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# The Relationship between User Perception and User Behaviour in Interactive Information Retrieval Evaluation

Mengdie Zhuang, Elaine G. Toms, and Gianluca Demartini

Information School, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S10 2TN,UK

{mzhuang1, e.toms, g.demartini}@sheffield.ac.uk

**Abstract** Measures of user behaviour and user perception have been used to evaluate interactive information retrieval systems. However, there have been few efforts taken to understand the relationship between these two. In this paper, we investigated both using user actions from log files, and the results of the User Engagement Scale, both of which came from a study of people interacting with a novel interface to an image collection, but with a non-purposeful task. Our results suggest that selected behavioural actions are associated with selected user perceptions (i.e., focused attention, felt involvement, and novelty), while typical search and browse actions have no association with aesthetics and perceived usability. This is a novel finding that can lead toward a more systematic user-centered evaluation.

**Keywords:** user-centered evaluation; user perception evaluation; user behaviour evaluation

## 1 Introduction

Typically, interactive information retrieval (IIR) systems evaluations assess search processes and outcomes using a wide range of measures such as time-on-task, user satisfaction, and number-of-queries submitted. Some of these measures relate to *user perception* of the results, the search experience, or the interface; they use data from user responses to questions collected either during or after a search task is complete. Some measures relate to *user behaviour*, that is, the actions and selections made by the user while interacting with a system. These measures are calculated from data collected by system log files while the user is in the process of searching or browsing, and include, typically, time/date stamp, interface object used (e.g., mouse movements, search box), and keystrokes. Most evaluations will include a combination of these measures particularly in lab-based studies. In general we presume that both types of measures are indicative of performance, opinion and outcome.

This research uses an existing dataset that contains both perception and behavioural data to test the relationship between the two. This will be a first step toward testing

the hypothesis that user behavioural actions predict user perceptions of IR systems. If this is indeed the case, the assessment of IIR evaluations can be significantly simplified for automatic data collection of essential measures. At the same time strong correlations (if they exist) among the various perception and behavioural measures will suggest that the measures are evaluating the same phenomena, which may lead to a more parsimonious set of measures. Surprisingly, we still do not know which measures are the more reliable and robust, and indicative of overall results.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses how both user perception and behaviour are used in IIR evaluations. Section 3 describes the dataset used in this study, the measures extracted from the dataset, and our approach to the analysis. Sections 4-6 deal, respectively, with the results, discussion and conclusions.

## 2 Background

The evaluation of IR systems has puzzled the field for half a century. Initially relevance emerged as the measure of preference to assess primarily topical relevance using, e.g., mean average precision, mean reciprocal rank, and discounted cumulative gain [15]. But with *interactive* IR came a focus on users and their needs, which examined the effect of individual differences [6, 9] on search, and evaluated search outcomes [16], as well as user behaviour [24] and user perception [16] of the search process. More recently broader aspects of user context [5, 8] have been considered.

Due to the iterative nature of the search process, we do not know if and when an outcome meets a user's need. A user may assess an outcome immediately, but when the task that prompted the search is complex, that judgment may only come after a succession of search tasks (and other types of information tasks) and over a period of time. Individual differences such as age, gender, expertise, mental effort, and learning style may affect the process, but there is as yet definitive influential set [1, 6, 8].

The core measures used in evaluations to date have tended to combine elements of user behaviour (e.g., number of queries) and perception (e.g., satisfaction) as demonstrated by results of the various TREC, INEX and CLEF interactive tracks over the years. These have been characterized in multiple ways [14, 19, 25]. One of the few attempts to examine the interactions between these two dimensions is the work of Al-Maskari and Sanderson [1, 2], who examined the relationship between selected aspects of behaviour and perception, and found significant associations between user satisfaction and user effectiveness (e.g., completeness), and user satisfaction and system effectiveness (e.g., precision, recall). To our knowledge, there is only one measure that integrates user behaviour with user perception: Tague-Sutcliffe's informativeness measure [20] that assesses the performance of the system simultaneously with the perception of the user. But this is atypical and due to the effort (e.g., constant user feedback) required in implementation is rarely used [10].

