



# Intranet portals: Marketing and managing individuals' acceptance and use

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## ABSTRACT

With increasing pressure on businesses to digitalize and integrate their internal communications, intranet portals are becoming popular as knowledge banks that distribute tailored information throughout organizations. However, user acceptance of intranet portals is often an issue that could lead to failure of core business functions. This study provides increased understanding of the uptake of intranet portals by developing and testing an intranet portal usage (IPU) model containing antecedents to user acceptance of a recently introduced intranet portal. SEM was used to test the relationships between prior experience, Internet self-efficacy, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, intention to use and usage. Results from a survey of university students indicate that internal marketing communications focused on portal experience and functionality provides the greatest value to the acceptance and use of intranet portals within organizations, while Internet self-efficacy leveraged through portal experience provides a complex relationship to perceived usefulness. Ongoing collaboration between marketing and IT departments benefits the perceived usefulness of portals as users gain familiarity

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## 1. Introduction

Intranet portals are at the forward edge of increasingly pervasive information communication technology (ICT). Organizations are continually faced with the challenges and promised rewards of technology, however implementation issues are common. Economic realities, business re-alignment, and increasing competition are providing pressure for departments that were once autonomous business units to become progressively more collaborative. Of particular note, marketing's increasing use of technology in its activities has led to a dependence on ICT professionals and the systems they implement (Ling and Yen, 2001; Pires and Aisbett, 2003). As organizations implement fully integrated information systems such as intranet portals, employees and stakeholders are expected to quickly and readily accept and adopt ICT.

Intranet portals provide organizations and institutions with a single electronic access point to a large and diverse array of internal web-based information for authorized end users (Schubert and Hausler, 2001). Implementation of intranet portals allows for shared information workspaces that extend and transmit organizational knowledge (Li and Wood, 2005). However, Kakumanu and Mezzacca (2005) noted that issues of design consistency and a lack of extensive research has hampered the acceptance and use of

intranet portals. Consistency issues relate to poor conversion of raw information and data into accessible systems that match the practices and navigation needs of end users (Detlor, 2000). Despite the best efforts of information technology (IT) departments, the user implementation stage of intranet portals remains the most detrimental stumbling block (Damsgaard and Scheepers, 2000).

Ironically, the implementation of intranet portals uncover and highlight issues such as employee IT sabotage and espionage (Band et al., 2006), and what some authors define as a digital divide where an individual's use of technology is hindered by their lack of confidence, competence and prior knowledge (Chinn and Fairlie, 2007; Henning and Van Der Westhuizen, 2004). Poorly implemented intranet portals, and poor subsequent management, have been found to limit dissemination of organizational knowledge, create misinformed or disenchanted employees, inhibit internal and external communication and permit ineffectual customer relationships (Agarwal and Prasad, 1997; Butler, 2003; Stenmark, 2003).

This study aims to increase understanding of the problems and acceptance of intranet portals in organizations from a marketing perspective by extending the technology acceptance model (TAM) to include two external constructs, prior experience and Internet self-efficacy (Davis, 1989).

## 2. Review of the literature

Pickett and Hamre (2002, p. 39) describe an intranet portal as a dynamic and personalized "gateway to network-accessible

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resources” that belongs exclusively to a organization. Also known as corporate portals, enterprise portals, and employees portals, intranet portals evolved from web search engines to customizable, synchronized and real-time repositories of organization’s intellectual capital (Benbya et al., 2004). Intranet portals are generally accessed via a web interface (World Wide Web (WWW)) and allow users to customize the information feeds they receive, as well as the location and visual appearance of this information on a browser page. Advanced intranet portals enable collaboration between users in multiple interactive ways that streamline work efficiencies (Detlor, 2000).

Dias (2001), in an extensive review of the literature, identifies several positive characteristics of intranet portals including; enhanced information life cycle management, greater pin-pointing of organization experts in particular fields, ability to better meet individual user’s information needs, and the fostering of information exchange between employees, suppliers, resellers and customers. Intranet portals are also intrinsically linked to the development of organization knowledge management strategies (Cloete and Snyman, 2003). In addition, the reduction of information overload and the increase in shared organizational knowledge are among the most anticipated benefits of intranet portal implementation (Daniel and Ward, 2005).

However, marketing researchers have yet to address the relationship between intranet portals and organizational impact, often deferring responsibilities in this area to IT professionals who lack marketing and customer focused experience (Clarke and Flaherty, 2003). While several marketing studies address areas such as portal service quality (Bauer et al., 2005; Gounaris and Dimitriadis, 2003), marketing implications for portal acceptance within organizations need development.

