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A Brief Look at Chatbots in Light of the Future of University Websites: Benefits, Opportunities, Applications, Challenges and Risks

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Chatbots offer a very fast, easy and dynamic interaction in textual, audio and visual forms. Their high-level capabilities have paved the way for the increasingly widespread use of chatbots on every platform that include human-machine interaction, from education to health, from finance to customer relationship management, and so on. University websites, as one of the most common and potential application areas of chatbots, have recently gained an attractive dynamism, speed, flexibility and high-level user experience. These sites, as frequently-visited platforms, provide a wide range of information and services to many people every day, including academic, administrative staff, active and prospective students. The richness and diversity of the features and functions offered by these sites cause them to be served in a dispersed and hierarchical structure. This distributed and relatively static structure makes it difficult to access information and causes cumbersome and inefficient use of functions and services. They also lack the dynamism of chatbots.

On the other hand, chatbots emerge as a much more dynamic, interactive, fast and easy tool, compared to ordinary web pages. These tools have the potential to accelerate and facilitate access to information; to perform frequent tasks effortlessly from a single point without getting lost among piles of pages; to be customizable for people; and to provide a higher level of user interaction and experience. They also promote the quality of education and services, communication and interaction between the parties, increasing the satisfaction of all stakeholders. Besides, universities are likely to reach much wider audiences with these tools.

This study provides a concise review on the benefits, potential opportunities, application types, difficulties and risks that can be provided by chatbots to university web platforms. In this context, many aspects such as development environments and technologies, difficulties, risks and security measures are discussed in detail and the right design and implementation approaches are presented. It also reveals how well-designed chatbots with the right content and scope can benefit all internal and external stakeholders and potential students. Additionally, the opportunities and potential that these tools can provide in improving the service quality of universities are discussed. Consequently, this study shows how chatbots will be an important part and play a critical role in the future of university websites.

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