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Successful Commercial Website Design

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ABSTRACT

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I wrote this paper as the bachelor thesis of degree programme of Business Information Technology. The aim of this thesis was to get familiar to the basic issues related to web design and implementation, discover the factors contribute to successful commercial web designs.

The thesis was theory based with case study and research. Detailed principles and elements of web design were described and analyzed in the theoretical part. A qualitative research has conducted as the last part which aimed at improving the user experience.

As the result of this thesis, characters of a successful website design were generalized and among them I found that follow the usability is the most important issue. Always position yourself in users' perspective and provide good user experience is the way to construct a successful commercial website.

Keywords: web design, persuasive technology, usability

Content

1. Introduction

As the expansion of the ICT world, Internet becomes the most important market these days; it goes deeply into our daily life. Internet represents a totally new way of information exchange which allows the dissemination of information to break through traditional political, geographical, economic and cultural barriers. Webpage as a new social media with the characters of timely, inexpensive, perfect interaction and consistency is playing a significant role on the Internet.

No one can tell the size of this market, it seems to be unlimited so far and everyone wants to make some profit by building his/her own website. However, creating websites sounds easy and it is easy indeed, a few lines of code and a couple of pictures can form a simple website, but making one that can be profitable is hard.

This thesis studies the factors that contribute to a successful commercial website. Both theoretical and example analysis parts are included, both online and offline references will be used. At the end of this thesis, a research is going to be conducted, questionnaires will be delivered to certain amount of people and data will be analyzed.

2. Macro design of web pages

"Web design is a broad term used to encompass the way that content (usually hypertext or hypermedia) is delivered to an end-user through the World Wide Web, using a web browser or other web-enabled software is displayed. The intent of web design is to create a website which represents a collection of online content including documents and applications that reside on web servers. A website may include text, images, sounds and other content, and may be interactive." (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_design 2011)

Web design involves the structure and elements of the website including the information architecture (navigation schemes and naming conventions), the layout or the pages (wireframes or page schematics are created to show consistent placement of items including functional features), and the conceptual design with branding. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0. December 11, 2008.)

All websites should initialize with a clear strategy so that it is apparent what they are trying to express. The strategy then enables the design to fulfil defined goals.

The most frequent issue in web design is that designers do not act and do not try to experience web sites from the user perspective. They are often misled to think that their web site is the proper one when in fact it might not be. The websites are constructed for users and designers might only have that impression for the simple fact that they're familiar with it.

It would be useful to open up a few sites and take a look at it, how it's designed, how easy it is to go through etc. Consider the usability of any page and ask yourself is it good to use or not.

Common mistakes of website design

(Bi-weekly column by Dr. Jakob Nielsen, principal, Nielsen Norman Group)

Automatic audio

Always give users the option of turning the music or any recorded information off. Don't automatically assume that your visitors will be captivated by your voice or your music on your site.

Spinning, flashing, or blinking ads

No one likes the sites full of blinking ads. Flashing banner ads are the equivalent of a carnival barker trying to lure people into a sideshow. You don't need to shout to people to get you message heard. Keep you ads limited and your content abundant.

Unnavigable sites

Never ever expect your visitors to jump through "link hoops" to get to your target information. Users are "idiot". Make your product, price, or service, clear, precise, and easy to find. Design your content so that even elementary school children can understand your site.

Excessive pop-ups

Nowadays, pop-ups are inevitable. But if visitors have to close multiple pop-ups to get to your site, they may leave and never come back. The same

applies for "fly-in" or "hover" that bounces across the screen. If you have to use anything, incorporate a pop-up that loads when a visitor leaves your site.

A page full of dead links and 404 error messages

Keep your links up to date and take down the links that are no longer active. Error messages in click new links are truly annoying.

Dark text on a dark background.

Don't expect your readers to work to read your content like this, because they won't. They will leave and find the information they need elsewhere.

Use Flash judiciously.

Unless you have a film site or a product that requires a detailed visual description, resist using Flash for e-commerce pages because Flash files are complicated and slow-loading. If you must use Flash, make your files as small and fast-loading as possible. If you are using your site to sell a product, use high-quality and fast-loading photos and creative descriptions of each item.

Solid blocks of text with no breaks between paragraphs.

That may work in print, but it will not fly on the Web. People don't read online content the way they read offline. Same in presentations, audiences just want get the idea in a short time.   Imposing blocks of dark text will put off your readers. Make your content clear and concise. Break up your paragraphs, and use plenty of white space.

Bad Search

Overly literal search engines reduce usability in that they're unable to handle typos, plurals, hyphens, and other variants of the query terms. Such search engines hurt everybody.

A related problem is when search engines prioritize results purely on the basis of how many query terms they contain, rather than on each document's importance. Much better if your search engine calls out "best bets" at the top of the list -- especially for important queries, such as the names of your products.

Search is the user's lifeline when navigation fails. Even though advanced search can sometimes help, simple search usually works best, and search should be presented as a simple box, since that's what users are looking for.

Not Changing the Colour of Visited Links

A good grasp of past navigation helps uses understand their current location and status, since it's the culmination of their journey. Knowing your past and present locations in turn makes it easier to decide where to go next. Links are the key factor in this process. Users can exclude links that proved fruitless in their earlier visits. Conversely, they might revisit links they found helpful in the past. What is more, knowing which pages they've already visited frees users from unintentionally revisiting the same pages over and over again.

Fixed Font Size

With cascading style sheets, a considerable amount of flexibility can be programmed into content submission forms. But this also gives websites the power to disable a Web browser's "change font size" button and specify a fixed font size. And most of the time, this fixed size is tiny, reducing readability significantly for some people.

Page Titles with Low Search Engine Visibility(SEO)

Search is the most usual way for users to discover websites they are searching for. Search is also one of the most important ways users find their way around individual websites. The humble page title is your main tool to attract new visitors from search listings and to help your existing users to locate the specific pages that they need.

Page titles are used as the default entry in the Favourites when users bookmark a site. For the homepage, begin the with the company name, followed by a brief description of the site. Never start with words like "The" or "Welcome to" unless you want to be alphabetized under "T" or "W."

For other pages than the homepage, start the title with a few of the most salient information-carrying words that describe the specifics of what users will find on that page. Since the page title is used as the window title in the browser, it's also used as the label for that window in the taskbar under Windows, meaning that advanced users will move between multiple windows under the guidance of the first one or two words of each page title.

Violating Design Conventions

Consistency is one of the most powerful usability principles: when things always behave the same, users don't have to worry about what will happen. Instead, they know what will happen based on earlier experience.

