

Usability Test for The Weather Channel

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of three usability tests conducted on The Weather Channel's website. The website offers various features, including real-time and historical weather information, interactive maps, weather-related articles, and health-related content like allergy forecasts and an air quality index. The primary objective of this study was to evaluate the website's user-friendliness, specifically focusing on how easily users could access and utilize its features. To achieve this, three participants were tasked with completing a set of predefined tasks on the website, and their interactions were closely observed. The researcher collected and analyzed participant feedback to identify areas for improvement in the website's usability. Those recommendations include clear labeling for location in pollen forecast, minimizing intrusive ads, adding a search functionality for articles, making content more relevant, and making the temperature scale conversion more user friendly.

Methodology

The participants for this usability study were selected based on convenience and diversity. It was convenient for the researcher to ask family and friends to participate. Participants that accepted were sent an email invitation to join a Google Meet session. They were informed that they were not going to be recorded and that they did not need to use their webcam, since the researcher was only interested in observation through screen sharing. The demographics of the test participants are shown in this chart:

	Age	Gender	Occupation	Computer Proficiency
Participant 1	28	Female	Coffee Shop Manager	Moderate
Participant 2	26	Male	Project Manager	High
Participant 3	52	Female	Restaurant Owner	Low

Due to the distance between the researcher and test participants, and because the researcher was sick, the usability tests were conducted remotely via Google Meet. This allowed participants to complete the tests from the comfort of their own homes and eliminated the need for travel.

The researcher and participants used their personal computers for the sessions. Google Meet was used because it was free, equipped with screen sharing, and did not require creation of an account to join. The researcher sent an invitation link through email for participants to join the session. The email also included a link to a Google Doc created by the researcher that included the entry and exit questionnaires and the tasks. The Google Doc gave permission to the participants to edit the document so they could fill out the questionnaires. Once the participant joined the Google Meet, the researcher gave them the option of turning off their webcam and asked the participant to click on the weather.com link sent in Google Meet's chat feature. Then the participant was asked to enable the screen sharing function and only display the weather.com tab. This software allowed the researcher to communicate with participants and observe their interactions with the website in real time.

The usability test included a series of tasks designed to evaluate the website's user-friendliness and effectiveness in delivering weather information. To begin, the researcher welcomed the participants with a brief script and provided an opportunity for them to ask questions about the test (Appendix A). Participants were asked to view the homepage without clicking on anything and to fill out the entry questionnaire in the Google Doc (Appendix B). The entry questionnaire served as an initial assessment tool, capturing participants' first impressions before they engaged in the usability tasks. Following these steps, participants were then assigned the following tasks:

Task #1

You're going shopping for travel supplies and want to check the weather before you head out. Find the current weather conditions for your location, and what the weather will be in a few hours from now.

Task #2

You are planning to go to Liberia, Costa Rica this week. Check what the weather will be there for the next few days. Find information for rain, wind, humidity, and UV index.

Task #3

You're curious about what the weather was like last year at this time. See what the temperatures in Liberia were last year in this month.

Task #4

You want to see if there are weather conditions that will affect your flight for this week. Access a radar map to track weather patterns.

Task #5

Hurricane season in Liberia is from June to November. Find an article on how to get ready for hurricane season.

Task #6

Pollen aggravates your allergies. Find out whether you need to pack medication for your trip.

Task #7

Celsius is the standard for weather reporting and everyday use in Costa Rica. Change the temperature scale from Fahrenheit to Celsius.

The tasks were given to the participant in the Google Doc, but the researcher also read each task out loud for better understanding (Appendix F). Participants completed the tasks relatively quickly so there was no need for the researcher to ask them to move on to the next. The researcher did not give help with the tasks, even when the participants struggled. The participants did well at voicing what they were doing and thinking throughout the process. After completing the tasks, participants were asked to provide feedback on their experience by completing the exit questionnaire in the provided Google Doc (Appendix G). The exit questionnaire aimed to capture participants' thoughts, insights, and any challenges they encountered during the usability test. The researcher thanked the participant for their time and ended the video session.

