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A Usability Evaluation Framework

For Saudi E-Government Websites

Dalal Ibrahem Zahran

ABSTRACT

Usability engineering is a user-centric evidence-based methodology that is driven by end users satisfaction and improved performance through their involvement in the design, testing, and evaluation of software and websites to produce systems that are measurably easier to use, learn, and remember. E-government is a new face of government that reaches citizens through electronic citizen-centered Websites. In 2005, the Saudi e-government program "Yesser" was created as a best practice guideline for designing public Websites. But organizations conducting global e-government evaluations, such as the UN and Brown University, gave Saudi e-government low ranking even though their emphasis on the usability of the Websites' design was limited or lacking.

It has been the purpose of this research to assess the current state of the usability of Saudi e-government through a formal evaluation of its ministries' websites. An Interactive Service E-government Framework was developed for this research to select e-ministries based on the adherence to e-government standards and guidelines. From 22 Saudi ministries, only six qualified as been on the average in the 1st e-government stage. This research developed an e-government usability framework containing 30 design criteria based on common criteria from four usability frameworks available within the literature to investigate the six ministries for usability evaluation using multi-usability methods; researcher's assessment, heuristic evaluation and formal usability testing with target users. Comparing "Yesser" with the proposed usability framework revealed its limitation and deficiency with only 13 out of 30 guidelines covered, of which only a few were followed by the evaluated Websites. Consequently, results revealed that in addition to Saudi e-ministries having numerous errors such as network or server errors, broken links, under construction pages, and non active links, they had sever usability problems many of which prevented completion of typical tasks such as lack of security, data validation, search facility, site map, and appropriate navigation. Overall the evaluated websites were not citizen-centered leading to users' dissatisfaction and frustration.