

Cultures of Health Website Usability Study - Spring 2008

<http://hih.uwindsor.ca>

Investigator:

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Introduction

The Cultures of Health website recently went live to the public. It's a new collaboratively designed website for history and health researchers, students and educators. From the inaugural note: "As our ideas for this site developed, we saw a need for a kind of on-line research magazine, one that could accommodate eclectic fragments and work-in-progress presented by researchers of all kinds, and quickly get them up and circulating in a pleasing format." With these goals in mind, the site was designed and in the Spring of 2008 a short usability study and concept check was performed on the site. A small selection of highly qualified participants, participants that were most representative of the potential users of the site, were interviewed one on one and asked to review the website for the first time.

Research Questions and Goals of the Study

- * Is the website inviting to users and does it make sense to them?
- * Will the users feel encouraged to participate? How would the most likely participate?
- * Is the website easy to use, navigate and search?
- * Is the content of the website useful and clear to the participants? Are they able to review the archived documents and the articles easily?
- * Are the languages on the website suitably translated and is there enough?
- * How comfortable are the intended users with using websites of this nature? Is it likely that the intended audience will follow the site by RSS or by bookmarking?

Method

Using 5 or 6 participants selected to closely reflect the expected users of the website, they will be interviewed one on one. During these interviews the participants will be discussing their online habits as well as viewing the new website. They will be asked to do some small tasks with the website and give general feedback on the usability and the concept of the website.

Findings

Participant Profile

- Many of the participants are used to working with libraries and archives for research work. Popular services mentioned included JSTOR and Leddy Library.
- Most do not actively contribute to websites or post comments or articles online.
- Many only spend a few hours online everyday and spend most of that online time working by doing research.

- Many are not active participant on the web, and would require active prompting to participate with a website.
 - One participant commented that they wouldn't feel as comfortable commenting on the website since they were "just a graduate student and this is more of an academic website"
- None of the participants used RSS feeds currently, many don't know what they are.
- Most of the participants they would likely bookmark the site and try to come back to it when they remembered it.
 - **Recommendation:** This group of users is likely to be unfamiliar with websites with high participation, be clear where they can contribute and that it is encouraged.
 - *"I've never been to a website like this that wanted user participation."*
- Many of the participants noted that more and more their research is being conducted online in libraries and archives.

Website Concept

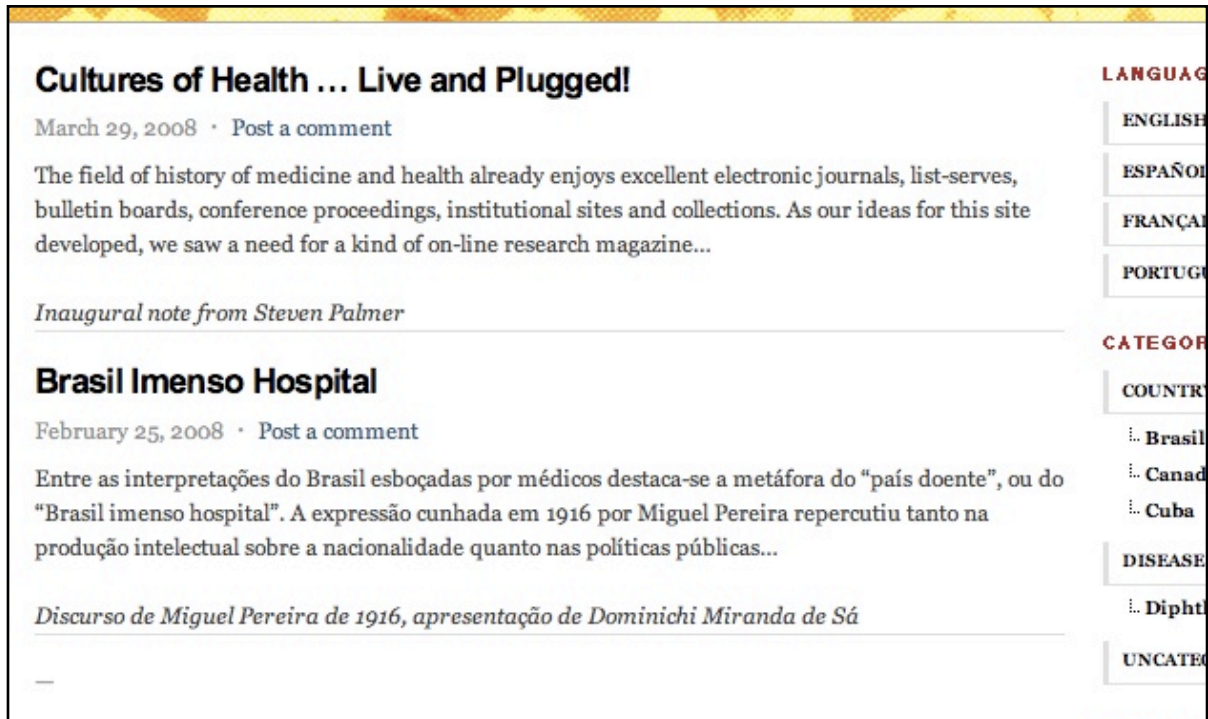
- Most thought the idea of the website was good and unique. However, even with a lot of prompting many of the participants feel they wouldn't contribute to the website.
- Most found the additional languages a great idea. Many were expecting more to be translated when they changed language.
 - **Recommendation:** When the user changes into a new language the change should be obvious. One possible solution would be to change some of the colors on the site when the language is changed.
 - **Recommendation:** Many had hoped that most content on the website would be translated, with the exception of original documents.
 - **Recommendation:** Divide the banner picture into separate links for each language and have it the largest picture be the language that the page is currently in.