The more users' expectations prove right, the more they will feel in control of the system and the more they will like it. And the more the system breaks users' expectations, the more they will feel insecure.

3. Micro design of webpage

Website can be defined as a collection of basic elements, design and production of those elements is the basic phase of website construction.

3.1. Visual and audio elements

Most of the elements can be processed by the browser itself without any external programs or modules. For example, most browsers can display the PNG, JPG and GIF format, video files like FLV and SWF can also be played by browsers, but for the music file like mp3 need to be downloaded to the local disc and run with the appropriate external program. Browser plug-in can play more formats of multimedia files. Microsoft's IE kernal browser provides OLE-ActiveX-based technology in the multimedia page. ActiveX has now become a popular technology. Another multimedia technology is JavaApplet. It is written in Java language used in web applications which is smaller compared to plug-ins and ActiveX, JavaApplet has greater flexibility and a good cross-platform capabilities.

3.1.1. Text

Readability

The primary function of text in visual communication is to convey the information and achieve the objective. The design of the text should avoid complex disorder, which means people can easily recognize and understand. The fundamental purpose of writing is to design better and more effective to

convey the author's intention to express the theme and ideas. For instance, no one is willing to read a web page with huge amount of complicated text.

Font and line spacing

Font size can be calculated in different ways, such as point and pixel. For the reason that computer-based pixel technology need to convert point for the print unit so point is recommended.

The most appropriate font size for page body is 12 points, for the pages that need to display more they usually use the font size of 9 point. Larger font can be used to emphasize the title or other places, smaller fonts can be used for footer and supporting information. Notice that the small font size can easily produce sense of exquisite but the readability might be poor

Changes in line spacing will also have a great impact on the readability of the text. In general, it is suitable to set the line spacing close to the font size. Regular spacing ratio is 10:12, that is, 10 words with line spacing 12 points. Proper spacing will form a significant level of blank space to guide the viewer's attention but spaced too wide will lose continuity.

Text should have its own character: The design of the text should be subordinated to the main style. The entire text cannot be divorced from the main style characteristics, not to conflict with; else it will undermine the aspirations of the text effect.

Font color

In web design, designers can set text, text links, visited links, and links selected with various colors. For example, if you use Frontpage editor, the

default setting is like: the normal font is black, the default link is blue, and the text becomes purple after click. But it should be noted that, excessive use of colors for the text will disturb the viewer to read the contents, unless you have special design purpose.

Also note that the text color contrast, which includes brightness, purity and comparison of cold and warm colors. These not only play a role in the readability of the text and, more importantly, you can use the color to achieve the desired design effect.

3.1.2. Background

The background of web page design is very important, especially for personal home page. The background of a home is equivalent to the wall of a room, like a good background can not only leave visitors good impressions but also affect visitors' acceptance of the contents. If you always pay attention to different sites, you should find that even one site with the different pages will have various background design.

Solid color

The solid color background is simple, but it is the most commonly used because in comparison to the background image, it has advantage of display speed. The page file, usually by using <body> tag to specify the background color of the page, the HTML syntax is:

<body bgcolor="color">

the "color" means different colors and you can use a variety of different colors. The easiest way is just type common English names, such as blue, yellow,

black, etc, it can also use hexadecimal color codes, such as # 0000FF, # FFFF00, # 000000, etc., in addition, using a percentage value and integral method will give the same result.

Ripple background

In fact, ripple background is just combination and repeat of same images, in this kind of background, the sand grain is common used.

Beginners always have such experience, when trying to put their own pictures as the background of the pages, what displayed on the browser is not just a photo, but the same picture in the horizontal and vertical direction of repeated order. This is the way how browser deals with background image, due to this law we can use a small size picture as the background page, it automatically repeat and cover the entire page, so that greatly reduced the download time of web pages.

Strip background

Strip background and ripple background is relatively similar, it applies to the page background in terms of horizontal or vertical direction is arranged repeatedly. It is also the background of a picture using which use the browser auto-repeat arrangement, only difference is that the repeat of the background image is in one direction and only repeat the order.

Photo Background

Add photos as the background of pages is used widely in website design. This is really simple with cascading style sheet added into the page file <head> ... ... </ head> with following for the CSS statement:

<style Type="text/css"> <! - Body {background-image: url (myphoto.jpg);

background-repeat: no-repeat; background-attachment: fixed;

background-position: 50% 50%} --></ Style>

3.1.3. Pictures (Buttons, Icons)

Button design is often overlooked. However, well-designed button can make your site professional in general.

Color

Colors of the buttons should be distinctive comparing to the rest of the colors, high contrast and brighter colors are often used for buttons.(see figure 1)

Figure 1:   Sign up button of Twitter

Position

Buttons and icons should be located in the places which are easier for users to find, such as top left, header, navigation area.(see figure 2)
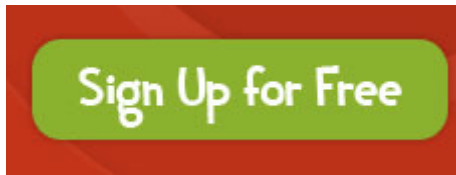

Figure 2: Facebook top left

Texts on button

Text written on the buttons and buttons is also an important part of the design. Clear and brief is goal of the text and it is always starts with verb, like Sign up, Download, Try.

Text on button can also be attractive, for example the magic word "FREE" is usually used on buttons. (See figure 3)

Figure 3: Sigh up button

Size

The size of the button usually depend on how significant it is, the bigger the more strike on eyes. (See figure 4)

Figure 4: Button of wiki

The size of the icons also needs to adjust the display screen due to the reason that different screens have various size and DPI. (See figure 5)

Figure 5:   icons of IPhone and Mac

File type and size

All the elements of a website will be downloaded by the clients' browsers so the file size of those pictures and icons directly affect the downloading speed.

Various formats of picture are used nowadays such as JPEG (JPG), BMP, PNG, GIF, etc., All these types can be viewed with browsers. For websites, JPG, GIF and PNG are commonly used. Both JPG and GIF format has a large degree of compression which will be much smaller at same level of visual effect comparing to other formats. Whether to use GIF or JPG is depend on the amount colors where GIF is suitable for pictures with fewer colors.

