A Critical Evaluation on the User-Friendliness of Search Interfaces of Micro CDS/ISIS and INMAGIC

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this experimental survey is to study the User Friendliness of search interfaces of two Text Retrieval Packages (TXT) used in libraries in Sri Lanka, namely Micro CDS/ISIS (Version 3.0) and INAMGIC (Version 7.1).

The Methodology followed to study the search interfaces was, end user behaviour by direct observation using True Comparison Group method. The user community was divided into three categories, Experts, Intermediates and Novices, depending on their competency level of computer literacy, and equal number of representations were selected for the sample.

Performance of each user group at every stage of the search module during the first search was evaluated. The certainty level based on the clearness they showed, in using the interfaces, and uncertainty level, based on the intermediary help used was measured in terms of user friendly features offered by the search modules. Two interfaces of CDS/ISIS and INMAGIC were compared in order to evaluate User-Friendliness.

Search results were also evaluated according to the exact number of hits obtained, false drop levels and zero number of hits obtained, within the range of the search tries allowed. Factors affecting the performance of users were studied and relationships drawn to user friendliness of search modules.

It was observed that the user friendly features inherent in a search module had a significant effect on user

behaviour, regardless of the competency level of the user. But competency of the user had affected the performances when the search interface did not provide systematic help to the user, in the form of, online tutorial, online help, language used and help/error messages.

It was evident that even a naive user with low level of computer literacy, can become an expert within a short period of time if the idea of User's Model with User Friendly features is adopted in designing search interfaces of TXT packages.