Results

The usability test results offer insights into the Weather Channel's website's ability to meet users' needs and reveal usability issues. I've outlined the tasks into sections to discuss participants' feedback and the researcher's observations.

Task #1

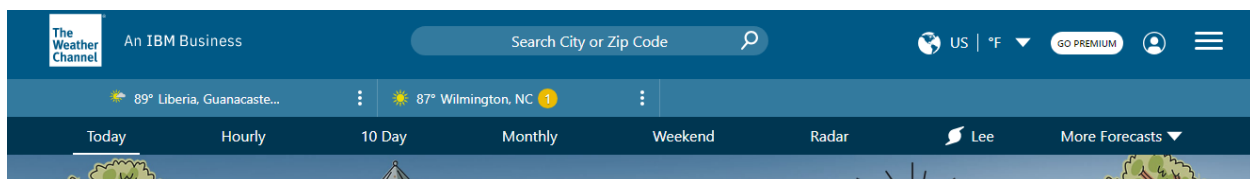
Task #1 was created to test the most important feature of the website: checking the forecast in a user's current location. All participants found this easily, but participant #3 had commented that she expected the current weather conditions to be on the homepage. Instead, a top news story is displayed. This expectation might have arisen because many weather websites, unlike The Weather Channel (which also reports news), typically prioritize displaying current weather information prominently.

Task #2

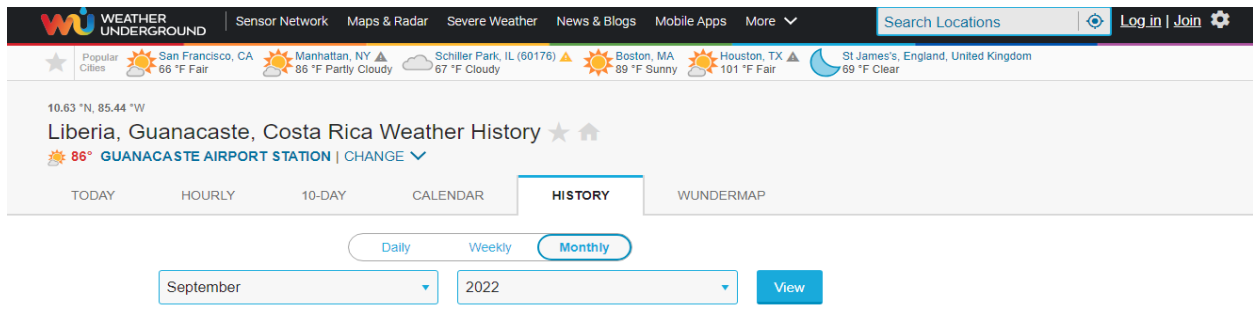
Task #2 asked the participant to find the weather forecast for a different location, specifically, Costa Rica. All participants found this quickly as they typed the location into the search bar and clicked on the 10 day forecast. Participant #1 noted that an ad popped up on screen when a new webpage loaded, slowing down this process. On a positive note, participant #2 mentioned he liked that his current location was saved in the header beneath the search bar, allowing him to easily toggle between locations (Appendix I).

Task #3

Task #3 asked the participant to find historical weather information from last year. All participants had issues with this task. The researcher intentionally worded this task so as not to give away the solution by saying, "search under Monthly to find last year's weather". Participants didn't know where to begin to look for this information. The header gives options for Today > Hourly > 10 Day > Monthly > Weekend > Radar > Lee > More Forecasts.



Participant #3 looks for a historical weather tab in the header but doesn't find one. Instead, she goes to the hamburger menu and finds a tab for almanac. Participant #2 clicks on More Forecasts looking for the answer and finds what he thinks is correct, a link to Yesterday's Weather. This opens a tab to a different website but gives no data about the historical weather. He eventually finds it in the Monthly tab in the header.



