Concept

Jakob's law

People spend most of their time on other sites, so they expect yours to work the same way as the ones they already know.



In Spanish
Ley de Jakob

Origin
Nielsen (2000); under this name, Nielsen (2017)

What problem it addresses

Explains why an original interface can confuse: people arrive with habits learned on other sites and apply them without thinking.

An example

Getting back to the homepage from an online store.

Logo in the center



Logo in the center: not where people look

A different design, with the logo centered above the menu. **Getting back to the homepage is harder.**

Logo on the left



Logo at the top left, as on other sites

Top left, where it is on most of the sites people already use. **One click takes you back.**

There is nothing new to learn: people apply what they already know from other sites.

Why it happens

1 

We spend almost all our time on sites that are not yours.

2 

That is where we learn where things usually are and how they work.

3 

When we reach yours, we look for the same things in the same place.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Put things where people already look for them, like search or the cart at the top.

Avoid

Reinventing familiar controls, like scrolling or the menu, just to look different.

Don't fall for it

Following conventions does not forbid innovation: change something familiar only if the improvement outweighs the cost of learning it.

6 times

What the research says

In a study with 50 people on 14 online fashion stores, those using a site with a centered logo were 6 times as likely to fail to get back to the homepage in one click as with the logo on the left (Whitenton, 2016).

● ○ ○ **Single study.** It is a single study, small and from a single sector. The law itself sums up Nielsen's experience in usability testing: it did not come from an experiment.

Connections

Used in

- Design system

Related to

- Nielsen's usability heuristics
- Most advanced yet acceptable
- Mental model
- Usability

Authors and works

2000	**Jakob Nielsen**	Put forward the idea in his column “End of Web Design”, as he later explained himself.
2016	**Kathryn Whitenton**	Measured how hard it is to get back to the homepage when the logo is not where people expect it.
2017	**Jakob Nielsen**	Presented it under the name “Jakob’s Law of Internet User Experience”.
2020	**Jon Yablonski**	Gathered it with other user experience laws in the book Laws of UX.

Sources

Original sources

- Nielsen, J. (2000, July 23). End of web design. Alertbox. Nielsen Norman Group. View source (https://www.nngroup.com/articles/end-of-web-design/)
- Nielsen, J. (2017, August 18). Jakob's law of Internet user experience [video]. Nielsen Norman Group. View source (https://www.nngroup.com/videos/jakobs-law-internet-ux/)
- Whitenton, K. (2016, July 10). Centered logos hurt website navigation. Nielsen Norman Group. View source (https://www.nngroup.com/articles/centered-logos/)

Secondary sources

- Nielsen, J. (2023, September 8). Jakob's law of the Internet user experience. Jakob Nielsen on UX (Substack). View source (https://jakobnielsenphd.substack.com/p/jakobs-law)
- Yablonski, J. (2020). Laws of UX: Using psychology to design better products & services. O'Reilly Media. View source (https://www.oreilly.com/library/view/laws-of-ux/9781492055303/)

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