PNG format can give a transparent background and this is main reason of using it. (See figure 6 and 7)
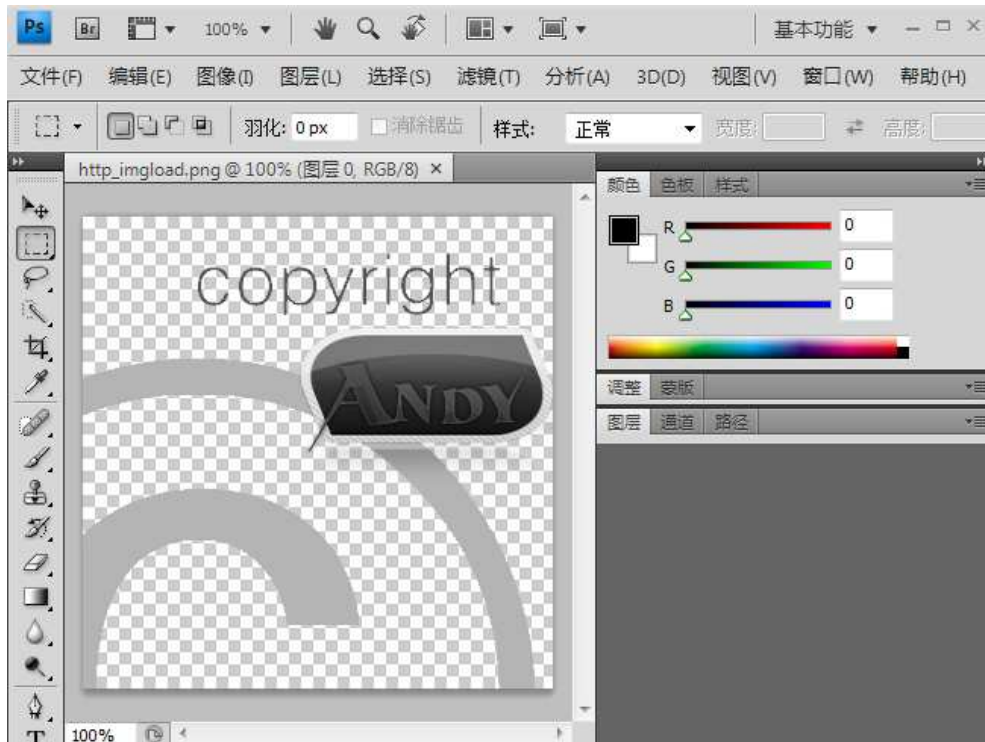
Figure 6:   Making PNG picture with transparent background in Photoshop
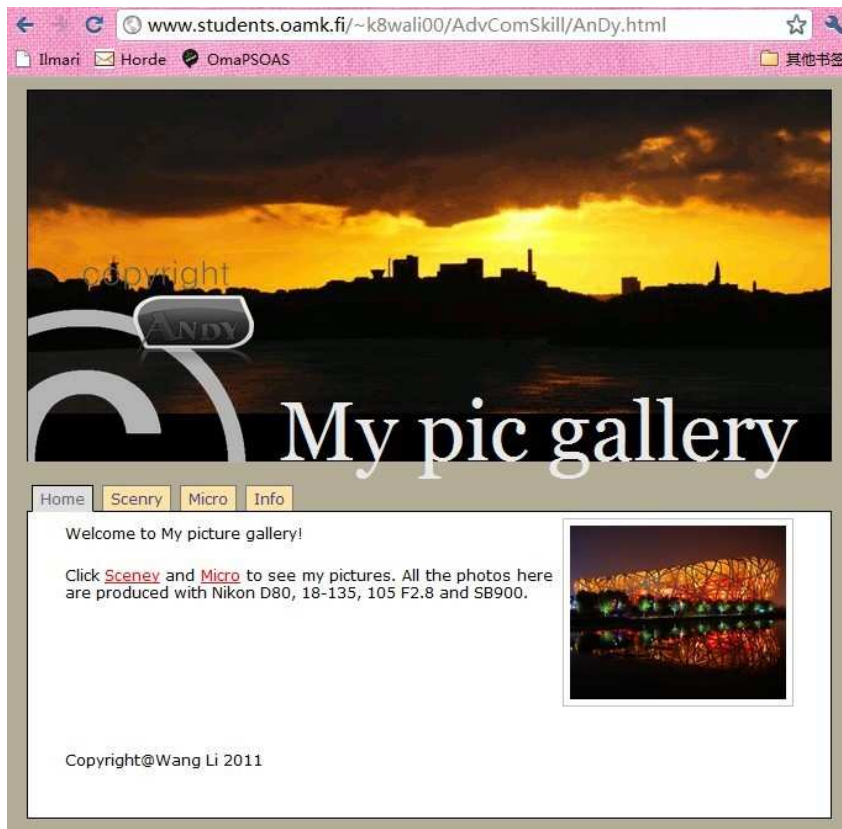

Figure 7:   View in browser

3.1.4. Colors

Color on the Web is an excellent way to improve web designs. A computer monitor is made up of thousands of tiny little red, green and blue dots which are grouped three and three. These little dots are close together-- so close that we don't really see them as dots, but rather our eyes mix them up to form one homogenous color.

All colors in the spectrum can be generated with this system of dots. For instance, if the red and green dots are shining at 100% their strength, while the blue not lit at all, you will see the result as a pure yellow color.

HTML colors

HTML colors are displayed as a combination of red, green, and blue light. You can use any number from 0 to 255 for each value to get an RGB code that you can use for colors. This gives you more than 16 million colors to choose from (256 x 256 x 256). And most modern monitors are capable of displaying at least 16,000 colors. If you can't find the color you like in that many choices, well, it probably doesn't exist.

Named Colors

There are different ways of adding color to your pages. One of the easiest ways is to use named colors. These are just what you think they are: color names like red, blue, green, and purple.

But some browsers don't render color names, or they render them differently than other browsers. So, that's why it's better to use hexadecimal codes for your color names.

Hexadecimal codes

These are the codes that define colors. They are groups of three hexadecimal (base 16) numbers. The first number is red, the second green, and the third blue. Each hexadecimal number is an RGB triplet. 00 is the lowest hue, and FF is the highest. For example, red is ff0000, blue is 0000ff, green is 00ff00, and purple is 990099.

Putting color in documents

Using CSS to add color is easy. The most common method of putting color in your documents is with the <style> attribute. Choose the color you would like your text to be, enclose it in a span tag, and use the style attribute to assign a color.
e.g.
red
Another way to add color is to use it as a background color on tables. Just add the background-color style to the table, tr, td, or th tags.

Synchronize the web colors

Keep it simple. Use very few colors.