Summary

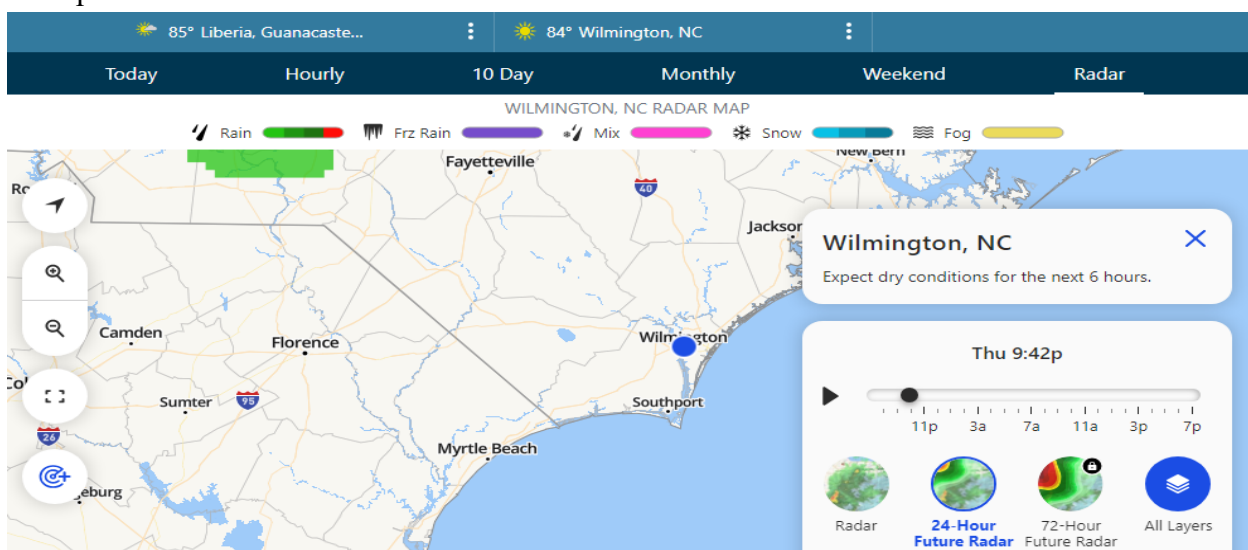
No data recorded

Daily Observations

No Data Recorded

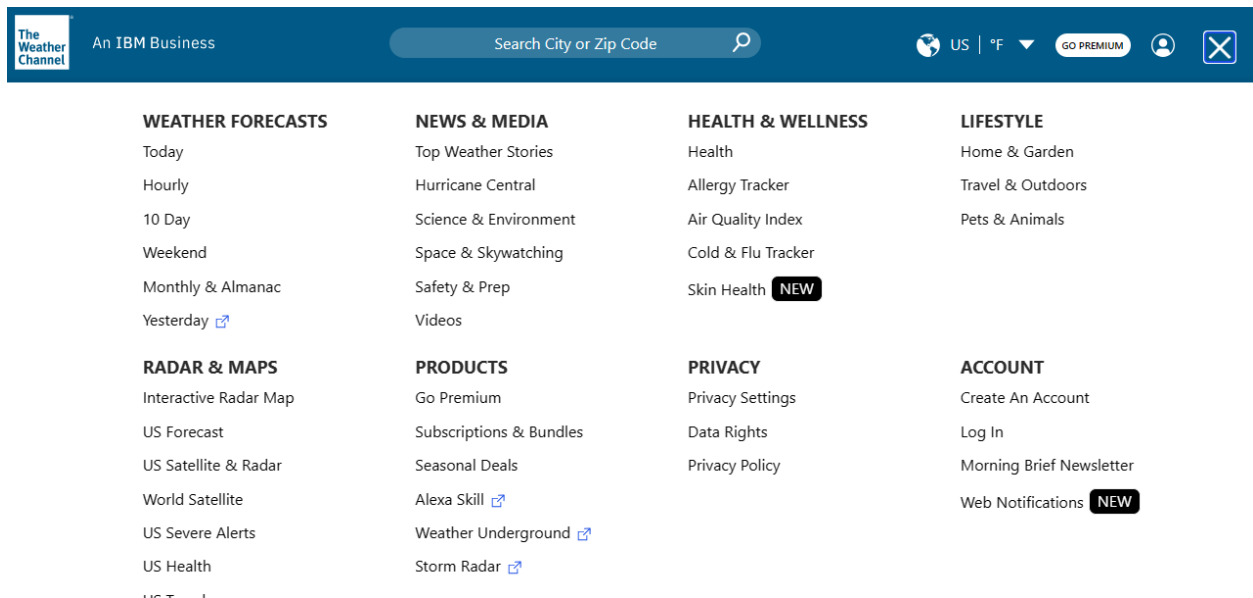
Task #4

Task #4 asks the participant to look at a radar map to track weather patterns in their current location. The participants have been completing tasks related to Costa Rica's weather, causing initial confusion when looking for a radar map in their location. Participant #3 found the radar map easily in the header. However, she noted there is no search bar to type in a location on the map, which she thought would have been useful. She found that clicking the navigation icon took her to her location. Participant #2 switches to his current location by clicking on the location saved in the header under the search bar. He clicks on the 72-hour radar but finds that it's a premium feature.



Task #5

Task #5 asks participants to find an article on how to get ready for hurricane season. This is another task that took a while. All participants looked in the hamburger menu and searched in the News & Media and clicked Hurricane Central. The more efficient option would be to look in Safety & Prep, but none went there first because it was further down on the list.



