The Effect of Information Satisfaction and Relational Benefit on Consumers’ Online Shopping Site Commitments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Among the potential determinants of consumers’ commitments to online shopping site are information features of the Web site, because online shopping consumers have to base their judgment solely on the product or service information presented on the site. When consumers are satisfied with such information features and perceive clear benefits from their relationships with the site, we can expect them to be more committed to the site. In this study, we investigate the relationship between such determinants and consumers’ commitments to an online shopping site. Results of the online survey with 1,278 Korean customers of online bookstores and ticketing services indicate that information satisfaction and relational benefit are highly predictable of consumers’ commitments to an online shopping site. In addition, we found that information satisfaction is affected most by product information quality, while relational benefit is strongly related to service information quality. These results seem to reflect the consumers’ different perceptual weights to different information contents of the Web sites in forming their Web site perceptions.

Keywords: consumer loyalty; information quality; Internet buyers; Internet shopping

INTRODUCTION

Shopping at an online site is like shopping through a paper catalog, because both involve mail delivery of the purchases, and in both cases, customers cannot touch or smell the items (Lighter & Eastman, 2002). So the promise of e-commerce and online shopping depends to a great extent on user interfaces and how people interact with computers (Griffith et al., 2001). Moreover, the characteristics of information presentation, navigation, and order fulfillment in an interactive shopping medium are considered important factors in building e-commerce trust than in the traditional retailing (Alba et al., 1997; Reynolds, 2000).
However, while information contents of a Web site might be an important determinant of consumers’ online shopping behaviors, there has been little empirical research on how such information features affect consumers’ commitments to a shopping site on the Web (Hong et al., 2005). This study examines how information features and other related technical and social aspects of an online shopping site affect consumers’ commitments to such sites. The study was conducted in Korea, which leads the world in the deployment and usage of high-speed Internet infrastructure (IMD, 2005). Korean consumers’ extensive use of online shopping would provide an appropriate context for studying online consumer behaviors.

The article is organized as follows. First, we review information aspects of an online shopping site. Second, based on the literature, we develop a research model and a set of hypotheses to be tested. Third, in the research methodology section, the procedures for hypothesis testing and the testing results are described. Finally, we discuss the key findings and implications of this study and propose future research issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior studies on online shopping (Liu & Arnett, 2000; Lohse & Spiller, 1998; Szmanski & Hise, 2000) classify the attributes of an online store into four categories: merchandise, customer service and promotions, navigation and convenience, and security. These studies, however, did not recognize the fact that information aspects of these service attributes may affect consumers’ satisfaction and perceived benefits with the shopping site, eventually determining their commitment to the site. In this section, for each category of the service attributes, the importance of information for achieving consumer Web site commitment is confirmed from the literature.

Merchandising includes product-related characteristics such as assortment, variety, and product information. According to Lohse and Spiller’s (1998) study, big online stores are less effective than small ones at converting site traffic into sales, because consumers have difficulty finding the products they seek. It is argued that since a primary role of an online store is to provide price-related information and product information to help reduce consumers’ search costs (Bakos, 1997), more extensive and higher-quality information available online leads to better buying decisions and higher levels of consumer satisfaction (Lightner & Estman, 2002; Peterson, 1997). For instance, online shopping stores can offer hyperlinks to more extensive product information such as price comparison, product testimonials (e.g., book reviews at an online book store), and product demonstrations (e.g., software downloads).

The second attribute category for an online store is customer service and promotion. Customers want careful, continuous, and useful communication across geographic barriers (Lose & Spiller, 1998). These attributes frequently are identified as a salient dimension to determine the store choice behavior in both online and offline stores (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997; Kolesar & Galbraith, 2000). The third attribute category is navigation and convenience. This is related to the user interface of an online store (Szymanski & Hise, 2000). Store layout, organization features, as well as ease of use are considered in this category. Since user interface of an
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