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ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT OF FUNCTIONALITIES OF WEBSITE STRUCTURES FOCUSED ON CUSTOMER NEEDS IN THE ERA OF MODERN E-MARKETING

Introduction

Nowadays, thanks to the possibilities offered by the Internet, both the speed of obtaining information and the organization of physical resources are available at your fingertips. That simply means that people can not only buy products from classic shops but also, with the help of a computer mouse, they have the option of using products from all over the world. According to the report of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) 93.3% of households in Poland had access to the Internet in 2023¹. Therefore, the universality of Internet phenomena is definitely gaining momentum. However, problems arise when an appropriate business decision has to be made. The fact that every entrepreneur has access to the general functionalities of this medium does not mean that it provides every market entity with the opportunity to achieve the highest sales value. To achieve this goal, one has to return to the deep-rooted conviction about the focus on the needs of the final customer. The message being built is supposed to express a certain value that satisfies the recipient and encourages him/her to visit the company's website and reject the websites of its competitors. When deciding on visiting a website, the users consider how much relevant information they will obtain there in relation to the effort put into extracting the content they are looking for². The aim of the article is to verify to what extent current market participants tend to use methods focused on the needs of end users, i.e., those related to the area of User Experience.

¹ M. Gumiński, W. Guzowski, M. Huet, K. Juszcak, M. Kwiatkowska, P. Mordan, M. Orczykowska, *Analizy statystyczne: Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce w 2023 roku*, [in:] M. Wegner, Urząd Statystyczny w Szczecinie. Ośrodek Statystyki Nauki, Techniki, Innowacji i Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego, Warszawa-Szczecin 2023, p. 24.

² R. Budiou for „Nielsen Norman Group”, *Information Foraging: A theory of How People Navigate on the Web*, <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/information-foraging/> (accessed: 24 May 2024).

1. Digital adaptation after the Covid-19 pandemic - *Human-Centered Design*

The most noticeable change in recent years has not been due to a significant industrial revolution but to the need to adapt to the new conditions in the global social environment. This refers to the crisis caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019. Innovative approaches to managing, automation, digitization and increased needs to conduct research on new e-consumer practices are the solutions that have made it possible to escape the oppression of the new reality are³. The restrictions imposed in many countries have suspended the previous possibilities to meet consumer needs through stationary points of sale. This has accelerated the expansion of online trade and initiated changes that are likely to be long-term in nature; they will cover issues related mainly to shopping habits and the development of online sales channels⁴. As a result, the needs of the e-consumer are becoming a differentiator and an element of competitive advantage in the current market. The pandemic has forced a return to the path of thinking initiated in 1955 about *Human-Computer Interaction*, which today is referred to as *Human Centered Design*⁵.

This need has developed the idea of *Customer Experience*, a doctrine that focuses on improving customer experience at every stage of the purchasing process. Its objective is to achieve consumer's durable satisfaction and positive purchasing reactions as well as to acquire the skills to manage the experience of one's own buyers⁶. According to J.Kamiński, the essence of such activities is "to provide customers with branded experiences i.e., the ones that are only ours. They distinguish us in the eyes of customers [...] thanks to the conscious work that we have put into providing customers with exactly the experiences that they want to pay for"⁷.

2. *User Experience* as a tool for experience design

³ K. Szuper, *Wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na innowacyjność polskich przedsiębiorstw*, [in:] A. Stępnia-Kucharska, M. Piekut (ed.), *Współczesne problemy gospodarcze- Gospodarki w czasach kryzysu część II*, Politechnika Warszawska Kolegium Nauk Ekonomiczno-Społecznych, Płock 2021, pp. 11-12.

⁴ K. Kud, M. Woźniak, *E-handel poprawą efektywności logistycznego łańcucha dostaw pomiędzy handlem a klientem detalicznym w dobie kryzysu COVID-19*, „Zeszyty naukowe Szkoły Głównej Gospodarstwa Wiejskiego w Warszawie. Ekonomika i Organizacja Logistyki”, 2022, 8(4), p. 40.

⁵ M. Ritter, C. Winterbottom, *UX w projektowaniu witryn internetowych*, tłum. M. Gutkowski, Helion, Gliwice 2018, pp. 16-18.

