The Influence of Perceived Source Credibility on End User Attitudes and Intentions to Comply with Recommended IT Actions

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ABSTRACT

Through persuasive communications, information technology (IT) executives hope to align the actions of end users with the expectations of senior management and of the firm regarding technology usage. One highly influential factor of persuasive effectiveness is the source of the persuasive message. This study presents a conceptual model for explaining the influence of source credibility on end user attitudes and behavioral intentions to comply with organizationally motivated, recommended IT actions within a decentralized, autonomous environment. The results of this study suggest that the elements of source competency, trustworthiness, and dynamism are significant determinants of attitudes and behavioral intentions to engage in recommended IT actions. These findings reveal the importance of these elements of effective communication in persuading end users to follow recommended IT activities and advance IT acceptance and adoption research through the application of persuasive communication theory to the domain.

Keywords: Effective Communication, End User Attitudes, Information Technology, Persuasion, Source Credibility

INTRODUCTION

A growing priority among information technology (IT) executives concerns the alignment of end users with strategies and goals relating to the acquisition and use of technology within the firm (Peterson, 2004; Changchit, 2006; Hong, Thong, & Tam, 2006). This is an issue of IT governance and involves all activities that ensure the organization’s technology plans are executed and its policies are implemented (Sambamurthy & Zmud, 1999; Peterson, 2004; Johnston & Hale, 2008). Often, the IT governance posture assumed by the organization mirrors that of its enterprise governance model (Warkentin & Johnston, 2008). For some, that
means the IT decision-making responsibilities are centralized within a single administrative unit that is charged with the administration of IT for the entire firm. For others, their IT function takes on a more decentralized structure in which decision-making responsibilities are distributed on either a departmental or individual level. Within a decentralized environment, end users have autonomy over their respective computing facilities and information assets. As such, the successful implementation of IT within the firm rests largely on the interactions that occur between end users and systems and the degree to which these activities match the desires of management or the needs of the firm as a whole (Ahuja & Thatcher, 2005; Warkentin & Johnston, 2008).

Senior executives create written policies and procedures in order to manage the frequency, purpose, and manner in which end users interact with IT within the firm. Unfortunately, these documents are often incomplete, outdated, or ambiguous, leaving users with no clear direction (Lichtenstein & Swatman, 1997). For many firms, the mere presence of written usage policies is insufficient in eliciting a desired usage behavior among users (Foltz, Cronan, & Jones, 2005). In such cases, secondary communication channels are needed and are available through the dialogue between managers and users found in training and policy awareness programs, as well as in daily informal discussions. Even for those firms that have well-established policy and procedural documents, these supportive communications serve to reaffirm the desires of management (Siponen, Pahnila, & Mahood, 2006).

A key element of this supportive communication is the use of persuasion (Siponen, 2000). Persuasion is commonly cited as an effective method for controlling the actions of others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Siponen, 2000). Particularly in the context of actions involving IT acceptance and use, persuasive arguments can address both the cognitive and social dimensions of the interaction. IT acceptance theories maintain that IT use is a cognitive event in which the human component appraises the benefits possible from the synergy of man and technology and assesses the technology’s ability to facilitate the attainment of goals (Davis, 1989; Robey, 1979; Compeau & Higgins, 1995). Such appraisals include ease of use, usefulness, effort expectancy, performance expectations, self-efficacy, and compatibility, among others (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003; Agarwal & Venkatesh, 2002; Moore & Benbasat, 1991). IT acceptance and use are also social phenomena in which the relationship between the human and system follows the rules of social behavior (Banville & Landry, 1989; Compeau & Higgins, 1995). As part of this social relationship, the human component may consider a system’s approachability and likeability (Schaumburg, 2001).

The use of persuasion for modeling end user and IT interaction, however, is not a panacea. As Cacioppo and Petty (1984) describe, there are many factors, or combinations of factors, that influence the manner in which individuals respond to persuasion. For instance, one’s perception of self-efficacy can have a direct influence on his or her attitudes and intentions to respond in a constructive manner to persuasive messages (Bandura, 1977; Witte, 1992; Thompson, Compeau, & Higgins, 2006). Specifically in the context of IT acceptance and use, if an individual is confident in his or her ability to engage in IT activities, he or she will have a more positive attitude and will more likely participate in the activities if properly motivated (Marakas, Yi, & Johnson, 1998). Other factors include one’s ability to process persuasive arguments and to later recall them accurately (Cacioppo & Petty, 1989), the quality of the message (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980), and frequency of exposure (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980, 1989).

One highly influential factor of persuasive effectiveness concerns the source of the persuasive message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Susan Cramm (2005) may have stated it best,
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