The emerging role of intranet portals as the communication centre of many organizations intensifies the importance of research surrounding the use and management of portals (Jacko et al., 2002). Inefficiencies and poor return on investment in intranet portal technology is frequently attributed to a critical mass of employees who are unwilling to accept the new information system(s) (Benbya et al., 2004), “Understanding what motivates people to apply their expertise is key to avoiding the trap of building technology marvels that no one uses.”

The technology acceptance model (TAM) is an empirically validated measure of information technology acceptance (Davis et al., 1989) and is considered a “robust, powerful and parsimonious model for predicting user acceptance” (Gentry and Calantone, 2002; Pagani, 2004; Venkatesh, 1999; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000, p. 187). However, while a growing number of studies use TAM to investigate the acceptance of the WWW (Agarwal and Prasad, 1997; Selim, 2003), marketing discussion of acceptance in the context of alternative Internet based applications and their impact on internal organizational communication is absent.

Prior experience is an adequate predictor of IT usage for both experienced and inexperienced users, with inexperienced users placing a different emphasis on the antecedents of intention and usage (Dishaw and Strong, 1999; Jackson et al., 1997; Taylor and Todd, 1995). However, Brown and Muchira (2004) find that victims of accidental or deliberate personal data tampering were less likely to purchase products online, suggesting that prior experience does not necessarily have a positive effect on technology use. Bettman and Park (1980) find individuals who possess low levels of prior experience with a task are more likely to find the task difficult and tend to give up in favour of an easier resolution. The authors explain this lack of motivation as a result of little prior knowledge and lack of ability to interpret data. However, Bettman and Park note that individuals with high levels of prior experience possess the necessary ability and knowledge, but are de-motivated to process information or complete tasks because they rely on rote solutions. The authors

conclude that individuals with moderate prior experience are most likely to complete a task given their balanced level of ability, knowledge and motivation.

Prior experience alone is unlikely to adequately explain user’s perceptions of their ability and knowledge (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh, 2000). Internet self-efficacy, which taps the cognitive aspect of ability and knowledge, appears to complement prior experience in helping to explain user behaviour. The prior experience used in this study is considered as the “knowledge accumulated from past experiences” with an intranet portal (Ramayah, 2005, p. 11).

The term self-efficacy originates from the study of psychology and concerns the “judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations” (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Studies indicate that people who hold their abilities with computers in low esteem are less likely to use computers and vice versa (Chau, 2001; Igbaria and Ilvari, 1995; Igbaria et al., 1997; Olivier and Shapiro, 1993; Venkatesh, 2000; Venkatesh and Davis, 1996; Yi and Hwang, 2003).

Computer self-efficacy is conceptualized in this study as a general measure of Internet self-efficacy: “the self-perception held by individuals of their ability to interact with the Internet” (Torkzadeh and Van Dyke, 2001, p. 275). Tsai and Tsai (2003) find that students with high Internet self-efficacy have greater online information searching strategies and are more effective learners in web-based environments, indicating that Internet self-efficacy is a significant predictor of technology use in conjunction with the TAM model. Roca et al. (2006) investigate e-learning continuation and find Internet self-efficacy to be a significant predictor of perceived ease of use, where intention is increased by developing user’s beliefs of how the technology under investigation can improve performance and effectiveness.

## 2.1. Intranet portals, prior experience, Internet self-efficacy & TAM

The use of prior experience and Internet self-efficacy as external variables to TAM is well documented (Fenech, 1998; Lederer et al., 1998, 2000; Ramayah et al., 2005; Selim, 2003). Chang (2004) finds prior experience and age to be significant predictors of general Internet use, but non-significant regarding the use of intranet portals. Horton et al. (2001) successfully demonstrate the ability for TAM to detect user acceptance of intranet. When measuring usage of intranet portals the authors note that actual usage data, when available, provides superior results to self-reported usage. They suggest that future investigations should consider testing the validity of TAM in different intranet contexts.

Masrek et al. (2008) find prior experience and Internet self-efficacy are significant contributing factors to decision support, knowledge sharing and different modes of organizational communication in the context of corporate intranets. While these authors suggests that intranet portals aid the flow of information between departments such as marketing and R&D, other marketing communication using intranet portals, such as the flow of information between marketing and internal or external clients, remain uninvestigated (Egan, 2007).

Marketing communication is used to initiate and build relationships; mediate ideas, thoughts and feelings, transfer information, solve problems and simply connect people (Bordia, 1997; Rix et al., 2001). Communications research encompasses the transfer of meaning, as well as the transfer of data, and the use of channels of communication (e.g., technology mediated communication (TMC)) (Eunson, 2005; Rogers and Albritton, 1995). Communication effectiveness is defined as the sharing of meaningful and timely information, with timeliness impacting perceived communication quality, satisfaction and trust (Moorman et al., 1993; Sharma and Patterson, 1999).

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