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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE STRATEGIC USE OF IS
IN AIRLINE DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS:
AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a research model for a study of the influence of IT on distribution channels and draws from both MIS and marketing channel literature. The question that guides this research is the notion of influencing other firms’ (distribution channel) behavior by using IT. The objective is to explain how IT affects the relationship between airlines and their distribution channels and how it can be used to influence and monitor their behavior.

The need for firms to develop and apply their power effectively in distribution channels has been a major theme in the marketing channel literature (Frazier and Summers 1986) and has provided insights into the ways ongoing channel relationships can be effectively maintained and coordinated. Previous studies have not been able to articulate IT’s specific attributes and effects on performance improvement following its introduction (Venkatraman and Zaheer 1990). The MIS literature either focuses on the strategic use of IT or on user issues (Ginzberg 1981; Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw 1989).

An assumption underlying the design of this study is that IT cannot serve strategic purposes when it is not accepted by users. To fully understand business performance increases as a result of the use of IT, user and distribution channel behavior and perceptions are measured. The research model presented goes beyond existing conceptualizations of strategic information systems as “black boxes” to examine the effects IT has on the interaction between two organizations and their performance improvement.

This study introduces the use of measurements on both sides of the dyad, the user (on the supplier side) as well as the distributor (the travel agent), to the field of MIS.

The research design includes four sequential phases. First, a field work phase followed by a survey to all of the users of the system. Third, a survey to a sample of 1,700 distribution channel members (the travel agents). Fourth, based on responses in the third phase, another survey to the users of the system this time matched with distribution channel members to measure the use of particular strategies used with a specific agency as a result of the use of the technology.

The matched, multi-stage design provides a rich set of data where different users are matched with distributors to compare behavior and performance on each side. This design allows better understanding of the use of IT as a vehicle to change other firms’ behavior, thereby attempting to link behavior changes resulting from IT with performance increases.

REFERENCES


