

Chapter 81

Web Divide and Paper Unite: Towards a Model of the Local Tourist Information for All

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ABSTRACT

The authors present the first results of a study intending to unify the quality criteria of the local touristic information in digital support (Internet) and analog (paper). An analysis is made of the reading preferences of touristic information on last generation digital screens (tablet PC and multimedia mobile phones), traditional (desktop computers), and analog (brochures, magazines, and newspapers).

INTRODUCTION

Although the information in multimedia phones support is starting to be the common denominator among the teenager and young population, among the adults and the elderly the use of the computer is still essential. Between both technological devices we have the PC tablets which may serve as a kind of bridge. It is these bridges among generations which allow to establish the communication strategies with neutral information purposes or commercial marketing. In both cases communicability must always be present, regardless of whether the message is analogous or digital. In the field of the new devices it is necessary to add the usability of those devices.

Usability and communicability are not synonymous between themselves (Cipolla-Ficarra, et al., 2010; Nielsen, 1993). One of the main problems in the mobile devices is the amount of information which can be included on a single screen, without any need to carry out additional operations such as the pressure on the keys of the mobile device, the use of the pencil on the screens or the fingers on the keyboard, whether it is to move the sheet or activate links with additional information. These operations which may be trivial for a teenager are not so for an older person. An example are the information dots on structures related to tourism, such as can be the bus terminal, the train station, the ports or the airports, to mention a few examples.

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In the case of the ports, an excellent example has been an information point in the Industrial Polygon of the Zona Franca (1991-1992), where the trucker arrived and in a very simple interface he had the map to load or download the goods (Cipolla-Ficarra, et al., 1993). From the point of view of interactive design, the user was the focus of the design, that is, the ergonomics had to have two levels: the first, where the direct interface element was installed (button, keyboard, etc.) and the second the communicability of the screen. An information point stand in the 90s and beginnings of usability engineering had to be quick, provide possible solutions to the mistakes of the users, visually likeable and with movements simulating reality. By working with a tactile screen, the user can see that as soon as he/she puts the finger on the screen (Shneiderman, et al., 2010), the selected button stirs up (sinking, change of color, dimension, etc.).

Without any doubt, this movement may be trivial from the point of view of interaction but it is very important that it is present. Other variables should be added, such as the eventual interaction mistakes of the users with the computer devices and always try to take care of the connection between the eye and the finger. The main beneficiary of an information point is not so much the user but that who sends the message. It is a communication of quality or prestige, since it offers an improvement of service. Certainly in this the user is considered, by knowing the services that will be offered, whether it is information on the geographical position on a map, the services or places to be visited, etc. in digital interactive support or not.

Finally in the evolution of the obtainment of that information in the early nineties and practically half the second decade of the 21 century is that said information is got nowadays in microcomputing devices which can be held in a single hand. Whereas the cabins containing the computers of the port in Barcelona were six meters tall and eight tons of concrete were used. This example makes

highlights in itself the importance of interactive information over use of paper, such as the maps in different languages which are handed out to the tourists or users of services.

TOURIST INFORMATION: ORIENTATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

One of the problems to be solved in tourism is the orientation of those people who find themselves for the first time in a place they do not know. In the case of physical places such as train stations, airports, etc., the signals system plays a very important role. However, even if a place is well signaled, the cultural factor inherent to it may keep the visitors in a state of disorientation (Fernandes, 1995). If to this factor we add the accessibility to the physical places, many of the potential passengers of an international airport, for instance, may decide to change their airport terminal in the future due to the orientation problems. An excellent example of signalization and accessibility in a European international airport is to be found in Amsterdam.

Orientation and accessibility are two quality attributes which are to be found in the earliest of-line interactive systems and which have served as a model for the online systems, in the touristic context, for instance. Traditionally these quality attributes have been considered at the moment of the interactive design and the evaluation of usability. Those attributes were turned into metrics in such methodologies and quality criteria such as MECEM: Metrics for the Communications Evaluation in Multimedia (Cipolla-Ficarra, 2000). and MEHEM: A Methodology for Heuristic Evaluation in Multimedia (Cipolla-Ficarra, 1999). Next there are a few examples and the interested reader may widen these issues in the following bibliographical references (Cipolla-Ficarra, 1996; Cipolla-Ficarra, 1997).

The accessibility to the information in the last generation interactive users for those users

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