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Researchers develop software package that adapts Facebook for visually impaired people

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This new software was developed by researchers at the Department of Programming Languages and Systems of the University of Granada.. So far, there were only special social networks specifically developed for visually impaired people, such as Blindworlds. Researchers at the University of Granada have developed a software package that adapts Facebook for visually impaired people.

The author of this study -which is still in an experimental stage- is Josefa Molina López, coordinated by professor Nuria Medina Medina, a member of the GEDES research group of the Department of Programming Languages and Systems of the University of Granada."So far, there were only social networks specifically designed for blind people, as Blindworlds (www.blindworlds.com), but social networks were not fitted with screen readers to make them accessible to blind people" Josefa Moina states.

In fact, the Spanish national organization of visually impaired people (ONCE) has criticized that the most popular social networks are not accessible to visually impaired people.

Facebook's Poor Accessibility

To show Facebook's poor accessibility, the researchers asked three user groups to perform a set of tasks using assistive technology (a screen reader). The groups were as follows: a group including people without any visual impairment; another group of people with severe visual impairment and an advanced knowledge of screen readers; and a group of people with severe visual impairment and a starter level of knowledge of screen readers. The researchers measured the time spent by each group to perform the tasks and recorded the challenges found by users. In case the user could not successfully perform a task, the researchers recorded the cause.

The researchers used the results obtained during this stage to figure out how to improve Facebook's accessibility. To achieve this, they used atomic refactoring sequences -changes that improve the internal structure of the code but do not change its external behavior. In all cases, they achieved to reduce the time devoted by the blind to perform the tasks. In fact, they even could perform some tasks they had not been able to perform before.

Source: http://canal.ugr.es/information-and-communication-technologies/item/62202

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