



Some people just want to read: The roles of age, interactivity, and perceived usefulness of print in the consumption of digital information products

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of digital technologies, both academic researchers and marketing practitioners alike continually seek a richer understanding of the way information is produced and consumed. Against this backdrop, this study explores the relationship between interactivity, consumer satisfaction and adoption intention in the context of digital information products. Drawing broadly on the services marketing literature, interactivity literature and diffusion theory, the results of our study suggest that in a utilitarian context, consumers are more likely to adopt interactive books than more traditional static e-books. However, satisfaction with interactivity is moderated by the age of the consumer, with older “digital immigrant” participants more satisfied by static e-books and younger “digital native” participants more satisfied by interactive e-books. Also, the less useful consumers find print products, the more likely they will be to adopt interactive digital books, and this effect is also moderated by the age of the consumer. Finally, with the proliferation of digital devices only expected to continue, these findings have important implications for both product development and marketing communication programs.

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Some consumers, it turns out, just want to read.
The New York Times (Peters, 2011)

1. Introduction

A common anecdotal perception is that people, especially today's younger generation, are reading less than they used to. However, recent studies suggest that due to the wealth of information on the Internet, people are actually consuming more information today than ever before (Bohn and Short, 2009). Understanding the consumption of digital information is important because as consumers progressively find meeting their physical consumption needs taking less of their time, they are devoting increasingly more time to the consumption of information (Ariely and Norton, 2009). At the same time, changing information consumption patterns in the digital world are making it increasingly difficult for information providers, such as book, magazine, and newspaper publishers, to achieve profitability. New hardware platforms such as the Amazon Kindle™ and Apple's iPad™ are providing new ways to consume information

in digital form. Tablet computers have become “lifestyle devices,” with more than 82 million US consumers, or one-third of US online consumers, forecast to be tablet users by 2015 (Rotman Epps, 2011). The reach of digital information on the images of brands is becoming pervasive. For example, marketers of some luxury product brands are beginning to create their own digital publications to reach out directly to consumers, avoiding more traditional publications (Carr, 2011). Yet it is surprising how little research is available to help identify and clarify effective business models for digital information products.

The publishing industry is facing a grave threat but at the same time, an unprecedented opportunity. Young people today do not learn and work the way older generations used to (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2005). They do not limit their consumption of information to material found in a hard copy of a book or magazine—they are accustomed to a web-oriented world where the information they need is instantly at their fingertips and at the click of a button. In the same way that commerce has been transformed through the Internet (Koufaris et al., 2001), information consumption has seen two major transformations: the transformation of physical media from paper to digital screen as well as the transformation of readers into computer users. To understand today's information consumer, we need to study their behavior not just as consumers of traditional information products, such as books, magazines, and newspapers, but also as users of computer systems (Koufaris, 2002).

One of the key differences between print and digital media is the potential for interactivity. While consuming information in

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print form is a linear process, consuming information online is an interactive, consumer-driven process, offering participants the opportunity to change the view and content of the product they are consuming with a mouseclick or the tap of a finger. Although the importance and effects of interactivity have been studied in online shopping (e.g., Dholakia and Zhao, 2009; Fiore et al., 2005; Song and Zinkhan, 2008; Yoo et al., 2010; Yoon et al., 2008), interactive advertising (e.g., Fortin and Dholakia, 2005; Sundar and Kim, 2005), mobile advertising (Choi et al., 2008) and web site (e.g., Cui et al., 2010; Liu and Shrum, 2009; Lustria, 2007) contexts, limited existing research examines the role of interactivity in the context of digital information products (Kirk, 2010, 2011; Kirk and Gopalakrishna, 2011).

In general, interactivity is viewed to have positive effects in web site and electronic shopping contexts (cf. Dholakia and Zhao, 2009; Lustria, 2007; Yadav and Varadarajan, 2005), so the addition of interactivity to what have traditionally been print products should also elicit positive effects. On the other hand, there is evidence that too much interactivity can result in “cognitive overload” (Liu and Shrum, 2009), a finding that may be moderated by personal factors such as expectations of interactivity (Sohn et al., 2007) or experience level (Liu and Shrum, 2009). Further, research in education suggests fundamental differences between today’s young “digital natives” and “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001, 2005) and it is possible that these differences may affect the way these two groups respond to interactivity in digital versions of books, magazines, and newspapers. Both satisfaction, which has a pleasurable component, and perceived usefulness should affect adoption of digital information products.

