

Indu Rallabhandi

Site name: Alumni section of the PES University website

Link: <https://alumni.pes.edu/>

Heuristic Evaluation

Introduction:

Heuristic evaluation is a method that experts use to inspect the user interfaces of products. A set of guidelines (that are pre-determined) are used to measure the usability of the product. These guidelines are called heuristics. Conducting a heuristic evaluation, lets the expert understand the strengths and weaknesses of the product, to be able to focus better on improving it. The expert walks through the website, listing in detail, the issues and conveniences of the product, and rating how satisfactory it is. This is done very early on in the project to have a clear understanding of the website and where/how it can be improved to provide a better experience to its users.

I have used Nielsen's heuristics to conduct this evaluation. Jakob Nielsen's criteria are the most commonly used method to conduct a heuristic evaluation. The following are his set of 10 heuristics along with their descriptions¹ that help determine the usability of a product:

1. *Visibility of system status*: The system should always keep users informed about what is going on, through appropriate feedback within reasonable time.
2. *Match between system and real world*: The system should speak the user's language, with words, phrases and concepts familiar to the user, rather than system-oriented terms. Follow real-world conventions, making information appear in a natural and logical order.
3. *User control and freedom*: Users often choose system functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit" to leave the unwanted state without having to go through an extended dialogue. Support undo and redo.
4. *Consistency and standards*: Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing. Follow platform conventions.
5. *Error prevention*: Even better than good error messages is a careful design which prevents a problem from occurring in the first place. Either eliminate error-prone conditions or check for them and present users with a confirmation option before they commit to the action.

¹ Reference: Barnum, C. M. (2020). *Usability Testing Essentials: Ready, Set...Test!* (2nd Edition (ed.)). Morgan Kaufmann.

6. *Recognition rather than recall*: Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible. The user should not have to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Instructions for use of the system should be visible or easily retrievable whenever appropriate.
7. *Flexibility and efficiency of use*: Accelerators—unseen by the novice user—may often speed up the interaction for the expert user such that the system can cater to both inexperienced and experienced users. Allow users to tailor frequent actions.
8. *Aesthetic and minimalistic design*: Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed. Every extra unit of information in a dialogue competes with the relevant units of information and diminishes their relative visibility.
9. *Help users with errors*: Error messages should be expressed in plain language (no codes), precisely indicate the problem, and constructively suggest a solution.
10. *Help and documentation*: Even though it is better if the system can be used without documentation, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Any such information should be easy to search, focused on the user's task, list concrete steps to be carried out, and not be too large.

To rate each of the above-listed heuristics, I will be using the rating scale proposed by Jakob Nielsen²:

0 = I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all

1 = Cosmetic problem only: need not be fixed unless extra time is available on project

2 = Minor usability problem: fixing this should be given low priority

3 = Major usability problem: important to fix, so should be given high priority

4 = Usability catastrophe: imperative to fix this before product can be released

Along with the above rating, I will be giving each heuristic a positive/negative tag.

Positive

Shows that the feature is a convenience

Negative

Shows that the feature is an issue/inconvenience

Evaluation:

This is the evaluation of the alumni section of the PES University website. <https://alumni.pes.edu/>

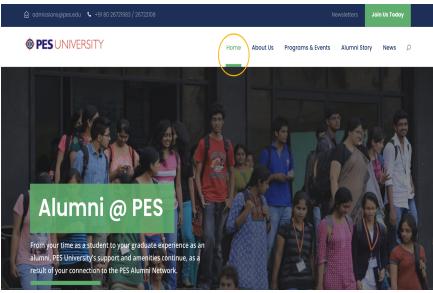
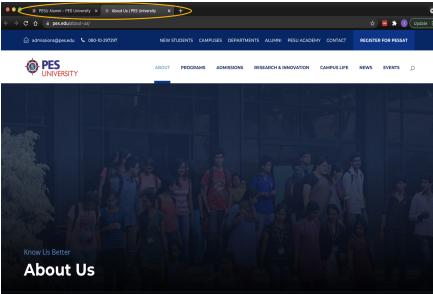
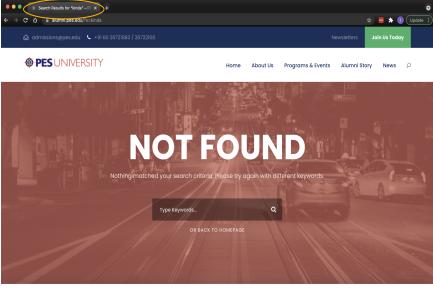
² Reference: Sauro, J. (2013, July 30). Rating the Severity of Usability Problems. MeasuringU. <https://measuringu.com/rating-severity/>

