

A Framework for Designing Usable Localised Websites

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Abstract

Website localisation is the process of adapting the linguistic and cultural content of an internationalised web design for a specific target audience in a specific locale. With the advent of globalisation, website localisation is becoming a powerful way to attract online customers in a global market. Hence, the main driving force behind such moves is financial, but with a strong motivation towards cross-cultural sensitivity.

The primary aim of this research therefore is to explore the design of websites for different cultures. It seeks to provide an outline of the current and relevant literature with regard to cultural usability and user interface design. It also aspires to develop and experiment with a Cultural User Interface (CUI) profile. The intention is to create a framework for designing usable localised websites. To achieve these ends, the research employs various methodologies. These include descriptive/interpretive studies of the literature and previous studies by academics and industrial institutions. Furthermore it utilises surveys and case studies among Internet users, web designers, and web production companies in the target cultures (Arab and British). In the process a website has been redesigned according to the guidelines of a newly built framework within the context of an action research approach. Finally, by comparing the original and the redesigned websites, a comparative evaluation has been carried out.

The research findings contribute to the general field of software/web localisation and personalisation. They also provide academics and industry with information on the degree to which cultural localisation is needed to ensure usability. In addition, they highlight the extent to which users' cultural background and perceptions influence their preferences and hence the acceptance of the virtual world of online user interfaces. The main findings of this research highlight the necessity to understand both the target culture and the needs of the business commissioning the website. They also show the value of design consistency (navigation, layout, interaction, graphics and colours, etc). Furthermore the researcher was able to identify a drawback in web designers' current practices in the investigated countries, in terms of their limited utilisation of existing guidelines for the exploitation of intercultural usability, accessibility, knowledge, tools and methods.

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