## 2.1 User Perception

The multiple measures of user perception are often associated with measures of perceived usability. Satisfaction, for example, was borrowed from usability research and tends to be consistently deployed in IIR studies. Other measures include ease of use, perception of time, and usefulness of results. All are measured post the user's interaction with the system, and require user response to a set of questions or items.

One recent multi-dimensional measure is the User Engagement Scale (UES) [16] which calculates six dimensions (Table 1) of a user experience: Aesthetic Appeal, Novelty, Focused Attention, Felt Involvement, Perceived Usability, and Endurability (see definitions in Table 1). The scale contains 31 items; each item is presented as a statement using a 5 point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Unlike other measures, the model underpinning the UES shows how Endurability is explained either directly or indirectly by the other five dimensions. The UES has been used to evaluate multiple types of systems (e.g., e-shopping [16], wikiSearch [17], Facebook [4]). This scale follows standard psychometric scale development methods [7], and has been tested for reliability and validity. Although differences have emerged [17] in the various applications, it is the most tested measure of user perception of a system.

## 2.2 User Behaviour

How a user interacts with a search system is characterized typically by a set of low-level user actions and selections at the interface (see [2, 14, 18, 20]):

- frequency of interface object use, e.g., number of times search box has been used;
- counts of queries, categories viewed in a menu, mouse clicks, mouse rollovers;
- time spent using objects, viewing pages.

Multiple efforts have attempted to look for patterns in these actions, patterns that might have the capability to predict likelihood of a successful outcome [21, 24]. The challenge with user behaviour measures is that they are only *descriptive* of the outcome, and are not *interpretive* of the process. That is to say, they lack the rationale behind why those behaviours may lead to a successful outcome. The challenge with log files is the voluminous number of data points and the need to find a reliable approach to defining groups or sets based on behavioural patterns. Not all users are alike and nor do they all take the same approach to searching for the same things as evidenced by the TREC, INEX and CLEF interactive tracks.

## 2.3 Research Objectives

We hypothesise that behavioural patterns are indicative of a user perception of IIR system usage. That is, selected behavioural variables are associated with selected user perceptions of the user's interaction with that system. We test this hypothesis by isolating measures of user behaviour as represented by actions in a log file and examining the association with a user perception of their experience as measured by the UES.

### 3 Methods

#### 3.1 Overview

We used the data collected by the CLEF 2013 Cultural Heritage Track (CHiC). This section briefly describes that dataset, the measures we extracted from the dataset, and how we approached the analysis, but see [12] for the details of that study.

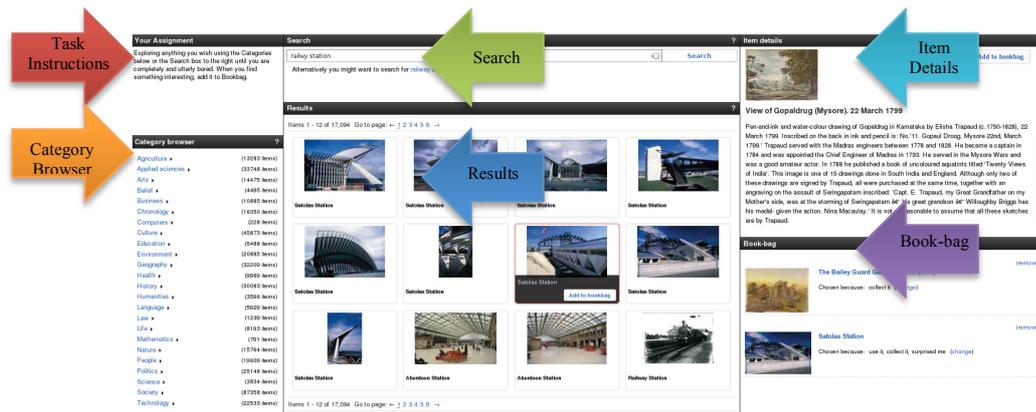


Fig. 1. CHiC Culture & Heritage Explorer user interface [12]

#### 3.2 Dataset

**Application System.** The system, an image *Explorer*, based on Apache Solr<sup>1</sup> contains about one million records from the Europeana Digital Library’s English language collection. The Explorer was accessed using a custom-developed interface (see Fig. 1 [12]), adapted from wikiSearch [22], with three types of access: 1) hierarchical category browser, 2) search box, and 3) a metadata filter based on the Dublin core ontology although the labels were modified for better user understanding. The interface used a single display panel that brought items to the surface leaving the interface structure as a constant. Using one of the three access methods, participants searched or browsed the content, adding interesting items into a book-bag, and at the same time providing information about why the object was added using a popup box.