⁶ H. PhamThi, T. Nghia Ho, *Understanding customer experience over time and customer citizenship behavior in retail environment: The mediating role of customer brand relationship strength*, „Cogent Business & Management”, 2024, Vol. 11: 2292487, p. 2.

⁷ J. Kamiński, *Projektowanie doświadczeń usługowego klienta- Customer Experience*, [in:] M. Chłodnicki, A. Karel (ed.) „Service design po polsku”, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2020, p. 156.

Trends in the current market and economy exert natural pressure towards digitization of available businesses. The idea of *Design Thinking*, which was developed in a business context, is helpful here. This is a design method whose main advantage is the development of a combination of design sensitivity with the satisfaction of human needs in the condition of currently available technological innovations⁸. The development of technology created several sources that can be used when browsing websites. This includes desktop computers, smartphones, screen readers and tablets. Interfaces, i.e. *the interaction space between a human being and a machine*⁹ must not only meet the requirements of standard websites opened on desktop devices, but also the requirements of parameters adapted to smaller screens of mobile equipment. This is the doctrine of the *Mobile First* concept based on the conviction that society will increasingly use mobile devices to access the Internet functionalities.

In order to effectively combine the above-mentioned concepts, it is necessary to use tools that can be easily mastered by the user of modern solutions. Categorizing them under one heading, they can be defined as the *User Experience (UX)* doctrine, i.e., the user functional experience. According to the ISO 9241-210:2019 standard, the concept of UX is a holistic vision about the user's perception and reactions that result from using a product, service, or system¹⁰. This basic assumption leads to the construction of such languages and communication patterns that will not require any explanation. They should effectively suggest and direct the user who will, as a consequence, smoothly use the advantages of a given website. When the communication on the website fails, the product does not sell even if it meets all the requirements of the buyer¹¹. In order to achieve satisfactory results from using UX today, one must act consciously, considering every of the six dimensions presented in Table 1. *User Experience* is a process offering a wide range of topics that leads to understanding the significance of innovativeness and continuous improvement of the existing solutions.

⁸ D. Kaczorowska-Spychalska, M. Kalińska-Kula, A. Mardosz-Grabowska, A. Matuszewska-Kubicz, *Przyszłość marketingu*, R. Kozielski (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2020, pp. 215-216.

⁹ K. Gawlik, B. Borowiec, *Projektowanie interfejsów*, [in:] G. Mazurek (ed.), „E-marketing. Planowanie, narzędzia- praktyka”, Poltext, Warszawa 2018, p. 211.

¹⁰ ISO 9241-210:2019 standard, *Ergonomics of human-system interaction*, <https://www.iso.org/standard/77520.html>, (accessed: 24 May 2024).

¹¹ J. Królewski, *E-marketing. Współczesne trendy. Pakiet startowy*, (ed.) J. Królewski, P. Sala, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2016, p. 115.

Table 1. User Experience dimensions

SPECIFICATION	CHARACTERISTICS
USABILITY	A set of website features thanks to which the contact with it is easy and simple for the user
ACCESSIBILITY	The website is adapted for the support of various browsers, computer systems and for making browsing easier for people with disabilities
USEFULNESS	Meeting actual needs of users – does the website provide what the user came to it for
DESIRABILITY	Website’s image quality, graphics, esthetics, effectiveness
FINDABILITY	Possibility to find the website by the user, adequate marketing communication
CREDIBILITY	Assuring the user that the product offered is the best answer to his/her needs

Source: P. Morville, *User Experience Design*, <http://semanticstudios.com/publications/semantics/000029.php>, qtd.: M. Koralewski, P. Nowak, *Poradnik: Podstawy User Experience w projektowaniu stron WWW*, Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości, Warszawa 2012, p. 4.

