Towards Understanding the Determinants of Employees’ E-Learning Adoption in Workplace: A Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) View

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ABSTRACT

E-learning has been widely used as a prominent solution to provide on-demand learning opportunities to reduce training time and cost. While e-learning acceptance has received a significant attention in academic/student domain, little research has been conducted in organizational setting. This paper aims to contribute to understanding the underlying factors which influence employees’ intention towards using e-learning systems, through developing and proposing a conceptual research model based on one of the most comprehensive behavioral theory, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). The proposed conceptual model first examines the native UTAUT constructs and then, by borrowing insight from other theories in the literature, expands the UTAUT theory to account for more context-specific e-learning factors in a workplace setting, namely, perceived organizational support, e-learning self-efficacy, perceived e-learning content quality and e-learning satisfaction. The paper also identifies directions for an empirical examination of the proposed research model in future.

KEYWORDS

E-Learning, Technology Acceptance, Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), Workplace E-Learning

INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the needs of today’s highly competitive global economy, employees must be up-to-date with the latest knowledge and technologies (Lin & Wang, 2012; de Melo Pereira et al., 2015; Yoo et al., 2015). To cultivate a highly trained and educated workforce, organizations have invested substantial resources in developing e-learning alternatives to traditional types of training systems (Lee et al., 2011). E-learning, which refers to a wide set of applications and processes such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration, has been widely adopted by organizations as an emergent approach for enhancing the skills of knowledge workers. This electronic method of learning offers a wide range of benefits such as cost-effectiveness, delivery-efficiency, self-management of learning, on-demand training, and time/place-free availability (Cheng et al., 2011).

While e-learning systems are increasingly being used and have been proven to be beneficial to the employees, these systems remain underutilized in many organizations (Lee et al., 2011). In spite of the great importance of web-based learning systems in organizations, some potential users choose
Christopher Pappas, the founder of The e-Learning Industry’s Network, which is the largest online community of professionals involved in the e-learning industry, stated that 2.5 billion dollars were invested on corporate e-learning in 2015 (Christopher Pappas, 2015). Despite this huge investment, in many countries, a large number of corporate e-learning initiatives have found to be a failure, or at least not productive enough, due to lack of adoption by employees (Cheng et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the underlying factors that determine the use of web-based learning systems within organizations (Karaali et al., 2011).

Prior research examining the adoption and use of E-learning systems has used many theories and models to study a broad range of factors at organizational and individual levels (Cheng et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2011; Alrawashdeh et al., 2012; Punnoose, 2012; Karan & Chakraborty, 2015; Renda dos Santos & Okazaki, 2015). The extant research has tried to explain e-learning adoption based on user perceptions of the technology such as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Many early studies sought to use Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain the adoption of E-learning systems and expanded the model to explain the intention and use behavior of students and employees (Punnoose, 2012; Cheung & Vogel, 2013; Cakır & Solak, 2015; Mohammadi, 2015; Renda dos Santos & Okazaki, 2015). Upon development of Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) by Venkatesh et al. (2003), which is a parsimonious and robust model of technology acceptance based on consolidation of several earlier models and theories, a number of researchers have used UTAUT, and extended UTAUT, to predict factors affecting web-based and e-learning system use (Chen, 2011; Cheng et al., 2011; Paola Torres Maldonado et al., 2011; Alrawashdeh et al., 2012; Yoo, Han, et al., 2012). However, most of these studies are mainly focused on the e-learning system acceptance of students and few of them have evaluated the UTAUT model in the context of workplace e-learning (Cheng et al., 2011). This research is an attempt to address this gap. The specific objective of the study is to propose an extended version of the UTAUT to investigate the underlying factors that influence employees’ decisions to accept and use of an e-learning system. This paper covers the research model development. The model is to be empirically validated in the future upon completion of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Technology Adoption, and UTAUT Model

Individual adoption and use is one of the richest streams of IS research, with several models explaining the key dependent variables of interest, that is, behavioral intention to use a system and system use (Venkatesh et al., 2011). Behavioral intention is defined as “a person’s subjective probability that he will perform some behavior” (Sykes et al., 2009). System use is defined as the frequency, duration, and intensity of an employee’s interactions with a particular system (Al Awadhi & Morris, 2008; Venkatesh et al., 2011). In the last three decades, the extensive efforts of researchers to understand the determinants of technology acceptance has resulted in a plateau of theory and models on adoption and use of technology. In 2003, Venkatesh et al. proposed the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) based on consolidation of eight well-recognized competing models and theories, namely, theory of reasoned action (TRA), theory of planned behavior (TPB), technology acceptance model (TAM), the motivational model (MM), model of PC utilization (MPCU), innovation diffusion theory (IDT), social cognitive theory (SCT), and the integrated model of technology acceptance and planned behavior. According to UTAUT, four key constructs determine technology usage intention and behavior: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions. Also, individual level factors (e.g., gender, age, experience and voluntariness of use) are posited to...
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