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The Hidden Literacy Behind Website Development

Websites are one of the most effective ways to share information in modern times. We often see them as simple and intuitive. Though, websites are carefully crafted to be simple and intuitive and requires much more than knowing how to code. In fact, there is a whole community of website developers that debate the best practices when it comes to websites. A user has certain expectations of a website which must be considered by a developer in order to ensure the satisfaction of the user and a successful exchange of information. In essence, a website must have characteristics of simplicity, intuitive design, and accessibility.

Simplicity

The best way to present information is to have clear paths to understanding that message. If you were to have a plethora of information packed into one page, you would quickly overwhelm a user and fail to share the information as intended. The preferred approach is to break down the information into simple pieces that can give the user information based on their needs. In the same way this paper uses headings to define structure, a website has several pages and sections that break down the information. The more information that can be simplified, the more enjoyable and productive the experience is for the end user.

Intuitive Design

When you visit a website like google.com, you come with a set of expectations of how the website should work. For example when you want to search for something, you expect to be able to click on the magnifying glass to search your input. This may seem obvious but there has to be a distinction between elements you can press and elements that you cannot. The way a website communicates this to you may be subtle but dramatically increases the usability of the website. An example of the google.com communicates the purpose of the search bar is by focusing it with a shadow whenever the user positions their mouse over the search field. This communicates that the search bar is important and can be clicked. When creating a website, all the intuitions of the user should be correct or else it fails at giving the user an enjoyable experience.

Accessibility

A well designed website can be perfect in simplicity and intuitive design, but will still be incomplete if nobody can use it. What I mean is if a user is colorblind and a website decides to put text that is hardly visible to that user, the website exclude that user from using the website properly. This is why accommodating for your audience as much as possible is so important for a website. If you ignore an entire group of users because of disabilities, then you lose the power that a website can have to share information.

Multiliteracies

The traditional definition of literacy as it pertains to written text is not sufficient to explain the multiple literacies required for making a website. Tony Mirabelli offers a more useful definition for literacy, where “Literacy extends beyond individual experiences of reading and writing to include the various modes of communication and situations of any socially meaningful

group” (Mirabelli 302). The idea that literacy is not only being able to read and write text, but rather extends to a more figurative idea of literacy, is useful in appreciating the literary significance of website development. Multiliteracies pertains to the array of literacies needed to perform an activity. The main literacies used in website development are computational literacy, social literacy, and design literacy.

Burbules makes an interesting case that the defining feature of websites is their link to the interconnected web (102). He claims that it allows for a more critical type of literacy than one might expect. Smith also brings up an important idea that all digital media requires literacy (15). Together they agree that the electronic literacy offers a critical literacy in the modern age which cannot be overlooked. The way we interact with technology today shows exactly how important this type of literacy is becoming which makes it more important to research this field.

Apparently during Smith’s research, he discovered that through the digital projects being worked on, the participant began to transcend linguistic barriers and became literate in social literacy(19). Social literacy is also used in website development when designing the website as well as when working on a team to complete a website. Barbules discusses a different form of social literacy where the interconnectivity of the world wide web brings us together and is inherently a social activity(16).

Though previous research has done a great job at either focusing on the literacy involved in the digital era or explaining the design philosophy of making a website, there has not been extensive research into the way multiple literacies are used in making a good website. Website development has complex literacy requirements that need to be further studied and fleshed out. How are multiple literacies used in making a website that is engaging for the user and

communicates information in a neat and efficient manner? As apart of this community myself, I feel as though it is important to use the knowledge of multiple literacies to improve the overall quality of websites and user experience.

I intend to find the answer to this question by observation and interviews with users of a website. In this paper, I study the ways in which computational literacy, social literacy, and design literacy is used in creating a website. The layout of this paper includes the method in which I conducted my research followed by my findings including computational literacy, social literacy, and design literacy headings. After my findings I conclude with a discussion on my findings and how it is important in the bigger discussion on multiliteracies in the technological field.