Participant #1 searches through many articles in the Hurricane Central page but doesn't find one about preparing for hurricane season. She suggests that there should be a search bar to find articles by keywords. Eventually she goes back to the hamburger menu and finds the article under Safety & Prep. The suggestion for a search bar was also mentioned by Participant #3 in the exit questionnaire (Appendix J). Participant #2 takes a different approach. His first instinct was to click on Costa Rica's location to see if there's a top story about hurricanes. He does find news articles on that page, but none are specific to Costa Rica. He then follows the same pattern as participant #1 and inefficiently searches through Hurricane Central before eventually finding his way to Prep & Safety.

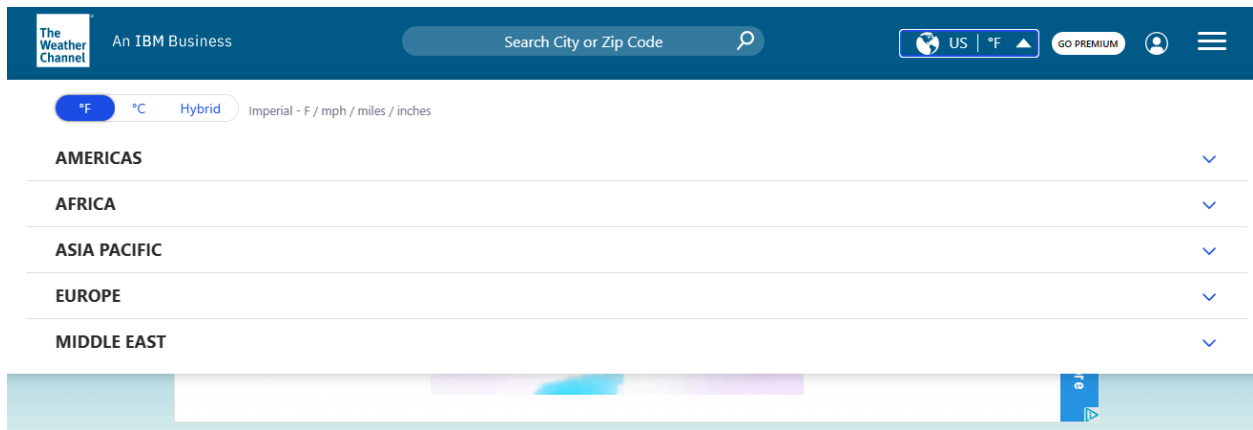
Task #6

Task #6 asked participants to see if pollen is an issue in Costa Rica. Participant #2 quickly located the pollen forecast by accessing the hamburger menu and selecting "Allergy Tracker." It wasn't clear if the forecast was for Costa Rica or his current location and the only way for him to

