ACLU Website Analysis

IST 331

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Team 5- Clubs

Christopher Allgyer

Jeralyn Tseng

Ryan Sheehan

Michael Chlysta
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1. Introduction

While designing user interfaces there must be certain aspects that need to be taken into account for to fit the users needs. Designers should always ask certain questions especially to users before actually building the interface. These questions can be researched many different ways but one of the most common ways is just to ask what the user needs to the user. These questions that need to be accounted for in the interface should be based off the Ritter’s (2013) ABCS.

“According to Ritter et al. (2013) the ABCS is used to help organize design relevant human characteristics. The ABCS is an acronym represents the four aspects of users that need to be taken into account of when designing interfaces.

A- anthropometrics: the shape of the body and how it influences what is designed; consideration of the physical characteristics of intended users such as what size they are, and what muscle strength they have and so on;

B- behavioral issues: perceptual and motor characteristics, looking at what people can perceive and what they can do directly.

C- cognitive: learning, attention, and other aspects of cognition and how they process influenced design; users defined how they think and what they know and what knowledge they can acquire

S- Social factors: how groups of users behave, and how to support them through design; users defined by where they are- their context broadly defined including their relationship to other people.

A website is a user interface and should include questions off the ABCS as well. The very first question should be, “who are the users of the website?” After concluding who the
users are you can continue to ask questions like what is the website for, will it be used for business, education, pleaser, or information, is their any needs of the users like disabilities, or any other questions that pertains to the ABCS of the users. By taking in these factors while designing a website, it can lead to a better purpose driven site. Its being used to what it was created for. Having it properly designed will increase usability and benefit not only users but the business who created it.

This website analysis’s purpose is to assist the creators of the ACLU website in making a more effective website and easier for all users to do what they need to on the site. First we will provide some generic problems that we as users have found while searching around the ACLU website and provide those problems. We then will present this analysis in a behavior from looking at three key concepts which are included in the ABC’s. The first analysis and experiment we will conduct is a learning analysis. This analysis shows how the users actually use the ACLU web page and how they learn to do certain tasks on the webpage. We want to see progression in taking steps to complete a process and if we don’t there's no learning done by the user showing the UI (User Interface) to be not to be friendly. The second analysis and experiment that we will do is a task analysis. The tasks analysis is used to show how long it takes for a user to complete a task on the site. The longer it takes the less friendly the UI. Finally the last analysis and experiment will be a Perceptual analysis. We want to conclude how users view the page and what stands out from what they do on different perceptions. Once all of these analyses are complete we will include suggestions in updating the website to fit the user needs more. We don’t want to just give out our problems with the website but give suggestions in which we believe would provide better functionality and interaction to the scope of users that go to the site.
2. Website Description/Preview Screen/Contact

ACLU is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties guaranteed to every person in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States. ACLU stands for the American Civil Liberties Union. The website is used by this organization to drive this purpose even further and to reach out to the U.S. Citizens more.

The ACLU is set up in a unique way to reach out to its customers. Currently the website's homepage is set up in that there are links at the top which include Key Issues, Action, Stories, About Us, and Donate. In these links it takes users to other parts of the website in that they can perform different tasks or gather information. In looking at the full screen view of the website it doesn’t fit the entire page. The upper left side includes the authentic logo and states the name of the organization. Throughout the left side of the site it includes a news feed like feature of current issues, blogs, press releases, news, cases, reports, letters, and any other multimedia which allows users to see what’s currently trending throughout the ACLU. Throughout the right side of the homepage includes small areas that includes links to videos, podcasts, signing up for the aclu, finding the local ACLU, learning more about legislative and supreme courts, and even social media sites run by the ACLU to join. Near the bottom of the homepage there is featured links of the ACLU and actions against certain discrepancies like freedom of speech, capital punishment, religion, racial justice, and many more. Also there is links to certain aspects of the organization like user agreement, privacy, contacting them, and accessibility.
Figure 1. Web screen of ACLU homepage (upper half). The following parts described below are shown some in this web screen.

Figure 2. The lower half of the homepage.
While looking at this website it is beautifully set up in many ways but could use some minor changes which could make the site a more user friendly experience and increase productivity of the site. We were able to get in contact with Sara Mullen who controls/maintains the website currently. She is the director of the ACLU specifically for PA. We were able to communicate through email with her on allowing us to analyze the website and the purposes of why the website is used.

