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Assessing the Customer Behavioral Intentions on the Web: A Research Model

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Abstract

This paper describes a research model of assessing the customer behavioral intentions on the Web. This model combines information systems and marketing literature. Five propositions were proposed in the model.

Introduction

Electronic commerce is a modern business methodology that addresses the needs of organizations, merchants, and consumers to cut costs while improving the quality of goods and services and increasing service delivery through computer networks (Kalakota et al. 1996). The Internet, especially the Web, enables global electronic commerce so that a vast array of goods and services are being advertised, brought, and exchanged worldwide. As the widespread use and dependency on the Web increases throughout the world, so does the need to assess the effectiveness and/or the successfulness of Web commerce. A high quality Web site is generally considered as a necessity for success in today’s electronic commerce environment. This paper suggests that select design features will produce a successful Web site that can influence customers’ favorable behavioral intentions. Customer behavioral intentions have become better measurement variables than attitude, satisfaction, or effectiveness. This is because favorable customer behavioral intentions will lead to better financial results for business organizations (Zeithaml et al., 1996).

Theoretical Development

A major electronic commerce research issue is to identify the success of Web sites for electronic marketing activities (Strader et al. 1998). In the context of electronic commerce, the functions and features provided by Web sites can be classified into three phases of marketing activities: pre-sales, on-line sales, and after-sales. Any electronic commerce activity fits within these three classifications. The pre-sales phase includes a company’s efforts to attract customers by advertising, public relations, new product or service announcements, and other related activities. Even here, questions remain as Wang (1999) reported a study by Millward Brown Interactive comparing the impact of rich media enabled banners with GIF banners on standard measures of effectiveness, which produced some conflicting results. Customers’ electronic purchasing activities occur in the on-line sales where orders and charges are placed electronically through the Web facilities. The after-sales phase includes customer service, problem resolution, and the like. In this context a successful Web site addresses all phases of marketing activities by attracting customers, generating dependability and trust, and providing for customer satisfaction.

Based on this definition, Liu and Arnett (1998) further found that Web site success is related to four major design factors: quality of information and service, system use, playfulness, and system design quality. But, another measure of success must be related to the customers' involvement with the Web site. The purpose here is to promote the position that these four factors, coupled with higher levels of customer involvement such as extent of return visits, will be positively related to favorable customer intentions, which will in turn lead to better financial results. In short, the site must be well designed and must encourage high levels of customer involvement to lead to better customer behavioral intentions. First, business organizations and Web developers should actively seek ways to improve information and service quality provided through Web sites. Second, the way in which customers use a Web site is another aspect toward which business organizations and Web site designers should focus. Customers rather than business organizations should be empowered to control the on-line transaction process. Third, there is a need for business organizations and Web developers to cultivate hedonic pleasures in the Web site to attract customers. In addition, there is a direct relationship of system design quality and the success of the Web site.

Although the above discussion provides some important general guidelines for the design of a Web site in the context of electronic commerce, a more comprehensive model which includes consumer involvement needs to be addressed. Involvement refers to the amount of time and effort a consumer invests in the search, evaluation, and decision processes of consumer
behavior (Lamb et al., 1994). It deals with a consumer’s ability, preference, motivation, and the role that is played during purchasing activities. Thus, consumer involvement is an important indicator of the success of a Web site in that it generates better behavioral intentions.

**The Research Model**

The research model of assessing customer behavioral intentions of a Web site is presented in Figure 1. This model provides the following propositions:

P1: High involvement with the Web site is positively related to favorable customer behavioral intentions.

P2: Information and service quality are positively related to favorable customer behavioral intentions.

P3: System design quality is positively related to favorable customer behavioral intention.

P4: Playfulness is positively related to favorable customer behavioral intentions.

P5: System use is positively related to favorable customer behavioral intentions.

**Measurement Variables**

Table 1 presents the measurement variables for the research constructs. Measurement variables of information and service quality, system design quality, playfulness, and system use were based on the authors previous research results. For the research construct of customer involvement, measurement variables include: accessibility to the Web (available time and/or available computer equipment), preference (physical shopping mall or electronic shopping mall), motivation (perceived benefits), and the role in purchasing (decision maker, influencer, purchaser, or user). The variables of ‘say positive things’, ‘remain loyal’, ‘recommend the site’, and ‘spend more’ are used to measure customer behavioral intentions.

**Conclusions**

An initial survey of student surrogates provides insight into some of the established relationships of the model. A questionnaire survey will be employed to conduct this study. Student samples will be used in the first phase of this study. Then, we will target actual customers to test the relationships of the model. The findings should offer empirical support for the notion that successful Web site design and customer involvement features can increase favorable customer behavioral intentions and therefore lead to financial benefits for the business organization.
Table 1. Measurement Variables

Customer Involvement.
    Accessibility, Preference, Motivation, Role in purchasing.

Information and Service Quality.
    Customized information presentation, Relevant information, Accurate information, Complete products/services description, Perceived quality of products or services, Ethical standards, Information to support business objectives, Interactive feedback, Quick responsiveness, Assurance to solve customer problems, Empathy to customers’ problems, and Follow-up services.

System Use.
    Balanced security and ease of use payment, Insure correct transactions, Allow customers to control entire transaction, Gain Customer confidence during transaction, Ease of use for the transaction, Track order status, Keep confidential for customer information

Playfulness.
    Customers to enjoy visiting the Web sites, Motivate customers to feel participation, Promote customer excitement, Charming features to attract customers, Promote customer concentration.

System design quality.
    Well organized hyperlinks, Customized search functions, High speed of accessing the Web, Ease of correcting server’s error. Customer Behavioral Intentions Say positive things, Recommend the site, Spend more, and Remain loyal.

References


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