3. Methodology of own research – company website analysis

In order to exist in the modern market, every entrepreneur should include the organization of a company website in their business plan. The idea behind undertaking the research was the attempt to analyze and evaluate the official website of a company operating in the Polish market. The objective was to assess to what extent, despite the lack of an imposed requirement for websites to be digitally accessible, the current company website meets the WCAG 2.1 standards and the requirements of the Act of 4 April 2019 on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities. For the purposes of the research, the selected company was a producer of cardboard packaging, K&T Pak Limited Liability Company Limited Partnership. This is a small company¹², having its own website for several years¹³. Its selection was determined by the low level of complexity of the website thanks to which the researcher was able to conduct basic verification with the use of publicly available auxiliary tools. The other criterion for selecting this website was the possibility to access the technical audit provided by the company organizing the content of www.ktpak.pl.

The basis for the study was the qualitative research method in the form of a document content analysis conducted as a case study of the K&T Pak company. The subject of

¹² *Rejestr: Organizacja K&T PAK*, <https://rejestr.io/krs/680743/k-t-pak> (accessed: 24 May 2024).

¹³ *Producent opakowań tekturowych, K&T PAK Zembrzyce*, <https://ktpak.pl/> (accessed: 24 May 2024).

considerations were individual technical and visual elements of the website, verified by two commonly available tools. One of them was the modified checklist provided by the Ministry for Digital Affairs and developed on the basis of *WCAG 2.1. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines)* that include directives concerning the accessibility of digital content both for standard users and for persons with disabilities. They were prepared by W3C- *World Wide Web Consortium*, which develops standards helping to build a network of websites based on the principles of accessibility, globalization, privacy, and security¹⁴. In Poland, the implementation of the WCAG guidelines is a legal requirement and is imposed on every website and mobile application belonging to public entities¹⁵. The list questions were modernized and adapted to the researcher's level of knowledge; moreover, the tables were adapted by the simplification of the visual interpretation of results. To support and objectify the observations made during the evaluation, the researcher used a Google Chrome browser extension called DevTools from Google LLC in the official 64-bit version 121.0.6167.185. This is a set of tools built into the browser whose main task is to facilitate and enable ongoing website editing and a quick diagnosis of potential problems¹⁶. As regards the analysis of the company website www.ktpak.pl, the researcher used such functionalities as the elements panel and the device mode. In the next step, the results obtained were confronted with the official technical audit from the company that currently runs the website of K&T Pak. The audit is a set of information from experts operating on the Polish e-services market. The document consists of 22 pages and refers to general information about the company's domain. Due to the extensive scope of the subject matter, the focus was on interrelated data in order to compare them in terms of the degree of coverage and reliability of the presented parameters and the results of the self-audit.

The research enabled the author to verify the condition of the selected 17 subsides of www.ktpak.pl and, on the basis of the conclusions drawn, to assess whether the website is consistent with the basic principles of *User Experience* or there is need to refresh it. The independent audit and the document provided by the external company were conducted on the 7 March 2024. The basis for the research was the *Checklist for independent examination of the digital accessibility of a website and its compliance with the Act of 4 April 2019 on the digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities* in the 2021 version. Having

¹⁴ W3C, <https://www.w3.org/> (accessed: 24 May 2024).

¹⁵ Act of 4 April 2019 on digital accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public entities, consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2019, item 848

¹⁶ Google for developers- Devtools, https://developer.chrome.com/docs/devtools?utm_source=devtools&hl=pl, (accessed: 24 May 2024).

consolidated the objectives presented above, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Company website www.ktpak.pl meets the guidelines of the checklist of the Ministry for Digital Affairs by over 50%.

H2: Company website www.ktpak.pl meets all WCAG 2.1. key guidelines.

H3: The results of the independent audit of company website www.ktpak.pl are consistent with the results of the external audit.

H4: Company website www.ktpak.pl meets at least three basic dimensions of *User Experience*.

H5: There is need to modernize the current structure of website www.ktpak.pl.

4. Website structure evaluation – the specificity of research tools

The evaluation included the analysis of 17 subsites of the www.ktpak.pl domain. The titles of the subsites in the sample were as follows: Home page; *About Us* tab; *Offer* tab along with subsites for each type of service provided by the website (nine types of services): 1) Bulk packaging, 2) Shaped packaging, 3) Non-standard packaging, 4) Corners, 5) Partitions and trays, 6) Fillers and inserts, 7) Individual designs, 8) Corrugated cardboard packaging, 9) Solid cardboard packaging; *Blog* tab with the article: 1) “Why is cardboard grammage so important?”; *Products/gallery* tab; *GDPR* tab; *Contact* tab.

