Chapter 29
Faculty Adopters of Podcasting:
Satisfaction, University Support and Belief in Podcasting

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ABSTRACT

Educators have started incorporating iPods for academic purposes and a growing interest exists in using podcasting as an educational tool. However, it remains uncertain whether podcasting will hit the critical mass and become an indispensable teaching tool for the classroom. In this regard, it is critical to evaluate the adoption experience of the faculty and identify the benefits and challenges encountered in the process. This paper derives its theoretical framework from two threads, the original model of the diffusion of innovation and the modified model in the organizational setting, which will help explore the phenomenon of podcast use at universities. This paper examines factors that might have a significant role in the faculty’s experiential use of podcasting.

INTRODUCTION

Educators have been constantly testing technological tools to facilitate learning and teaching. For years, they have implemented a wide range of electronic devices and technological developments in classrooms: radio, closed circuit television and the Internet. E-learning pushes the use of technological tools to an unexpected higher level. In recent years, podcasting has become the buzzword on campus. CNN reports that iPods are “the most in thing among undergraduate college students” ahead of beer and facebook.com (CNN, 2006). It is easy to imagine students using the iPod to make up for lectures they missed, or to brush up on key concepts as the final exam approaches (Read, 2007). Professors of higher education are given a chance to meet students on their own turf.

Though some professors jumped on the bandwagon, “not everyone is sold on the utility of the podcast” (Vestal, 2007). It is uncertain whether podcasting will hit the critical mass and become a majority of professor’s indispensable teaching kit in classroom. However, it is critical
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to evaluate faculty’s adopting experience and identify the benefits and challenges encountered in the process. After all, faculty members are the podcasting adopters, users and practitioners. Their perception and their experience with podcasting will help develop models of applied podcasting practice and inspire continued innovations with the technology and determine the impact of podcasting on higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Podcasting in Higher Education

Podcasting gained public attention in June 2005 when Apple released the iTunes 4.9 software with the addition of a podcast directory (Huntsberger & Stavitsky, 2007). Podcast download continues to increase with 19% of Internet users saying so in April of 2008, up from 12% of Internet users who said so in August 2006 (Madden, 2008). In November 2006, Podcast Alley cataloged 26,000 podcasts with more than 1 million episodes but in August, 2008, podcasts doubled to 43,000 with more than 2 million episodes (Madden, 2008). In promoting podcasts, universities are a strong participating force either with faculty producing podcasts or students developing podcasts (Madden, 2008). Almost all podcast portals have a category that specifically hosts and archives universities’ podcasts. For instance, Podcast Alley has a category called University Channel that archives a collection of public affairs lectures, panels and events from academic institutions all over the world. On the iTunes Store, iTune U was created so that the public can find educational audio and video files from the top universities.

In elaborating the educational outcomes induced by digital technologies, Hoag et al. (2003) pointed to the benefits of engaged learning, increased access to class materials, asynchronous and synchronous communications and more interactions among students. Dennis et al. (2003) added that the profound transformation through digital technologies lies in the extension of traditional boundaries of time and space, of interactions between students and teachers and the exponential growth of access to the resources. The initial research findings on podcasting seem to measure up to the positive speculations while others wonder whether these ubiquitous devices are really achieving educational goals. The so-called “iControversy” was coined to describe this concern (Vess, 2006, p. 479). Some educators reasoned that the podcasting has no inherent pedagogic values because “the pedagogical value of podcasts depends almost entirely on student motivation and the learning ‘context’ of the application” (McCloskey, 2007). Others speculated that “technology must remain subservient to pedagogy less we forget our educational mission” (Miller, 2006).

Good use of podcasting comes from the creative and well-thought planning of materials on podcasts. For example, University of Connecticut Psychology Professor David Miller used iCube, the recorded weekly one-hour discussion of course material or psychological topics when students met with him in his office (Campus Technology, 2007). Georgia College & State University Professor Deborah L. Vess did not want her graduate students simply listen to iPod lectures passively; instead, she created an application that relied on the student as producer of podcasts to foster an active learning environment (Vess, 2006). Such professors reported students had evaluated the use of podcasts positively.

As more instructors began to consider using podcasts to enhance online courses or supplement traditional classroom courses, some institutions (such as Duke University, Stanford and UC Berkeley) have taken a larger stride by implementing campus-wide initiatives to support podcasting practices. However, obstacles abound including technology know-how (Read, 2007); time, resources and IT staff expertise. The uncertainty about the potential impact of podcasting on higher education.

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