

CHOWDHURY, G.G. & CHOWDHURY S. *Information users and usability in the digital age*. London: Facet Publishing. 2011. 208 pages. ISBN-9781856045971. £44.95

This is a well-organised and very well-written book. Chowdhury and Chowdhury clearly have extensive experience in conducting studies and evaluating usability. They also take the effort to present their information in an accessible, clear and engaging way. The book is divided into ten sections. Chowdhury and Chowdhury outline in the preface that sections four, five and six can be read separately as these are the more practical elements of the book. These middle sections cover Usability study basics, Usability study participants and Usability data analysis. The other sections look at what usability studies can measure. For instance, which user groups might be assessed, what would be the purpose of the study and how do we monitor and evaluate the behaviour, thoughts and intentions of remote users?

The authors do not provide a prescriptive formula for what improves the usability of a website (which most texts on this subject matter do tend towards). Rather they offer a more considered discussion stressing that good usability depends upon the user groups, their intentions at that time and the intentions of the providers of the service. As indicated, usability also depends on what is being measured. An example of this open-mindedness comes in the introduction in which the authors provide screenshots of major UK websites. They discuss the differences between websites in terms of information delivery to intended user groups. The CBBC site is an example where clear and engaging images are going to be of paramount importance. The authors also compare the Library of Congress with the British Library pointing out the different intentions of the sites (pp.10-11).

Not only do Chowdhury and Chowdhury provide excellent bibliographies at the end of their chapters, they also sometimes include an outline of the major publications on a topic at the front of their chapters (Chapter 3, Human Information Behaviour). They include helpful diagrams and end the volume with a look towards the future in Issues and Trends in Usability Research.

I found this to be a confident, well-researched and comprehensive text. It is useful for anyone conducting a usability study or for those interested in studying their user groups. I would recommend it both as an overview of the subject and as a more in depth and extensive analysis of the topic of usability for those who require a practical guide to conducting usability studies.

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