Academic Libraries and the (Post)-Mobile World: Making Library Web Resources Future Friendly

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Abstract: Mobile Web browsing is becoming increasingly pervasive, especially among younger Web users. Academic libraries are attempting to cater to this audience by creating mobile apps or full mobile versions of their websites. Usability of mobile websites is crucial to ensure users have a positive experience with the site, increasing the likelihood that they will use it again in the future. In this study, comparative usability testing of three academic library mobile websites was conducted with student participants using their own mobile devices. This presentation will discuss the results of the testing and explore which design principles work well for library mobile websites and improve their usability and sustainability.

Keywords: Mobile, Usability, Academic, Library, Website



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OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To determine the usability of mobile library websites and to extrapolate best practices for sustainable library mobile website design.

Research Question 1. What can we learn about the needs of academic library users in accessing and using mobile library websites and online information resources?

Research Question 2. What are the specific usability issues with the given mobile websites identified by academic library users?

METHODS

- Usability testing approach
- Testing was conducted in the field to enable collection of realistic user behavior data
- 3 academic library mobile websites tested
- Participants: 6 former and current academic library users
- Test consisted of assigned tasks, in addition to pre-test and post-test interviews
- Assigned tasks focused on main functions of academic library websites, such as catalog and database searching

FINDINGS

General Observations

- Academic library mobile websites in general were difficult to use for their main function of searching catalogs and finding articles.
- Information architecture tended to be misleading and inadequate.
- Good visual design and layout does not correlate to good usability.

Needs of Academic Library Mobile Web Users

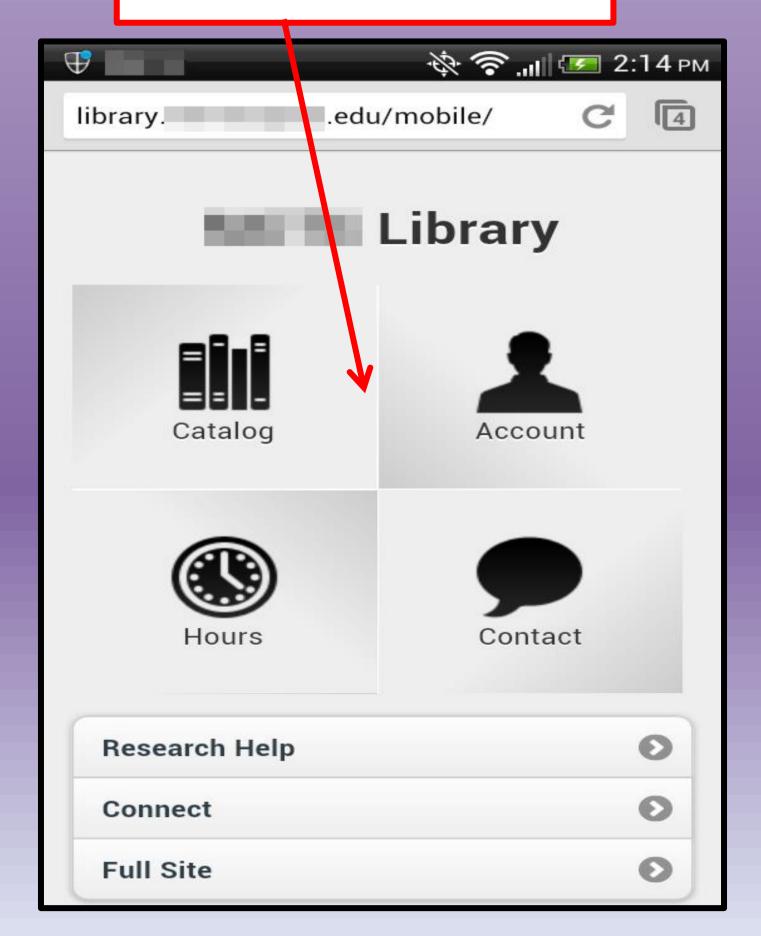
- All test participants expressed a desire for one search interface to search entire site.
- Users prefer to have all content mobile optimized, as opposed to linking to the full site for certain items.