3. Website Problems

The ACLU website is one in which already looks pretty appealing to the eye and looks professional. Unlike other websites that have glaring issues with their designs the ACLU website has decent organization and a theme. This made our group approach the site with a critical eye, looking deeper into the site and analyzing details. The site also made our project team think about the different things we have learned throughout the semester, applying the learnings to the ACLU’s website gave us a chance to validate patterns we have seen with website/interface design.

3.1 Homepage

One of the first places we decided to look at was the homepage itself. Applying the different types of analysis learned throughout the semester (learning, task, perceptual) we can identify problems with usability in each section of the site. Using the learning analysis we were able to determine that there were indeed flaws with the homepage, the most prevalent being the organization. We learned that having too much clutter in the homepage created an environment that seemed chaotic to new users using the site. The ACLU is currently using their homepage to
display a ton of different information at once instead of focusing on the major functionalities that
users are looking for.

3.2 Website Navigation/Navigation Bar

After we discovered how users learn when they visit the ACLU’s website we then wanted
to learn how users navigated the site. Using the methods learned in the course we used task
analysis to break down the users actions and see where we can make the navigation of key
functionality within the site more efficient and streamlined. Using the GOMS/KLM method we
noticed that some tasks take several more steps to complete than expected, and there are
inconsistencies when it comes to how some tasks are navigated. A reorganization of the
navigation bar to match a new organized homepage would allow users to get a better overview of
all the things they can do when visiting the site. Users performing a task can quickly get
confused or lost because of the many different ways to navigate to the same spot (navigate
through the entire menu bar or try to find a link in the large list of links at the bottom of the page).
Paired with a better information scent we believe that the different tasks on the site can be vastly
improved.

Figure 3. The Navigation bar

3.3 Color Usage

The last analysis that we used to identify areas on the site to improve was a perceptual
analysis. By applying knowledge gained through previous perceptual labs we have gained a
better understanding of how color, saturation, and hue can play a huge role in users perception. The ACLU site already attempts to set up a theme and color scheme but it is somewhat inconsistent in some areas, and problematic in others. These inconsistencies can be found when looking at the colors used in highlighting important functions such as the sign up box, which can appear as one color on one part of a page but a totally different color on another. Text can has the tendency to blend in to the colors around it, not allowing the text to “pop” or pull the users attention. Another problem is the amount of links blocked in at the bottom of the page. When users are looking for a specific link it is hard for them to quickly isolate it from the large block of links. This ties in with the spacing used within the site. The site stays a static size even when maximized. If the site was changed to utilize the left and the right of the screen it would increase white space and reduce clutter. The other major problem we have identified is the use of “high interest colors” on parts of the site where lots of different information is. This can be seen on the homepage where colors that tend to grab users attention are used on the smaller less important parts of the page.

4. Learning

Analyzing the learning curve helps us understand how the different features of the website affect how easily the users are able to form a general idea when navigating the website based on the mental model; whether it is through browsing or for other purposes. These features include how well their menu suggests what type of action and sub-function each button contain, and how direct the users are able to make those connections.

By constantly performing the same processes, we learn to carry them out efficiently and effectively to the best of our abilities. Ritter et al. (2013) define learning as “performance
changes with practice, typically getting faster, becoming less effortful, and generating fewer
errors. We can analyze the way people learn with Wright’s learning curve (Writ, 1936). This can
show us how the amount a process is done vs. the amount of time it takes the process to be
completed. As the number of times the task/process is completed, the time taken should decrease,
giving a curvature graphical representation of learning. This curve is a good representation of
learning and is what we used in our analysis. We want to see whether the website is easy to
navigate and how fast users can perform a task at the end of their several trials.

4.1 Study and Subjects

In the learning lab, we asked five subjects, two IST students and three non-IST students
who have never heard or been to the ACLU website to perform the tasks. We assume, from their
background that they have no problem using the computer. The task is actually the same as the
first one in the task analysis lab. It helps us to compare and to understand whether subjects were
able to increase their efficiency in navigating the website with learning. However, one difference
is that the subjects did not know the path to their destination page. Instead, they were being told
what page to arrive at, but will have to figure out the path on their own. We timed the subjects as
they completed each trial. Then based on the learning curve, we will compare the results with
their learning pattern and performance.

