Reviewer’s report

Title: User experiences of evidence-based online resources for health professionals: User testing of The Cochrane Library

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Reviewer: J. F. Arocha

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Authors: Rosenbaum, Glenton, & Cracknell

Title: User experiences of evidence-based online resources for professionals: User testing the Cochrane Library

The paper describes a usability study of the Cochrane Library with health professionals who were asked to search the library, starting from an empty page. The sample consisted of 32 people, all health professionals ranging from midwives, nurses, to medical doctors, among others. All study participants were familiar with the Internet, with the Cochrane Library, and possessed knowledge of systematic reviews. Furthermore, participants were either native English or speakers of English as a second language, in the UK and Norway respectively. The authors used the beehive “model” as a guideline for scoring the protocols. This model list seven areas, called “facets” to evaluate: usefulness, usability, findability, credibility, accessibility, and valuability.

The methods used consisted of think aloud protocols while the study participants searched for the Cochrane Library and located information its Web site. The participants followed instructions from a tester, who used a semi-structured guide. The think aloud sessions were audio and video recorded. Two observers in another room, who saw the sessions in an adjacent room, transcribed and discussed the sessions.

The study focused its analysis on six of the seven categories listed in the beehive model (accessibility was not evaluated). The paper reports several problems with the Cochrane along the facets analyzed.

Comments on the article:

(1) Problems involved in user experiences constitute one of the major obstacles in the adoption of health information resources by health professionals and health consumers, as it’s been recognized by the American Medical Informatics Association. In this regard, the issue addressed by the researchers is an important one.

(2) In general, the discussion and conclusion sections are well balanced and supported by the data. That is, if we take the qualitative information as the basis for conclusions, these appear to be well supported. However, it is suggested that
the qualitative data be complemented by some quantitative information on the number problems or participants who found some particular problem (see below).

(3) Overall, the paper is clearly written.

(4) The limitations of the study are clearly stated.

Major revisions:

(1) The authors should describe their methods of analysis they used to code the verbal protocols. Once, they gathered and transcribed the data, what did they do with it? How were the problems in each of the facets identified?

(2) Did the researchers collected demographic information on the study participants? Age, years of professional experience, level of computer expertise, etc? The authors are requested to provide these.

(3) Although I understand that the study is qualitative, the results should present numerical data on how often the listed problems were found. For instance, in the section on "Desirability," the authors say that "Most participants complained that the site looked messy..." but how many is most? It is suggested that numbers of participants reporting the problems be provided.

Minor revisions:

(1) A summary table, showing the facets evaluated and the problems found on each of the facets may be helpful in providing the results.

(2) No information regarding data reporting and data deposition is included in the article. It is suggested that the researchers address this issue.

(3) Page 7, last par, last 2 lines: "We then asked them to perform a series of tasks..." A couple of examples of such tasks would be helpful.

(4) Page 9, 10, Findability is used twice as a heading.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests