Chapter 1
Importance and Usability of University Websites

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ABSTRACT

An organization's website is a gateway to its information, products, and services. As such, it should be a reflection of the needs of the clients that it serves. Unfortunately, website design and development is often driven by technology or organizational structure or business objectives, rather than user needs. Since higher educational institutions have started to use their websites as a means of recruiting students, an effective website design emerged as a critical factor in attracting students. The usability factor is an extremely important aspect in an individual website as it ensures the survival of each institution in digital environment. In addition to the importance of website usability, the COVID-19 virus significantly increased the importance of websites, especially university websites. Website users and designers accept usability as major criteria in developing websites. If any institution website has poor usability, it is difficult to use, and visitors may turn to other institutions' websites.

INTRODUCTION

At any time, education affects almost all of us, such as employees, students, parents and citizens. In this sense, education can be considered as a basic necessity like health care. Educational institutions are a large, complex, and changing industry with universities, private schools, and a small but very rapidly growing number of private for-profit educational institutions (Perna, 2020).

Growing demand of education improved accessibility and convenience, and the technology is changing the environment for education globally. In this dramatically changing environment, educational institutions are attempting to adapt purposes, structures, program while new institutions are emerging in response (Chauhan et. al., 2020). Changes and new developments are being fueled by accelerating advances in digital communication technologies that are sweeping the world. Significantly growing demand for education combined with these technical advances are in fact a critical pressure point for challenging the dominant assumptions and characteristics of existing traditionally organized educational institutions in the 21st century (Daniela et. al., 2018).

The recent developments such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and new applications of virtual reality to build simulated learning environments are predicted to have dramatic effects upon learning environments at all levels. In higher education industry, educational institutions are designing or develop new programs to take advantage of these emerging technologies (Quintero and Selwyn, 2018). At the same time, educational institutions are trying to market their programs to new or existing audiences in new ways. Corporations also have formed new alliances with universities to promote technology for education. Totally new models for educational institutions are also being developed to respond to the opportunities created by a worldwide market for education and new technologies (Dunn and Kennedy, 2019).

Shortly, after the commercialization of the web, the multimedia component of the web which is called the world wide web (WWW), experienced a phenomenal growth. Businesses, higher education institutions and individuals raced to place websites and content on the web as part of this growth (Ferris and Farrell, 2003). Like all other higher education institutions, universities are required to present and market their services on the internet. So, the web has become a crucial tool in communicating with the various constituencies of an institution such as prospective and current students, parents, academicians, employees and competitor universities. Because of these endless opportunities, the number of websites has continued to increase as well as the importance of website usability.

The rapidly changing environment, particularly the recent marked increase in public availability of information leads the global higher education system to become more marketed. In other words, the endless opportunities of the web, increasing number of websites and websites themselves open the door to the emerging competitors and new organizations that will compete directly for students, academicians, departments and prestige. The competition over the internet among a large number and different kinds of universities has introduced new phrases and developed new concepts since the needs, desires and expectations of students change in accordance with the internet (Morse, 2017).

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