Mobile Service Design Thinking for Consumer Decision-Making Under Multichannel Environment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to present mobile service design thinking, with the aid of mobile devices and mobile internet, to help consumers make proper decisions throughout the process in today’s multichannel environment such that they can complete their activities and thus achieve value. This article first conducts a literature review to examine how consumers conduct activities by using those ancillary services to achieve their value step by step through their decision-making process in the multichannel environment. After that, it adopts the human-centered design toolkit developed by IDEO by three main phases: hear, create, and deliver, which link the process of human-centered design, to present mobile service design thinking. With the ubiquitous ability of mobile devices and mobile network, the mobile service design thinking presented by this study can help consumers make decisions in a more effective and efficient way in the multichannel environment, no matter which channels consumers would finally choose to conduct their activities.

KEYWORDS

Consumer Decision-Making Process, Multichannel, Mobile Service, Service Design

1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals conduct various activities to satisfy their different needs every day. To conduct these activities, they need different services and/or products provided from service/product providers to support their activity engagement. To go out for dining, for example, consumers need transportation services, dining services, and meals. For some activities such as buying a house to enjoy its safeness and comfort, consumers’ decision process can be intricate and time-consuming. In these cases, what consumers need to fulfill such a need can cover a wide variety. To analyze such needs for complex activities, it is necessary for researchers to do it step by step. Developed in the 1960s and 1970s, Grand Models are often applied to describe the process of purchase decision. The Grand Models define the stages of consumer decision-making process by a step-by-step sequential structure, which, in general, covers five main stages: (1) need recognition, (2) information search, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) purchase decision, and (5) post-purchase behavior (Blackwell et al., 2006).

The sequential structure of Grand Models provides an important basis for researchers to closely examine consumer behavior step by step. This is particularly useful when some newly developed shopping channels; e.g., Internet shopping and mobile shopping, emerge. To clearly identify the differences between various shopping channels, a step-by-step comparison according to the sequential structure of consumer decision-making process is important. In the ‘information search’ stage, for example, consumers can generally acquire more in-depth information by face-to-face contact with

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the staff through physical store shopping, while they can acquire more in-breadth information by the powerful searching capability of the Internet through online shopping.

Consumer shopping behavior within such a multichannel environment has been recognized as an important domain. It is common that consumers use different channels at different stages of their decision-making and purchase process (Balasubramanian et al. 2005; Frambach et al., 2007; Dholakia et al., 2010). Among the online channels, the role of mobile devices with their ubiquitous capability is especially noticeable. According to Shankar and Balasubramanian (2009), mobile device exhibits three important characteristics: ultraportability, location-sensitivity, and untetheredness (wireless feature). By its time-sensitive and location-sensitive nature, mobile marketing is believed to have the potential to change the paradigm of retailing (Shankar et al., 2010).

Despite its ubiquitous ability, mobile devices and mobile network still have their limit capability to provide full services for consumers throughout their decision-making process. Even so, however, since mobile devices and mobile Internet have become indispensable in our daily lives, mobile channel actually can serve as important touchpoints to contact consumers directly, quickly and ubiquitously. Consumers receive many messages over their mobile phones from services/goods providers every day, most of which are about services/goods promotion. Few of consumers, however, accordingly follow the messages and make efforts to the next step. A reason for this is that consumers are not properly guided about how to follow the messages to the next step. It should be services/goods providers’ responsibility to have a better service design for consumers by taking advantages of mobile devices’ characteristics; e.g., ultraportability, location-sensitivity, and untetheredness.

Service design is a newly developed discipline first emerging in the early 1990s when a group of scholars in Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany started to describe it as a new design agenda (Sangiorgi and Prendiville, 2014). Today service design has become a multidisciplinary area which covers business, design, marketing, human resources, operations, organizational structure, and technology disciplines (Teixeira et al., 2012). In each field, it is generally recognized that information technology (IT) plays a vital role in implementing the service design. The role of IT has made the innovations and services technically feasible and economically viable (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015). Even so, there are still very limited studies found to investigate how mobile services can be applied to facilitate service design practices. Especially the knowledge about how to realize the various service design-related approaches and tools in real-world settings is still sparse (Jevnaker et al., 2015). Only a few studies use design tools and methods with an emphasis on gathering customer insights, creating compelling narratives and making experiences tangible (Karpen et al., 2017).

This study tries to fill this gap with an emphasis on the role of mobile services in helping consumers accomplish their shopping and purchase tasks. It aims to present mobile service design thinking, with the aid of mobile devices and mobile network, to help consumers make proper decisions throughout the process in the multichannel context such that they can complete their activities and thus achieve utility and value. As Dorst (2011) noted, design thinking is a new paradigm for dealing with problems in many professions, most notably information technology (IT) and business. With the ubiquitous ability of mobile devices and mobile network, it is believed that a good mobile service design can help consumers make decisions in a more effective and efficient way in today’s multichannel environment, no matter which channels consumers would finally choose to conduct their activities. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, it discusses consumer decision-making process under multichannel environment. It is followed by a section describing the characteristics of mobile services. In section four, it introduces service design including its history and definition. In section five, it presents the idea about mobile service design and proposes possible methodology to implement the idea. Finally, it gives a summary and draws the conclusion in section six.
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