

Researchers promote usability for everyone, everywhere

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According to Michael Twidale, professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, bad usability can be an irritation for everyone but "especially awful" for the

underprivileged. In "Everyone Everywhere: A Distributed and Embedded Paradigm for Usability," which was recently published in the *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology (JASIST)*, Twidale and coauthors David M. Nichols (University of Waikato, New Zealand) and Christopher P. Lueg (Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland) present a new paradigm to address the persistence of difficulties that people have in accessing and using information.

Twidale points to the COVID vaccination rollout as one recent example of bad usability. In many places, people have to book their vaccine appointments online, which can be difficult for the especially vulnerable elderly population.

"When hard to use software means a vulnerable elderly person cannot book a vaccination, that's a social justice issue," he said. "If you can't get things to work, it can further exclude you from the benefits that technology is bringing to everyone else. Making a computer system easier to use is a tiny fraction of the cost of making the computer system work at all. So why aren't things fixed? Because people put up with bad interfaces and blame themselves. We want to say, 'No, it's not your fault! It is bad design.'"

Twidale and his coauthors propose expanding awareness of usability and distributing the topic across disciplines, beyond the "tiny elite" of usability professions. In turn, this increased emphasis on usability could lead to improvements in other disciplines such as politics (e.g., better ballot design) and medicine (e.g., user-friendly medical devices).

"A wider usability movement would remind members of any profession that regardless of their domain and efforts in making the world a better place, bad usability makes everything worse. In contrast, reducing bad [usability](#) is often a relatively low-cost way of contributing to

improvements within these professions."

More information: Michael B. Twidale et al, Everyone everywhere: A distributed and embedded paradigm for usability, *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/asi.24465](https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.24465)

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