How user friendly is Windows 8?

Our research question is dealing with the design of Microsoft’s latest creation Windows 8. This iteration of their popular operating system is incredibly different than all of their past designs and has raised eyebrows from their users. Most of the past designs for Windows have stayed very similar and have had safe and familiar features for the user. The transformation era between Windows 3.1 and Windows 95 was quite significant. Windows 3.1 users found difficulties to use Windows 95 at first because it was a new operating system. It was first time for users to use the start button, upgraded internet explorer, and multi-media programs. However, Windows 95 eventually became the world’s most dominant operating system. In the same manner, there are many people who question whether or not Windows 8 is a good operating system. Microsoft users have grown up using Windows and have remembered how to do everything the same way regardless if it was Windows 95 or all the way up to Windows 7. This applies to all college aged students, but it also relates to the older generation because they too have used the same operating system for most of their time using computers. The designs have all been familiar and have been incredibly popular with the public because they are the same general look. This popularity can be shown through the fact that as of 2010 the market share between Windows and Mac was 92.21% Windows compared to 5.11% Mac OS (iTOK blog 2011). This new design however is not the same and does not have the same feature that Microsoft users are used to. Is Windows 8 user friendly for new users? What parts of it work well for new users, and which do not work well?

Windows 8 still operates the same and has all of the same capabilities of the old systems plus more, but the problems are how the capabilities are displayed and how users are supposed to find them, so that they can use them accurately and quickly. Windows 8 has changed from the
past designs with the most dramatic change being that they removed the Start Button from the bottom left hand corner of the desktop, and they transformed it into a whole new Start screen with applications. That used to be where every user would go to find things and use all of their applications and settings. This was replaced due to how smart phones and new technology is moving towards the app system where every program is its own app and you go in between them easily and quickly like on an iPhone or any other smartphone. Popular search engine Google Chrome, which most people find as the most visually appealing and fastest browser, runs this app system on it. The application system in Google Chrome is minor compared to Windows 8, but it does have an “Apps” toolbar in which it features your favorites, so that they are easy to find and use quickly. In September of 2013, 53.2% of users were using Google Chrome compared to the next most used browser having 27.8% of users (w3schools). Microsoft may have used this example as another guideline when they were designing Windows 8 in order to make it look visually appealing.

Figure 1
This is Windows 95.

Figure 2
This is Windows 2000
This is Windows 7. This is Windows 8.

You can see from Figure 4 that Windows 8 is very different and was a culture shock for consumers. The look is completely different from the older versions, whereas the first three Figures look similar in their general appearance. Older consumers who have been using Windows their entire life did not like the new change and felt like they had to learn how to use a computer again. This is not something that you want in your product because it will push users away from your operating system. People like to be comfortable with what they know and the technology that they use. Humans throughout time have been against change in their lives and generally like when things are the same because it makes them feel comfortable and safe. A Harvard business review explained some of the reasons that people resist change such as loss of control, everything seems different, more work, and past resentments (Canter 2012). Technology is something that many users don't feel safe in already, so when changes like this are made it makes many users scared and against it. Windows 8 is different and people don't want to learn how to use a computer again. Consumers need to start using Windows 8 due to the benefits and speed it provides, but until it becomes more user friendly it appears as if people are going to stay
with Windows 7 and past iterations. This applies strongly in the business world where companies could benefit greatly from using this new system, but because it is difficult to learn and not user friendly they do not want to decrease efficiency in the workplace in order to train their employees on this new operating system. The problem is that users should not have to undergo training just to upgrade their operating system. This upgrade should be something that makes their work easier and makes them more efficient, but instead it is something that scares them and steers them away from using it because it isn’t user friendly. The sooner people embrace the change that Microsoft made, the quicker that they can become familiar with it and start to utilize the new system and it’s benefits. The point is that it an “upgraded” system, so it needs to be handled that way, but instead it is looked at as a bad operating system.