4.2 Procedure

We conducted our experiment in an IST classroom, an environment that is relatively
stable and quiet where the subjects can concentrate. Since this is a learning lab, we tried to
minimize any outside stimuli. The procedure is as follows:
1) Give subjects the address to the website. They are explained with the objective and what ACLU does so that they form a general context.

2) Tell the subjects that they will perform a task and ask them if they have understood what ACLU is.

3) Give subjects the instructions of the task in these exact words: “find the local affiliates.”

4) As soon as they begin, we time (using cellphone timer) them until they hit the button that will take them to the Pennsylvania affiliate page (all subjects chose Pennsylvania).

5) The time for each trial then be recorded.

6) Step 4 and 5 are repeated another 4 times.

4.3 Results

As shown in Figure 3, when it came to the question of a subject learning the task and getting faster, we did see a decrease in time from trial to trial (on average). However, this went hand in hand with our other question about mistakes as we saw during the trials when subjects made mistake or mis-clicked on buttons as they got more comfortable with the task. As the subject got faster it put a higher emphasis on execution and less on remembering the content of the task. In turn, this would affect the performance time negatively (increase in time). By looking at some of the types of mistakes that were made, it seemed that the subjects felt more comfortable and tried to go faster, which sacrificed accuracy due to the lack of patience, and the desire to hit a better time record.

One surprise occurred during the learning lab was that, although the task, “find the local affiliate” was the same as the one in the TA lab, the subjects from the learning lab navigated to
the page through a different path. This path was not previously known to us as experimenters. This also suggests that different users have a different perception and notion of information, and how they are connected.

![Learning Curve for Individual Subject](image)

**Figure 4.** Learning curve for individual subject and the mean.

5. **Task Analysis**

By using task analysis, it makes one’s user-designed system to be much more efficient and error-free. It is a common procedure to do if one is looking to build a user-friendly interface that takes into account of the users and their capabilities. According to Ritter et al (2013), Task Analysis is “the tool for performing these monitorings on the user. It helps describe and understand how people perform particular tasks. It can be useful for several purposes ranging from describing behavior to helping decide how to allocate tasks to a team.”
According to Hacko et al. (2013), is it also about analyzing the details in relation to how users “perform their tasks and achieve their intended goals. Tasks analysis helps identify the tasks that your website and applications must support and can also help you refine or re-define your site’s navigation or search by determining the appropriate content scope.”

5.1 Study and Subjects

The study of task analysis is based on the KLM and GOMS model. When we collect the data, we used the RUI 2.3 Keylogger Program. Since subjects in this analysis will be given the path to arrive at their destination page, out study of the website pertains more to the interface and users’ interaction with the website, as well as other more location-related feature of the website. The subjects of this analysis all have a basic understanding in computer and are familiar with using the mouse and keyboard. However, they have not previously been exposed to the website other than when given the instruction to navigate it for this lab analysis. (Please note that this group of subjects is a separate group from the learning experiment subjects.)

5.2 Procedure

The subjects are given instruction of their tasks; the first task is to find the local affiliate and the second is to sign-up for a petition. The subjects are then are demonstrated with the steps as to how to arrive at the two pages for the 2 tasks.

The keylogger is started and as soon as it started recording, the subjects began their tasks. Similarly, the subjects hit the “stop” recording button as soon as they finished the tasks. The keylogger records every single keystroke, mouse movement, and mouse click.
5.3 Results

Using the KLM model, we predicted the time that it will take each subject to complete each task. The task analysis lab is where we realize tasks can be different in terms of their nature: Finding the local affiliates only requires mouse clicks and browsing, while signing a petition requires typing and inputting information. While browsing time can be relatively similar, when the task requires value input, the amount of time really differs as the length of information is different. An addition discovery is that users move their cursor around when waiting and usually it causes them to move away or to have to refocus when the page loads. The results show that the ACLU website can be a little clustered, and can use more space to increase usability.

