

VI. Conclusion

This bachelor thesis has examined »How can we improve the usability of the Fhp website by adjusting the navigation elements and the information architecture (IA) to the end that we optimise the user experience (UX)?« For this purpose, a new design concept of the page's content was developed, with focusing on its UX elements of navigation and AI.

A. Summary of Results

The results outline that the webpage has many usability issues which adversely affect the user experience. These problems are based on the user navigation design, the AI structure and that the web design is not responsive. For improving the user satisfaction, this project has developed a new interface for the main menu, submenus and other navigation elements - like the search bar and footer, an alternative landing page navigation besides the current navigation system, as well as adaption of the website's information architecture. Moreover, all design decision base on the previously developed persona Julia who represents Fhp's stakeholder group students.

After the problem analysis and description of the use cases: Certificate of study, the Library catalogue, Course catalogue, the design process was divided into three phases with different focuses. In the first phase, the primary objective was to design new interfaces for navigation elements. It included the inventions of removing the current hover menu, placing a new navigation bar instead of at the top (above the header image) and aligned its main items horizontal. It also involved the interactive look of the main menu, by adding icons and colour highlights and drop down interaction, as well as developing a more effective search tool, reducing the head bar and footer elements, and reconsidering their functions and essential content. Further, in this phase similar adjustments for the submenu elements was designed, as well as a responsive layout for navigation with mobile devices was developed to offer a holistically UX design concept. All modifications were visualised with design examples of screens.

The next process stage focused on the concept of navigation and its usability. Therefore, the primary objects were the navigation structure and its items, of the main menu as well as the submenu of the design department. As results their first level categories were reduced to five items, with a new list order, and got the following new labels: Im Studium, Internationales, Lehre & Forschung, Infos Studienangebot, Fachhochschule (for main menu); Studium & Lehre, Der Fachbereich, Forschung & Projekte, Öffentlichkeit (for submenu of design department). Besides that, the hierarchy, section levels and subitems of both menus were reorganised and with charts documented. To demonstrate these adjustments screens were designed.

Additionally, a dendrogram was developed to illustrate the new arrangement of the page's areas. This graphic shows that categories »Im Studium« and »Fachhochschule« contain the most content. Accordingly, it visualised the cluster of new IA structure with a five-level hierarchy. Due to the IA structure, it had been the navigation dilemma discussed. Central considerations were that deep level hierarchies and flat navigation structures had opposed advantages and disadvantages. Navigation concepts with high usability take both sides into account. The forward design decisions consider that argumentation.

Also, the idea to offer users of the Fhp's website an alternative navigation structure beside the main menu was introduced. This second navigation system based on several stakeholder landing pages with flat hierarchies, which guide the users efficient to their objectives onsite. Therefore, we grouped the stakeholders of Fhp's webpage into the following seven categories: Studierende, Interessenten, International Students, Alumni, Mitarbeiter, Unternehmen, Presse, and developed a landing page for the target group students (Studierende), as an example of the concept. The principle of this particular page was to offer its stakeholder a navigation interface with reduced options. So, we defined thirteen topic pools, which represent the objectives and needs of students onsite, and assigned the most relevant links of the webpage's content as subitems.

Then, the users' benefits of this navigation system were discussed. All arguments base on the project's goal to improve the usability of the Fhp homepage, like more effective and efficient navigation, or findability of specific items.

In the last process phase, the focus was on developing and visualisation to compare the new navigation concept with the IA structure of the Fhp homepage. This graphic demonstrated the intersection points of the students landing page of the website's content, and showed the reduced students' landing page perspective, in comparison with the internal view of the whole menu structure of the institution.

Further, three information graphics were designed to outline the optimised navigation flow based on the new navigation concept. As a reference, we described the improved user experience of Julia (persona) in the use cases.

B. Review and Reflexion

The landing page navigation based on the theory that each user will know what stakeholder group he belongs to and will only need the features targeted at this segment. So, it is suggestive to think organising Fhps web pages' content by stakeholder groups would be easier for the users. The function of the landing page is to help users navigate more efficiently and effectively by anticipating each group's needs and sending them down to their particular site. Despite the described advantages, role-based navigation systems can cause usability issues too. One problem can be, that forcing people to self-identify creates an additional step and takes people out of their task mindset. This question increases users' cognitive effort, and people have not even made it past the navigation yet. Additionally, users can ask whether the category will have information about that group or for that group. For example, the link Studierende might lead to an expectation to see information about the students who study at the university, rather than to think specific information for student members, because the label alone can't tell what to expect.

Besides that, they can feel anxious that the information they see might be incomplete or incorrect. Therefore, usability tests are necessary to learn more about the user's experience (way of thinking, needs and feelings) by asking them what they expect from stakeholder categories.

However, even if the landing page navigation based on the best user researches, the page is always developed for the average user and can not fulfil the individual needs of everyone. This matter regards the whole User experience from the Fhp's homepage, from IA structure up to the visual navigation design. The website will never be perfect. There is ever potential for improving its usability. All in all, periodically user test are essential to know what needs to be optimised and the first step to enhance the whole user experience.

C. Concluding Remarks and Outlook

The key to a useful navigation menu is to keep it simple. No matter how many content categories an IA structure has and how many pages need to link together. Therefore, simplicity might be the most important usability guideline for further developments of the Fhp's homepage. The fewer design features the page contains, the less cognitive effort the users has to do for scanning and comprehending the content, and the better the chances that they will choose the correct option for navigation onside.

Attempting to impress the users with cool effects should not be the priorities for designing new interface elements for the website. Other designers may be impressed by extraordinarily design implementations, but the most users will be far more pleased by content that is findable and easy to use (usable). For guaranteeing the best UX design of the Fhp's website, it is essential to consider theoretical principles with UX research that proves whether the design concept works for its target audience.

Last of all »There is a lot that goes into perfecting navigation design and getting it right means it usually has to go unnoticed. By aligning the user goals, content strategy and navigation design, UX designers can create a cohesive and consistent user experience that users will love.«