The following are the pages that come under the scope of this evaluation:

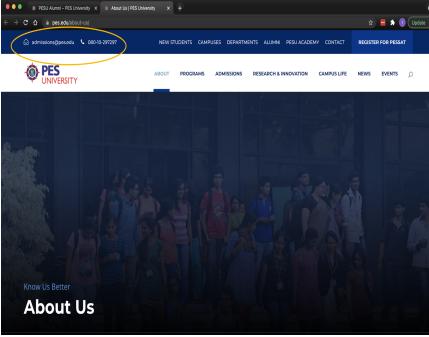
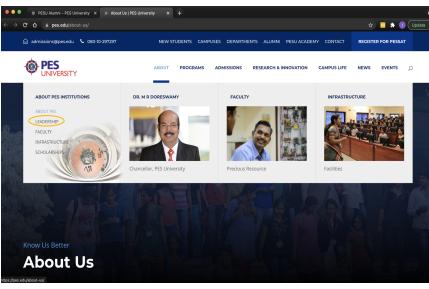
1. The Homepage: <https://alumni.pes.edu/>
2. About Us: <https://pes.edu/about-us/>
 1. Programs: <https://pes.edu/programs/>
 2. Admissions: <https://pes.edu/admissions/>
 3. Research and Innovation:
 1. Research domains: <https://research.pes.edu/>
 2. Research in the news: <https://news.pes.edu/tag/research>
 3. PISAT: <https://pisat.pes.edu/>
 4. Campus Life: <https://pes.edu/campus-life/>
 5. News: <https://news.pes.edu/>
 6. Events: <https://events.pes.edu/>
 7. New Students: <https://pes.edu/new-students/>
 8. Contact: <https://pes.edu/contact/>
3. Programs and Events: <https://events.pes.edu/tag/alumni>
4. Alumni Story: <https://news.pes.edu/tag/alumini>
5. Newsletters: <https://alumni.pes.edu/newsletters/>
6. Join Us Today: <https://pes.almacconnect.com/>

Heuristic: Visibility of system status

| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|----------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------|
|----------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------|

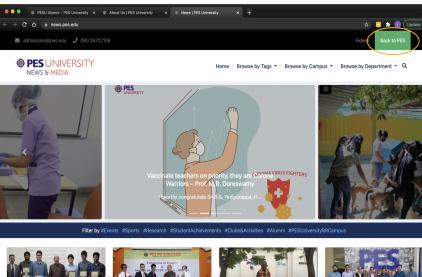
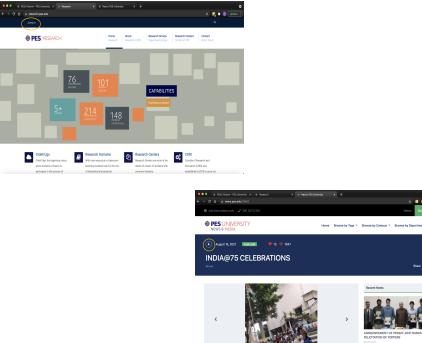
| | | | | |
|---|----------|---|--|---|
| The website shows the user which page they are on by underlining the corresponding tab in the menu | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| The website opens the web pages that have a lot of sub-pages (All options in the menu, except the newsletters page) in new tabs, making it easy for the user to see the tabs simultaneously | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| The search bar on the right corner of the page returns a not-found message in case of invalid input. It also provides a search box in the redirected page for easy searching | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| This website is mostly used to provide information about the university to past, present, and future students/parents/faculty. Therefore, it doesn't require a lot of input interaction from the user | | | | |

Heuristic: Match between system and real world

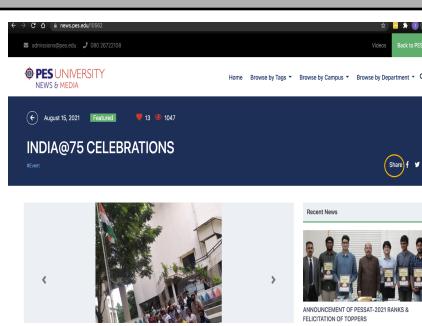
| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|---|----------|--------|---|---|
| Links and navigation cues are mostly simple words in English, but the site also uses certain easily understandable icons (Like the email and phone icons). Navigation is similar to other university websites and is pretty intuitive | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| The word leadership is not intuitive | Negative | 2 |  | “leadership” can be replaced with “our leaders” or simply “leaders” |

