Editorial Preface

Etail Research from B2C Models to Customer Intimacy—Part 2

Guest Editor:
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This is the second of two special issues that focus on the end user of e-commerce processes and practices—the etail consumer—and the websites they visit. Despite the dot.com fallout, many etailers continue to thrive and new ones are still being born. New knowledge about the etailer-customer relationship is being discovered. We continue to learn about the factors that lead to success in this new frontier. The authors of articles in this special issue evaluate the relationship between consumers and the etailers they visit online in terms of searching for online information, trust between etailer and consumer, navigating the etail interface, and paying for online purchases.

Our lead paper provides a wonderful overview of the field. Khawaja, Hwang, and Yi utilize a meta-analytical methodology to assess the current thinking in online consumer behavior, and seek to establish an integrative framework. Given the recent etail fallout, the authors evaluate 42 separate studies in major IS journals in order to identify the key drivers of online consumer behavior and establish directions for future research. Their integrative framework proposes system quality, information quality, service quality, and vendor and channel characteristics as key factors that impact online consumer behavior. They also evaluate research constructs such as perceived usefulness and ease-of-use (from the Technology Acceptance Model) and trust.

Then, we have two papers that evaluate the consumer search process in greater detail. First, Hodkinson and Keil develop a model of consumer Web search behavior that combines previous consumer search theories with other behavioral variables. They identify navigational skills and personal Web skills as significant contributing factors. Finally, they propose a taxonomy of Web search actions, and present a call for future research. In another paper, Leug, Moore, and Warkentin evaluate consumer search in the context of situational involvement, as is typically the case with health care searches, as contrasted with online consumer search behavior ex-
hibiting less search intensity. Their research findings suggest that the level of situational involvement impacts search behavior and the communication between patients and health care providers. In addition, in the long run, there is also a link between an individual’s health and his or her use of the Internet to find information.

In our fourth article, Dai and Grundy evaluate customer perceptions of a new payment method for online purchases. Traditional methods, such as credit cards, work well for large-value, low-volume transactions, but this paper explores the micro-payment model, specifically for newspaper content. Their empirical assessment evaluates server-side versus client e-wallets, as well as factors such as consumer effort and economic trade-offs. Their findings suggest that the barriers to adoption can be overcome and implementation can be justified for certain repeated etailer-customer transactions. Finally, they present a prototype architecture that demonstrates the validity, usability, and security of micro-payment systems.

And finally, in a study of etail website interfaces, Gammack and Hodkinson evaluate levels of user interactivity (along a continuum with virtual reality at one end) as a factor affecting consumer engagement, trust, and involvement. They suggest that certain website design factors make a measurable impact on the customer experience, which can impact the bottom line for an etailer. They evaluate consumer perceptions of Web interfaces for online sellers of swimwear and conclude that enhanced interactive virtual environments increase the consumer’s involvement and willingness to purchase. Trust can be enhanced through the provision of online support pages, and increased trust often leads to purchase decisions. Virtual reality displays can increase consumer attention, helping them visualize complex products, leading to decreased perceived risk and higher intent to purchase.

We also have another book review—the time of a popular ecommerce textbook. Ernst Bekkering and Greg Rose review a widely used (and widely cited) college-level electronic commerce textbook by Efraim Turban and his colleagues.

These two special issues of the *Journal of End User Computing* have presented research manuscripts exploring several important issues in the area of etailing. As the practice and study of ecommerce matures, we will continue to seek a deeper and more complete understanding of the nature and relationships of the critical components—buyers, sellers, intermediaries, and technologies—that bring them together.