Factors Affecting Portal Design

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INTRODUCTION

The word *portal* has been citied in the literature as one of the most popular terms. A Google search on the Web for the word revealed 25.6 million entries in December 2003. Due to a considerable degree of overuse and overlap, portals are seen everywhere and it would be difficult to make any use of the Web without encountering one (Tatnall, 2004). According to White (2000), a portal provides user-customizable access to information and applications through a Web browser. Tatnall (2004) specifies that a portal aggregates information from multiple sources and makes that information available to various users. In other words, a portal can be defined as an integrated and personalized Web-based application that provides the end user with a single point of access to a wide variety of aggregated content anytime and from anywhere using any Web-enabled client device.

From a technical point of view, utilizing portals based on Internet technology is a new approach to facilitate information management including information dissemination, information access, information share, and information exchange. Due to the expansion of the Internet, portal users might spread all over the world. In a global environment, there are a number of differences from country to country. Some of those differences could tremendously influence portal design, portal implementation, as well as portal application in a global context. In this short article, the effort will be put on studying several influential factors that could affect portal design from a global point of view. The study results should benefit information technology managers, educators, and students involved in business intelligence, information systems management, information resource management, and knowledge management. Particularly, the discussions about influential factors could contribute further to portal design, portal implementation, and portal utilization for various international, transnational, and multinational businesses.

BACKGROUND

During the past two decades, advances in computer technologies combined with telecommunication technologies have lead to the development of the Internet and its most popular application, the World Wide Web (the Web) (Khosrow-Pour, 2000). Portals have been developed based on the Web to facilitate access to information contained in documents spread throughout the Internet and, therefore, become the most-desired user interface in Global 2000 enterprises (Drakos, 2003). A number of recent publications reported various portals' applications; for example, organizations could use portals to deliver information and applications to their employees, (Counsell, 2004; Daniel & Ward, 2003); Portals allow staff to find the information and knowledge that they need to do their job (Detlor, 2004; Terra & Gordon, 2003). Portals can improve collaboration with external business partners such as customers and suppliers (Detlor, 2000; Dias, 2001). Moreover, portals can also improve the provision of information and allow the information provided to be tailored according to the role or location of all individual users, ensuring that they are fully informed on issues relevant to their role or their interests (Ben-Arieh & Pollatscheck, 2002).

Research publications above have been concentrated on information contents management regarding the customization or personalization according to portal users' roles and information requirements. So far, there has been little effort put on studying influential factors on portal design from an international portal users' background in a global environment. The purpose of this article therefore tries to fill this research gap and promote the portal design further in a global context.

Table 1. Colors related to some countries (Adapted from Russo et al.,1993)

Color \ Country	Red	Green	Yellow	White
Anglo-American	Danger	Success; Safety	Coward	Purity
French	Aristocrat	Crime	Lucky; Temporary	Neutral
Chinese	Happy; Success	Life; Hope	Wealthy; Powerful	Death
Japanese	Anger; Danger	Young; Energetic	Grace; Nobility	Death
Arab	Death	Fertile; Strong	Happy; Wealthy	Joy
Indian	Life	Wealth; Fertile	Success	Death

FACTORS THAT MAY AFFECT PORTAL DESIGN

International portal users may spread in different regions or countries globally. In practice, they speak different languages, have different life styles, and belong to different cultures. Accordingly, they could have very different perceptions and expectations when they approach to a same portal in an international environment. They may also have completely different interpretations when they access to the same message on a portal. The following discussions will be concentrated on studying several influential factors affecting portal design in a global context, which might be caused by different perceptions, expectations, and interpretations of the international portal users in a global environment.

Color

Color is a useful and primary tool for portal design because it can be used to catch and hold portal users' attention. It also helps to sustain, reinforce, and enhance a positive experience when portal users search for information or browse it. Therefore, color is quite important for portal design in practice. However, color possesses very different meanings both implicitly and explicitly in a global context. For instance, sacred colors in the Judeo-Christian West (e.g., red, blue, white, gold) are different than Buddhist saffron yellow or Islamic green. Subdued Finnish designs for background screen patterns might or might not be suitable in Mediterranean climates (Marcus, 2003). Based on Russo and Boor (1993), some significations of colors related to several countries are adopted and presented in Table 1.

As you can see from Table 1, on the one hand the specific color may indicate very different meanings from country to country; on the other hand, the same meaning may be represented with completely different colors in different countries. For example, red color means happiness, prosperity, and success in China. It is the most preferred color for Chinese in most celebration events such as Chinese wedding ceremonies. It is also often used to decorate a site to celebrate festivals, important events, or to welcome very important persons. Nevertheless, red color means danger for Anglo-American, anger for Japanese, and death for Arab. The meaning of white color, as another similar example, is the other way around. White means purity for Anglo-American and is commonly used for weddings, but it means death for Chinese and is normally used for funerals.

Apparently, the differences of colors go deeper than just appearance in a global environment. Selecting colors to design portals can be risky for international users since the same color may have very different meanings in different countries. Because the wrong choice of colors will send unacceptable messages to portal users in the particular

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