“Less Clicking, More Watching”: An Option for Entertainment on the Web?

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ABSTRACT
How can entertainment be provided on the web? Contrary to the common wisdom that sees the web as an inherently interactive medium, this experimental study has found evidence that people may want watchable entertaining experiences on the web, i.e., “less clicking, more watching.” This hypothesis was tested in two prototypes of documentary-style streaming web narratives, yielding preliminary evidence that entertainment on the web can be less interactive than currently thought.

Keywords
Web entertainment, web design; experimental studies.

INTRODUCTION
Although people use the web to procure information about entertainment, travel, and hobbies, and have fun by web-surfing and chatting [1] there are hardly any web experiences similar to the most common entertainment activity , namely, watching TV (see [3]). Here we present the first results of our experience in developing an entertainment website for arts and culture where the user centered design (UCD) process led us to the design of TV-like, streaming, web-delivered multimedia experiences quite similar to TV documentaries, but enriched by “hot links” to extra content.

LESS CLICKING, MORE WATCHING
The research described in this paper originated from studies related to the creation of a website for art and culture. The goal of this website was to bring entertaining cultural content to users around the world, not as a database of cultural artifacts or knowledge, but instead by providing entertaining experiences similar to visits to a museum, attendances of performances, or the watching of cultural TV programs.

What kind of entertainment do people want from a website on art and culture? To answer this question, we conducted a variety of UCD activities including usability walkthroughs of existing websites and a series of our own prototypes. A major result of the usability walkthroughs was that most of the participants did not express interest in websites that involved active interaction with the content or other people, such as when using a filtering system, creating a notebook, or chatting (see details in [2]).

To our surprise, a prototype based on a streaming multimedia experience where a guide took the users through cultural artifacts was the clear winner. Two aspects seemed to be particularly important for our subjects: having an experience with “less clicking, more watching”; and having a human voice, an expert or celebrity, conducting and commenting the experience.

Based on the results of the discovery phase, we developed a design concept for the cultural website based on the idea of providing users with guided multimedia *tours*. In our design, a tour presents information to the user continuously, from beginning to end, unless the user chooses to explore related material or to exercise control (that is, pausing, rewinding or fast forwarding to the next scene). While the tour is being watched, opportunities to obtain related information are presented as hot spots on the screen, some of them in the streaming multimedia format (referred as *side tours*), some as web pages (*branches*). All the related information is also available for exploration at the end of the tour, in a web page called the *Explore Page*.

The design concept described above informed the design and development of two pilot tours that are the basis of the testing described next. The first tour features the work of a toy pianist, Margaret Leng Tan. The tour lasts 4:15 minutes, with two side tours, and five branches. The second tour focused on Ludwig van Beethoven and his Ninth Symphony (lasting 10:10 minutes), with three side tours, and five branches.

THE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY
Traditional usability testing is based on the concept of identifying tasks to be performed by the user and on evaluating the success of a system or interface in helping the user to accomplish the tasks. However, when we faced the issue of evaluating our design concept and prototypes,

we realized that in entertainment there is no clear concept of task. Because there is also no established method to evaluate entertainment (as discussed in [2]), we designed an evaluation study primarily based on directly asking the subjects whether they had an entertaining experience or not. The study is described in great detail in [2]; here we provide a brief overview.

The 24 subjects of our study completed three web experiences, based on our two pilot tours. For each of the two tour subjects, we had constructed a low- and a high-interactivity version of the tour. *Low-interactivity* tours had limited play control (pause and resume) and no side tours or branches; *high-interactivity* tours included all the elements described in the design section. Subjects first experienced both the low- and high-interactivity versions of one tour (in different orders) and then experienced the high-interactivity version of the other tour. After each tour, subjects filled out a post-session questionnaire (PosSQ) where they are asked to rate (1-7, 7 best) the engagement, entertainment, interactivity, and subject matter appeal of the tours for them.

The goal of the first two versions of the same tour was to familiarize the users with the format of the tour and its interactive options. All results reported in this paper are based on answers collected in the PosSQ after the third tour and in the debrief questionnaire (DQ) administered by the experimenter at the end of each session.

For each tour experience, we analyzed the videotapes and logged the user's mouse activity. We counted the number of times the subjects moved the mouse pointer so that it was located on an object that could be selected (rollovers), and the number of times an object was actually selected and activated. Also, we broke such interactions into two groups — those that occurred during the main tour presentation, and those that occurred after the subject had reached the Explore Page (E/P), i.e., the end of the tour.

RESULTS

The averages for user ratings of the four aspects of the tours were all above neutral (4.0): engagement, 5.52; entertainment, 5.25; interactivity, 4.87; and appeal of the subject matter, 5.17. There were no significant differences between the ratings of the two tours on any of the four measures. Results of the DQ showed that 18 out of 24 (75%) subjects said they would like to have the multimedia experiences similar to this again.

We next analyzed the relationship between user mouse activity and the user's four subjective ratings of the tours. Results show that user mouse activity was negatively correlated with engagement and entertainment both before and after the Explore Page, and total (see table 1). This means that users who watched the tours more, and interacted less, felt more engaged and entertained.

Also, as shown in Table 1, subject matter appeal was negatively correlated with mouse activity both considering the total mouse activity and the activity after the Explore page. In other words, subjects that liked the subject matter of the tours tended to watch more, while subjects with less interest in the subject interacted more, perhaps looking for more appealing content.

	Engage.	Entertain	Interact	Subject Appeal
Mouse acts	**-0.44**	**-0.48**	**-0.44**	**-0.45**
Before E/P	**-0.41**	-0.35	-0.29	-0.01
After E/P	**-0.46**	**-0.44**	-0.19	**-0.43**

Table 1. Correlations of user mouse activity with engagement, entertainment, satisfaction with interactivity, and subject matter appeal: total, before, and after the Explore Page (E/P) (bold = correlations significant at the $p < 0.05$ level).

CONCLUSION

In this research we designed and evaluated entertaining, narrative web experiences that gave users the freedom to watch a streaming multimedia narrative and interact when they wanted to. The results of our study seem to give support to the "less clicking, more watching" design approach identified in the discovery phase.

First, our results suggest that we achieved our goal of providing entertaining experiences. Second, the negative correlation between mouse interactivity and entertainment and engagement seems to indicate that a tour is most entertaining when experienced as it was designed to be, that is, to be watched in a TV-like manner. Third, the negative correlation between subject matter appeal and interactivity seems to suggest that subjects do not like to watch when they are not satisfied with the content.

These results raise a question about the common belief that entertainment on the web must follow the model of video games and chat rooms, and be highly interactive and participatory. We have identified a strong desire for storytelling experiences, similar to the type that are the core of today's TV broadcasting. However, we should stress that the results described here are still preliminary: it is necessary to conduct studies with a larger number of subjects, a more diversified range of tour subject matters, and, certainly, on a real, public entertainment website.

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