- Some participants commented that the direction of the website wasn't immediately clear to them and that cultures of health are two very broad topics. There were questions about how far back in history the website would cover, as well as which diseases or other topics it may cover.

Website Layout

- Many were able to navigate to the article snippets through the right hand navigation.



The screenshot shows a website layout with two article snippets. The first snippet is titled "Cultures of Health ... Live and Plugged!" and is dated March 29, 2008. The second snippet is titled "Brasil Imenso Hospital" and is dated February 25, 2008. To the right of the snippets is a navigation menu with two sections: "LANGUAGE" and "CATEGORY". The "LANGUAGE" section includes links for ENGLISH, ESPAÑOL, FRANÇAIS, and PORTUGUÊS. The "CATEGORY" section includes links for COUNTRY (with sub-links for Brasil, Canadá, and Cuba), DISEASE (with a sub-link for Diphtheria), and UNCATEGORIZED.

- Some thought these snippets were comments, or only part of the article but could not find the larger article. This made the site feel very incomplete to them.
 - **Recommendation:** In the archives the snippets need to have very clear links to the whole article. One possible solution is to add "Continue Reading" or "More. . ." at the end of the snippet in blue underlined font.
 - **Recommendation:** There should be some indication on the right hand navigation where the user currently is, in order to make it clearer to the user.
- Many participants missed the inaugural note on the front page. However, when they found it in the archives they were confused by it and felt that it needed a more predominate spot on the website.
- Some participants were expecting the website to be more like the sites they are used to and have an archive search for research. These participants often missed some of the content.

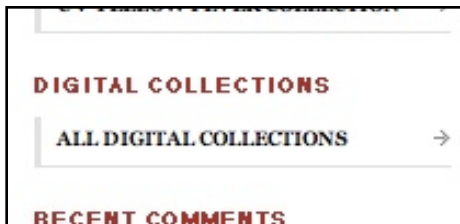
Other Observations

- A few participants found the digital archives on the website, but only one was able to successfully find documents within them.
 - **Recommendation:** When in the digital archives there should be an indication of how many articles are being indexed here.

- **Recommendation:** The browseable headings for the archives should be more obvious that they are clickable links.

The screenshot shows a search interface with a navigation bar containing the following tabs: Search, Subjects, Titles, Organizations, and How to. Below the navigation bar is a search form with the following structure: "Search for" followed by a dropdown menu containing the word "chapters", then "that contain" followed by another dropdown menu containing the word "some", then "of the words" followed by a text input field. To the right of the text input field is a button labeled "Begin Search". Below the search form is a section titled "About this collection" with the text: "This is a demonstration collection for the Greenstone digital library software. It contains a small subset (11 documents) of the Humanitarian and Development Libraries." Below this text is a link titled "How to find information in the Greenstone demo collection".

