

The Importance of Sociability Heuristics for Social Television

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ABSTRACT

In this position paper, we explain why sociability heuristics are important in the design and evaluation of social interactive television systems. We describe the method we used to create the heuristics, and illustrate the importance with one of the heuristics.

INTRODUCTION

In several academic and company research labs, social interactive television applications are being developed (see e.g. [1,3]). Although none of these systems have (yet) been launched commercially, the social character of watching television as well as the success of social networking applications on the internet and beyond, suggests that there might be a lot of potential in such systems. However, if they want to be successful, it is important that they fully support the social interactions that are central to them, but taking into account the special context of watching television. It is not easy for designers, even specialists in the field, to use only their experience or common sense to make sure they account for every aspect. Just as there exist usability heuristics to aid designers in creating and evaluating usable interfaces, designers of social television systems can benefit from sociability heuristics to create sociable interfaces. In this paper, we introduce the creation of these heuristics, which can be presented at the workshop at uxTV2008.

METHOD

We performed several user tests with different social interactive television systems and thoroughly analyzed literature that reports the results of user studies in the lab as well as in the field. Based on these studies we used grounded theory and affinity diagramming to create a list of 12 sociability heuristics that can guide the design as well as the evaluation of social television systems. Usability issues are not directly addressed in these guidelines, as there are plenty of other general usability heuristics or specific guidelines for interactive television [2]. Of course, these sociability guidelines should be used together with usability guidelines for interactive television, as a social television system should not only be sociable, but also usable.

SOCIABILITY HEURISTICS: AN EXAMPLE

As space in this position paper is limited, we want to single out one heuristic to illustrate the importance. The heuristic

“guarantee personal privacy and group privacy” states that designers have to make sure the system enables users to ensure their own personal privacy, by choosing what (not) to disclose, but also group privacy, by taking into account the presence of multiple viewers in a collocated viewing situation. Even though this heuristic might sound self-evident, as with many other guidelines it has been proven that common sense and experience alone is not sufficient for ensuring a usable or sociable system. Our list of 12 heuristics will aid designers and developers in just doing that.

CONCLUSION

At the workshop, we will be able to contribute to the discussion with our experience in user testing several social television systems, and the twelve sociability heuristics we have created based on these tests.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

David Geerts has a master in Communication Science at the K.U.Leuven and a master in Culture and Communication at the K.U.Brussel. He leads the Centre for User Experience Research (CUO) of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium), is involved in several research projects on user-centered design and evaluation, and is taking his doctor's degree on Sociability of Interactive Television, with the purpose of developing guidelines and heuristics for designing and evaluating social television interfaces. He organized several workshops and SIGs at CHI2006, CHI2007 and CHI2008 and two workshops on Social Interactive Television at EuroITV2007 and EuroITV2008. David Geerts is program chair of EuroITV2009, the 7th European Interactive TV Conference.

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