ABSTRACT

Human Computer Interaction is a relatively new field. It has borrowed theories, techniques, and tools from such diverse disciplines such as computer science, management of information systems, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and design. The Web design process needs to evolve in order to include the constructs and tools provided by multidisciplinary research. Culture has been proven to have a direct influence in the way a Web site can be both evaluated and designed. In order to attract and retain users, electronic government Web site designers must acknowledge that culture plays a key role when it comes to user acceptance. The best way to approach the users, who in the case of an electronic government are the citizens, is a citizen-centered approach that must be incorporated into the Website design process.
INTRODUCTION

Human Computer Interaction (HCI) is a relatively new field. It has borrowed theories, techniques and tools from such diverse disciplines, such as computer science, management of information systems, sociology, anthropology, psychology and design. Thus, HCI development has been a derivation of interdisciplinary and collective efforts from different research perspectives in order to provide a better understanding of the way the user interacts, adopts, and efficiently performs specific tasks by using technology.

Usability evaluation has been broadly used as a means to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of Websites. It also has consistently adapted tools from sociology and psychology by implementing focus groups, ethnographic studies, and interviews in order to have a better understanding of the way users perceive Websites and how familiar and friendly they are for the users. Thus, usability evaluation aims to make predictions about how people will use a Website; make predictions about interactive elements that may be problematic and predict consequences of not fixing usability problems; and the resulting product may be an interface that will deliver information in the most efficient way (Patton, 2002).

Since the World Wide Web was conceived, its main objective has been to deliver information in the most appropriate and efficient fashion to users. As a result, the Internet has proven to be the most interactive and global means of communication and has reached more international audiences than any other massive communication technology.

Because of this global reach and the crescent acceptance among users all over the world, private and public institutions have developed efforts in order to address information to the targeted audiences. Among these institutions, governments have played an important role in the way services and communications are delivered to their citizens.

Even though commerce was the main use originally given to the Internet, electronic government Websites have appeared, and there is a fierce competition among the main electronic government leaders to become the model and to set the standards, when it comes to adopting and adapting electronic government applications, services, and innovative solutions. An electronic government is the result of governmental efforts to achieve efficiency and to reduce transaction costs. It also reflects the interest that citizens may have a method to interact and become not only participants, but protagonists, in the way these services and transactions are performed.

Web design is a topic being considered and explored with a more scientific scope. With the development of the Internet, the number of Websites has grown considerably, and Web design has become a profitable part of this new massive communication means.

One way to identify innovative solutions to enhance the user’s experience when it comes to navigation, exploration, and finding information, services, or applications the user is seeking is by providing a usable Website. A Website is usable when it enables the best possible human performance. To ensure the best possible outcome, designers should consider a full range of user interface issues (Kojani, Bailey, & Nall, 2004).

To attract and retain citizens, electronic government Website designers should acknowledge that culture plays a key role when it comes to user acceptance. The user interface development process focuses on understanding users and their individual differences. These differences result from inter alia—differences in cultures.

Until recently, the phenomenon of culture has been the subject mainly of sociology and management theory, as well as language teaching methodology. Much less work has been dedicated