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Arzoo Atiq

University of Auckland, a.atiq@auckland.ac.nz

Lesley Gardner

University of Auckland, lgardner@auckland.ac.nz

Ananth Srinivasan

University of Auckland, asri001@comc.auckland.ac.nz

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Designing Technology-Enabled Services through Consumer-Provider Interactions

Arzoo Atiq
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Lesley Gardner
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Ananth Srinivasan
University of Auckland, New Zealand

Abstract

Technology-enabled services have considerably changed the way people learn, perceive, and interact with the system. The system refers to the entities such as people, technology, and environment involved, resulting in an outcome. The paper makes use of related literature from the marketing, computer science, human-computer interaction, and service science disciplines to extract major themes, which are relevant in consumer-provider interactions during the process of technology-based services' design. The purpose of extracting these themes is threefold. First, they help us to develop a formal and an efficient relationship between the consumers and providers. Second, they contribute towards the fact that value co-creation is a function of the interactions. Third, they systematically guide any service designer to include the consumers in the design of the services, which they are consuming. Thus, consumer-provider interactions have an integral role to increase the value gain for the consumers and the providers. This study attempts to find "how providers can improve the service design process through interactions with their consumers". It is submitted as a research-in-progress paper.

Keywords: Consumer-Provider Interactions, Service Science, Technology-Enabled Service Design, Telecommunication Service.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations strive for cutting the operational costs, while, prompt responses to complaints, the availability of networks, and the reductions in consumer-provider interaction time are the valued gains of ordinary telecom consumers all over the world. Technology significantly changes the way consumers perceive, learn, and evaluate services, although they have no functional relationship with the organization (Bitner et al. 2008). Hence, there is a need to develop a formal and an efficient relationship between the consumer and provider. The motivation to carry out this research is, therefore, efficient management and co-ordination of resources of the organization's and consumers' experiences (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). Therefore, this study attempts to find "how providers can improve the service design process through interactions with their consumers". This research problem has been studied under various disciplines and from different perspectives; however, none of the studies has taken providers and consumers views holistically at the same time (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer 2009 Pg.98).

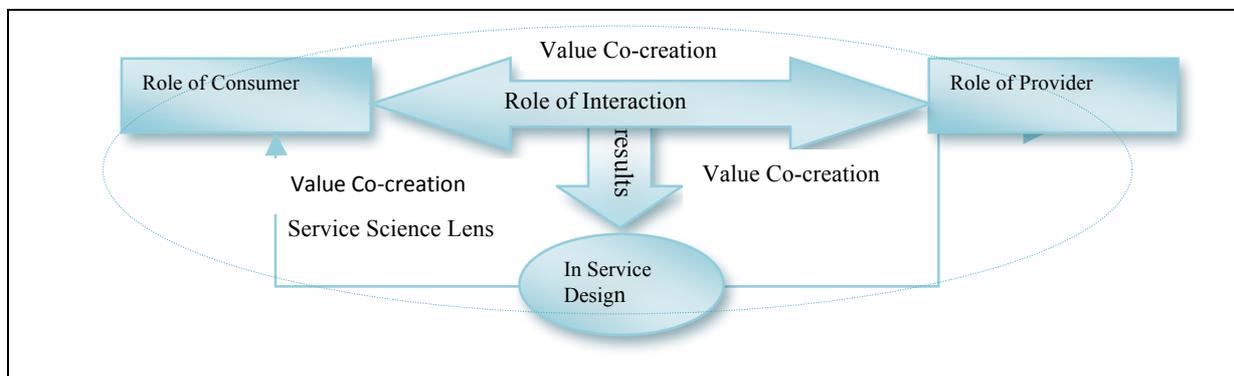


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model

This research is therefore making use of service science theory, which is interdisciplinary and provides a platform for holistic consumer-firm investigations. The service science paradigm emphasizes the co-definition of service value as collaboration among providers and consumers of the service. Service Sciences has been defined as an emerging area that stresses on the basic sciences to drive innovation, competition, and improvements through services (Bitner et al. 2008). In addition, Spohrer et al. (2007) define service systems as "value-creation networks composed of people, technology, and organizations". Thus, service science has a potential to determine systematically new service related problems that involve intelligent consumers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004) and ubiquitous services (Yoo 2010). In this realm, there is a need to find solutions to the problems of, "how to design, build, operate, use, sustain and dispose of service systems for the benefit of multiple stakeholders, including customers, shareholders, employees at large". Hence, the research problem that we address stem from the above question that is, how to facilitate the design of technology-enabled services through consumer-provider interactions?