**Task.** Participants first read the scenario: “Imagine you are waiting to meet a friend in a coffee shop or pub or the airport or your office. While waiting, you come across this website and explore it looking at anything that you find interesting, or engaging, or relevant...” The next display, Figure 1, presented the browse task with no explicit goals in the upper left corner: “Your Assignment: explore anything you wish using the Categories below or the Search box to the right until you are completely and utterly bored. When you find something interesting, add it to the Book-bag.”

<sup>1</sup><http://lucene.apache.org/solr/>

**Participants.** 180 participants volunteered with 160 on-line participants and 20 in-lab participants who were recruited via a volunteers' mailing list.

**Procedure.** Participants (both lab and online) used a web-based system, SPIRES [11] which guided them through the process. The only difference between the two is that lab participants were interviewed, which is outside the scope of this analysis. The SPIRES system started with an explanation of the study, acquired informed consent, and asked for a basic demographic profile and questions about culture before presenting the Explorer and the task to participants. Once participants had executed the task, and essentially were "bored," they moved on to the 31 item UES questionnaire [7, 16] about their perceptions of the search experience and the interface, and provided a brief explanation of objects in the book-bag, the metadata and the interface.

### 3.3 Measures

The following measures (see Table 1) were extracted from the CHiC study data:

1. User perception measures: the UES with six user perception dimensions[16];
2. User behaviour: 13 variables that represent typical user actions e.g., examining items, selecting categories, and deploying queries. Times were measured in seconds.

**Table 1.** List of perception and behaviour measures

Variable	Definition
<i>User Perception measures -- the User Engagement Scale (UES)</i>	
Aesthetic Appeal	Perception of the visual appearance of interface.
Felt Involvement	Feelings of being drawn in and entertained in interaction.
Focused Attention	The concentration of mental activity, flow an absorption.
Novelty	Curiosity evoked by content.
Perceived Usability	Affective and cognitive response to interface/content.
Endurability	Overall evaluation of the experience and future intentions.
<i>User Behaviour measures</i>	
Queries	Number of queries used
Query Time	Time spent issuing queries following the links
Items viewed (Queries)	Number of items viewed from queries
Bookbag (Queries)	Number of items added to Bookbag from queries
Topics	Number of categories used.
Topics Time	Time spent exploring categories and following links
Items viewed (Topics)	Number of items viewed from categories
Actions	Number of actions (e.g., keystrokes, mouseclicks)
Pages	Number of pages examined
Bookbag Time	Total time spent reviewing contents of Bookbag.
Bookbag (Total)	Number of items added to the Bookbag
Bookbag (Topics)	Number of items added to Bookbag from category.
Task Time	Total time user spent on the task.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

**Data Preparation.** After extracting the data, each participant set was scanned for irregularities. Pilot participants and those who did not engage (e.g. left the interface for hours) were removed. 157 participants remained. The two datasets were saved into a spreadsheet or database for preliminary examination, and exported to SPSS.

**User Perception.** First, Reliability Analysis assessed the internal consistency [3] of the UES sub-scales using Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Second, the inter-item correlations among items were used to test the distinctiveness of the sub-scales. Third, Exploratory Factor Analysis using Maximum Likelihood with Oblique Rotation (as we assumed correlated factors [18]) to estimate factor loadings tested the underlying factors, to compare with previous UES analyses, and validate it for use in this research.

**User Behaviour.** First, the raw log file data were exported to a spreadsheet. A two-step data reduction process sorted 15396 user actions into 157 participant groups containing participant id, time stamp, action type and parameter. Next Exploratory Factor Analysis (using Maximum Likelihood with Oblique Rotation) was used to identify the main behavioural classes. These then were used to calculate the measure per participant for each variable listed in Table 1. Finally, Cluster Analysis extracted symbolic user archetypes across 157 participants.