It can be tempting to fill up your page with 3-5 colors or more, but even if they are all the same hue, the more colors you have on a page, the more likely that they will look wrong in some situations.

Keep using browser safe colors where you can.
The browser safe palette is a limited palette, but it has wider support than not. Most monitors can display #f00 more easily than #f11, even though both reds are very close in color.

3.1.5. Navigations

Creating good web site navigation is the most important task a web designer has to accomplish in the web design process. Web site navigation is the pathway people take to navigate through sites. It must be well constructed, easy to use and intuitive. Poor navigation does not help users and often, your site can prove to be less accessible than others.

Good navigation is fundamental to good web design - in both business and informational sites - users should be able to find information easily. If the navigation is not easy to use or intuitive users will quickly go elsewhere in search of information. We often see ourselves in front of web sites without knowing what to do next. The navigation is so well hidden or disguised that the some users simply don't know how to use it. Navigation is the single most important element in creating accessible and usable web sites.

Often, people will create a site loaded with information, and present it in such a way that you have to work the site out before you can do anything with it. While

it's necessary to organize your information into a logical structure, remember that people find it hard to comprehend anything but the most simple and obvious structures.

3.1.6. Music

Basically there are two way to insert music in web page-with <bgsound> tag or <embed> tag.

The <bgsound> contains 5 properties of which "balance" stands for left and right channel balance, "delay" stands for delay playing the sound, "loop" stands for the number of cycles, "volume" stands for the sound volume and "src" is the path of the file.

This it most common way of adding background music and it support various music file types such as MP3, WAV and MID.

E.g. <bgsound   src="music.mid"   loop="-1">

Another way of embedding music in web page is using the <embed> tag. This is more powerful than <bgsound>, combined with some music play add-ons, it can display as a web player.

Properties of <embed> are also greater than <bgsound> For instance the code can be like <embed   src="music.mp3"   autostart="true"   loop="true" hidden="true"></embed>.

4. Persuasive technology in website design

In this section, persuasive technology will be introduced and analyzed in web design.

4.3. About persuasive technology

Persuasive technology is generally defined as technology that is designed to change attitudes or behaviours of the users through persuasion and social influence. The technology is being used in any area of human-human or human-computer interaction. The design of persuasive technologies can be seen as a particular case of design with intent. (Fogg, 2002)

The Web, Internet, mobile and other ambient technologies create opportunities for persuasive interaction, because users can be reached easily. In addition, the Web and other Internet-based systems are optimal for persuasive communication, because they are able to combine the positive attributes of interpersonal and mass communication.

4.4. Persuasive system design

Persuasive systems can be defined as "computerized software or information systems designed to reinforce, change or shape attitudes or behaviours or both without using coercion or deception". (Harri Oinas-Kukkonen, Marja Harjumaa(Jan 2008), Communication of the association for information systems, Volume 22)

Key design principles(quotation from Harri Oinas-Kukkonen,

Marja Harjumaa(Jan 2008))

Principle	Definition
Reduction	A system that reduces complex behaviour into simple tasks helps users perform the target behaviour, and it may increase the benefit/cost ratio of behaviour.
Tunnelling	Using the system to guide users through a process or experience provides opportunities to persuade along the way.
Tailoring	Information provided by the system will be more persuasive if it is tailored to the potential needs, interests, personality, usage context, or other factors relevant to a user group.
Personalization	A system that offers personalized content or services has a greater capability for persuasion.
Self-monitoring	A system that keeps track of one's own performance or status supports the user in achieving goals.
Simulation	Systems that provide simulations can persuade by enabling users to

	observe immediately the link between cause and effect.
Rehearsal	A system providing means with which to rehearse behaviour can enable people to change their attitudes or behaviour in the real world.
Praise	By offering praise, a system can make users more open to persuasion.
Real-world feel	A system that highlights people or organization behind its content or services will have more credibility.
Authority	A system that leverages roles of authority will have enhanced powers of persuasion.
Social learning	A person will be more motivated to perform target behaviour if he can use a system to observe others performing the behaviour.
Cooperation	A system can motivate users to adopt a target attitude or behaviour by leveraging human beings' natural drive to co-operate.
Competition	A system can motivate users to adopt a target attitude or behaviour by leveraging human beings' natural drive to compete.

Table 1: key desing principles

4.5. Persuasive website design

Most people think website design is about how something looks but it can motivate and influence human behaviour, change people's way of think and do things.

A successful commercial website depends on great amount of clicks and regular users, so that the design should persuade people stay. There are millions of websites on the World Wide Web and a sizable chunk of them would cater to your target markets and audiences. If you need to make your businesses a success, then you would need to make your business tower above the rest.

Persuade through good usability is the typical way to do the persuasive website design. Good usability is more than fluid navigation and a good implementation of information architecture principles. Every aspect of web design and development adds up to ensure high usability of the final web product. Whether you're concerned with choosing the best web technologies or the right font face for that shiny button, you are ultimately concerned with the usability of the website. All usability methods can be considered and implemented while working on the web product; none of them should be considered as separate steps that can be performed optionally and in isolation from the team's work to design, develop and launch the product.

Usability correlates in a significant degree to loyalty. This is because usability methods are always goal oriented. You have the business goals on one side, the user's goals on the other, and you balance them out. If the business goal to

sell products is not balanced with the user's goal to find information related to the product, then we have a problem: the site's usability is poor.

Another key tip for persuasive website design is keep limited colours used in the pages. Colours have a powerful impact on user behaviour on the website. Therefore, it is important to use them carefully and cautiously. Ideally, select two to three colours that go well with one another and design a colour scheme for your website. Make sure you don't pick anything that is too light or too dark. Select a combination that is comforting to the eyes and create a pleasant visual appeal. An overload of colours can give an amateur impression while a steady display of pleasant colours can convince your visitors that you are a professional in the industry.

Intuitive navigation will also contribute to a persuasive website design. Navigation that is not intuitive is no navigation at all. If visitors are not able to browse through your website easily and seamlessly, then they cannot extract information that they need. As a result, they will not stay for long on the website. Therefore, make sure you have a clear and intuitive navigation that guides visitors to important pages of your website and makes information readily available to them. Make sure all the links and buttons on your web pages are clearly visible and also labelled appropriately so that visitors can locate information easily.

The content of the website is of course an extremely important part that serves to communicate with the visitors and convince them. It becomes all the more important in case of business or e-commerce websites because of their increased reliance on the same. Keep the content clear and concise. Include information about the theme. Remember, instead of blatantly advertising the

products and services, talk about how your products and service will help the visitors. This will give your content a convincing tone.

