Evaluating Usability Factors in Three Brazilian Portals

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ABSTRACT
The usability of a system is a concept that relates to the quality of the interaction of systems with the users and depends on many aspects. The objective of this article is to carry through an evaluation of usability in three of the biggest portals of information and service of Brazil. A usability test was carried out to reach this objective. It was used users with and without experience in computer science, for the development of specific tasks to test the efficiency of the portals analyzed. The evaluation was made through standards of usability described for Nielsen.

1. INTRODUCTION
The importance of the interfaces of computational applications has been increasing in the last few decades. Thus the necessity to interact with computers is more present in the life of all. The innovation in the field of the Information Technology (IT) has caused changes in the form of living of people that must adjust themselves to this reality. For this reason it is necessary easy information systems that allow to get and to supply information to the users in easy and intuitive way.

Hence, the usability acts to stand out the importance of thinking ahead about the users, and only 22.22% of the respondents answered that always the portals inform the size of downloads. Therefore, the interfaces of the websites must be friendly and easy of use. This account so much to whom uses the Internet for the most different ends.

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At a time where it verifies the emergency of terms as interactivity and usability, it is well-known the function each more critical played by IT, being distinguished the Internet. In this environment, each second worth a lot in the time to conquer users or to offer services. Therefore, the interfaces of the websites must be friendly and easy of use. This account so much to whom uses the Internet for the most different ends.

2. METHODOLOGY
This research used a usability test as form to evaluate the usability factors of the three portals. A usability test is a process in which representative participant evaluate the degree that a product is in relation to the specific criteria of usability (Rubin, 1994).

The usability test used 12 users for the development of specific tasks to test the efficiency of the portals analyzed, being that nine work with computer science and the other three use the Internet only in the day by day.

The research verified if the portals offered a resource that showed one brief explanation of link before the user clicks on it. The results show that 38.89% affirmed that the time of reply of the portals is enough. The others 58.33% affirmed that the time of reply of the portals is satisfactory.

3. DATA ANALYSIS
3.1 Design of the Page
The first factor to be analyzed is the Design of the Page, divided in three items: Land of the screen, Time of reply, and Links.

3.1.1 Land of the Screen
In the first question related to the land of the screen, 66.67% of the users affirmed that the available space to the content is fine. However, with respect to priority given to the comparative content to the use of the land of the screen to show other resources or services, the analyzed portals still need to improve in this aspect.

3.1.2 Time of Reply
As for the reply time, the evaluated portals demonstrated a good performance. Only 5.56% of the users answered that the site did not react fast to the commands, and 36.11% of those found that the time of reply of the portals is enough. The others 58.33% affirmed that the time of reply of the portals is satisfactory.

With regard to the time of download of file of the portals, for 33.33% of the users these portals almost never inform the size of downloads. Only 16.67% said that the portals always inform the size of downloads. Therefore, these portals need to inform to the user the size of the file, and then one can decide if will download it at that moment or not.

3.1.3 Links
The research verified if the portals offered a resource that showed one brief explanation of link before the user clicks on it. The results show that 38.89% affirmed never the portals show the headings of links to facilitate the navigation of the users, and only 22.22% of the respondents answered that always the portals inform the heading of links. Thus, it expects that these portals always inform some information about the link before the user clicks on it.

3.2 Design of the Content
For 55.55% of the users, the content available for the portals is satisfying the necessity of them with regard to the quality and brevity of the texts. The others...
44.45% were indifferent as regards to the adequate formatting of the texts in the site. Therefore, as the result was not satisfactory for the great majority of the respondents, it is expected that the portals try to develop more objective contents, dividing the subjects in topics, facilitating and providing to the user a clearer and direct reading.

3.3 Design of the Site
In respect of the use of metaphors in portals, 47.22% of the users demonstrated indifference to this aspect, affirming that the use of metaphors does not harm and nor contributes for a good navigation. No informer answered that the metaphors helped a lot in the navigation, and 38.89% said to be satisfactory the use of metaphors in the portals.

In the aspect of the navigation, referring to the identification of where the user is in the site, 61.11% of the users said that is satisfactory or very satisfactory the navigation of these portals. This information proves that the portals are informing the localization of the users whenever possible, facilitating to get the information in any place of the site, and not leaving them to lose during the navigation.

4. CONCLUSION
The results in general showed that the users have a good impression as regards to the usability of the portals. The purpose of this research was exactly to show the reality of the main Brazilian portals since all internet users currently access these sites at least once per day. In such a way, verifying the usability of these portals and identifying possible deficiencies in them, it can solve them, and consequently to facilitate the access of the information for any type of user, from the least to the most experienced in the Internet.

The majority of the developers and Brazilian companies still invest very little in usability, and usability tests still are something rare. Therefore, it must be had in mind that the elaboration and accomplishment of tests to evaluate the usability, applied to a product, as it was the focus of this work, is a good pointer to display problems in potential. This sufficiently minimizes the risk of offering an unstable product and of difficult learning in the market.

This work did not intend to analyze all the existing problems with the usability of these portals since the research would be much more ample. As recommendation for future research aiming at practical results, it is suggested a work deepened in this subject using more professional without experience in computer science, in order to get a set of suggestions for the improvement of the usability in the sites of the Web. This set of suggestions can be carried through one checklist or developing a method of evaluation for portals of information and service.

REFERENCES


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