**Correlation Analysis.** Correlation analysis using Pearson's  $r$  was then used to examine the relationship between user perception and user behaviour.

## 4 Results

The results first present the analysis of the user perception measures, then the user behaviour measures and finally the analysis of the relationship between the two.

### 4.1 User Perception

First, the Reliability Analysis resulted in Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$  to  $0.90$  indicating good internal consistency for each of the sub-scales; values between  $0.7$  and  $0.9$  are considered optimal [7]. Next, correlations among the UES subscales (see Table 2) were tested. Values  $<0.5$  indicate that the sub-scale should remain distinct while  $>0.5$  indicates that the scale might be merged during Factor analysis.

Table 2. Correlations among UES sub-scales (\*\* $p < 0.01$ )

Sub-scale	Aesthetics (AE)	EN	FA	FI	NO
Endurability (EN)	0.692*	1			
Focused Attention (FA)	0.370	0.621*	1		
Felt Involvement (FI)	0.558*	0.826*	0.793*	1	
Novelty (NO)	0.546*	0.715*	0.650*	0.824*	1
Perceived Usability (PU)	0.471*	0.596*	0.206	0.385	0.234

An initial examination of the *scree plot* (i.e., the eigenvalues of the principal components) that resulted from the Factor Analysis identified a four-factor solution that accounted for 59.8% of the variance. A five-factor solution, albeit accounting for 63% of the variance, was less appropriate as only two items were loaded on Factor 5 with lower absolute loading values than those on Factor 4. The four-factor model demonstrated a very high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO = 0.924), indicating that the factors are distinct. The statistically significant result from Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2=3609.9$ ,  $df=465$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) also suggested relationships existed amongst the dimensions. Table 3 summarises the four factors that were generated: Factor 1 contained 11 items from Novelty (3 of 3), Focused Attention (1 of 7), Felt Involvement (3 of 3), and Endurability (4 of 5). Factor 4 remained as in the original UES, Focused Attention (6 of 7) almost remained distinct (Factor 2), and Perceived Usability (8 of 8) plus 1 item from Endurability formed Factor 3. Factor 2-4 had good internal consistency as demonstrated by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . Correlation analysis resulted in significant, although moderate, correlations amongst the factors. Given the results, some of the overlapped items may be removed from Factor 1 (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.95$ ) (see Table 3). However, we used the original factors in our remaining analysis.

**Table 3.** Factors resulting from the Factor Analysis (\*\* $p<0.01$ )

Factor	Sub-scale	Cronbach's $\alpha$	M	n	Factor		
					2	3	4
1	EN, FA, FI, NO	0.95	2.67	11	0.66**	0.45	0.59**
2	FA	0.90	2.19	6		-0.26**	0.36**
3	PU,EN	0.86	3.14	9			0.51**
4	AE	0.89	2.55	5			

## 4.2 User Behaviour

First, we performed Exploratory Factor Analysis on the behavioural measures listed in Table 1 to assess, first if they highly correlate and, second, to identify distinctive groups according to behavioural actions. The result demonstrated a mediocre Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO = 0.634), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2=2736.4$ ,  $df=78$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) suggests that there were relationships amongst the items. This resulted in a three-factor solution, which accounted for approximately 76% of the variance.

Table 4 displays the factor weights for three user behaviour factors. Factor 1 seems to represent search actions, and Factor 2, browsing actions. Factor 3 mainly contains general task-based actions. However, both Actions and Pages are present in both factors, and thus were excluded from further analysis. In order to test for other irrelevant variables in each factor, we performed a reliability analysis by factor ablation measuring *Cronbach's  $\alpha$  if items Deleted*. Notably, the exclusion of Bookbag (Topics) from Factor 3 would yield an  $\alpha$  value of 0.537, which makes it the most critical measure. Factor 1 (Cronbach's  $\alpha =0.846$ ) and Factor 2 (Cronbach's  $\alpha =0.707$ ) reflected good internal consistency. Correlation values between General behaviour and the other two

behaviours are considered as moderate (i.e., 0.362 and 0.251 with 1 and 2 respectively). This indicates that searching and browsing behaviour had a moderate correlation with general behaviour. The correlation between Searching behaviour and Browsing behaviour was 0.621, which is considered significant. The resulting factor from this analysis suggests that participants' behaviours could be described from three main dimensions (Searching, Browsing, and General).

