

Study on the Use of an iPad app for University Student Recruitment

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Abstract

Multi-touch tablet devices, like the iPad, are increasingly used for sales and marketing activities. In the higher education sector, these devices can contribute to university promotion and student recruitment. With this purpose, we have created an iPad app to be used by university informants in orientation fairs addressed to secondary school students, and evaluated its usage in a fair. Two questionnaires have been distributed between informants and visitors to evaluate their satisfaction. The results show that the app has contributed to improve the task of informants, and has produced a positive impact in visitors.

Keywords: educational reform, student recruitment, marketing app, human-centred design, education fairs.

1. Introduction

iPad tablets are especially well suited for marketing purposes, as a support for the sales discourse addressed to potential customers. The iPad design facilitates using it to share a presentation between the speaker and the listener, since the screen is easily available to both. The iPad high resolution screen and its stylish appearance in the hands of a sales representative contribute to offer a good firm image to the potential customer, since they are still seen by the public as high-end novel devices. For these reasons, iPads are being

used thoroughly for marketing purposes in any kind of fair.

Additionally, the Apple App Store for iOS devices offers several CRM (Customer Relationship Management) applications to support sales activities, like myCRM [1], Resco Mobile CRM [2], Sales Beaver[3], or Upvise Pro CRM [4], among others. These apps offer different degrees of support for the outside sales representatives, like the possibility of performing prospection tasks, preparing meetings with potential customers and carrying out follow-up duties.

Public funded higher education institutions are facing an increasing competition to recruit students, and they are required to undertake marketing activities in order to increase recruitment figures. Fairs for secondary school students are one of the most important events for this purpose, where universities have the opportunity of engaging prospective students with their educational offer.

For European countries, the reform of their higher education systems brought by the Bologna Declaration has led to the appearance of new degrees. The new engineering degrees in Spain begun implementation in 2009, and secondary school students are, in most cases, not familiarized with the variety of new degrees on offer.

In this scenario, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM) has decided to support an innovative education project to develop an iPad app as a showcase of their undergraduate degree offer. With

this project, we also aim to explore the iPad technology possibilities to enhance UPM reputation among secondary school students as the leading technical university in Spain. The iPad app is meant to be used by UPM students and professors in their tasks as informants in the main Spanish orientation fair addressed to secondary school students: AULA 2012. This paper presents the user-centred design approach taken for the design of this app, and the results of its usage in AULA 2012.

2. Human-Centred Design

The app users will be university students who act as informants in university orientation fairs. Previous editions of these fairs showed that informants could not easily inform about other degrees apart from the one they were enrolled in, due to deficiencies in the information available. The primary objective of this project is to provide an easy to learn tool that addresses such deficiencies, giving support to the informant duty at the fair, and thus improving the information obtained by prospective students. The secondary objective of the project is to offer an image of the university as being in the edge of technology, via the usage of 20 iPads in the university stand at the AULA fair.

In order to achieve the aim of giving a good support to the app users (informants), a human-centred design [5] approach has been followed.

A special emphasis has been given in the project to the activity of understanding and specifying the context of use. Five informants with experience in previous editions of the AULA fair were interviewed to get the main characteristics of the informant tasks. The most important characteristic was the limited amount of time available to offer information to a visitor in peak times, where it was common to have 3 or 4 visitors waiting for the

informant to finish with the person he or she was currently informing. Thus, the main requirement for the system was to provide the information in an efficient way, so that the user could access the information as quickly as possible, and following a discourse that fits with his or her mental model of explaining university degrees to fair visitors.

According to these requirements, the interaction design of the application was undertaken, following both the generic usability heuristics in [6][7] and the specific guidelines for iPad [8]. Only the most common gestures in iPad apps have been used, like pinch and panning. This is to avoid common pitfalls found in commercial apps for iPad [9].

The app is organized into four sections: UPM (university-level information), degrees, schools and visitor request registration. The first three sections are meant to be navigated in this order, as it is the usual flow of discourse for a visitor when he or she is interested in getting the most information, according to the inquire with expert informants mentioned above.