The objective of this research is to analyse the interactions of consumer and providers in the technology-enabled service design. This analysis will suggest the points of interactions where consumers can give their inputs for better service delivery, usage, and functionality. Moreover, three services will be analysed based on the extent of their interactivity. In the service marketing literature, Bolton et al. (2009) presents a categorizing scheme that discusses the extent of technology enablement and the extent of customer participation. In this categorization, the author positions interactive TV as a highly technology-enabled service

that requires high customer participation, while basic telecommunication and utility services are examples of low customer participation but high technology-enablement. However, the participation of consumers in the design of these services requires further empirical investigation. Therefore, for future research, IPTV, mobile broadband and value-added-services on fixed lines will be used as units of analysis. The focus of the research will be on the nature of consumer-provider interactions while using and designing such services as depicted in figure 1.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review discusses the objective constructs to draw themes, which can help in the design of technology-enabled services. This categorisation, depicted in table 1, will then help us to identify the link between the types of services that providers are designing and the level at which consumers can interact with the organization to improve those services.

Consumer Role in Service Design

A consumer by definition is anyone who uses any good or service. In the literature, two roles of consumers have been identified; active consumer versus passive consumer (Tuunanen et al. 2008). The authors discuss users being the ‘passive’ consumers of the system in comparison to the developers or designers. Passive is when consumers’ access shared spaces e.g youtube. In active discussion, consumers participate in a live programme or the actors perform a remote surgery. Fischer and Sharff (2000) argue that being a consumer or a designer is not a binary choice but a continuum from passive consumer to the active consumer, all the way to a meta-designer. This new role of the consumer has brought extensive innovation and consumer-focused services (Michel et al. 2008; Stewart and Pavlou 2002; Tuunanen et al. 2008).

Nonetheless, Steen et al. (2007) point out that it is also possible that some of this participation will not be as useful. The authors argue that innovators can become prejudice about customers’ needs when they involve customers more regularly. Moreover, user involvement has a potential to guide innovators towards imitative innovations, as customers express their preferences in terms of products that they already recognize. Thus, to involve consumers in the design of services is not a straightforward task and can end up in disappointment for the organization. In our research, these issues have the potential to shed light on common risk items when involving consumers in the design process.

Consumer- Provider Interactions in Service Design

The classification of consumer-provider interactions in service design will help in clarifying the level, at which providers are interested for the two parties to interact. In this regard, three themes have emerged from the literature.

The first theme is the consumer-provider interaction while usage of services. “Use” is one level of interaction. This type of interaction is through the usage of services (Meuter et al. 2000). The second theme is consumer-provider interaction in an obligation that is when a consumer either reports a fault or collects information or gives orders for new services; these could be the next level of interaction, which involve encounters with the provider organization at a certain degree (Meuter et al. 2000). The third theme is consumer-provider interaction before design; it is possible to ask consumers about their needs, and involve them in the design of the services they want to use (Arias et al. 2000; Fischer 1998; Fischer and Sharff 2000).

The last theme of interaction has its basis from the organizational practice of involving end-users in the design of information systems (Pitts and Browne 2007; Steen et al.

2007) . However, in the contemporary literature, consumer involvement stems from the Management framework of service-logic innovations, which emphasizes on the changing roles of customers for service innovation (Michel et al. 2008) while Service Science emphasis is on information (Chesbrough and Spohrer 2006). Communication occurs when the two parties speak the same language. Likewise, consistency of information is necessary for supporting interactions. Information is usually considered as codified knowledge (Chesbrough and Spohrer 2006). Still, in the case of service design, both tacit and codified knowledge need to be transformed that increases the complexity of service system design. In our investigation, the emphasis is on information, which can be used, shared, and manipulated in the interactions of consumers and providers.

