

Chapter XXIX

Consumer-to-Consumer Electronic Commerce: A Distinct Research Stream

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ABSTRACT

Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) e-commerce is a growing area of e-commerce. However, according to a meta-analysis of critical themes of e-commerce, C2C e-commerce was only represented in the area of online auctions (Wareham, Zheng, & Straub, 2005). C2C e-commerce can encompass much more than just auctions. The question then becomes, “is C2C e-commerce a different research area that deserves its own stream of research?” This study adapts constructs from a business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce study of satisfaction (Devaraj, Fan, & Kohli, 2002) to determine what, if any, the differences are in the C2C e-commerce arena. The constructs include elements of the technology acceptance model

(TAM), which includes perceived ease of use and usefulness; transaction cost analysis (TCA), which includes uncertainty, asset specificity, and time; and service quality (SERVQUAL), which includes reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Participants in the study answered questions regarding these various constructs in relation to their experiences with C2C e-commerce. The findings indicate that TAM, TCA, and SERVQUAL all impact satisfaction in C2C e-commerce. Reliability and responsiveness (areas of service quality) were found to influence C2C e-commerce satisfaction, where as they were not found to be an influence in the B2C study. These findings warrant further research in the C2C e-commerce arena. The study provides implications for future research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

E-commerce is a continuously evolving phenomenon. While media attention of e-commerce has declined in focus, academic research of e-commerce appears to have increased. This can be seen in the amount of e-commerce-specific journals as well as the number of e-commerce-related articles published in the IS main stream journals (Wareham et al., 2005).

In a meta-analysis of the critical themes of e-commerce research, Wareham et al. (2005) performed a meta-analysis of the critical themes of e-commerce research. The analysis included a review of abstracts from “mainstream IS journals,” both academic and professional (a full list of the journals used in the analysis can be found in the referenced article), between the years of 1997 and 2003 (65% of which fell between the years 2001 and 2003). At a top level, there are four main areas: (1) business-to-business (B2B), (2) B2C, (3) strategy, and (4) technology adoption. They further refined these broad areas into 17 different themes found in e-commerce research. Of the 17, C2C research was not listed. Some may argue that “Auctions” (one of the 17 themes) covers the full realm of C2C e-commerce. However, C2C e-commerce can encompass much more than just auctions.

C2C e-commerce can also take place in online communities, chat rooms, third-party consumer listing services, and Web-based discussion forums. For example, one consumer recalled a recent C2C e-commerce transaction conducted in a Web-based discussion forum. He indicated to the other participants that he had a car part to sell. Another participant indicated a need for that part. They exchanged address information through the forum. Once the seller received the check from the buyer, he sent the part to him. While the payment and product were sent via postal mail, all interaction regarding the transaction was completed within the Web-based forum. Similar to how third-party consumer listing services

(such as Half.com) or online auctions (such as eBay) facilitate the transaction between sellers and buyers, so did the Web-based forum in this anecdote. The difference comes in the intent of the forum versus the third-party consumer listing service and online auction. However, regardless of the intent of the venue, C2C e-commerce is indeed being conducted in many areas in addition to online auctions. And as such, should be included in the stream of research surrounding C2C e-commerce.

In a quick search for C2C e-commerce, only a few articles could be found which did not solely focus on online auctions and reputation systems. For example, Lin, Li, Janamanchi, & Huang (2006), Livingston (2005), and Melnik and Alm (2002) studied C2C online auctions and reputation systems, and Yamamoto, Ishida, and Ohta (2004) studied C2C reputation management systems, where as Strader and Ramaswami (2002) examined consumer trust in C2C online markets and Armstrong and Hagel (1996) and Orman (2006) described the value of online communities. Even with the online auction and reputation system articles, Wareham et al. (2005) found that only 3% of the articles they reviewed dealt with this area. This lack of research leads one to wonder whether or not C2C e-commerce is a different enough research area to have its own stream of research. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are enough differences to build a new area of research. This research is an exploratory study to empirically determine if there are indeed differences found in C2C e-commerce and B2C e-commerce research that indicate a need for C2C e-commerce to have its own research stream. To do this, a previous study by Devaraj et al. (2002) that focused on the satisfaction of B2C e-commerce over other commerce methods is modified to reflect C2C e-commerce, utilizing three well-known frameworks: (1) TAM, (2) TCA, and (3) SERVQUAL.

The next section of the paper discusses the research model, followed by the method and

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