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Xiaoni Zhang
Northern Kentucky University

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WEB USABILITY STUDY: A REVIEW

Xiaoni Zhang
Northern Kentucky University
zhangx@nku.edu

Abstract

Usability study yields fruitful results. Many researchers have contributed to the various perspectives of usability study on information systems (Dzida, 1996; Fisher, 1999; Huang and Windsor, 1998). Usability is a field of research that investigates how easy it is to accomplish a variety of tasks with a specific tool or system. As the Web has penetrated into our daily life, Web usability has become a topic of concern. Although usability study on the Web does not have a long history compared to traditional usability study, some insightful and useful findings have been produced in this stream of research.

Usability study of the Web is essential for business success and Web users' satisfaction. Because the adequate amount of Web usability study exists, it allows us to think aloud about what we have learned in Web usability. In this study, we intend to gather articles pertaining to Web usability study in the past several years, synthesize them, identify research patterns, and point out gaps which can be used to further our knowledge in Web usability study.

The study uses two methods to identify studies related to Web usability: abstract scanning and key-world search. The collection process is conducted using online journal databases, including ABI Inform, Business Index, Academic Index, EBOSCO, Business Search Premier, ACM Digital Library, and independent databases of publishers that publish relevant journals.

The first method used to identify Web usability studies was abstract scanning. This is a time-consuming process, in which the authors painstakingly scanned every article title in MIS, Web, E-Commerce, Computer Sciences, and related journals published since 1997. The year 1997 was used as a cut-off point, because almost no relevant studies were found before 1997 in preliminary search of several major journals. The abstract scanning process involves two steps. The authors first read the title of an article to determine its relevancy. If the title seems to be related to Web usability, the abstract of the paper will be retrieved and read by the authors to make a determination. Due to the possibility that some Web usability studies may appear in journals not selected in the abstract scanning process, the authors also conducted a key word search on all the online databases used. As with any search engines, wording differences in keyword search will result in different outcomes. Thus, the selection of key words is critical. The initial key words used are obtained from the key word sections of articles identified using the abstract scanning method. Synonyms of the initial key words were also used.

After articles were identified, we classified articles into the following categories: task, cultural differences, user satisfaction, and social relationships. Specifically, there are twenty articles are relating to the task issue in Web usability; eight papers are in the area of cultural difference in Web usability; nine works are devoted to user satisfaction and four papers fall in the category of on social relationship. Key findings in each of the four categories will be reported at the conference.