



Perceived usefulness of podcasting in organizational learning: The role of information characteristics



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ABSTRACT

Podcasting has been used widely to support individuals' learning activities. However, most of the research focuses its use in formal educational contexts. Little attention has been paid to the use of podcasting in organizational settings to support employees' learning activities. To address this gap, this research investigates employees' perceived usefulness (PU) of podcasting to facilitate their learning activities within organizational settings. Using a global company as the case study, the data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using qualitative techniques. The study finds that the characteristics of the information delivered by the podcasts (i.e., information overload, information privacy, and information relevance) play an important role in shaping employees' PU to adopt podcasting for learning. Excitement toward the technology and tenure are also found to have an impact. In fact, contrary to prior findings, which showed the importance of emotions occurring during the use of technologies, towards their ultimate adoption, this study finds that emotions (excitement in our case) in anticipation of podcasting implementation plays a significant role in individual's PU towards adoption. Further, we develop a set of propositions to discuss the relationships between these factors and the PU of podcasting in organizational settings. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Web 2.0 applications (e.g., blogs, wikis, podcasts, RSS (Really Simple Syndication), social networking, etc.) refer to a wide collection of second generation interactive technologies and services that facilitate communication and collaboration among different users using a more socially connected Web (O'Reilly, 2005; Ajjan, Hartshorne, & Buechler, 2012). One distinct characteristic of Web 2.0 applications is that it introduces new communication tools that facilitate information sharing by allowing any users to freely create, edit and share contents (Allen, 2008; Paroutis & Saleh, 2009). Consequently, more and more organizations are now implementing Web 2.0 applications and tools (the phenomenon is termed as enterprise 2.0 by McAfee (2006)) to support employees' learning (Levy, 2009). In a survey of the use of Web 2.0 in enterprises conducted by McKinsey & Company (Bughin & Chui, 2010), 66.7% of the 3249 surveyed executives reported using Web 2.0 in their organizations; and increasing access to knowledge/

experts, and reducing communication costs were the top specified benefits from their use of Web 2.0.

Although Web 2.0 technologies share certain common features such as interactivity (McAfee, 2006), each technology has its own characteristics. For example, blogging is essentially considered as a one-to-many technology in which a primary user communicates to a group using RSS feed technology (McHaney, 2012), while Wiki is a structured website that allows a community of people to develop content collaboratively (Levy, 2009; McHaney, 2012).

Podcasting, an important Web 2.0 technology, is a method of publishing audio or audio/video files to the Internet that allows users to subscribe and receive new files automatically through an RSS feed (von Krogh, 2012). Podcasting has grown in popularity over the years (Berry, 2016). According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Centre, the awareness of podcasts has more than doubled since 2006 with roughly 49% of Americans aged 12 and up were aware of podcasting by early 2015, with 33% of all Americans 12 years of age or older have listened to at least one podcast (Vogt, 2015).

Podcasting is often used as a learning or marketing tool to broadcast organizational knowledge such as training materials and policies and to connect with customers, employees and other

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stakeholders of the organization (Evans, 2008; Moss, O'Connor, & White, 2010). Analogical to radio broadcasting, podcasting is exempt (in the United States) from Federal Communications Commission (FCC) oversight and thus provides regular users the ability to reach millions of listeners instantly (McHaney, 2012). This makes podcasting a form of social media with potential benefits at the organizational level. Despite its increasing popularity and usefulness as an organizational tool, current research on the use of podcasting mainly focuses on educational contexts (Chester, Buntine, Hammond, & Atkinson, 2011; Moss et al. 2010). Its adoption in other organizational contexts has largely remained unexplored.

We argue that podcasting use in organizations is different from that in educational contexts because of the different characteristics of the users. The users in educational settings, mainly being the students, are expected to have different perceived values and beliefs about podcasting as a mechanism of learning compared with the users in organizations, i.e., the employees (Gu, Churchill, & Lu, 2014; Merhi, 2015; Pegrum, Bartle, & Longnecker, 2015). Compared to student users whose main focus is learning, employees have defined roles and responsibilities towards achievement of organizational goals and targets with much stronger commitment to work as well as family (Berry, 2016). With the increasing demands and pressure from modern-day work and life, allocating time for learning becomes more difficult for employees either because of lack of time or lack of motivation, or both (Rosenberg, 2008). Thus, employees might have different attitudes towards the use of podcasting for work purposes (Friedl & Vercic, 2011; Matthews, 2006; Ramadan, 2013). Therefore, the existing findings about podcasting by student users in an educational context might render little insight into employees' use of podcasting in organizational contexts.