We used three different ways to get the information that we needed for the work that we needed to do. We gave each of the participants a usability test first that gave them steps that they could do to try and familiarize themselves with Windows 8 in a quick way and see some of the new features that Windows 8 has. After the usability test the user was then asked to answer some survey questions and a usability test review. Since our surveys consist of both a structured survey and an interview it will be harder to reach more people than an online survey. To overcome such a problem, we decided to get as much detailed data from our participants as we could possibly get. After participants arrived to the survey room, we briefly explained to the participants the purpose of the testing and the test procedures. We will be using data from rating scales and open ended questions from three different groups. We wanted to make sure to use questions with scaled answers (Strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree) so that we will be able to compare answers from one participant to another and look at the similarities and differences that they have with their experience with Windows 8. Additionally, participants were
given a usability test where they will be given tasks and we timed each of participants until they finished. During the tasks, the users were not given any words even if they had difficulty, unless they were completely stuck for multiple minutes and simply could not continue. If users cannot finish a certain step from our task s/he were moved on to the next step. We recorded the participants’ time that it takes to finish the tasks that we give. We are going to be using the three groups of participants to collect data from multiple perceptions. Additionally, we interviewed each participants after each survey test to find out how each of the three groups feels about Microsoft’s new operating system in depth.

Our research will be used to analyze usability of the new Windows operating system. We also decided to use both qualitative and quantitative research for our surveys by giving survey questions that participants can answer on a scale of 1 to 10 and interviewing participants individually after a set of survey test. The test that we conducted has three groups of participants; the three groups are participants who primarily uses an old version of windows operating system on their most used computer, participants who use Macs as their most used computer, and participants who use Windows 8.

To utilize collected data, we used average task completion time for each of the three groups to find out which group took longer/shorter to complete the tasks. We can to do the same comparison for other data as well. Besides quantitative data, we will be able to get qualitative data from structured interview from open ended questions. We will be able to use the answers to these questions to get users actual opinions and thoughts on the system and how well they feel that it operates.
Usability Test

1. Log on to the computer
2. Go to the desktop
3. Connect to the Wi-fi
4. Open a web browser
5. Go to Facebook
6. Open Twitter in a new tab
7. Close Twitter
8. Go back to the Home Screen
9. Search for a file “test.doc”
10. Save this onto the desktop
11. Find “Settings” from the Start Menu
12. Open the weather Application
13. Close the weather Application
14. Open Excel from the Start Menu
15. Log off computer

Usability Test Review

1. Logging on to the computer was easy.
   Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly disagree
2. Going to the desktop was easy.
   Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly disagree
3. Connecting to the Wi-fi was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

4. Opening a web browser was easy

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

5. Going to Facebook was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

6. Opening Twitter in a new tab was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

7. Closing Twitter was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

8. Going back to the Home Screen was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

9. Searching for a file “test.doc” is easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

10. Saving this onto the desktop is easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

11. Finding “Settings” from the Start Menu was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

12. Opening the weather Application was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

13. Closing the weather Application was easy.

Strongly agree agree undecided disagree strongly disagree

14. Opening Excel from the Start Menu was easy.
15. Logging off the computer was easy.

Survey Questions

1. Do you own a Windows or Mac Computer?
2. Have you ever used Windows 8?
3. Which features do you like on Windows 8?
4. Which features do you dislike on Windows 8?
5. Did you have problems using any applications on Windows 8? Which ones and why?
6. Do you prefer Windows 8, Windows 7, an earlier version of Windows, or Mac?
7. What was your first impression on the new home screen implemented in Windows 8?
8. Do you feel like the new interface is easier to use compared to the previous versions?
9. If you don't have windows 8 how likely would you be to purchase it on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being I am buying it and 1 being I am never buying it) Why, or why not?
10. How would you rank the usability of windows 8 on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being easy 1 being impossible)?
11. Windows 8 is a very easy system to pick up and use.

   Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly disagree
12. Windows 7 is a very easy system to pick up and use.

   Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly disagree
13. Macs are a very easy system to pick up and use.