FINDINGS

Usability Issues with Academic Library Mobile Websites

- 1. No link to journal articles or databases on landing page.
- 2. Inadequate and/or non-existent search filters in catalog.
- 3. Not optimized for mobile devices, such as content being cut off and requiring users to use catalogs and databases in full site.
- 4. Information architecture that is misleading and/or inadequate.
- 5. No links back to the home page.
- 6. Required to retype queries each time a new search is attempted.
- 7. Content on landing page doesn't fit onto one screen and requires excessive scrolling.

Issue #1: No link to journal articles or databases on landing page.



SUSTAINABLE MOBILE WEBSITE DESIGN BEST PRACTICES

Information Architecture

Ensure the site is easy to use, navigate & understand. Our testing showed that users value landing pages where all available information is well organized, unambiguously labeled, and doesn't require additional scrolling.

Provide a clear hierarchy of information & text links. Our testing showed that users will become frustrated and leave the site if they can't quickly locate the necessary information.

Don't get bogged down in visual design and layout. Once the structure is determined, it can easily be adjusted for any screen size. The literature shows that simple tweaks to the code can be made to adjust design and layout for various devices.

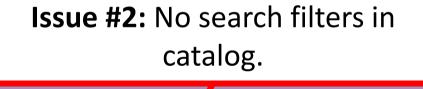
Images

Use SVG images. The literature shows that they are scalable, have faster load times, and are supported by most modern browsers.

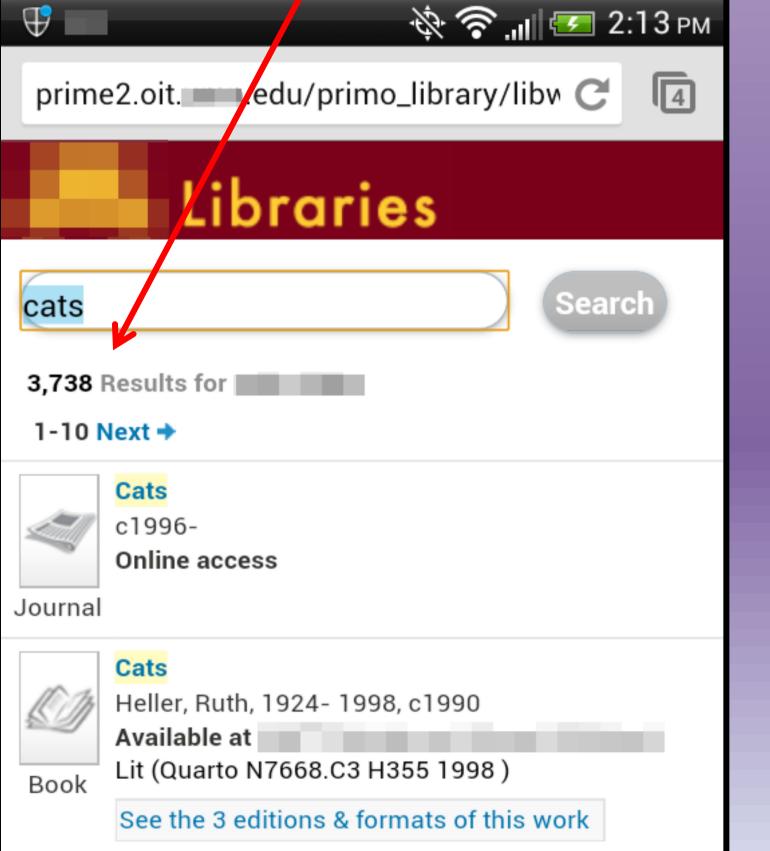
Content

Avoid duplicate content. The literature shows that content that is easier to find reduces resources required to power search.

Make content come first. The literature shows that this approach is future friendly, as it prepares you for new screen sizes and devices much better than a visually oriented process.



Issue #3: Not optimized for mobile devices: Content cut off.



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