The checklist to examine the website was prepared for public entities due to their legal obligation to implement the standards. However, any user is able to independently conduct the analysis in terms of the standards. The structure of the checklist was based on a set of questions that detect accessibility issues on a given website to a greater extent. Each question was accompanied by a short description with instructions, WCAG reference criteria, and possible answers with a precise description of when and which one to give. The document stated that it was not necessary to answer every question from the checklist and a basic ability to use online resources was sufficient for testing. To assess the compliance, it was enough to find an error at the basic level. Such a question provided the answer whether the service is inaccessible. A negative answer to any of the five key questions meant that there were barriers that prevented the website from being used by people with disabilities. Finally, twenty-eight questions were selected from the proposed pool of questions: twenty-seven questions from the basic level and one from the medium level. The set included a list of all key questions. Table 2 presents a modernized table in its simplified version.

Table 2. Table summarizing the examination of digital accessibility – a shortened format

BASIC LEVEL					
QUESTION No.	CATEGORY	WCAG 2.1	FULFILLED (1 POINT)	NOT APPLICABLE (EXCLUDED FROM ANALYSIS)	UNFULFILLED (0- POINTS)
1	NAVIGATION	2.4.7 – Focus Visible			
2		2.1.1 - Keyboard			
3		2.1.1 - Keyboard			
4		2.2.1 -Timing Adjustable			
5		2.4.4 – Link Purpose (in context)			
6		2.4.4 – Link Purpose (in context)			
7	NAVIGATION (ct.)	2.4.5 – Multiple Ways			
8		2.4.5 - Multiple Ways 3.2.3 – Consistent Navigation			
9		2.4.3 – Focus Order			
10	APPEARANCE	2.3.1 – Three Flashes or Below Threshold			
11		1.4.4 – Resize Text			
12		1.3.4 – Orientation			
13		1.3.1 – Info and Relations 1.4.1 – Use of Colour			
14		1.4.1 - Use of Colour			
15		1.3.3 – Sensory Characteristics			
16	CONTENT	1.4.2 – Audio Control			
17	CONTENT (ct.)	2.2.1 – Timing Adjustable 2.2.2 – Pauze, Stop, Hide			
18		2.4.2 – Page Titled			
19		1.1.1 – Non-text Content			
20	FORM	3.3.2 – Labels or Instructions			
21	MULTIMEDIA	3.3.1 – Error Identification			
22		3.3.3 – Error Suggestion			
23		3.3.4 – Error Prevention (Legal, Financial, Data)			
24		1.1.1 – Non-text Content 1.2.3 – Audio Description or Media Alternative (Prerecorded)			
25	MULTIMEDIA (ct.)	1.2.2 – Captions (Prerecorded)			
26		1.2.5 – Audio Description (Prerecorded)			
27	DOCUMENTS	2.4.4 – Link purpose (in context)			
MEDIUM LEVEL					
28	FORM	1.1.1 –Non-text content			
TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS RECEIVED					

Source: author's own research based on: *Lista kontrolna do samodzielnego badania dostępności cyfrowej strony internetowej i jej zgodności z ustawą z dnia 4 kwietnia 2019 r. o dostępności cyfrowej stron internetowych i aplikacji mobilnych podmiotów publicznych*, Departament Społeczeństwa Informacyjnego, Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, Warszawa 2021.

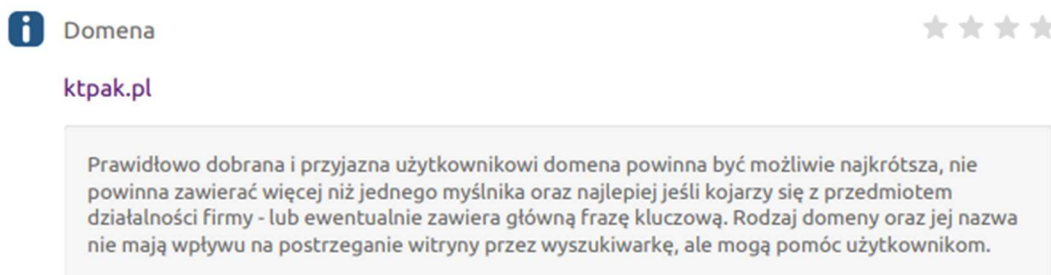
5. Interpretation of the results of the self-audit of the website