**Table 4.** Exploratory Factor Analysis of user behaviour data

	<b>Factor 1 Searching</b>	<b>Factor 2 Browsing</b>	<b>Factor 3 General</b>
<i>Queries</i>	0.970	-0.019	-0.103
Query Time	0.961	-0.079	0.051
Items viewed (Queries)	0.946	0.057	-0.135
Bookbag (Queries)	0.693	-0.221	0.421
<i>Topics</i>	0.060	0.998	-0.391
Topics Time	-0.162	0.887	0.196
Item viewed (Topics)	-0.077	0.793	0.114
Actions	0.519	0.616	0.102
Pages	0.307	0.394	0.300
<i>Bookbag Time</i>	-0.015	-0.230	1.037
Bookbag (Total)	0.225	0.003	0.824
Bookbag (Topics)	-0.398	0.380	0.749
Task Time	0.275	0.118	0.614

To assess how participants acted, one action item (i.e., the one with highest weight, shown in italics in Table 4), was selected from each factor and submitted to a Cluster Analysis using Ward's hierarchical clustering method [23]. The results were manually inspected including descriptive statistics for each action item, and the resulting dendrogram. The 157 participants best distributed into 3 clusters (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Means of user behaviour variables in each cluster

<b>Cluster</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Queries</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Bookbag Time(s)</b>
1	Explorers	10	18.2	9.8	821.6
2	Followers	98	2.7	10.10	29.8
3	Berrypickers	49	3.96	11.4	137.6

Each of the clusters represents a set of participants who exhibit certain types of behaviours illustrative of information seekers. The first represents *explorers*, who spent the longest time checking items in the book-bag, and used on average the most queries. They were clearly concerned about their results, and specific about what they were looking for. The second group contains directionless *followers*. They do not appear to have specific interests about the content and just trailed the inter-linked categories rather than using queries. They added fewer items to the bookbag, and

appeared to stop early. The third group acted much like Bates' *berrypickers* [5]. Their search and browse activities interacted to sustain participants' interests in the collection. They seemed to obtain information by noticing and stopping to examine other contents, which are not strongly relating to the item that they currently viewing. Some used queries to refine their searches. The interpretation of three clusters suggests the three behavioural factors described the participants in this case. For the subsequent examination of the relationship between perception and behaviour, these three behaviour factors (Table 4) were used.

### 4.3 Relationship Between User Perception and User Behaviour

We tested the relationships among the three user behaviour factors and the six UES sub-scales (see Table 6). The user behaviour factors do not correlate with Aesthetics and Perceived Usability. Of the others, correlations between the searching and browsing behaviour factors and Endurability, Focused Attention, and Novelty were also insignificant. Only the general behaviour had a moderate correlation with Focused Attention, Felt Involvement, and Novelty.

**Table 6.** Correlations between UES sub-scales and user behaviour factors

	<b>Searching</b>	<b>Browsing</b>	<b>General</b>
Aesthetics	0.057	0.09	0.097
Endurability	0.167	0.171	0.277
Focused Attention	0.149	0.233	0.354
Felt Involvement	0.232	0.221	0.383
Novelty	0.279	0.231	0.393
Perceived Usability	0.045	0.101	0.072

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 User Perception

The reliability analysis of all six original UES sub-scales demonstrated good internal consistency, which aligns with previous studies [16, 17]. In our correlation analysis, Perceived Usability had a positive and moderate relationship with Focused Attention, which is in contrast to the results of the wikiSearch study, which found a negative correlation between the two [16]. A key difference between the two studies is the interface and content, e.g., images versus Wikipedia, and multiple access tools versus only a search box.

The original six-dimensional UES structure was developed with e-shopping data [16]. However, our results identified four factors, which is consistent with the result obtained from the wikiSearch study [17] and Facebook [4]. This suggests that in a searching environment, the dimensions of UES structure may remain consistent regardless of data type (text data or image data), or perhaps it is due to the presence of rich information and interactivity. Novelty, Felt Involvement, and Endurability had

been demonstrated to be reliable sub-scales in the e-shopping environment, and some of the items within these sub-scales were used successfully to measure website engagement and value as a consequence of website engagement in online travel planning [13]. This highlights the notion that different user perception dimensions may be more relevant to different interactive search systems. In our setting we observed that Endurability, Felt Involvement, and Novelty show the same information.

