scored the highest at 51. Blackberry 10 received a score of 38 and Android received 30. iOS 7 scored 17 while iOS 6 scored 14. This means that iOS 7 had more cases where something happened that was not expected or intended than iOS 6. This again may have been a result of the new added features and cognitive load. “While iOS 7 has added some useful efficiency features, some of the new additions also contribute to UXF. A good example is the Control Center: it is clearly useful, yet has the annoying habit of accidentally popping up” (Pfeiffer). In each of the tests, it seems that the iOS 7 and 6’s results are directly connected to the cognitive load. While iOS 7 has a higher cognitive load than iOS 6, which according to Pfeiffer is bad, these added features have created greater efficiency and customization. Pfeiffer addresses this saying that “these additions results in a slight increase of cognitive load over the previous release, albeit not at a point where they risk overwhelming even a casual users.”

At the end of the report they combined each metric to create each OS’s final overall score. The iOS7 received a score of 73.25, the iOS6 70, Android 57.25, Windows 8 47.25, and the Blackberry 10 received 56.37. I think that the four usability metrics that they used to review these OS’s were very good, and gave a very good idea of how each performs relative to one another. I do feel that they should have tested other metrics such as learnability. Cognitive Load may have a lot of impact on the learnability of a device, however they mainly scored this metric based on the amount of items a use would need to learn, and not on how easy or difficult these items were to learn. This could have drastically changed the ratings in this category.