check was by clicking on his current location and seeing if the pollen forecast changed (it did). Participants #1 and #3 had a more difficult time. Participant #1 scrolls through the entire page looking for it, finding a link to an air quality forecast, however, this gives no information about pollen. The participant then navigated to the hourly forecast, hoping to find relevant information but was unsuccessful. She makes the comment that she wouldn't use a weather website to check for pollen, rather, she would google it. She is about to give up when she finds it under More Forecasts. In the exit questionnaire, Participant #1 highlighted her frustration regarding the pollen forecast, noting that it did not specify the city for which the forecast was applicable (Appendix H).

Task #7

Task #7 was the final task. It asked participants to change the temperature scale from Fahrenheit to Celsius. All participants expected to be able to toggle between Fahrenheit and Celsius by clicking on the current temperature. After discovering that was not an option, they all eventually found the F at the top of the screen and changed the scale there.

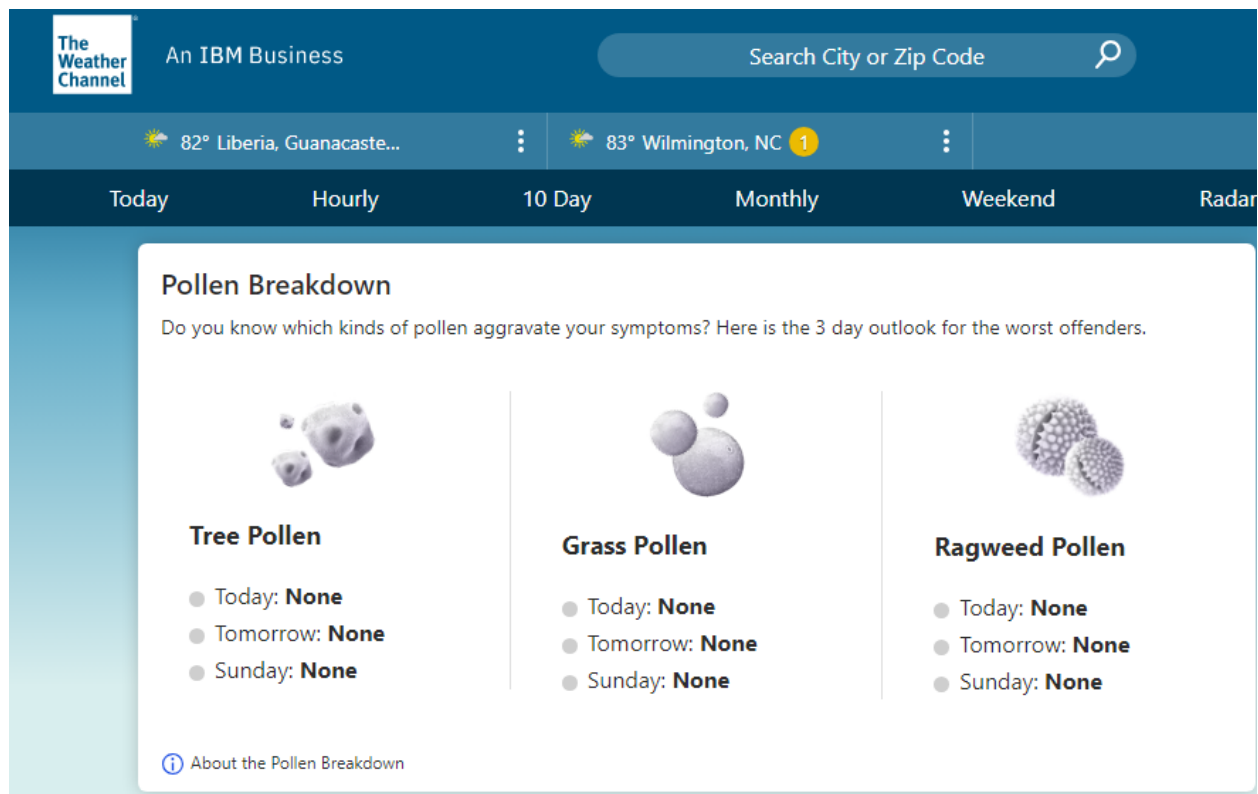


Recommendations

Based on the findings from the usability tests, several logical and necessary revisions are recommended to enhance the Weather Channel's website's usability and user experience.