Compared with the successful adoption of podcasting in the educational realm, organizations experience a low rate of adoption and use by employees (Kügler et al. 2012). Successful learning activities facilitated through the use of podcasting is critically dependent on the adoption of these technologies by desired individuals (Paroutis & Saleh, 2009). The perceived characteristics of a technology play an important role in shaping an individual's use (Moore & Benbasat, 1991). Therefore, researchers have called for further empirical investigations on barriers and enablers to the adoption and diffusion of Web 2.0 technologies including podcasting in organizations (von Krogh, 2012). Responding to such calls, the purpose of this study is to investigate podcasting's use for individual learning in organizational contexts by studying the following research questions:

(1) What factors and (2) how do these factors influence individuals' perceived usefulness of adopting podcasting to facilitate learning in organizational settings?

This research significantly contributes to the knowledge in a largely unexplored area of podcasting adoption in organizational settings particularly outside the educational domain. Specifically the study:

- 1) empirically identifies five factors that influence users' perception of podcasting adoption in organizational settings (Section 4.1, and 4.2), and
- 2) develops a conceptual model to discuss how these factors influence the perceived usefulness of podcasting from employees' perspectives (Section 5).

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we first review relevant research on podcasting use and perceived usefulness to pave the theoretical background for this research. In section 3, we describe our research method, including case description, data collection techniques and data analysis methods.

The results are presented in the following section. Based on the results, we propose a set of propositions in section 5 to describe their impact on perceived usefulness of podcasting in facilitating individual learning in organizational settings. Finally, we discuss the implications and the limitations of our study, and make recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. Podcasting use in learning

By automatically transferring digital files to portable devices (such as iPod, MP3 players and mobile phones), podcasting provides an easy and low-cost method for users to access information at anytime and anywhere they want (Yoo, 2010). Because of its ability to enhance convenience, flexibility and accessibility to information and knowledge, podcasting has gained increasing popularity in assisting learning activities (McLaughlin, 2006).

Our review of prior research on podcasting use revealed that a majority of the research has been conducted in educational contexts (e.g., Ono, Ishihara, & Yamashiro, 2015; Vasquez, 2015). These studies have mainly explored users' acceptance of podcasting either from students' or instructors' perspectives (e.g., Lin, Zimmer, & Lee, 2013; Moss et al. 2010; Walls et al. 2010) and the effectiveness of podcasting in enhancing students' learning outcomes and academic environments (e.g., Facer & Yen, 2012; Heilesen, 2010). For example, Pegrum et al. (2015) empirically examined the use of podcast for exams and found that students performed better on tasks that involved use of podcast compared to tasks where it was not used. The findings lend credence to work by Collier-Reed, Case, and Stott (2013) and Lonn and Teasley (2009), who also show that students mainly use podcasts for the purpose of better understanding, especially before tests and examinations. Synytsya and Voychenko (2015) added that given the popularity of mobile devices among youth, podcasting using moodle-based Learning Management systems could help in furthering m-learning based distance education. The findings resonate an understanding that when compared to PC-based podcasting, mobile-based podcasting systems are considered 'friendly' and 'easy to operate' (Ono et al. 2015). Podcasting could help instructors improve face-to-face instructions (Lonn and Teasley 2009). In summary, researchers have found that users perceive podcasting as a useful tool to improve their learning outcomes by means of increasing access to learning materials, improving understanding of the materials, strengthening learning motivations and so on (Evans, 2008; Moss et al. 2010).

Although this body of research provides important insights into individual's perception of podcasting use, the differences between organizational contexts and educational contexts as discussed above (Section 1) suggest that researchers should be cautious when directly applying those findings.

For similar reasons but with a different purpose, organizations are also increasingly applying podcasting to support employees' learning activities such as broadcasting company events and policies, distributing learning materials, and using as a marketing tool to discuss new products (Biech, 2008; McHaney, 2012). Although researchers have recognized this trend of organizational use of podcasting, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical study thus far that has been conducted on this specific topic. Empirical research on the use of podcasting for facilitating organizational learning is still scarce (von Krogh, 2012).

2.2. Organizational use of podcasting

While the use of podcasting for educational purposes has been extensively examined as discussed above, little research exists on

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