

Chapter 20

Engineering the Services of the Library Through Mobile Technology

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ABSTRACT

Many universities are struggling to response the needs of its users. This is attributed to the rapid change in technological innovations. The growing interest on mobile technology in organisations is at a fast pace, particularly in institutions of higher learning. Mobile technology could be used in academic libraries to provide a better service to their clients or improve the service that they currently provide. Case study research was conducted at Capital University to understand the factors that could influence and impact the adoption of mobile technology in academic library services.

1. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of mobile technology in organisation including institution of higher learning is rapidly increasing, more than ever in the last few years (Castells et al., 2007). The increase in adoption and usage of mobile technology has expanded challenges and opportunities for business, social and educational services. This rapid diffusion, particularly among students and teenagers presents numerous opportunities for business, social and educational services (Bicen & Cavus, 2010; Brown et al., 2003; Roblyer et al., 2010).

The development and use of ICT in libraries has slowly emerge on which, there has been many successes and failures over the past years (Igben & Akobo, 2007). Developments in ICT have impacted all sectors of society, including the education system. In institutions of higher learning, the application of ICT is changing how teaching and learning are carried out in many ways. This includes academic and non-academic activities and processes.

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Before the advent of ICT, academic libraries were the sole custodians of information, which was predominantly in print. ICT brought changes necessitated by new information repackaging. Academic libraries are faced with managing hybrid resources (print and electronic) and are challenged to acquire the necessary skills (Poole & Denny, 2002).

In the past several years, both public and academic libraries have begun implementing mobile versions of at least some elements of their web sites including catalogues; online journal articles (Bridges et al. 2010). Rapid developments in ICT and evolving learner behaviours require learning institutions to continuously re-evaluate their approaches to deliver service to their clients. The increasing availability of low-cost mobile and wireless devices and associated infrastructure usher in both opportunities and challenges for educational institutions and their teachers and learners. Mobile learning and mobile technologies brings the rewards of placing institutions at the forefront and addresses student requirements for flexibility and ubiquity, that is, 'anywhere, anytime (Clyde, 2004; Gay et al., 2001; Hill & Roldan, 2005; Liu et al., 2003), and any device' learner engagement.

The use of mobile technologies for service delivery is rapidly increasing. Many organisations including institutions of higher learning have in the recent years employed mobile technologies such as cellular phone, specifically, the short messages service (SMS), and multimedia messaging services (MMS) to deliver various services. Many institutions of high learning have adopted the E-Learning and M-Learning approaches to enhance flexibility and improve on students and research outputs. When considering the use of mobile technologies in academic library services it is not sufficient to recognize that a large number of library patrons use mobile phones. The particular type of device they use and the degree to which they are web-enabled must also be considered. The range of device available can greatly impact the use and acceptance of mobile technologies in libraries (Bridges et al. 2010). Paying attention to the types of devices the users have can also help to design mobile services that best meet the user's needs.

2. RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative research approach was selected mainly because of rationale such as its probing and close interaction nature. The qualitative research approach allows for clarification from respondents to questions from the researcher. Also, it allows for close interaction with interviewees, enabling the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the situation. Also, the researcher can observe events and actions as they happen, without removing them from their context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The study adopted the case study method as its research design. Creswell (2009) defines case studies as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Yin (2009) recommended case study inquiries for "how" and "why" types of research questions, where the researcher has little or no control, and the purpose is to investigate real-life contexts, phenomena, and situations. Capital University was used as the study. The focus of the study was on the university's library.

The users of the university's (Capital University) library include students and academic employees. The users have various backgrounds, and come from different academic disciplines in accordance with the university structure. The university was structured into seven faculties. The library provides services, which include books, electronic thesis and dissertation & DVD requests, printed and electronic journal articles to the faculties. The services were provided through information systems and technology, and manually.

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