With reference to the four basic principles of WCAG, the perceivability of the K&T PAK website was focused mainly on the needs of each type of user who would like to know what the website includes. Considering the median value of the study results, the compliance level was 82%. Thus, the first thesis of the study was confirmed as the company website www.ktpak.pl met the guidelines of the Ministry for Digital Affairs checklist by more than fifty per cent. The worst overall score obtained was 68% in the case of the *Contact* tab. Therefore, the structure of the K&T PAK website created a potential space for further exploration of the entire website but the weakest score for the *Contact* site meant that the main information goal was achieved the least compared to the rest of the study sample. Thus, the main goal of a future change should concern the *Contact* subsite. This is a special place due to the essential purpose of creating the www.ktpak.pl website, which is to inform and be a source that provides sufficient guidelines for the user to take initiative in the form of inquiry through such direct access channels as telephone or e-mail.

The research confirmed that the use of a keyboard is possible and there are no elements that would distract the user. Moreover, there are no elements that would mislead the user or cause unwanted movements on the website. It is possible to view the website in different orientations, but despite the readability of the text content, using mobile devices does not offer the same functionalities as the desktop computer – working links should be added do Facebook website and the company's location in Google Maps. This has a direct impact on the second dimension of *User Experience*, i.e., adapting the site to various browsers. There is also no map or search engine. This results in insufficient fulfilment of the fifth UX dimension, i.e., findability. This also refers to the first dimension, which should ensure easy contact between the website and its user. As far as the third and the fourth dimension (Desirability and Usefulness, respectively) are concerned, no elements were found that would not comply with their characteristics. While attractiveness is a subjective concept, the esthetic requirements are met sufficiently in the author's opinion. This indicates that thesis No. 3 has been fulfilled as the website meets at least three dimensions of *User Experience*.

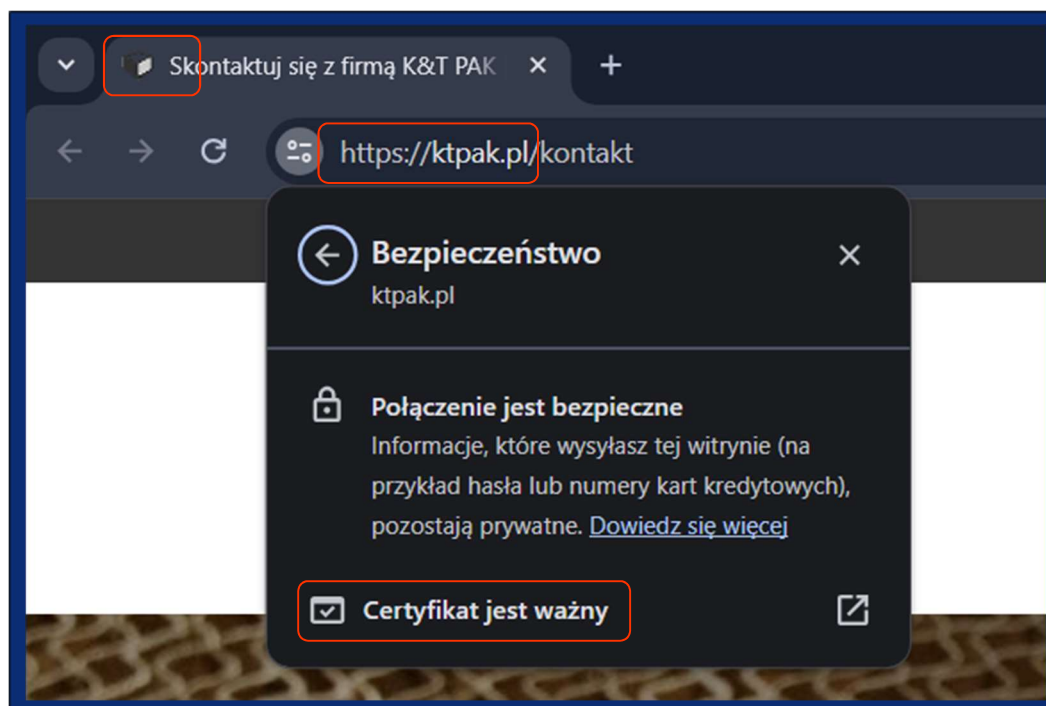
In the comparison part, in the case of eleven questions from the accessibility study checklist, a thematic convergence was noticed between the audit of the external company and the results of the author's audit. This refers mainly to the issues of the www.ktpak.pl website responsiveness, the presence of title pages, their correct structure, and the performance speed parameters. An example of the convergence is given in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the external audit <https://ktpak.pl/>, SEO-Audyt dla Twojej strony • WeNet.pl – domain description