5. Case Analysis

Commercial websites have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. As of this writing, there are hundreds of them, with various technological affordances, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. Three successful examples in the different field of commercial field (Search engine, Social networks and E-commerce) will be studied in this part which is base on the previous theories.

5.1. Google.com

Main page of Google appears to be my favourite design in the field of social networks, which is "simple" but "powerful".

"Simple" refers to Google's design of the layout. One logo, one search bar, two buttons and few text links form the Google.com. It is universally known that Google is extremely obsessed with simple design and there is a "decree" in Google development team that words appears in the main page should be less than 28. Simple design made it clear for users to know what to do and whether they can find what they need from the page in a short time.

In 2009 Google received a design patent for Google homepage (see figure 8). It took the US Patent Office over five years to approve this patent for the design of a "graphical user interface for a display screen of a communications terminal."

Figure 8: The design of Google which applied for patent

In an attempt to offer a snappier and better search engine results page, Google has announced a new "Instant Previews" feature in 2010 that allows users to preview pages before clicking on them (see figure 10). It will cache popular pages from popular websites for the previews, and for other websites, it will generate the screenshot on the fly. The new feature is called "Google Instant Previews" and it adds a magnifying glass icon beside every page allowing users to instantly view a screenshot preview of the page before clicking on them. Google would also highlight the search term in that page making it easier for you to navigate and browse through the page instead of having to go through each and every element on the page. Google Instant Previews essentially gives users the ability to see and evaluate a website before they visit it. Google accomplishes this by taking a screenshot of every webpage in its index and giving users access to it via a magnifying glass icon that sits to the right of every search result.
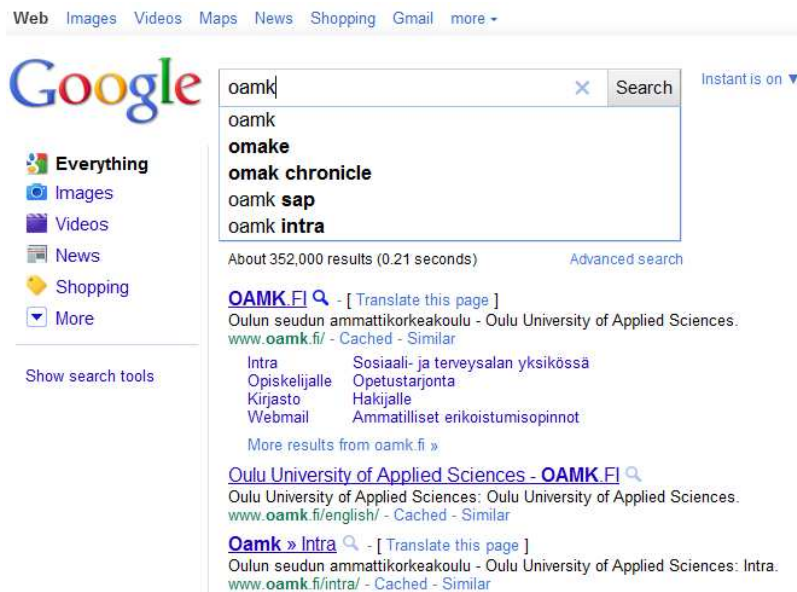
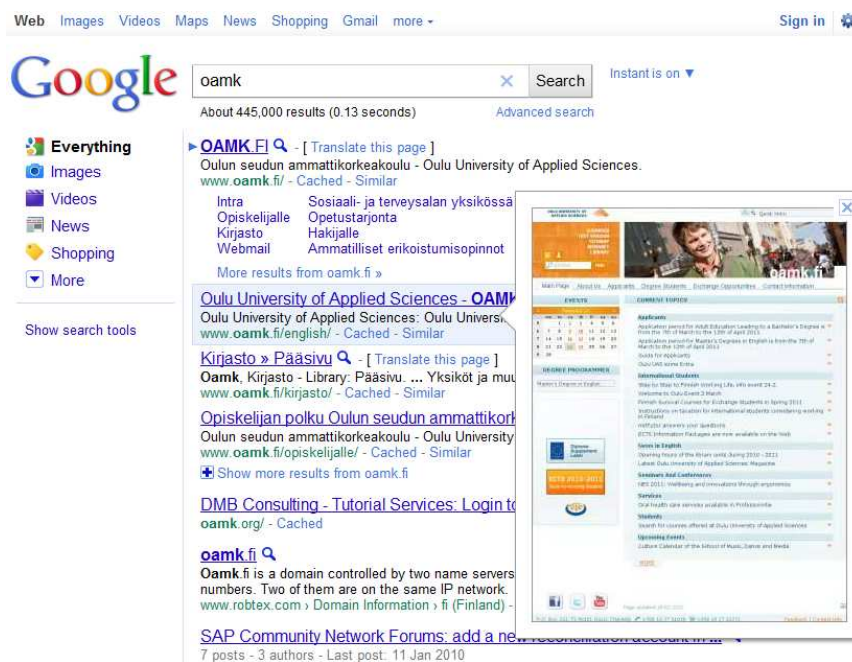*Figure 9: If you type "oamk" as the search term*

Figure 10: Instant preview of www.oamk.fi/English/

Another big advantage of Google web design is you will never detect any cross browser compatibility errors. This is due to the reason that Google will detect

the user's browser kernel first and then gives the proper page file for user to download (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Screenshot of Google's html files on server

Alexa.com provides information about websites including Top Sites, Internet Traffic Stats and Metrics, Related Links, etc. Google is ranked 1st in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings.

Almost 50% global Internet users visit google.com daily and the percentage stays steady with a smooth upward trend. This strongly proves that the design of Google is persuasive.

Google contributes us a truly successful web design template in the field of social networks. They have amazing functions and effects which appear in a simple way that provide perfect user experience.

5.2. Facebook.com

Facebook has become so popular on the internet that around 150,000 registrants may be recorded per day. More precisely, Facebook may register approximately 1 million users per week.

According to the latest results released in Alexa, Facebook is the second most popular site in the world. Around 40% global Internet users visit facebook.com everyday and people spend more than 30 minutes on average per day doing stuff in Facebook.

Facebook makes full use of "social proof" in their web design. As human nature, people go with flow; they like to observe other people's behaviour to judge what's normal, and then just copy it. For example, Friends may send you the invitations, suggestions and requests for applications and pages (see figure 12). I assume most people will click them and have a try.

