Student Acceptance of University Web Portals: A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

A large number of university web portal’s content and design do not meet today’s students’ expectations and requirements. To address students’ expectations, universities spend millions on the redesign and maintenance of their web portals which students say are inadequate and lack basic services. To this end, this study explored the factors that influence students’ acceptance of university web portals. It proposed an extension of Davis’s (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) by adding three user related external constructs in it. A total of 429 usable responses were collected from university students through a web survey. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The results of the study revealed that website quality, perceived self-efficacy, and facilitating conditions were significant in explaining students’ use of university web portals and therefore, indicated that the extended TAM has sufficient explanatory power to explain students’ usage of university web portals. In conclusion, important theoretical and practical implications of the results are presented for both researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: Acceptance, Perceived Self-Efficacy, Structural Equation Modeling, Students’ Technology Acceptance Model, University Web Portal

INTRODUCTION

For over the past two decades, the use of internet technology in educational activities has resulted in significant changes and improvements in the education sector. Colleges and academic communities in the United States first introduced their websites in the mid-1990s (Masrek, 2007). By adding enhanced design graphics, sophisticated technical and interactivity features these websites have been improved, advanced and matured over time. By now, most of the universities have developed their own web portals. These web portals work as gateways to various information and services from multiple sources. Generally, these web portals have multiple interlocked pages which present contents like academics, information about colleges and departments, school email, admission, registration, payments,

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course management system, library system, live transportation information, and campus news etc. The main purpose of these web portals is to virtually convey necessary information to the students as well as to the faculty members and employees of the universities and to provide them option to conduct academic and related activities online.

In general, development and maintenance of web portals are expensive and time consuming (Bringula & Basa, 2011). To achieve the optimal use of web portals, it is imperative that the design and functions of the web portals satisfy users’ expectations. This is true for university web portals as well. The main audiences of university web portals are generally young, computer literate and innovative (Mechitov, Moshkovich, Underwood, & Taylor, 2001) Internet generation students. These students have growing expectations and new demands on university web portals. The design, contents and features of typical university web portals are not always sufficient to serve them. It is not always easy to meet all the expectations of the Internet generation students and satisfy all their information needs through university web portals, unless these are sophisticated and up-to-date according to the students’ requirements. Students tend to care about design, appearance, information availability, the ease of finding specific information, system quality in terms of technical issues, links to pages, speed, connectivity etc. To address students’ expectations, universities spend millions on redesigns and maintenance of university web portals which students say are inadequate and lack basic services. These raise the importance of exploring students’ perceptions of their university web portals, what they appreciate and what they dislike about the web portals and finally what makes a university web portal attractive and more acceptable to its students. Despite their critical importance, there has been relatively little research devoted to cover these issues. The core focus of prior website research has been on large commercial websites which are typically developed and maintained by business corporations (Mechitov et al., 2001).

Very few studies focused on academic websites (i.e., Bringula & Basa, 2011; Masrek, 2007; Mechetiv et al., 2001; Meyer & Jones, 2012; Wilson & Meyer, 2009). Existing research on university websites has focused mainly on potential students’ view of university websites in regards to the college search process, admission process, or faculty views of university web portals (Bringula & Basa, 2011). Some of them are comparative studies (i.e., Mechetiv et al., 2001; Meyer, 2008), some focused on one of the specific features of the university websites: homepages (i.e., Meyer, 2008), department website, (i.e., Zengin, Arikan, Dogan, 2011), web based learning (i.e. Lau & Woods, 2009; Liaw, Huang & Chen, 2007; Park, 2009). Thus, exploring students’ perception and attitudes toward university web portals and the underlying factors that affect their attitudes seem an important area to research, which is the focus of this study. Taking a holistic view, this study focuses on a university web portal as a whole. It proposes an extension of Davis’s (1989) Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to determine students’ attitude toward university web portals. This study seeks to understand the factors that affect students’ usage of university web portals by examining the validity of a proposed extension of the original TAM framework.

This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the effect of additional user-related variables on the original TAM constructs and hence extending the TAM. The study has potential to inform on the use of university web portal by students. Through a better understanding of the students’ attitudes and the factors that affect their attitudes toward using university web portals, higher educational institutions will be better placed to develop, modify and upgrade university web portals, make them more useful to the students and ensure increased student usage of the university web portals.

The next section of this paper presents a brief description of original TAM. Following this, a summary review of literature on users’ attitude toward web portals in general as well as toward university web portals is presented to explain the basis of the proposed extension.