Clear Labeling for Location in Pollen Forecast

It is recommended to improve the clarity of location in the pollen forecast. All participants expressed confusion about whether the forecast was for their current location or Costa Rica. A clear indication of the location associated with the pollen forecast would enhance user understanding. This could be achieved by simply labeling the location next to the “Pollen Breakdown”.



Minimize Intrusive Ads

Participants #1 and #3 encountered ad pop ups, which disrupted user experience. Participant #2 didn't experience this because he had an ad blocker enabled. The researcher understands ads are used to make money for the website, but the Weather Channel should at least remove pop up ads to minimize interruptions in the user flow. Participant #3 mentioned in the exit questionnaire that the ads made her want to leave the website (Appendix J).

Search Functionality for Articles

Task #5 demonstrated that participants had difficulty finding specific articles. To streamline the process, a search bar within the "News & Media" should be implemented to allow users to search for articles by keywords.

Content Relevance

Participant #2's feedback made a valid point about the news articles unrelated to weather. When examining the homepage, he noticed articles about Jimmy Buffet, and "Is beer good for you?". To enhance user satisfaction, the website should prioritize weather-related content over clickbait articles. The content strategy should focus on providing accurate and timely weather reports.

Temperature Scale Conversion

Task #7 indicated that participants expected to change the temperature scale by clicking on the current temperature. To enhance user-friendliness, users should be able to toggle between Fahrenheit and Celsius directly from the temperature display.

These recommendations are based on the usability test findings and aim to address the challenges and issues identified during the evaluation process. The Weather Channel's website can be made more user-friendly and efficient by implementing these changes.

References

The Weather Channel. "The Weather Channel | Weather.com." *The Weather Channel*, 2023, weather.com.

Krug, Steve. *Rocket Surgery Made Easy: The Do-it-yourself Guide to Finding and Fixing Usability Problems*. New Riders Pub, 2010.

Appendix A

Welcome Script

Thank you for participating in this usability test. I'm interested in gathering your feedback on The Weather Channel's website to determine how user-friendly it is.

Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers, and your honest opinions are valuable.

As you use the site, I'm going to ask you as much as possible to think out loud: say what you're looking at, what you're trying to do, and what you're thinking. This will be a big help to me.

Let me know if you have any questions as we go along. I may not be able to answer them right away, since I'm interested in how people do when they don't have someone sitting next to them to help. But if you still have any questions when we're done I'll try to answer them then.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix B

Blank Entry Questionnaire

Please examine The Weather Channel's homepage. You can scroll up and down but don't click on anything yet.

1. What do you think this site is for?
2. Are there any aspects of the homepage that catch your attention?
3. Do you find the layout and organization of the homepage to be visually appealing?

Appendix C

Completed Entry Questionnaire #1

Please examine The Weather Channel's homepage. You can scroll up and down, but don't click on anything yet.

1. What do you think this site is for?

To inform the person what the weather is currently or in the future and to discuss news.

2. Are there any aspects of the homepage that catch your attention?

Attractive graphics.

3. Do you find the layout and organization of the homepage to be visually appealing?

Yes, the layout is spaced out well making it easy to find what I need.

Appendix D

Completed Entry Questionnaire #2

Please examine The Weather Channel's homepage. You can scroll up and down, but don't click on anything yet.

1. What do you think this site is for?

I think the site is for checking the weather and weather related news.

2. Are there any aspects of the homepage that catch your attention?

Saw that there is a hurricane. This matters to me because I live on the East Coast.

I noticed that my location was accurate even though I am running a VPN.

It seems to be click bait news rather than a weather forecast like I expected.