Figure 12: from Facebook requests

All Facebook users know that almost everything on Facebook can be liked by click the "Like" button. This is a typical kind of "Commitment" in a persuasive web design. People like to believe that their behaviour is consistent with their beliefs. Once you take a stand on something that is visible to other people, you suddenly feel a drive to maintain that point of view to appear reliable and

constant. Once you like something in Facebook, then you may pay more attention to it in the future.

Figure13: Like button in OSAKO official page

The web design industry has witnessed an immense development in the form Facebook. The valuation of Facebook may be around 10-15 billion USD. This makes around 250 USD and 375 USD per active user. Other social networking sites have followed on the same path as Facebook. Web design features close to those on Facebook may be noticed. But it remains to be seen if they can become as popular.

5.3. Ebay.com

Millions of items are listed, bought, or sold daily on eBay. According to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings, ebay.com is ranked 23rd in the world and 9th among users in the US. Visitors to this site view an average of 18.4 unique pages per day. Average time on page is around 14 to 15 minutes. There is no doubt that Ebay.com is currently the leader in the field.

Reciprocation can be detected in the main page of ebay. Human nature indicates that if we feel we have been done a favour, we will want to return it. If somebody gives you a gift, invites you to a party or does you a good turn, you feel obliged to do the same at some future date. "FREE" is a magic word in web site design and most people will follow the link. The main page of ebay always gives some items with free shipping (see figure14).
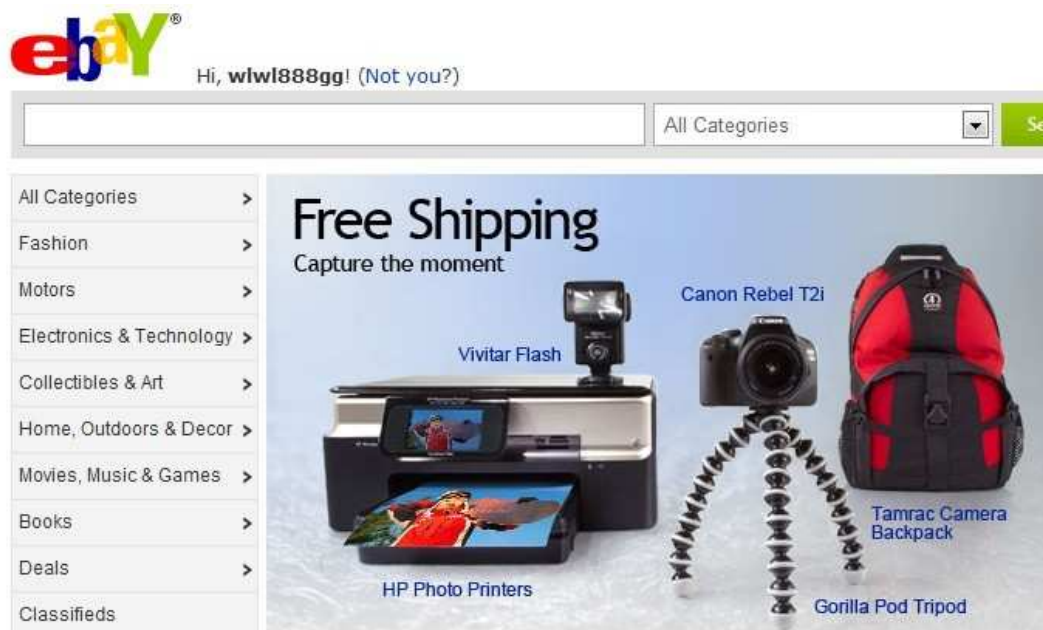

Figure 14: Free shipping advertisement

People's attention is always drawn to what's relevant to them right now. We are more likely to pay attention to elements in user interface that are novel and that are relevant to where there are in our task. For example, there are specific times during a purchase when shoppers are more likely to investigate a promotion or a special offer. By identifying these seducible moments you'll learn when to offer a customer an accessory for a product they have bought. The main page of Ebay is salience (see figure 15), it gives the items you searched and viewed and shows you the items that are recommended (relevant to your search) for you.
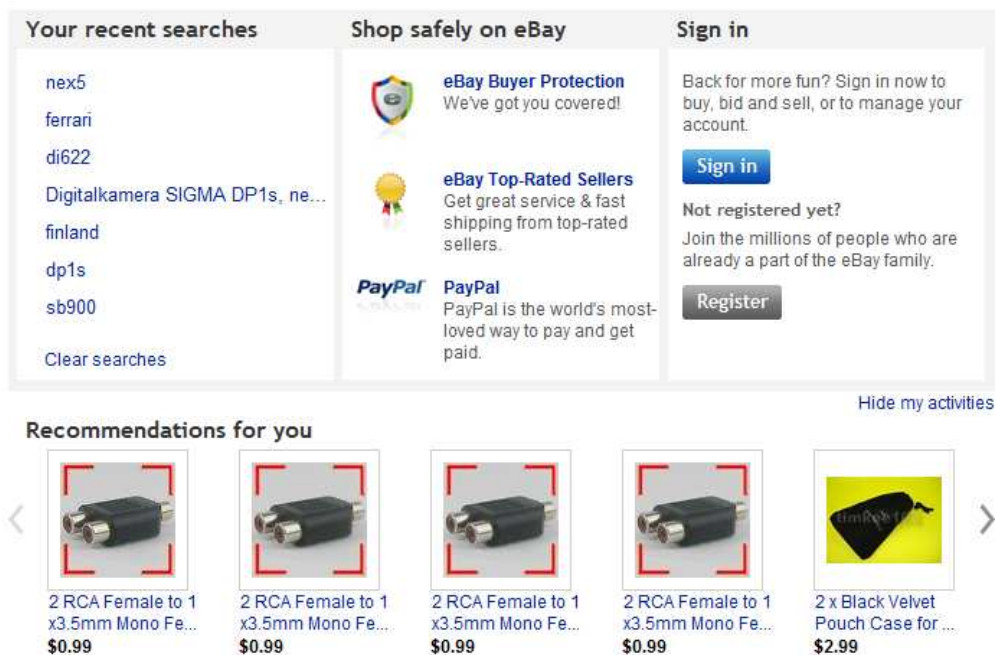

Figure 15: Ebay page

6. Research

As the last part of the thesis, the research is proceeding with the theories mentioned in previous part.

6.1. Research Plan

Background and goals

I am doing this research as a part of my bachelor thesis to discover the factors that contribute to a successful commercial website design. As I depicted in the previous theoretical part, the designer should think himself as a normal user when doing the designing work. A research on people's preferences in viewing web pages is the most effective and straight way to find out those factors. In this research, I am going to base on usability and user experience.