Therefore, this study contributes to the interactivity and services literatures by examining whether interactivity always enhances consumer satisfaction with and adoption intention of digital information products, and if not, whether the age of the consumer and their perceived usefulness of print products may moderate the effect. Diffusion theory, suggesting that consumer adoption of new technologies depends on their perceptions of that an innovation is superior to its precursor (Ellen et al., 1991; Rogers, 1962, 2003), is applied to examine the effect of perceived usefulness of print. In response to calls for a focus on user traits to assess the impact of interactivity (Tremayne, 2005; Zeithaml et al., 2002), this study also examines the effect of age of the consumer as a moderator, operationalizing age as a consumer’s status as either a digital immigrant born before 1980, or digital native (Kirk, 2011; Prensky, 2001, 2005).

The paper begins with an overview of digital information products and the construct of interactivity, follows with hypotheses, methodology, and results, and concludes with a discussion, implications for researchers and practitioners, and areas for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Digital information products

The marketing literature to date has generally studied digital information products not as a separate product class, but as enhancements or add-ons to their “hard-copy” counterparts (Koukova et al., 2008; Venkatesh and Chatterjee, 2006). Koukova et al.’s (2008) research offers a hint that this assumption may need to be revisited, especially among today’s younger generation, and that young people today may actually view digital media as a primary vehicle and print media as the add-on. Despite the potential implications for marketing of these digital information products, it nonetheless appears there is not even an agreed-upon or commonly used name for this new class of product. The terms

digital products, digital media, online media, interactive media, and digital content, among many others, appear to be used interchangeably and without clear definitions. For this purpose of this paper, the term “digital information products” (Kirk, 2010; Koukova et al., 2008; Varadarajan et al., 2008) is used to refer to digital content whose primary purpose is conveying information, and which in print form traditionally took the physical form of a book, magazine, or newspaper. Further, the term “e-book” has traditionally been used to refer to a print book that has been digitized and can be accessed online, printed, or read with an e-reader such as an Amazon Kindle™. On the other hand, a new class of digital information products is emerging with the proliferation of interactive tablet devices such as Apple’s iPad™. Examples of these more interactive digital information products would include such products as the Inkling™ interactive textbooks and interactive magazines and newspapers that are being sold as “apps.” In this paper, simple digitized e-books are referred to as *static* digital information products or *static* e-books, while digital information products with an interactive user interface closer to that of a typical web site are termed *interactive* digital information products or *interactive* e-books.

To understand the distinct nature of digital information products, it is helpful to turn to the service literature. Indeed, according to Watson et al. (2002: 344), “information is service,” a view that appears even more true in the case of digital information products. For example, while purchasing a book results in a tangible outcome (the physical possession of a book), the outcome from the purchase of a digital information product is intangible. In addition, the very process of bringing a print product to market implies some level of quality due to the editorial process and production costs involved. However, the “free” cost of producing information on the Internet results in no such signal of quality. Further, as with services, production and consumption of digital information in an interactive context are inseparable. While a print or e-book product is produced and delivered intact to the consumer, in an interactive digital context, the consumer participates in producing the product and creating value (Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) by interacting with the system (Kirk, 2011).

A newer service paradigm has been offered by Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) that also supports the view of digital information products as services. Specifically, they propose creating a new paradigm around the idea that “marketing transactions that do not involve a transfer of ownership are distinctively different from those that do” (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004: 34). Digital information, along with other types of digital media such as music and movies, generally do not involve transfer of ownership—the ownership resides with the owner of the intellectual property, while consumers are granted permission to use it. As such, Lovelock and Gummesson (2004: 20) note consumers of this new classification of services obtain access or “temporary possession.” They propose “information-based services that can be recorded and stored on media” as a possible new subfield of services marketing (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004: 20).

With this new classification as a background, one can examine interactivity in digital information products.

2.2. Interactivity

While interactivity is an essential component of modern computer interfaces, its appearance in digital information products is relatively new, sparked in particular by the availability of tablet computers like the iPad™. Interactivity can have both cognitive and affective results. In terms of cognition, interactivity has been shown to increase learning in an education context (Seal et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2006). One of the reasons for this may be

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