Our results in Table 1 shows that the prediction from the KLM model (please see appendix) differs greatly from the actual keystroke logger recordings. One of the reasons being subjects who were unfamiliar with the website, in turn took more time to think, and therefore hesitated. Furthermore, the prediction only adds up every execution, but does not take into account the page loading time or the extra distance that the pointer/cursor traveled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prediction</th>
<th>Task 1 Find local affiliates</th>
<th>Task 2 Sign Petition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>23.18s</td>
<td>56.45s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>15.18s</td>
<td>29.89s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>22.74s</td>
<td>51.86s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>43.29s</td>
<td>35.25s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>9.10s</td>
<td>33.95s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td><strong>22.70s</strong></td>
<td><strong>41.48s</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Prediction vs. Actual Time (seconds) spent on each task
We realized that there are subtasks that make up a single task and measuring things such as mental processing time such as reaction time between subjects is very difficult. Through predicting using KLM, it not only gave us a rough estimate of time to complete a task, but it also allowed us to understand what subtasks truly made up each task of this experiment including but not limited to: keystroke, mouse movement and mouse click, as well as the differentiation of interaction with the websites, such as page browsing and information inputting.

One complication that our group encountered when running each task analysis was that we could not predict for an audience in general. An example of this was the different field lengths that the subjects needed to fill in. Some subjects names were longer than others, this meant that we would never truly be accurate with a single prediction. This reinforced what we discussed in class about KLM and it being a helpful framework to acquire estimates or organizing a task, although it will not always be completely precise. In our case, it was quite off. However, a method of improvement for future experiments is to compile the average lengths of first and last names, as well as email addresses.

Another complication with the field lengths were the subjects’ ability to type. Some of our subjects were able to type extremely fast, some typed at the average, and some were slow. This affected the times for each and every field. In addition to typing speed, some subjects also choose a different of inputting values when signing the petition. When moving to a different column, some subjects choose to use the mouse, while some simply click on the “tab” button. Clearly, the “tab” saves the subjects more time as it omits the time requiring the subject to both place the hand on the mouse, and find and move the cursor to the right location on the screen.

Another conclusion we have drawn was that we had done each experiment with the subject knowing ahead of time how to do the task. However, a first time user without any
knowledge of what the website looks like or with little knowledge of what the ACLU is composed of would not know what buttons to click on or where information falls on a certain area of the webpage. Therefore, this would also greatly result in differences compared to subjects who have been shown with how to complete the task at least once. For this experiment, measuring someone that knows the task ahead of time is more easily measured but it may not produce results for improving the way that users access the website. We also realized that knowing the task ahead of time still did not mean that users made no mistakes. Users would still misclick, scroll the mouse around while scanning the page, or mistype on the keyboard. These are all things that seem obvious when running the experiment but it made us think about the prediction of mistakes and why it isn't very plausible (and extremely hard to do).

Last but not least, although it has less to do with concepts pertain to reaction time, impatience during waiting for browsers to load page also made users to instinctively move the mouse around. By doing do, users may move the cursor to an area of the screen where it was not originally the last location a button was clicked. It could be very far from the next target button to be clicked or very close. This could also affect the time of task completion as the user could spend both more and less time finding or arriving at the location of the next to-be clicked button.

6. Perceptual Analysis

Perception is a vital aspect of the usability of any interface. The various ways that users are able to observe, recognize, and interpret functions of an interface determine its overall capabilities and effectiveness. A well designed interface should be able to be navigated by the intuition of its users with immediate comprehension.
The perceptual analysis that will be conducted for the ACLU.org website will give better insight as to how a user distinguishes and recognizes different aspects of the website. With this information, suggestions and proposals concerning how user views the ACLU website can be forwarded and presented to ACLU individuals. Because our Perceptual Lab did not involve using the ACLU website, our team will perform another perceptual analysis lab this time focusing primarily on the ACLU website.

6.1 Study and Subjects

When our team initially analyzed the ACLU homepage, we noticed a redundancy among its email newsletter signup function. On its rather long homepage, there are three separate links for an email newsletter sign up, all of which bring the user to the same page where it asks users to complete a form asking for their email address and zip code. As pictured in the figures below, options for signup are located in the top, middle, and bottom thirds of the ACLU homepage. Each option for signup in the figures is highlighted by a green circle around them, and are designated as “signup options #1, 2, and 3”. The goal of our perceptual analysis is to find which of the three options for signing up for email newsletters is the most recognizable. To perform this analysis, we tasked five subjects to sign up for the ACLU email newsletter from the homepage.
**Figure 5.** Top third of ACLU homepage with signup option #1
Figure 6. Middle third of ACLU homepage with signup option #2
6.2 Procedure

