A Measure of Fun

Extending the scope of web usability

Charlotte Wiberg

Department of Informatics
Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden.

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Department of Informatics
Umeå University

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Author
Charlotte Wiberg
cwiberg@informatik
.umu.se
www.informatik.
umu.se~colsson

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A Measure of Fun. Extending the scope of web usability.

Abstract

Currently usability research and practice are facing a challenge. The focus of design concerns is expanding from predominantly functional aspects of IT systems to overall user experience, which has direct implications for the area of usability evaluation. When the focus is on experiences rather than on more functional aspects of systems, a revision of usability methods is required. The aim of the study reported in this thesis is to explore the potential of traditional usability evaluation approaches to deal with issues related to user experience, such as fun and entertainment.

The empirical study reported in the thesis deals with *fun and entertainment*, employs concepts and methods of *web usability*, and specifically focuses on the so-called *entertainment web sites (EWSs)*. Existing studies in the area of usability evaluation are examined to determine to which extent these studies can shed light on evaluation of fun and usability. It is concluded that evaluation of fun and usability remains an open issue. Then apparently the most relevant theories of fun and usability are analyzed to establish if these theories can help *operationalize* fun and entertainment as aspects of web usability. Since the input from theories is judged as not specific enough to guide a revision of usability evaluation methodology, the study defines fun and entertainment relevant for usability evaluation as properties intentionally implemented by designers. In the study, traditional usability evaluation methods are applied on EWSs and based on these results the methods are revised. Finally, these revised methods are used in evaluations of EWSs once more.

The results of the study indicate that traditional usability evaluation methods can be applied to evaluation of entertainment and fun in the context of web usability. More specifically, existing empirical evaluation and heuristic evaluation methods are found to produce relevant and potentially useful evidence when applied to evaluation of entertainment web sites. Therefore, the main conclusion of the thesis can be formulated as follows; while the underlying concepts and principles of web usability can be employed in evaluation of entertainment and fun, specific evaluation methods need to be revised. The results reported from this study must be seen as a step towards development of appropriate methodology for assessing user experience.

Keywords: Usability, web usability, usability evaluation methods, inspection methods, empirical usability evaluation methods, funology, entertainment web sites, HCI.

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