Research Constructs	Themes	Research Emphasis w.r.t. the role of Consumer	References
Consumer Roles	Active Passive	Active Consumer	(Bolton and Saxena-Iyer 2009; Fischer and Sharff 2000; Normann and Ramirez 1993; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Stewart and Pavlou 2002; Tuunanen et al. 2008)
Consumer Provider Interaction	Usage	Active & Passive Consumer	(Bitner 1990; Kujala and Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila 2009; Normann and Ramirez 1993; Payne and Holt 2001; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004; Wikstrom 1996)
	Obligation	Active & Passive Consumer	(Froehle 2006) (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer 2009)
	For/before design	Active Consumer	(Fischer 1998; Fischer and Sharff 2000) (Beaudouin-Lafon 2004; Michel et al. 2008) (Kujala and Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila 2009)
Consumer-Service Interaction	Pure	Active & Passive Consumer	(Chase and Dasu 2008; Sampson 2008) Example: Value-added Service on fixed lines
	Mixed	Active & Passive Consumer	(Froehle 2006; Sampson 2008) Example: Broadband Service, IPTV Service
	Enhanced	Active Consumer	(Sampson 2008) Example: IPTV Service
Design Stage	Usage	Active & Passive Consumer	(Bolton and Saxena-Iyer 2009; Fischer 1998; Forlizzi and Batterbee 2004)
	Functional	Active Consumer	(Arias et al. 2000; Fischer and Sharff 2000; Forlizzi and Batterbee 2004; Kujala and Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila 2009)
	Technical	Active Consumer	(Fischer and Sharff 2000)
Value Co-creation	exchange	Active & Passive Consumer	(Gronroos 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2004)
	Use	Active & Passive Consumer	(Gronroos 2006; Normann 2000; Vargo and Lusch 2004)
	Process	Active Consumer	(Payne and Holt 2001; Prahalad and

			Ramaswamy 2004)
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Table 1: Research constructs and themes mapping with respect to the roles of consumers

Service Characteristics define the Consumer-Service Interaction

Service is an interaction process (Gronroos 2006), usually mediated by a software component with some computational capability (Deora et al. 2003) that co-creates value, whether through an interaction between a consumer and a service, or between a consumer and a provider or between a consumer and technology (Spohrer et al. 2008a). Service design is an antecedent to service usage (Glushko and Tabaas 2007). Services encompass different types of functional aspects. To include consumers in the design of technology-enabled services, the constructs that need to be thought upon are types of such services, service characteristics important in consumer-service interaction and service design stages where consumers can adjust themselves easily. The following sections discuss these constructs.

Spohrer (2008a) asserts that service theory should clarify the service characteristics and competencies according to diverse contexts that involve various stakeholders. One of the most important characteristics of service discussed in the extant literature related to our discussion is service interactivity. In service marketing literature, interactivity has been defined as customer-firm interaction in the technology-mediated environment (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer 2009). For consumer-service interaction, there is a need to define the extent of interactivity any technology-enabled service imparts for exploring the value in the dominant interactions. Drawing from Sampson’s classification (Sampson 2008) consumer-service interaction can be technology enhanced-customer contact, mixed-virtual customer contact and pure contact. This research is assuming that pure contact occurs when consumers mediate with each other using technology, for example, while only using the wireless network. The mixed virtual customer contact can be the mobile broadband or VAS on fixed line. Similarly, the enhanced interactivity is when consumer interacts with the service creatively, which could be by using IPTV on home television. However, all of these three services can become an enhanced-interactive service if consumers can interact with them effectively.

Furthermore, for consumer-provider interaction, there is a need to define the extent of “collaboration” from the consumers’ perspective. The research emphasis is on consumers’ role as providers are already actively involved in the design of services as depicted in table 1. By definition, collaborative services involve joint platforms for consumers to interact with each other, and they are based on relationships (Mathiassen and Sorensen 2008). Each of the mentioned services has different levels of consumer-service interaction and therefore, the functional demand from each service is diverse. “Functional” requirements refer to two main themes: work or entertainment (Fournier 1991). For example, consumers use the three services at their leisure time (IPTV) and work (broadband and VAS) or both (broadband and VAS). Thus, the usage behaviour exhibited with these services maintains diversity. It is an assumption that the study of services’ functional variance with respect to consumers’ usage behaviour can help in understanding the impact of consumer-service interactions in the facilitation of services’ design.

The three services we shall investigate in this research have one thing in common: all are "consumer-oriented services". They differ along two dimensions: the extent of *consumer-service interaction* during usage and *consumer-provider interaction* during service design.

Service Design Stages

It is important to identify the service design stage where consumers can interact with the designers to facilitate the design process. On analysis of major service design literature, three stages in service design are identified in the extant literature.

First is interface-level design (Beaudouin-Lafon 2004) which deals with the basic preferences that a consumer can customize and personalize while using services. The author suggests that HCI researchers should design “interactions and not interfaces”. Second is functional-level design (Balan et al. 2009). Many organizations let the consumer choose the functions required by them in any service. For example, Dell Computer Company allows the consumer to customize their laptop before buying. However, in a pure service organization, where the products are not manufactured imposes a limit to the involvement of consumers in the functional services. This research, therefore, will look in to the extent to which a service organization can involve consumers for the design of more innovative service offerings. The last is technical-level design, which has its roots in computer science discipline. According to this level of design, the consumers are expected to give an input in the technical mechanics of any technology-enabled service (Froehle 2006). For example, when consumers use a service such as Skype, live messenger on their laptops or PCs, they are not concerned with different service providers. They can demand the same level of convenience from the mobile service providers as well. From the mentioned service design stages, this research is concerned with functional level design of the service as depicted in table 1.