- **Recommendation:** In the navigation if you are going to list “all digital archives” you should list them separately as well in the navigation or the users may get confused when there is only two.



- Many participants seemed more comfortable browsing through the site and links than searching for specific information. This is possibly because of the nature of the test because about half noted that they liked to search sites more than browsing.
- Some commented that by browsing you are sometimes able to find tangentially related information that you didn't know about before.
- Most participants visited some of the related sites, some questioned how these sites were chosen and if more would be added.
- The articles on the website are often very long and may be hard to read in one sitting online.

Additional Feature Requests

1. Some requested the ability to share the documents, articles and archive material via email, IM or downloading.
2. Many hoped that the content, articles and archived material, would be able to be downloaded and saved easily for use in research.
3. Some thought that it would be useful to have more education about the website and its uses. Also to have that education in easier to read and understand format.
4. When considering the archived documents, a few thought it would be beneficial to have a short one or two lines of description with the document.

Conclusions

Overall the site was received very well. The concept of a site where many people could contribute was interesting and new to many of the users. It seemed to be that this type of website was good, but not something that they thought they needed right away. It will be important to ease user into this type of website with clear instructions and welcoming messages. Many were frustrated with the “lack of content” that they could find. It’s important to make links visible and obvious, many users online will spend little time reading and more time clicking looking for what they need. Each of the participants noted that the inclusion of different languages was a great touch to the website even if they found the implementation of the translation to be a work in progress. It seemed to be that translation into other languages was a weak point for many of the websites they are currently using, so they realize it’s a hard problem but always want more.

The website has many great features and is a great innovative concept for this area of research. The challenges the website will face in the future seem to be getting people to actively participate in something online they had never considered before, as well as being clear what is available on the website.

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Script

Pre-Amble

- Consent Form
- Thank you for participating.
- This will be a short set of Questions and tasks to better understand how you would be interested in using the website.
- Recording Screen capture and Audio which will be strictly confidential.
- If at any time you would like to quit or don't want to answer questions let me know and we can stop.
- This is not a test of you, there are no wrong answers, think out loud so I can better understand what is going on.
- Questions?

Pre-Questions

- How often are you online? What are some of your normal activities online?
- Can you tell me a few websites that you follow and like to keep up-to-date with?
 - What are some of the things you like about this particular site?
 - What are the ways you follow it?
- How often do you Use RSS feeds?
 - What other tools do you use?
- Can you describe for me any websites that you've posted comments on?
 - Can you tell me what happened last time you did this?
- Have you ever had a blog or a similar website that you contributed to?
 - What type of information would you want to contribute to a website?
- In your line of work or research, what type of websites are you normally using?
 - Can you think of an example of a site that you visit and reference frequently for work?
 - What do you like about this website?
 - What do you find frustrating about this website?
 - Have you ever found that you wanted to participate on this site?
 - How did you find this site? Is the common for you?

Tasks

We're going to visit a website, obviously the one you were asked by Dr. Palmer to see, I want you pretend that you found this site while searching for history of health and medicine. <http://hih.uwindsor.ca/wordpress/> play around with it, let me know what you think of it, what you think you could do with it.

How does it compare with other sites of this nature?

So let's say you needed more information about diphtheria and you happened across this article.

What would you do next?

Would you or could leave a note to thank them the article?

What might you do if you notice something was wrong in article?

What might you do if you knew that you had some amazing information that would go along well as another post with this site? (push to contribute)

[Upon viewing the instructions to participate...]

what would you be able to do next?

Where would you go on the site to find more interesting articles? (push to search)

Let's say that you wanted to keep up with this site, how would you go about doing that?

Post Questions

- On a site like this, what sort of content would you hope to find? Is there any content that you could see yourself contributing?
- Judging by what you've seen so far on this site what topics would you think it would be useful for?
- What do you remember the most about the website? What stands out to you?
- Would you tell colleges about this website? What would you say?
- In what ways might you feel that you could interact with the website in the future?
- What was the strong point of the website?
- Where do you think they could improve the website?
- Any other comments or suggestions?