Source: *Technical audit https://ktpak.pl/*, *SEO-Audyt dla Twojej strony • WeNet.pl*, firma WeNet Group Warszawa 2024, (audit completed on 7 March 2024).

Figure 2. Screenshot of Google Chrome browser window - www.ktpak.pl domain



Source: author's own research based on www.ktpak.pl website.

However, the results concerning the five key questions whether the website does not belong to the category of digitally inaccessible are the most significant. The answer to one out of five questions was negative. It concerns the section in which the user fills in their data: no text alternative is provided. Thus, the result for the www.ktpak.pl website is 80% (the ratio of the four key requirements that were fulfilled to the five requirements that were set). Consequently, hypothesis 2, which assumed that www.ktpak.pl website meets all WCAG 2.1. key guidelines, must be refuted.

Conclusions

In the author's opinion, the results were satisfactory. The stages of the self-audit confirmed several issues and indicated areas that require refreshment or improvement. The presented results indicate that despite the lack of centrally imposed criteria for meeting the conditions of digital accessibility, in practical conditions, market participants are partially inclined to use methods focused on the needs of end users. The following hypotheses were confirmed:

H1: Company website www.ktpak.pl meets the guidelines of the checklist of the Ministry for Digital Affairs by over 50% as the average result is at the level of 82%;

H3: The results of the self-audit of company website www.ktpak.pl are consistent with the results of the external audit as the spaces under investigation in their overall structure confirm each other;

H4: Company website www.ktpak.pl meets at least three basic dimensions of *User Experience*, including desirability, credibility, and usefulness;

H5: There is need to modernize the current structure of website www.ktpak.pl considering the audit checklist guidelines and to improve the conditions that do not meet the UX dimensions

One hypothesis was refuted:

H2: Company website www.ktpak.pl does not meet all WCAG 2.1. key guidelines as it fulfilled four out of five key requirements.

The results of the research will be applicable not only to the company's own use but also to market entities and individuals who want to implement websites and become familiar with their operation. The data presented in the tables will be helpful to developers, accessibility coordinators and other people responsible for implementing virtual improvements to websites. They can also become the basis for statistical analysis and consultations as regards future, legal implementation of changes for entrepreneurs in the Republic of Poland.

It can be concluded from the research results that, despite changing times, businesspeople should still focus on ensuring good communication with the customer and adapt to their ultimate needs. A positive conclusion is that in the era of modern digitization, every interested person has the opportunity to verify the website without any financial outlay. This makes it possible to make proper independent decisions concerning website refreshment or adaptation. The increasing awareness of the available possibilities generates better and more innovative solutions. It is important to start taking advantage of the online opportunities available at your fingertips.

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Abstract

The article reviews the issue of developing positive customer experience with regard to visual and structural design of websites. It addresses the issues of *Human Centered Design*, focusing on the concepts of *Customer Experience* and *User Experience*. Despite the lack of a statutory requirement to meet accessibility standards, an attempt was made to identify the extent to which current market participants are inclined to use methods focused on the needs of end users. The research is an analysis of a company website in relation to the criteria for meeting the conditions of WCAG 2.1. guidelines, and to the comparison to an external technical document as well as UX dimensions. The underlying research tools were a modified version of the checklist provided by the Ministry for Digital Affairs of the Republic of Poland and DevTools browser developer extension of Google LLC.

Key words

Websites, customer needs, user experience, e-marketing, digital accessibility.