

Chapter 44

Usability Evaluation of Tourism Icons in India

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ABSTRACT

For evaluation of tourism icons in India, several usability evaluation methods from HCI domain are used. These methods include expert-based methods as well as user-based methods. The expert-based evaluation methods mainly include semiotic analysis and lexical analysis. The user-based methods include test without context, test with context along, with a comprehensive user survey. As the domain of e-governance is a public domain, the usability testing of these tourism icons requires a comprehensive user survey, which truly represents a public, who is likely to use such e-governance websites. This comprehensive survey is conducted with a large sample of more than 80 users including government servants, public sector employees, private sector employees, social workers, politicians, academicians, students, as well as foreign nationals. During the usability evaluation, icons are classified as icons, indices, and symbols. With the help of user survey, these tourism icons are categorized as “well-accepted,” “well-understood,” and “difficult to understand” icons.

INTRODUCTION

In India, there are twenty nine states and seven union territories and most of them have their official tourism websites. These websites are designed to provide relevant tourism information and services to the Public and visiting Tourists, who are Indian Citizens, Non-Resident Indians (NRI) or Foreigners. There are unique tourism icons used by these Indian tourism websites, which represent a diversified culture of the respective state of India. There are three major types of icons viz. simple icons, indices and symbols. An icon is a visual sign that looks like what it means. An index indicates about a particular object or process through indirect means. A symbol is a sign which is used for representation of objects or process through convention or standard (Agrawal & Bhutkar, 2012, 2015; Bhutkar et al., 2011; Cumbria, 2015;

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“Horton”, 1994; Specht, 2014; Kalsi et al., 2009; Shah, 2007; Withrow et al., 2000). The examples of icon, index and symbol in e-Governance websites are depicted in Table 1. An icon showing a house represents housing. An index for education is represented using a graduation cap with rolled degree and red ribbon, which is an indirect representation of education. A symbol for differently-abled services is depicted by a person in sitting position on chair-like object. All the icons in Table 1 are referred from a section – ‘Topic’ on Indian e-Governance Portal (“India Web Portal”, 2016).


The tourism icons used in these websites are of the type – index and each of these icons indicates about state tourism through indirect mean representing regional or cultural aspect(s) of the respective state of India (Bhutkar et al., 2011; Kergosien, 1991). In this chapter, the tourism icons available with these state tourism websites are studied and evaluated to propose a comprehensive methodology of icon evaluation.

Characteristics of Icons

The icons have about 40 characteristics representing several aspects incorporated in them (“Horton”, 1994; Specht, 2014). These icon characteristics include major characteristics such as –

- **Functional Analogy:** If you can’t show the object itself, you can show the object that performs an analogous function in more familiar area.
- **Animal Use:** Animals or birds are used as symbols.
- **Overlapping:** Allowing one object to block the view of another for conveying the proximity.
- **Size:** Size is a dimension or magnitude of any object.
- **Shape:** Shape is an outline of any object.
- **Clarity:** Clarity is defined as a clear, understandable, informative and easy association with the message.
- **Universal:** Globally used.
- **Labels Off:** Labels are not displayed or required (If symbol is not obvious or known to all readers then it must be labeled).
- **Functional Analogy:** If you can’t show the object itself, you can show the object that performs an analogous function in more familiar area.
- **Color Indicator:** In color indication, each color denoted by background, border or text may have a different meaning.

Table 1. Examples icon, index and symbol in e-governance websites

| Icon | Index | Symbol |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

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