To protect the privacy and anonymity of the subjects, we did not ask them to actually signup for the ACLU email newsletter, which would have required them to enter their own personal email addresses. Instead we simply tasked the subjects to locate where they would signup for the newsletter. To do this, we verbally tasked each subject by instructing them to “Locate on the home page where you would subscribe to the ACLU newsletter.” None of locations of the three signup options were shown to the subjects. Once the subject located one of the options for signup, they pointed it out to the observer who recorded the data.
6.3 Results

The majority of the subjects selected signup option #1, followed with signup option #3. Surprisingly, none of the subjects selected signup option #2, even though it was the largest and most vivid of the options for signup to choose from.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject 1</th>
<th>Subject 2</th>
<th>Subject 3</th>
<th>Subject 4</th>
<th>Subject 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option #1</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option #2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option #3</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Signup options selected by the subjects

7. Implications

There are several recommendations that our team came up with to improve the usability of the ACLU website. The first recommendation is to keep the homepage simple, and clutter-free. The main problem with the current state of the homepage is the overabundance of information and links, for example blog feeds, social media outlets, and various forms of multimedia. Upon visiting the homepage for the first time, the user may feel overwhelmed with what is being displayed, and may have problem with navigation. To remediate this problem, our team recommends the ACLU place more emphasis on utilizing the navigation bar, rather than dumping information on the homepage, as a way for the user to use the site. This way, information can be better organized on separate categorical pages, leaving the homepage simple and straightforward.
A second recommendation called for more consistency with the ACLU homepage. A more subtle, but majorly important issue that we found was a lack of a description about the ACLU and what the organization does on its homepage. Another issue was the options for signing up for email newsletters. Having three different options on the homepage seems rather unnecessary, and only adds to the clutter of the page.

8. Conclusion
While the ACLU website already takes major steps to look not only professional but designed for its users, it is not void of problems. Using the different types of analyses and the many concepts learned throughout the semester we have been able to break down and dissect the ACLU website so that we can identify problems with design and issues regarding its users. Specifically we used the analyses to identify problems with the homepage, the navigation bar/navigation of the site, and the perceptual layout of text and color themes. Looking at these pieces individually let us identify problems that could be encountered by new users and experienced users. The ACLU website is attractive and functional but if additional changes are made to focus on some of these user problems the site can better serve its mission, especially since it is the front end for their large user base.
# Appendix

## Keystroke Level Models

### Find the Local Affiliate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step Description</th>
<th>Keystroke</th>
<th>Time (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Point to “About us” link</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on “About us” link</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to “Local Affiliates and Chapters” link</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on “Local Affiliates and Chapter link”</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrolling</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find and point to “PA” on map</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on “PA”</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3.26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sign up for a petition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step Description</th>
<th>Keystroke</th>
<th>Time (s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Point to “Action” link</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on “Action” link</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrolling</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to the first picture link</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on the first picture link</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to the “First Name” column</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move hand from mouse to keyboard</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type first name*</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit “tab” key</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type last name*</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hit “tab” key</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type email address**</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move hand from keyboard to mouse</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point to “Sign”</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Click on “Sign”</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>8.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Assuming that the average first and last name each contains 7 characters

** Assuming that the student uses the psu email, abc1234@psu.edu, which contains 15 characters
References


Authors of the report (please see outline on page 2 of the report for authors’ responsibilities):

- Christopher Allgyer
- Michael Chlysta
- Ryan Sheehan
- Jeralyn Tseng

Contact at the organization:

Name: Sara Mullen
email: SMullen@aclupa.org
Phone: 717.238-2258

What did the contact do during the semester, how did it work?

She provided us with details on what she did on the website. She granted us permission to give her recommendations and would like us to try to understand why the website is there and its purpose.

Have you shared the report with the contact?

We have not but we will as she requested for the recommendations that we have.

Do you grant permission to Ritter to share the final report with the contact with a cover letter?

Yes we grant permission to Ritter to share our Final report with the contact.
Do you grant permission to Ritter to share the final report on the IST 331 web site?

Yes. We grant permission to allow Ritter to use our report as an example on the IST 331 web site.

How likely are you to revise the report before sharing based on feedback?

Very likely.