ASSESSING PERCEIVED INTERNET LITERACY: AN EXPLORATION OF SELF-EFFICACY AMONG MARKETING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to develop a skills-based Internet self-efficacy scale and make a preliminary exploration of any influences on the student's perceived self-efficacy for Internet literacy. Also two previous computer self-efficacy scales were adapted for Internet literacy and used in validity assessment. As an exploratory step, the influential variables of age, gender, GPA, level of education, and number of hours spent on the Internet and in the library are examined. The paper contains a brief background of self-efficacy, the development of a self-efficacy scale for the Internet, a discussion of the exploratory analysis, recommendations for classroom pedagogy, and future research directions.

This study applies Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theory to the student environment. It focuses on the student's current and expected realities, suggesting that they will influence current and future behavior. In terms of this study, that a student's perceived level of Internet self-efficacy will influence their current Internet behavior and their outcome expectancies of future success, performance, and use of the Internet.

Development of the skills-based Internet self-efficacy scale follows Churchill's (1979) protocols of domain specification, sample item generation, data collection, measure purification, and validity assessment.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF ROTATED PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS

Variable Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Alpha
Surf the net	**.801**	.000	.000	.83
Info search	**.793**	.000	.000	
Using Netscape	**.753**	.210	.254	
Browsing	**.731**	.151	.139	
Using Explorer	**.724**	.000	.211	
FTP	.101	**.840**	.000	.83
Build a web site	.210	**.798**	.000	
Writing HTML	.176	**.762**	.000	
Hacking	-.131	**.742**	.142	
Cookies on/off	.161	**.682**	.145	
Send messages	.161	.000	**.895**	.80
Chatting	.311	.153	**.835**	

The final results of the factor analysis, as shown in Table 1, suggest three Internet skill dimensions. Interpretation of these components suggests *common everyday tasks* (e.g., surfing); *technical tasks* (e.g., build a web site); and *real-time communication tasks* (e.g., chatting). Additional findings suggest that younger students are more technologically proficient with the Internet and that the more technologically proficient any student is, the more hours they spend on the Internet. Younger and lower grade level students are socializing and spending more time on the Internet. Also, males appear to be more interested in the technological aspects of the Internet. There were no differences between males and females for the everyday and communications task dimensions.

Instructors have a variety of options, in appropriate classes, to improve Internet literacy and career expectations. For example instructors can: (1) send students to remedial training if they score low in their perceived Internet self-efficacy or adjust the homework assignment task level of the class based on the scores; (2) develop class assignments that utilize the Internet in a way where accomplishment will reinforce self-efficacy. Self-generated feedback is essential in building self-efficacy; (3) set higher positive expectations for the class. This is based on "The Pygmalion" effect, which suggests that there is higher learning with higher expectations; and (4) promote positive feedback, which will enhance self-efficacy and avoid negative feedback, which will depreciate it. Thus, instructors should look for every opportunity to praise student Internet work.

As each new generation of students arrives on campus, their level of Internet literacy may be different from those who proceeded them. Technology is ever changing. Thus, future advancements in technology may require a reevaluation of the scale. Until then, instructors should use every tool available to prepare their students for careers in marketing.

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