The navigation bar in the menu area (see Fig. 1) allows an easy browsing between the four app sections. There are two advanced features: The first one is multiple degree selection, so that several degrees can be consulted consecutively; and the second one is visitor request registration, which records email addresses from visitors wanting to receive additional information via email.



Fig. 1: App screen structure.

3. App usage and evaluation

The app has been used by informants at the UPM stand in the AULA 2012 fair. Its usage has been studied in the iPads used for giving information about university undergraduate degrees to stand visitors. The users were 79 informants (mostly students, but a few professors as well) who took turns to act as informants in the five days of the fair.

In this fair, the majority of information requests were related to specific degrees, according to usage logs. Informants have the iPads for their usage on the counters where they served visitors. Observation of the iPad usage showed that expert informants, the ones that had already served as informants in previous editions of this fair, tended to have a lesser usage of the iPad than novel informants. Expert informants had already a discourse for explaining the degrees they were more acquainted with, and most of these expert informants did not change much their habits for introducing the iPad. Nevertheless, when they needed to explain or give details about a degree they were not familiar with, they typically used the iPad.

As for novel informants, they relied more heavily on the app for carrying out their information duty. This observed usage was confirmed with the survey for informants distributed after the fair. Survey results are detailed below.



Fig. 2: iPad app usage in the AULA 2012 fair.

Additionally, in certain times, like lunch time, when there were less infor-

nants than iPads in the stand, visitors where observed using the app directly, without any explanation by an informant.

In order to evaluate satisfaction, two surveys related to the app have been designed, one for the direct users, the university informants, and a second one for the fair visitors who received information via the app.

3.1. Informant survey

This survey has been distributed between the 79 informants and 40 complete and relevant answers have been received. The age range of informants goes from 19 to 48, with a median value of 22.

Three quarters of survey respondents consider that the tool has helped them in their duties as informants, and more than 60% think that the app has contributed to giving better information about the degrees less known to them. Regarding perceived ease of learning, more than 90% of them value the app as easy to learn. This figure rises to 100% for the seven respondents who had no previous experience with an iPad. These results show that the app has fulfilled one of the objectives: to provide informants with an easy to learn tool, so that they are more productive in their task of informing visitors.

With respect to positive comments, the graphic content has been valued as helping to transmit to secondary school students complex details on the different degrees, like, for example, career profiles. iPad devices have been also mentioned as contributing to attract prospective students to the UPM stand in the fair.

Regarding negative feedback, some informants considered that the usage of an iPad could lead to a colder rapport with the visitor.

3.2. Visitor survey

The visitor survey has been distributed digitally between the 395 visitors to the UPM stand who left their email address

(by means of the app presented in this paper) in order to request additional information from the university. We have received 53 complete answers, all of them from secondary school students, and their age range is 15-19. A majority of respondents (31 of them) are students in the last year of secondary school (the one previous to university admission).

The number of respondents (41%) who agree that receiving information through the iPad contributed to improve their understanding about UPM degrees is much higher than the number of the ones that disagree (15%). Additionally, more than 50% of respondents mention that the presence of iPads in the UPM stand caught their attention. Similarly, a majority (68%) responds that they regard UPM stand in the fair as one of the most technological advanced. This positive attitude is even higher when considering the respondents who are in the last year.

With regard to comments received through the open questions in the survey, some answers showed appreciation on the usage of iPads for orientation purposes. The possibility of downloading the app directly in the student cell phone or iPad was also highlighted.

4. Conclusions

The main objectives have been fulfilled: An app has been developed to support the task of the informant, which is easy to learn and efficient to use; the usage of the app in the AULA fair has contributed to better explain less known degrees in the overall offer; and the presence of iPads in the university stand has contributed to transmit the UPM image as a university on the cutting-edge of technology.

The results show how promising iPad technology is for marketing purposes, in particular where non-professional staff is employed in sales activities, as it is the case for universities in promotion events

addressed to prospective students. The adoption of a human-centred approach for the development of mobile apps is critical for obtaining a good usability level, leading to good results with limited training.

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