   Strongly agree  agree  undecided  disagree  strongly disagree
One of the groups that we tested was Windows 8 users and how quickly they were able to do tasks on the system that they use. We wanted to make sure and test people that use Windows 8 so that we were able to see how hard it is for people to do tasks on a system they use compared to people using it for the first time. We were able to test 12 users that have experience with Windows 8 and had one other user with experience with windows 8 take the survey for us. Windows 8 users had an average time on the usability test of 3 mins which was by far the quickest of the three groups. This is not a very surprising thing but what is surprising is that it took this long for people to complete the tasks. When you are very familiar with a system most tasks should take only a few seconds but during our testing there were many Windows 8 users that would get stuck and not know where to go and get lost. This showed us how some of the hidden functions that Windows 8 has can be very difficult to find and if someone does not know that they exist they will not even try to do them. A few of the tasks in the usability test that even Windows 8 users had a problem with was how to search for a file, how to find settings, and how to close the weather application. The three tasks seemed easy but in reality a lot of Windows 8 users said that they had never used them and didn't know how to get to them. Windows 8 users also got a lot more frustrated when they didn’t know how to do something due to the fact that they thought they should of been able to do everything on Windows 8.

Mac users were another test group that we did for our research on how user friendly Windows 8 is. Typically, Mac users use Apple products because they prefer them to Microsoft products, so they already have a biased opinion toward the Windows operating systems in general. Quickly after logging on and coming to the Start screen Mac users did find the new
look to be visually appealing, but that is where the compliments for the system stopped. From that part on Mac users disliked everything about Windows 8, and got very frustrated while taking the test. Users had virtually no idea how to do anything because of all the hidden features, and it is an operating that is completely new that they have never used before. They struggled to find applications and to work within them. Mac users average time to complete the usability test was 6 minutes and 49 seconds. This is over twice the amount that is took Windows 8 users to complete the test, but that was understandable and expected.

The last group we observed was Windows 7 users who have not used Windows 8 operating system before. We wanted observe how Windows 7 users perform on Windows 8 and how they perceive Windows 8, the latest operating system We were able to test 14 users who use Windows 7. At first, most of Windows 7 users felt confident about the tasks even before the tasks were given. However, Windows 7 users struggled with many tasks such as finding locations of the functions. For instance the users were frustrated when searching for a text file because on Windows 7 they use a search box, but on Windows 8 they couldn’t because of the hidden functions. Windows 7 users had an average time on the usability test of 7 minutes and 8 seconds which recorded the longest average time taken among the three groups.

However, the unexpected result was that Mac users’ average time was faster by a small margin to Windows 7 users. This shows how different Windows 8 is from its previous versions. We concluded that this difference was resulted from Mac users being used to the non-traditional operating system created by Apple. They are not used to the same old simple desktop that Microsoft’s previous versions entail.
Below are some of the graphic comparisons that we created to show the difference in the results from each user group:

This shows that the only group that really has a noticeable agreement that Windows 8 is an easy system to pick up and use are Windows 8 users, and most of them are undecided and some disagree.
These graphs show an interesting trend, because you would think that Windows 8 users should have known how to do everything on the usability test. However, this shows that even experienced users did not know how to do some tasks, and that they agreed with the other groups that this task was not easy.
These graphs are an analysis of what should be an easy task of “Opening a new tab.” This task was very easy for Windows 8 users because they know how to work the system, but for Mac and Windows 7 users this still was a very hard step because it is a hidden feature and not something that they would have seen before from a previous Windows version or on a Mac.

In our research we found that Windows 8 is not an easy system to just pick up and use. It is a system that takes time to learn how to use, and has many hidden features that you must adjust to and learn. User’s that buy the system and adjust to it tend to like it, but it takes time to adjust to the way it works. The new look catches everyone’s
eye, but it also confuses them. Most users say that overall it is not a user friendly system until you take the time to learn it and get used to it. Microsoft took a very risky and bold jump when they decided to make such a radical change to their well liked operating system. When you look back at when windows 7 was released that even caused some outrage from users about it looking different and confusing some users when it was practically the same as past operating systems.

Although we only researched Windows 8 the original version, there has been an update since then that readded the “Start Button” in the bottom left hand corner of the desktop. They did this due to much complaining from users, because this is typically how a standard user would find most of their applications. They made a few other minor changes that helped increase the speed of the operating system. Although they added the Start Button feature, the system still is dramatically different from its previous version, and it is a change that Windows users will have to embrace if they are going to keep using Microsoft’s products.
References


Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUyFa1cP1q4&feature=youtu.be