Heuristic: User control and freedom

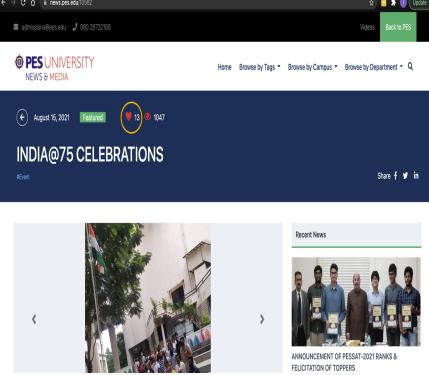
| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|----------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------|
|----------|-----|--------|------------------|-------------|

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| The links open in a new tab making it easy to exit (Just by closing the tab). If the user is still confused, the “Back to PES” option redirects the user to the homepage. | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| The “Jump To” option and “back” icon are also convenient. | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |

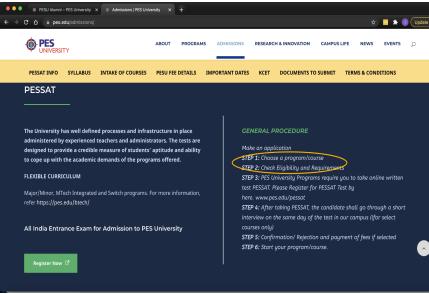
Heuristic: Consistency and standards

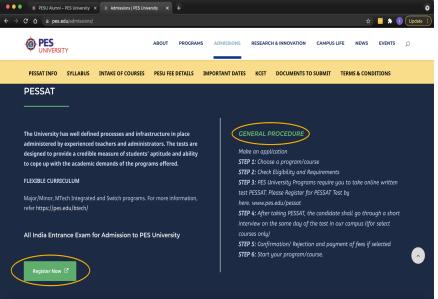
| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|--|--|--------|--|--|
| “Share” is intuitively assumed to be a link that leads to more options | Negative | 2 |  | “Share” can be written above the options given, or a colon can be placed after share. This will unambiguously indicate that the options after the word “Share” can be used to share the article. |

Heuristic: Error prevention

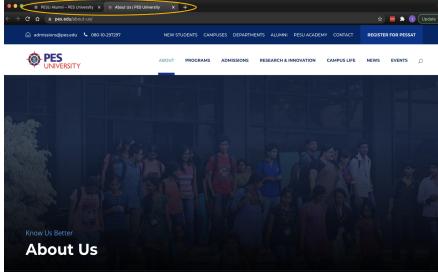
| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|--|----------|--------|---|---|
| There is no option to reverse like, in case the user likes it unintentionally. A single user can like the same article multiple times and the like count will only increase. | Negative | 4 |  | A user should be allowed to like the article only once. Even if the user does like it multiple times, the count of the likes should not increase. An option to dislike and reverse like the article should also be given. |

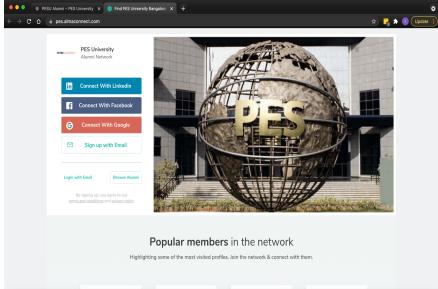
Heuristic: Recognition rather than recall

| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|---|----------|--------|--|---|
| On the admissions page, there is a section that provides the general procedure of the admission process. There are steps that the user needs to follow (without links to the relevant pages). This implements recall rather than recognition. | Negative | 2 |  | The links to the relevant pages can be provided / the step itself can be made into a link so that the users can effortlessly navigate to the pages. |

| | | | | |
|--|----------|---|---|---|
| The general procedure has a step about registration for PESSAT. Along with this step, a link to the registration portal is provided so that the user can easily navigate to it. Additionally, a bold button is provided in case the user misses the link in the instructions | Positive | 1 |  | The link in the instructions looks like plain text. It could be made to look more like a link so that users can easily identify it. |
|--|----------|---|---|---|