3. Do you find the layout and organization of the homepage to be visually appealing?

I do find it visually appealing. The different shades of blue are great. The gradient behind the content transitions into the mid page news stories well. The top page content blends in with the blue site theme.

Appendix E

Completed Entry Questionnaire #3

Please examine The Weather Channel's homepage. You can scroll up and down, but don't click on anything yet.

1. What do you think this site is for?

I think this website is for checking the weather.

2. Are there any aspects of the homepage that catch your attention?

The first thing I notice are the ads. Everything on the website is static except for the ads so they are eye-catching.

3. Do you find the layout and organization of the homepage to be visually appealing?

The layout is nice and organized but the ads are annoying.

Appendix F

Task Introduction

Suppose you are planning a vacation to Costa Rica. You want to understand the weather conditions there to ensure a pleasant and safe trip. You use the Weather Channel's website as a resource for weather information. Before your upcoming vacation, you'll want to explore the website in depth to familiarize yourself with it so you can find all the weather-related information you may need.

Task #1

You're going shopping for travel supplies and want to check the weather before you head out. Find the current weather conditions for your location, and what the weather will be in a few hours from now.

Task #2

You are planning to go to Liberia, Costa Rica this week. Check what the weather will be there for the next few days. Find information for rain, wind, humidity, and UV index.

Task #3

You're curious about what the weather was like last year at this time. See what the temperatures in Liberia were last year in this month.

Task #4

You want to see if there are weather conditions that will affect your flight for this week. Access a radar map to track weather patterns.

Task #5

Hurricane season in Liberia is from June to November. Find an article on how to get ready for hurricane season.

Task #6

Pollen aggravates your allergies. Find out whether you need to pack medication for your trip.

Task #7

Celsius is the standard for weather reporting and everyday use in Costa Rica. Change the temperature scale from Fahrenheit to Celsius.

Appendix G

Blank Exit Questionnaire

1. If you could change one thing about the Weather Channel's website, what would it be?
2. What did you like best about the Weather Channel's website?
3. Were there any specific features or sections of the website that you found particularly useful or frustrating?
5. How satisfied are you with the overall usability and user experience of the Weather Channel's website? Please rate on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
6. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback regarding the Weather Channel's website that you would like to share?

Thank you for participating in this usability study!

Appendix H

Completed Exit Questionnaire #1

1. If you could change one thing about the Weather Channel's website, what would it be?

Better user-face.

2. What did you like best about the Weather Channel's website?

Graphics were easy to follow/understand.

3. Were there any specific features or sections of the website that you found particularly useful or frustrating?

Cities were not always labeled (referring to pollen forecast)

4. How satisfied are you with the overall usability and user experience of the Weather Channel's website? Please rate on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

4

5. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback regarding the Weather Channel's website that you would like to share?

No thank you :)

Appendix I

Completed Exit Questionnaire #2

1. If you could change one thing about the Weather Channel's website, what would it be?

Less click bait articles unrelated to what I want from a weather forecast site.

2. What did you like best about the Weather Channel's website?

I like the ability to switch between two locations quickly.

3. Were there any specific features or sections of the website that you found particularly useful or frustrating?

I like the location toggle. I did not like the articles. I felt the content was overdramatic and had a fearful theme that is unnecessary. I just wanted to know the weather forecast.

4. How satisfied are you with the overall usability and user experience of the Weather Channel's website? Please rate on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

3

5. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback regarding the Weather Channel's website that you would like to share?

I am glad that I have an ad blocker on because this site would be bad without it.

Appendix J

Completed Exit Questionnaire #3

1. If you could change one thing about the Weather Channel's website, what would it be?

Get rid of ads.

2. What did you like best about the Weather Channel's website?

Easy to read, simple to use.

3. Were there any specific features or sections of the website that you found particularly useful or frustrating?

It is frustrating that there isn't a search bar for the articles.

4. How satisfied are you with the overall usability and user experience of the Weather Channel's website? Please rate on a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

4

5. Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or feedback regarding the Weather Channel's website that you would like to share?

The ads made me want to leave the site.