Chapter XIII

Computer Self-Efficacy and the Acceptance of Instant Messenger Technology

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Abstract

AOL instant messenger (IM) is a widely used Internet chat technology. There are indications that users do not find it easy to use initially, and this concerns AOL management; they think that if popular applications are not easy to use, the ability of AOL to attract and hold loyal customers will be impeded. In this chapter, the acceptance of IM technology is investigated within the familiar framework of the technology acceptance model (TAM), in which ease of use plays a pivotal role in promoting acceptance and subsequent use of a given technology. Computer self-efficacy (CSE) is examined for possible antecedent roles in structural models of acceptance processes. It is determined that CSE does operate in a mediating relationship between some of the critical subcomponents of the TAM model but that it does not operate within the strictly defined theoretical boundaries established for general antecedents to the overall TAM process.
Introduction

A leading Internet service provider (ISP), America Online (AOL), considers ease of use to be the defining feature of its consumer Internet access service; this company has secured its market position in the Internet culture by promoting ease of use and convenience (Stafford, 2003; Wired.com, 1998). AOL instant messenger is now one of the key differentiators that the company promotes as it expands its market coverage to business and industrial markets, and IM remains a critical feature with which it intends to maintain its competitive advantage in the consumer ISP market (Joyce, 2002). Managers at AOL view the instant messenger product as a potentially useful business communication tool for use in collaborative communications among work teams, in addition to its well-established reputation as a trendy consumer communication application (Stafford, 2003). They believe that business IM use increases business user involvement with AOL services.

AOL believes this high degree of visibility and user involvement in its IM product will ultimately lead to more profit for the company, as its use promotes increased online activity and subsequently increased opportunities to up-sell users with various e-commerce offers, in addition to the increased audience power for the benefit of online advertising that such online longevity engenders (Gonier, personal communication, May 2001). For these reasons, AOL has been very interested in determining how users are motivated to use IM, as well as in assessing the convenience of the IM utility to new users who may be experimenting with it (Stafford, 2001). This interest on the part of the IM developer in understanding IM user motivations is the basis for the observations and results reported here.

In this chapter, the results of an analysis of data from a large sample of AOL customers is reported in order to demonstrate the motivational factors that influence user acceptance of the instant messenger application. The effects of computer self-efficacy are examined as antecedents to technology acceptance processes related to motivated use of IM. The influence of well-understood usefulness and ease of use motivational constructs are considered in light of user self-efficacy with the IM application, and implications for developing user expectations in order to maximize acceptance and use of IM technologies are examined.

Theoretical Perspectives on IM User Motivations

CSE: User Self-Efficacy for Computer Technology

Bandura’s work in psychology (Bandura 1977, 1978, 1982) is the basis for the modern computer self-efficacy construct. Bandura determined that the degree to which an individual feels capable of performing a task is related to subsequent task performance. Compeau and Higgins (1995a) adapted Bandura’s work to the use of computer technology, and subsequently developed and validated a scale for assessing user perceptions of technological capabilities, which most scholars refer to as the “CSE” scale, for computer self-efficacy. A number of researchers have utilized this CSE scale in the investigation of the evolving TAM, or technology acceptance model (cf. Chau, 2001; Fenech, 1998; Igbaria & Iivari, 1995; Venkatesh, 2000),
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