Heuristic: Flexibility and efficiency of use

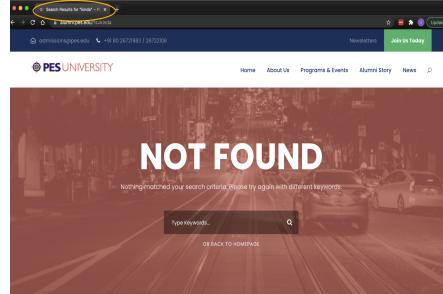
| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|---|----------|--------|--|---|
| Some of the links open in new tabs. This could be stressful, especially for the technologically novice user. | Negative | 2 |  | This is not a major problem (because only some of the links open in new tabs), but can still overwhelm non-tech-savvy users |
| Overall, other than the above mentioned minor issue, the website is easy to navigate and can be used efficiently by novice and expert users alike | Positive | 0 | | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |

| | | | | |
|--|----------|---|---|--|
| The alumni network cannot be viewed or accessed without login/signup(Individuals can be viewed). | Negative | 3 |  | Signup/login can be made mandatory for joining the network, but users should be allowed to view the different networks and the discussions in the networks to decide whether or not they want to join. |
|--|----------|---|---|--|

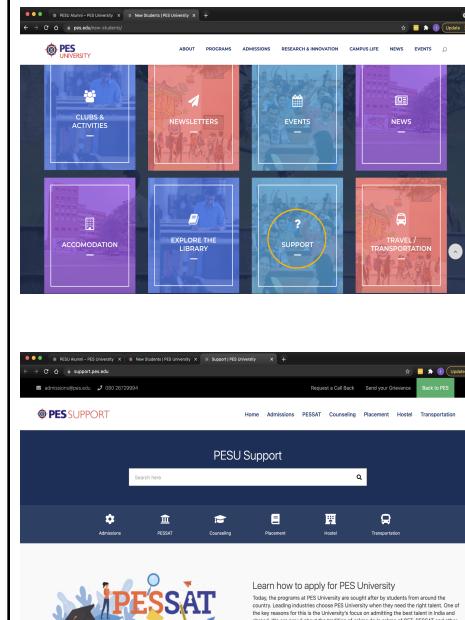
Heuristic: Aesthetic and minimalistic design

| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|---|----------|--------|---|--|
| The website uses consistent color and text patterns for all its content | Positive | 0 |  | N/A. It is a positive feature and does not require any change |
| There are certain pictures(especially in the background) throughout the website that don't have any relevance to the content on the page. | Negative | 1 |  | The irrelevant images can be replaced with either relevant images, simple designs, or solid color. |

Heuristic: Help users with errors

| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example / Figure | Suggestions |
|--|----------|--------|---|---|
| The search bar redirects the user to a “Page Not Found” page in case of invalid input. It gives the user an option to go back to the homepage or try a different search. | Positive | 1 |  | The page looks fine overall, but the “Not Found” text is too large. This can be reduced, and the sizes of the search box and link to the homepage can be increased. |

Heuristic: Help and documentation

| Comments | Tag | Rating | Example/Figure | Suggestions |
|--|----------|--------|---|--|
| The website has a lot of information in an organized manner but doesn't have a straightforward help/support page. There is a support page under the “new students” section but is not easily discoverable to anyone who is not a new student. The only other information available is the contact information. | Negative | 3 |  | A link to a support page, that everyone can access should be present. So that the user can resolve any issues, and have a smooth and effortless experience with the website. |

Conclusion:

The website has a lot of useful information that has been well organized. Most of the issues found were minor, and a couple were major issues. Navigation and feedback are the website's strong points. Overall, the user can accomplish the desired tasks and have a good experience with this website.

References:

1. Alumni section of the PES University website: <https://alumni.pes.edu/>
2. Barnum, C. M. (2020). *Usability Testing Essentials: Ready, Set...Test!* (2nd Edition (ed.)). Morgan Kaufmann.
3. Koh, M. (2016, May 5). A guide to conducting a heuristic evaluation. Optimal Workshop.
<https://blog.optimalworkshop.com/guide-conducting-heuristic-evaluation/>
4. Sauro, J. (2013, July 30). Rating the Severity of Usability Problems. MeasuringU. <https://measuringu.com/rating-severity/>
5. (2021). What Is Heuristic Evaluation and How Does It Improve Your Product?. adamfard.
<https://adamfard.com/blog/heuristic-evaluation>