Impact of Interactions---- the Value Co-creation

From the above discussion on the consumer role, plainly consumers are playing an active role in the co-creation of services. Therefore, there is a need of creation of value in every business process with the help of informed and dissatisfied consumers (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2004). Furthermore, according to service science, a service system comprising of people and technology is a value-creating system (Maglio et al. 2006; Spohrer et al. 2008a; Spohrer et al. 2008b).

There are three dominant views on value in the extant literature. Traditional focus was on value in exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Value in exchange refers to the value that is embedded in the product. Work on service-dominant logic from marketing literature also brings forward, the “value in-use” notion (Gronroos 2006), which refers to the value creation when consumers use the products. In management literature, another view of value prevails, the “value-in-process” as a central element coming out of consumer and provider interactions (Payne and Holt 2001).

User interacts with the product or service properties in a specific context, to gain the perceived value (Kujala and Vaananen-Vainio-Mattila 2009). Therefore, creating value for customers by motivating them to create their own value from the company’s service offerings is much needed (Normann 2000). To achieve this objective, organizations should continuously reassess and redesign their competencies and relationships in order to keep their value-creating systems responsive and flexible (Normann and Ramirez 1993). The continuous reassessment and redesigning are examples of value co-creation during the process (Pralhad and Ramaswamy 2004). Value is therefore, generated from the process of interactions between consumers and firm while designing the service functional aspects. In conclusion, the consumer-provider interaction needs a focus on value-in-process and value-in-use for the three types of services we are looking at.

DISCUSSION

This paper has extracted four major themes from the literature as depicted in table 1; the role of consumers in co-producing value, consumer-service interaction, the consumer-provider in interaction, and service design stages where consumers can be included. These

themes can be used for systematic enhancements to different types of technology-enabled services' design. The shaded cells emphasize the themes, which we are interested in for the mentioned services.

The table begins with the role of consumers; an active consumer compared to passive consumer. It also depicts the emphasis of our research with respect to consumer roles. Active consumers play functioning role in the usage of services and dynamically engage themselves in interaction with the services and the providers, while passive consumers do not participate in the design of services. Then going further, we need to sort out consumer involvement at some design level. The three levels are interface design, functional design, and technical design. Functional design facilitates consumers in choosing or requesting the behaviour required to them from any service. Interface design deals with the basic preferences that a consumer can customize and personalize while using services, while the technical design refers to the scientific mechanics of the technology medium used in imparting services.

To consider consumers as active participants at the design stage of the interface levels depend on the industry trends. For example, the services we are looking at already giving interface level design to the consumers. The preference is to include consumer in the functional level design for better value. Hence, an active consumer is the one who is participating at the functional design stage of the service development life cycle. Furthermore, active consumer interacts with pure, mixed, and enhanced services but the passive consumer may interact with pure and mixed services only. The last row of the table depicts the value co-creation themes. Consumers are co-creating services at the usage level, and hence, co-creating value. In our research, consumers and providers gain value through interaction; therefore, value-in-process is also an outcome.

The literature and the shaded cells of the table propose that a consumer of active service acts as a designer and imparts the resources of money and time to interact at the design level of pure, mixed, or enhanced service with the provider. This interaction creates a value-in-process as process routes can yield better results. Moreover, the interactions also result in the service design, which imparts value-in-use for consumers, which means that the consumer can get more value-in-use from the services they design for themselves. Similarly, this interaction results in the value co-creation at the provider's end by reducing the number of activities providers have to go through for customer's satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to extract themes from the literature in order to focus on the consumer-provider interactions during the process of technology-based services' design. These themes provide a foundation to explore further, the possibility of innovative interactions for facilitating the service design process in the organizations. The output of the interaction emphasizes on the value co-creation as a function of the interactions among the system entities as service science theory suggests (Spohrer et al. 2007). It defines the boundaries of the roles of consumer and provider, types of interactions and type of value co-created. This contribution will help in a systematic investigation in the areas of value co-creation in technology-enabled service design and use.

These themes will help in building a conceptual model, which will be validated in the field. An investigation around telecom services of the IPTV, the wireless internet and the value-added services in an emerging economy is underway. The research design is qualitative comprising of interviews from the designers and planners of the services, observations at the service-delivery centres and focus group discussions from the consumers. We expect that the research outcomes will help in the formulation of concepts that may guide the development of new adaptive and flexible services.

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