

Colloquium

Educational usages of podcasting

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Introduction

The portable MP3/MP4 podcasting device is no longer simply a medium for music or video entertainment. It is now also a bearer of educational material. Podcasting usage in education is increasing. The potential is to change the teaching and learning experience significantly, as it can facilitate organisation and delivery of information tailored to users' individual preferences and learning styles. However, there is a lack of understanding of some of its implications and potential benefits. In this colloquium, we examine the increasing adoption of podcasting by UK Universities over the period 2006–2007. The finding suggests that the current podcasting usages are driven mainly by four characteristics: teaching, service, marketing and technology. Identifying and separating out the usages assists the pedagogical challenge to focus upon a systematic adoption of this emerging technology as an educational aid.

A brief overview of podcasting

Podcasting is recognised as 'something genuinely new' (The Economist, 2006). It is comprised of either audio or video MP3/MP4 recordings that can be downloaded directly to the desktop computer as well as to various mobile devices. It's capability to transfer digital material to other portable devices provides an 'anytime, anywhere' media experience. It uses subscription feeds with Really Simple Syndication notification which automatically informs the subscriber as and when new material is available.

Research approach

Using information publicly available on the Internet, we undertook a study of podcasting adoption in UK Universities in a 12-month period between early 2006 and 2007. Our empirical data was combined with a critical analysis of the literature. Our analytical construct used tabularisation to record the usage of podcasting. This was followed by Prasad's (1997) hermeneutic approach which assisted us to develop descriptions that were 'plausible'.

A brief description of educational usages of podcasting

A typical example of podcasting usage in UK Universities is that of the dissemination of information such as by informing first-time users of the library service (eg, Bristol and

Loughborough Universities), or by broadcasting university news to staff and students (eg, Southampton University). There is also growing usage of podcast-integrated teaching and guest lecture presentations. We found the introduction of podcasting as part of distance learning schemes, was mostly contained within the University Intranet system. For instance, the University of Sheffield produces podcast updates relating to changes in the law for its students and in the University of Winchester, podcasting is used to help dyslexic students as a part of a dyslexia support scheme.

The current podcasting usage revealed an increasingly more integrated, expanded and creative adoption. The increased adoption marks a gradual shift from the experimental stage to being part of a technology-enhanced teaching strategy. The new uses include the usage of podcasting as a marketing tool for attracting prospective students. East Anglia University provides time critical information on clearing and availability of courses. Durham University uses it to offer a guided tour of the university and library, with an introduction to university life in general, useful for both prospective students and 1st year students. Podcasting is beginning to be adopted to supplement class materials (Shim, Shropshire¹, Park, Harris & Campbell, 2007) and support mainstream traditional teaching.

Characteristics of educational podcasting

Figure 1 presents the characteristics of educational podcasting: 'teaching-driven', 'service-driven', 'marketing-driven' and 'technology-driven' based on the grouping of podcasting usages at UK Universities.

Teaching-driven podcasting

The educational sector has paid particular attention to the potential of technology to facilitate improvement in the quality of teaching, to enable effective teaching and to improve the learning experience. Podcasting is being utilised not only to provide a repeat or summary of a lecture given but also to provide timely academic material such as law-related news to students. Such usages *could* create the relationship that is based on continuous communication and interaction between teachers and students by having students engage in academic debate and in accessing timely academic research. In the beginning, podcasting at Universities was limited to one-way communication from teachers to students but more recently has been used to provide a two-way communication so that it has become a means of communication and dialogue between teachers and students.

Service-driven podcasting

The service-driven podcast allows for diverse choices and preferences in usage for information gathering and dissemination. This enabling aspect embodies the concept of a service, which is an interaction, a conversation between two parties; the engagement here is the talking-through and the apprehending of the institutional conditions. The podcast here is used as a private conversation, consequently it is an 'idiosyncratic' service-driven collation that users can use to access relevant streams of content and information. Universities are recognising this potential and utilise podcasting to

Podcasting usage characteristics	Podcasting usages	Model summary
Teaching-driven	Augmenting teaching	Repeating/summarising lecture
		Providing additional lecture content
		Providing seminar/public seminar
		Providing up to date academic material
		University key personnel interview
Teaching-driven	Student assignment	Part of coursework
	Supplementing research publication	Presenting research paper
Service-driven	Delivering research information	Presenting research work
	Delivering information	Library tour
		Broadcasting departmental news
	Augmenting media	Broadcasting university news
		Industry sponsored media
	Providing timely information	University induction
		University clearing announcement
Sensory-aid support	Supporting student with learning difficulty	
Providing pastoral care	Church service	
Marketing-driven	Marketing	Recruiting prospective students
Technology-driven	Supporting teaching method	Sharing teaching practices

Figure 1: Educational podcasting drivers

improve the effectiveness of communication to broadcast news and provide timely information. Of special note is the innovative use as a sensory aid support mechanism, providing ways to help students who are dyslexic.

Marketing-driven podcasting

The adoption of podcasting as a marketing tool to recruit prospective students has to be seen as part of a strategic move, since there is an increase in competition to attract students between universities. By making university news, research work and a university/library tour publicly available, podcasting acts as a marketing delivery mechanism. This is a powerful tool as it increases customer retention through one-to-one marketing systems (Bisson, 2002).

Technology-driven podcasting

The process of podcasting has been documented by technology/media support departments at various universities. Technology-driven casting is based on the belief that the

use of any technology may help in teaching about podcasting, for use by teachers. This characteristic has been particularly evident in the early adoption phase by universities through technical early adopting advocates.

Conclusion

Educational podcasting usage has three perspectives that assist us in explaining the current adoption status. Firstly, the perspective of lecturers; podcasting enables direct communication and interaction with students which go beyond the temporal and spatial limitations of conventional face-to-face education. Podcasting provides lecturers with the facility to emphasise the information, which they feel to be critical for the students, thus augmenting the teaching material. The second perspective is that of the student's. The empowering ownership of accommodating user preference (Schultze & Orlikowski, 2004) helps to satisfy individual needs of knowledge ownership. The flexibility and affordability of podcasting cater to diverse student's needs by enabling repeated learning and offering an opportunity for the effective use of time. Finally, from the University's perspective, podcasting is a communication enabler, reaching out to a wider community. For instance, such podcast usage could provide a lifelong extended education to alumni and also create a culture of knowledge sharing and interdisciplinary collaboration.

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SOURCE: Br J Educ Technol 39 no3 My 2008

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