Exploring Online Research Methods: A virtual Training Environment

Heuristic Evaluation

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This report is divided into two sections, the first reflects on the findings of the first heuristic evaluation (October 2004) and how the website has been changed as a result of the recommendations from this early evaluation. The second presents the findings of a heuristic evaluation and review of the content of the web site undertaken in April 2005 (draft version of the site, /aprfile 140405).

Reflection on the Heuristic Evaluation (October 2004)

The key issues highlighted by this initial evaluation related to navigation and content design.

The issues raised on **navigation** were the several different means of navigating through the website; top menu bar, side menu bar, hot links in the text, bottom menu bar. The side menu bar was only activated when you click on the option of the home page. Several of the evaluators drew attention to this and felt that is should be permanently available and that the normal position for a menu bar is the left hand side of the screen not the right. This change has been implemented the drop down menu bar is now permanently available on the left of the screen. The left hand side bar is present on all screens and provides a consistent approach to navigation for the user. There remain different options for navigation e.g. tabs and hot links but the user has the consistency of the left hand side bar for navigation, if they become lost in the site.

The evaluators in the early evaluation noted the number of hot links in the text. The number of initial links has been reduced. The hot links within the module text refer to papers/ articles/web sites of interest and are very useful.

The evaluators highlighted the in balance in the content e.g. there was initially a lot of information about the project and no modules. This in balance has now been corrected as the content of the site has been added.

Overall the web site has improved significantly since the early heuristic evaluation. The look and feel of the site is good and it is easy to use. The report on the following page describes my reaction to the site and lists some minor problems I have encountered.

The quotes used on the entry page are now consistent; all appearing and then fade in the same way, the time delay seems fine.

Page design is clear, the use of the left side bar with drop down menu and logos of sponsors is effective. It is a good navigation feature to have this permanently available. Although there are still several means of navigating through the site (top bar and side bar) these are consistent on each page and so should not confuse the user.

Enabling the user to control when they see the **text** on screen is useful, as they are not overwhelmed by text and are in control. Occasionally when you enter a screen all the text appears and then disappears into the bullet points (see examples of this in table below).

There is inconsistency in the use of the "Close" option at the bottom of sections of text, some sections have it some don't. I think this feature should be consistent for all pop up sections of text. The use of arrows changing direction once the text has been accessed works well; you can clearly see what you have read.

Information boxes work well.

I like the feature of the personal reference list. Have users been observed using this feature, if so did they find it easy to use. If users have not been observed it should be focused upon in future user studies to ensure the instructions are clear and easy to use.

The Quiz and activities at the end of the module is a good feature to reinforce learning.

I have worked through the questionnaire and interview modules. The following table lists some minor problems that I have come across.

Description of the problem	Where did the problem occur	Severity rating
"Advantages and disadvantages of online research" – this is not an active link.	Modules/Introduction/Contents	3
Typo "legth" should read "length"	Questionnaire/Aims/point 5	3
Sampling issue/ recruitment- the text does not have a "close" link at the end.	Questionnaire/sampling issues/ recruitment	3
Text does not have a "close" link at the end.	Questionnaire/sampling issues/ To improve response rates a checklist	3
Text does not have a "close" link at the end.	Questionnaire/sampling issues/ Incentives	3
The title for the final case study does not remain visible while you are accessing the info.	Questionnaire/sampling issues/ case studies/ case study 3	2
The different screen sizes open a link but there is no info.	Questionnaire/ design issues 1/ appearance	2
All the text is immediately available on screen.	Questionnaire/ design issues 2	2
Clicking the close button on the first example for this section closes the	Questionnaire/ design issues / multi media stimuli	2

complete link not just the example		
Page not found error http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/quanmeth.html	Questionnaire/ Implementation/ Analysis	2
When you close the window for this pop up link it completely closes itself and Exploring online research methods site. http://www.w-lab.de/lab-united/actual.php	Questionnaire/ FAQs/Question 1	4
No "close" option on the pop up text	Questionnaire/ FAQs	2
When you close the window for both the pop up links they completely close themselves and Exploring online research methods site.	Questionnaire/ FAQs/Question "How can I create boxes in a word document	4
No text for the last question "Will I run into problems if …	Questionnaire/ FAQs/ Last Question	2
All the text immediately appears on the page.	Questionnaire/ Glossary	3
When you close the window for this pop up link it completely closes itself and Exploring online research methods site. http://www.htmlgoodies.com/	Questionnaire/ Further Resources/ web design/ websites	4
No authorised to view this page error http://developer.irt.org/script/form.htm	Questionnaire/ Further Resources/ web design/ websites	4
All the text appears immediately on screen	Interviews/ Introduction	2
All the text appears immediately on screen	Interviews/ Advantages and disadvantages	2
References some appear in red text, is this because they are not active links? Inconsistent with appearance of other references.	Interviews/ Advantages and disadvantages	2
All the text appears immediately on screen	Interviews/ Types	2
Error message page can not be found	Interview/ Technical Guide	