## 5.2 User Behaviour

Extracting types of user actions from the logfile resulted in three key behavioural classes that relate to users' search or browse behaviours and their general task-based actions. The searching behaviours were primarily associated with query actions. The browsing behaviours included actions related to using the categories as well as those related to keystroke and mouse activity and what could be construed as navigational activities. Actions and Pages, the items viewed, did not map well to any factor. While the third, which we call *general*, is more associated with actions related to the result and task. Notably actions associated with items selected as a result of using categories fit into this factor, whereas, those that resulted from using a query loaded with the other actions associated with a query.

In addition to examining and grouping the behavioural actions into usable sets, we found a novel set of user archetypes (explorers, followers, berrypickers) among our participant group. The explorers submitted sets of highly relevant queries. More specifically, subsequent queries were aimed at refining former ones. For instance, an explorer exhibited a closely related pathway: modern sculpture, modern british sculpture, hepworth, hepworth sculpture, henry moore, henry moore sculpture, family of man, family of man sculpture. In contrast, the query pathways input by followers and berrypickers are typically short (both pathway and query length), e.g., Scotland, Edinburgh. The user archetypes and pattern of query might be useful in evaluation simulations and in advancing log analysis techniques.

## 5.3 Relationship Between User Perception and User Behaviour

There are little indications of which measures are the reliable and robust. Therefore, as a first step to test the relationships between perception and behaviour measures, correlation values  $>0.35$  should be considered. When we measured correlation of user behaviours with user perception, the results were not as anticipated. User behaviour appears to be not strongly related to a user's perception of Aesthetics and Perceived Usability. How people searched and browsed through the images seems unrelated to their subsequent perception of the system. This may be attributed to user expectations about aesthetics and usability that limit the degree of variation among individuals.

Similarly the searching and browsing behaviours have no strong correlation with Endurability, Focused Attention, Felt Involvement and Novelty. This suggests that single exploring behaviours could not comprehensively contribute to calculating user engagement. However, the general behaviours which had more to do with managing the results had a moderate correlation with Focused Attention, Felt Involvement and

Novelty, which were combined into a single factor in our analysis of the UES. This indicates that system data that shows the general behaviour of users could contribute to these existing user engagement sub-scales; depending on the nature of the experiment, different user behaviour variables could be extracted from log files.

## 6 Conclusion

The key objective of our research was to assess whether a relationship exists between user behaviour and user perception of information retrieval systems. This was achieved by using actions from log files to represent *behaviour* and results from the UES to represent *perception*. The data came from a study in which people had no defined task while interacting with a novel interface to a set of images. In the past, studies have considered measures of behaviour and perception as two relatively independent aspects in evaluation. Our results showed that the aesthetics and usability perceptions of those searching and browsing appear un-influenced by their interactions with the system. However, general actions were associated with attention, involvement and novelty.

In addition, our research tested the UES scale, and like the wikiSearch results [16], we found four factors. This may be because both implementations were in information finding systems, and not the focused task of a shopper [15]. We also produced a novel set of information-seeking user archetypes (i.e., explorers, followers, and berrypickers), defined by their behavioural features which may be useful in testing evaluation simulations and build novel log analysis techniques that simulate user studies. Moreover, these user archetypes were reflective of search reality as behavioural measures were direct observables. On the other hand, user perception measures are based on a psychometric scale or descriptive data and thus are largely affected by context.

Our findings are preliminary and we need to replicate them using additional datasets. We have isolated selected behavioural variables that are significant to the analysis. The emerging relationship with the UES demonstrates that we may be able to isolate selected variables from log files that are indicative of user perception. Being able to do so would mean that IIR evaluations could be parsimoniously completed using only log file data. This means that we need also to refine the UES so that the result consistently outputs distinctive reliable and valid factors that represent human perception. The additional part of the analysis lies with the task and with the user's background and personal experience, which may account for the remaining variance in the result.

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