Designers do not act and do not try to experience web sites from the user perspective is the most frequent issue in web design. They are often misled to think that their web site in their own way.

Providing good user experience with good usability is the primary goal of website design.

The usability of a website refers to the approach to make web sites easy to use for an end-user, without the requirement that any specialized training be undertaken. The user should be able to intuitively relate the actions he needs to perform on the web page, with other interactions he sees in the general domain of life. Small changes in user interface can result in much better usability.

Goal of usability:

1. Present the information to the user in a clear and concise way.

2. To give the correct choices to the users, in a very obvious way.

3. To remove any ambiguity regarding the consequences of an action e.g. clicking on delete/remove/purchase.

4. Put the most important thing in the right place on a web page or a web application.

The population of the research will people who are surfing the web frequently and regularly with different background (occupation, age, gender, etc…), so the population to be studied can strongly represent the Internet users' point of view. The group I selected to involve in this research is randomly picked from my friends. I just created a public link and send via various ways.

The data collecting method will be a ZEF engine. Within the ZEF engine, it is easy and fast to get the complete results from the questions. The analyze part comes after the acquiring of the data.

For the time schedule I hope the questionnaire and means of sampling can be set before April. And from 1.4 to 9.4, I will send questionnaire then proceed to data gathering and analysis. Then from 10.4 to 16.4, conclusion part will be finished.

6.2. Results

Approximately 70 links were sent to my friends and 31 of them clicked but only 28 finished, 40% response rate is acceptable for a research.

Of the respondents the most were college students which are from 18 to 24 years old and 20 of them are male, 9 are female (see figure 16 and 17).
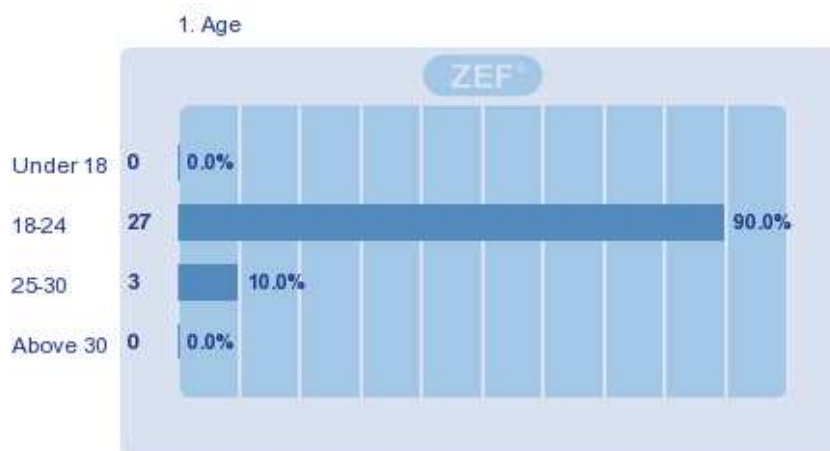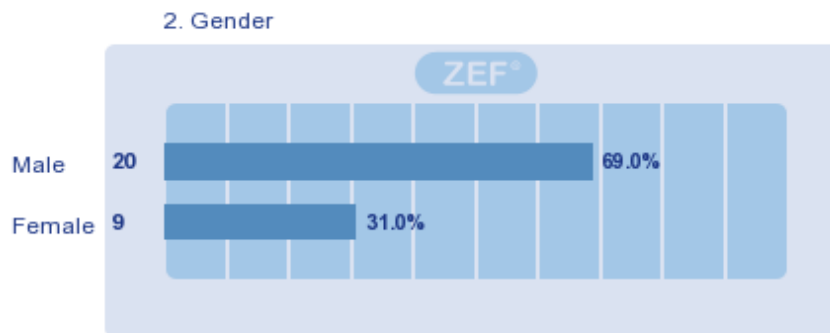

Figure 16: age distribution

Figure 17: gender distribution

35.7% respondents spend less than 1 hour on viewing social network sites per day and 28.6% spend 1-2 hours, 14.3% spend 2-3 hours where the rest spend more than 3 hours on them (see figure 18).
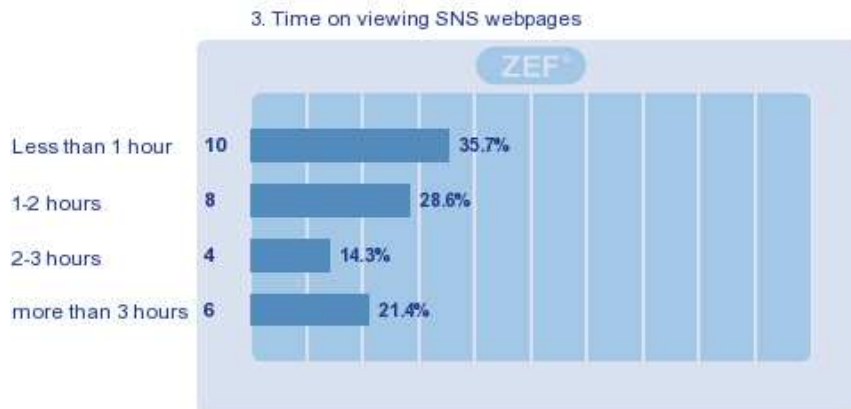
Figure 18: time on viewing SNS

According to the data, people's preference of background music seems balanced that 53.6% of them chose "yes" and rest do not want background music in SNS (see figure 19).
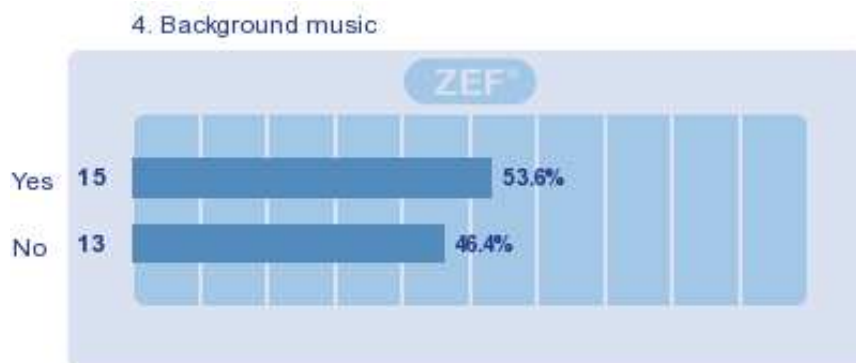

