



Chapter I

Evaluation of Web Sites on Information and Entertainment Properties: The Role of Involvement

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Abstract

This paper addresses the role of consumer involvement in Web site evaluation. We investigate the factors that lead the consumer to be involved with one site more than another. Based on previous research, we use the psychological constructs, information-seeking tendency, and focused attention (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996; Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000) to define the “information profile” of a consumer; and sensation-seeking tendency and mood variability to define the “entertainment profile” of the consumer (Eliashberg & Sawhney, 1994). The information and entertainment factors are hypothesized to affect consumers’ utilitarian (need, value) and hedonic (interest, appeal) evaluations of involvement, respectively, and ultimately, the affect toward the Web site (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Mano & Oliver, 1993; Zaichowsky, 1985, 1994). We examine these evaluations for various Web sites, whose respective information and

entertainment profiles are defined using elements such as informativeness, organization, and entertainment properties (Chen & Wells, 1999). The Web site properties are hypothesized to moderate the relationships between individuals' profiles and their evaluations of involvement and affect. We conducted our study using three surveys: (1) collection of data for classifying Web sites on information and entertainment properties, (2) collection of data for measurement of involvement, and (3) collection of data for time-based measurement of involvement. Our results show that the consumer's information and entertainment profiles significantly affect utilitarian and hedonic evaluations of involvement. We also find positive and significant relationships between the evaluations of involvement and affect toward the Web site. Further, we find that the Web site's information-specific properties moderate the relationship between information profile of the consumer and his/her utilitarian evaluation of involvement. A set of results from representative time-based evaluations of involvement shows that the respective elements of evaluation of involvement show increase/decrease over time if there is a match/mismatch between the user and site properties.

Introduction

The Internet has evolved as a dynamic new medium of information, entertainment, and commerce. Penetration levels have increased dramatically and new business opportunities have been created online (Hanson, 2000). Analysts have remained upbeat about the potential of e-commerce and predicted that traditional U.S. companies using digital marketing will spend \$63 billion on it annually by 2005; and that online retailing in Europe will grow to 152 billion Euros in 2006 (Forrester Research, 2001; Forrester Research BV, 2001). However, amidst all the excitement about the Internet, the importance of the most significant entity behind all this attention—the consumer—must be recognized. This is important since the consequences of the lack of in-depth understanding of the consumer could be devastating as manifested in many dot-com failures (Mahajan, Srinivasan, & Wind, 2002; Varianini & Vaturi, 2000).

In general, online consumers are younger, more educated, and more affluent than the general population (Hanson, 2000). Consumers visit the Web for entertainment (e.g., multiuser games, online discussions or chat rooms, music, videos), buying goods or services (e.g., online banking, online shopping, financial services, electronic catalogs, reverse auction), searching for information (e.g., reading news, searching online databases), communication (e.g., e-mail, chat),

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