Localising the User Interface for Elderly People in Malaysia

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The major motivation in this research is to encourage success in the adoption of computer technology among elderly people in developed countries. The demographic diversity and cultural differences among multi-racial elderly people in Malaysia can be both the uniqueness and challenge to this research. This paper reports the findings and results from a preliminary study conducted by the author in September 2005. Based on the findings, this research aims to blend culture and ageing concerns into localised interface design for the Malaysian elderly. It is hope that the localised user interface will attract more elderly people to go online and to enhance their Web experiences.

Ageing, Older Adults, Elderly Users, Culture, Culture, Localisation, User Interface Design

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the International Labour Organisation report in 2001, approximately 3.8% of Malaysians are in the age group of 65 and above. Even though the percentage is still small in comparison to other developed regions such as the US and UK, the older population is growing world-wide although the rate of change has been greater in developing countries [5]. The use of computers and the Internet appear to be increasing in line with the ageing of the population. Many studies have shown older people aged over 60 today constitute one of the fastest growing groups of the Web users [3, 4, 6].

In 2003, former Ministry of National Unit and Social Development in collaboration with The Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems (MIMOS) conducted a pilot study namely Warga Emas Networks and Eagle Nest targeted at elderly Malaysians. The study was aimed at promoting societal inclusion and freelance employment with the use of computer and the Internet among elderly people in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Kelantan. Based on the positive acceptance shown through the study, this research aims to discover and propose ways to encourage more elderly people to start their partnership with the Internet and to improve their online experiences.

Building on the current literature, the author has suggested that as people age, they will hold the same pattern of thinking, acting, communication styles and behaviours which they learn from living in a specific social environment. Studies on cross-cultural interfaces show there is correlation between the use of cultural elements (e.g. colours, metaphors) on the user interface design and the users’ performances [1]. Therefore, it is crucial to provide elderly people with an interface based on their cultural values.

2. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The preliminary study was conducted in two senior citizens’ centres in Selangor in September 2005. There were 16 respondents (Male: 10, Female: 11) aged between 50-70 years who filled in the self-administered questionnaires plus five respondents who were interviewed by the author. The majority of the respondents were Chinese (90 percent) and many of them had some computer experience (70 percent: 1-3 years experiences). The questionnaire was designed to identify levels of acceptance and importance of the Internet and email to the respondents. The questions focused on four main Web activities as follows: searching for information, online transactions, communication and leisure activities. Inputs from this study have been used to identify and determine potential activities and areas in need of improvement to promote the use of the Internet by elderly people in Malaysia.

2.1. Demographics

- Cultural lifestyle has significant influence to the level of acceptance and usage among the multi-racial communities (Malays, Chinese, Indian and others) in Malaysia. The differences in cultural lifestyle also influence their social activities. For instance, Chinese elderly people like to join senior citizens’ clubs to socialise. While Malays elderly people - especially those who lives in villages - participate in community activities and religious activities organised by the mosques in their residential area.
- There is correlation between education level and computer usage among elderly people in Malaysia.
- The use of Internet among senior elderly users (65 and older) is likely to increase in next decade.
2.2 Internet and Computer Experiences

- The reason for computer use among elderly people in Malaysia is Internet access and work-related tasks.
- Many elderly users who have had some computer experiences from their previous job choose to attend the computer classes to improve their computer and Internet skills.
- There is correlation between the level of confidence and computer performance.
- The most popular online activity is email and the least popular activity is online shopping.
- Email is used to communicate with family members and friends abroad.
- The lower percentage of other activities such as downloading video and file sharing indicate that it may be that elderly users did not know about these features or that the tasks might be too difficult for them to perform.
- Instant messaging is getting popular because of the availability of voice messaging and Web camera features.
- Online transactions are not popular due to the lack of awareness of the services provided by the local bodies and because many elderly users feel insecure using online financial services.
- Elderly people who live with their spouse and family members have an option not to do important transactions (e.g. daily shopping and paying bill) themselves. Alternatively, they let their spouses or family members do it for them.
- Elderly users are interested in using online greeting cards because it is convenient and cost-effective.
- There is potential use of the Internet as an alternative medium for elderly people’s participation in senior citizens’ associations and clubs.
- Elderly users in Malaysia are not interested in online dating and entertainment.
- Many of elderly people’s concern about the Web regard security and censorship matters.
- The price of a complete PC is equivalent to a month’s salary of a graduate employee. PC donations from public and private organisations such as IBM Corporation and MIMOS have helped to sustain computer lessons running under the Warga Emas Networks and Eagle Nest.

2.3 Local Web Contents and Application Development

- Although English is widely used among the respondents in this study, the percentage of elderly people who can English is lower in rural areas. Many Web sites and computer applications are written in English.
- Microsoft Malaysia has launched the Malays Interface Pack for Windows XP and Office 2003 targeting the Malay community especially in rural areas regardless of age groups. However, its acceptance by the Malaysians is still low.
- Limited accessibility features on the local Web sites have hindered elderly people from gaining the full benefits of Web services and access to the information.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there is increasing awareness and positive acceptance of the Internet among elderly people in Malaysia. It is important to investigate whether the current applications used by the Malaysian elderly are what actually they want to use or if they just use what is available and is taught in the computer classes. Initial investigation on the impact of culture into user interface design shows that it is appropriate to incorporate some cultural knowledge in localised user interface design for Malaysian elderly people.

REFERENCES