Figure 19: Preference of background music

Background is another significant part of web design, of all the respondents 23.1% want blank, 34.4% prefer solid colour as background and 42.3% of them chose picture (see figure 20).
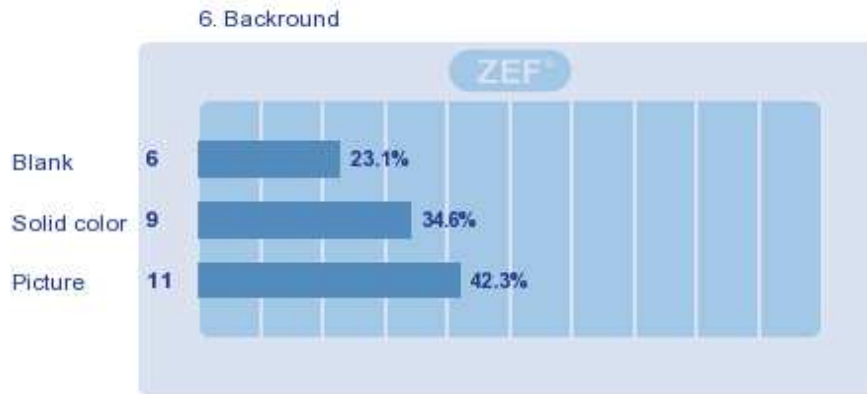
Figure 20: Preference of background type

Most respondents thought the navigation sector is the most important part of the web design and more than half of them prefer to have the navigation on the top of the page where another 25.9% respondents like left navigation system. And still 6 people like to have the navigation on the right side or bottom of the page (see figure 21).

Figure 21: Preference of navigation sector

Last question is about the choice between pop-up window and new tab. As I expected, 63% prefer new tab for links. On the contrary only 18.5% like pop-up window and another 18.5% do not care about this (see figure 22).
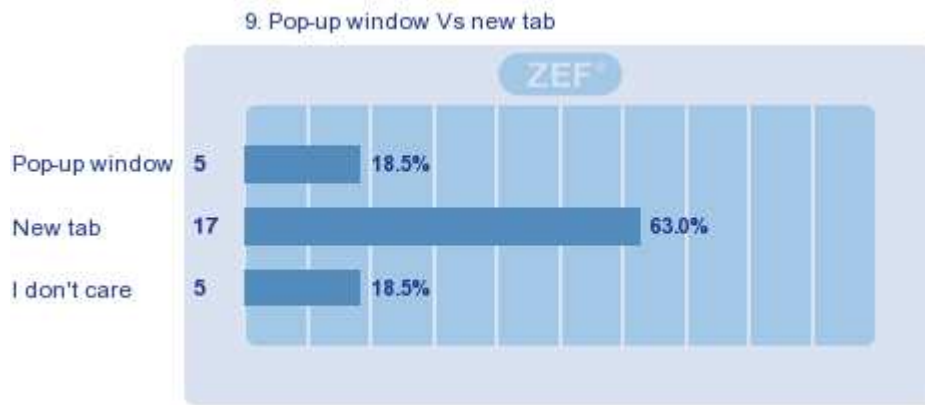
9. Pop-up window Vs new tab

ZEF

Pop-up window	5	18.5%
New tab	17	63.0%
I don't care	5	18.5%

Figure 22: pop-up vs new tab

6.3. Research conclusion

The result of the research is satisfactory but out my expectation; I thought all people would prefer simple design and everything on page should be as direct as it can be. The data shows that users draw a great attention on the design of the elements; they do want "good-looking" social network websites, not only those sites with great features.

Another interesting find is that using pop-up windows for links is annoying for most Internet users. For instance, Facebook changed its picture viewing system recently, if you click a picture in feeds, a pop-up window will appear with the enlarged picture. Many Facebook users around me found this change was a kind of failure, rarely of us like this way of showing picture.

The results gathered strongly proved the view that web design should follow usability, good user experience lead to success.

7. Discussion

Conducting this thesis took approximately 3 months which started in February. The delivery date is postponed due to the stuck in research part and problem fixing. Before the direction seminar everything goes smoothly and punctually. Then I stumped by the questionnaire setting, it was difficult to made questions appropriate which means the questions must cover every expected aspect without being stupid. The tough part of the research is always the data gathering, more than 150 links were sent to my friends and only 72 of them clicked the link of which only 31 were finished. According to the preliminary plan, both research and development were included for the thesis but for the reason of the amount of work needed for the development, the development part was cancelled.

The topic was approved in February then I changed it to "persuasive web design in the field of social networks" which was too narrow to analyze and discuss and then I made it just "web design in the field of social networks". But finally the content of this thesis appear to be more than web design of SNS, so the final topic changed to "successful commercial web design " Apart from the research part this thesis is almost 100 per cent theoretical based, both online and offline references were used to support the thesis.

The format and some details of the thesis were not so good before the direction seminar, there were no bullets for heading and figures, references were not listed after the quotation sentences.

Above all the thesis is almost finished at this point; it was a perfect process to familiarize with the web design issues and to learn new stuff which was more the content of the thesis.

8. Conclusion

The purpose of the thesis work is to discover the factors contribute to a successful web design in the field of social networks. Via the processing of this thesis, I had the opportunity to have a deeper acknowledge in the field of web design and persuasive technology. With the research conducted in the last part, I strongly realise the importance of experiencing and designing web sites from the user perspective and the way to build good usability.

Web design in the field of social networks is more than constructing a good-looking webpage; it should make people stay and even addict to it. Only with a great amount of regular users, the website can be defined as a successful one in the field of social networks.

The research is the toughest part but data gathered is valuable which gives strong impression of good user experience that users prefer nice webpage with straightforward operations.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1. Age
    Under 18
    18-24
    25-30
    Above 30

2. Gender
    Male
    Female

3. Average time on viewing SNS web pages per day
    Less than 1 hour
    1-2 hours
    2-3 hours
    More than 3 hours

4. Background music (Do you prefer to have music for SNS sites)
    Yes
    No

5. Elements of web design (Which element you care most for a SNS webpage)
    Background
    Text
    Button
    Logo
    Navigation

6. Background (Select your ideal background for SNS)
    Blank
    Solid colour
    Picture

7. Button (What kind of button design you like?)
    Simple text
    Simple icon

Nice effect

8. Navigation sector (Which part of the webpage should navigation sector located?)

   Top
   Left
   Right
   Bottom

9. Pop-up window Vs new tab(Which way you prefer for links?)

   Pop-up window
   New tab
   I don't care