The Brazilian Transparency Portal

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ABSTRACT

One of the e-government goals is to enable public access of official information to all citizens. The diversity of the audiences may imply that the way the exposed information is understood may not be homogeneous. An evaluation of the Brazilian Transparency Portal, conducted as part of this research, has corroborated the previous assertion. This evaluation showed that the official classification may limit understanding depending on the public, because it may be unclear or not widespread. Although non-governmental agencies were satisfied with the way information was classified, regular users had several problems for finding information in the Portal. In addition, different users identified distinct classifications for the same data item. Based on these results, a framework was developed to improve the usability of the Portal. A new form of user interface adaptability called “adaptability by classification” was proposed within this framework. The novel aspect of the framework is to allow data presentation in different ways according to the classifications expected by groups of individuals with the main goal of increasing digital inclusion.

Keywords: E-Government, E-Society, Public Expenditure, Usability, User Interfaces

INTRODUCTION

The development of electronic applications in third world countries has as one of its major challenges the provision of user interfaces to a wide diversity of population with different needs. In Brazil, according to the last research of the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee - CGI.br, only 35% of the population has a computer at home, and, 27% has access to the Internet. Other findings include: 46% never used a computer, with a rate rising up to 68% of the population in rural areas. With respect to internet experience, 52% affirm they have never had any contact. When investigating specially the electronic government services, 77% have not used any of the available services in the last 12 months. The main reason pointed out (46%) was the preference for personal contact (CGI.br, 2010).

Whereas different portals may have a defined or preferred target audience, due to the nature of the information to be presented, no citizen is out of the potential public of an electronic government portal. Therefore, publishing data of e-government applications respecting
the diversity pointed out by the CGI.br survey is not an easy task. Research must be carried out on how to offer better electronic services and, thus, to minimize the need for personal contact. Specially, when referring to government expenses in Brazil, the availability of information to the entire population is not a mere (moral) possibility, but a true obligation specified by Brazilian law (Brazil, 2009) in order to enable a greater oversight of the government work.

In addition to the obligation to disclose information about official expenses, the intention of the law should be to enforce a complete comprehension of the exposed information to all citizens. With this goal, the Brazilian Government launched an official internet portal called Transparency Portal.

The overall objectives of the research described in this article are: to identify accessibility and usability difficulties that may hinder consultations to the Transparency Portal, and, with the use of TICs, to determine ways to overcome the problems and to propose improvements to the portal. We have started the research assuming that, due to the lack of technical knowledge on public budget, regular users might have difficulties to find the desired data.

As specific objectives, this article seeks to identify a complementary form of user interface adaptation that may increase the usability of the Transparency Portal. This form of adaptation could address the barriers of formal classifications that are not well known to an audience and be also useful for other types of portals whose public has varying needs and knowledge about data presented by the portal.

The rest of the paper is divided as follows: “Background” presents a foundation about the common requirements of adequate e-government web portals. The “Methodological approach” describes the research carried out on the Transparency Portal and provides its outcomes to justify the framework described in the section “Proposed Framework”. Finally, “Conclusions” closes the paper.

BACKGROUND

The development of applications with good accessibility and usability is a key concept in e-government, and it is here understood as the requirement that applications can be easily accessed and understood by the entire population. Whereas accessibility allows information to be obtained even by those with special needs, a good usability ensures that the path to obtain an information will be found in an objective and easy way. Whenever possible, usability testing should be made to identify the most suitable user interface, especially when considering the needs of different users. Accessibility and appropriate usability lead to a greater use of electronic portals, in particular for those with major difficulties in the use of technology.

As a result of the review of related work, discussed in the section Usability Evaluation, six main parameters were identified for the success of e-government: websites with good usability; accessibility; real evaluations of existing portals; ways to encourage people participation; ways to integrate (the large amount of) data among agencies; and customization of user interfaces. The good usability of sites aims to encourage a better participation of all, since it allows those with or without special restrictions to have a better browsing experience. It is essential to ensure the success of a web portal. Accessibility, although intended for those with special needs, is not restricted to a specific audience, but, on the contrary, it aims at an expansion of the target audience. Real evaluations allow the identification of specific problems (including usability) on existing or developing sites. Ways of encouraging public participation are important for greater citizen involvement in the government and promotion of increased interest on the government policies and decisions. The integration of data seeks to mitigate this recognized difficulty when implementing the electronic government. The personalization of user interfaces aims to provide an individual browsing experience, improving the user satisfaction.
Portal Development Framework
www.igi-global.com/chapter/portal-development-framework/5971?camid=4v1a