



Time, attention, authenticity and consumer benefits of the Web[☆]

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Abstract This article addresses three potential consumer behavior tendencies: perceived time scarcity, competition for consumers' attention, and quest for authenticity. It also reviews prior research results on consumer benefits of the Web, which include convenience, time savings, ease of use, cost savings, and selection of items. The most prevalent consumer concerns are safety, waiting time, and loss of human interaction. This paper concludes that both time and attention are closely related to measurable attributes of interactive environments, while the ideals of authenticity may influence behavior less directly.

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1. Introduction

Consumers linger on their favorite websites. The need to cut costs pressures companies and government offices to move their services to information networks. But what drives the development of the Web? What quality criteria govern its development? How are consumer needs reflected in today's Web?

This article analyzes consumer benefits and behavior tendencies with respect to the World Wide Web and seeks to explain the attributes that describe consumer encounters with it. An understanding of consumer perceptions of new technology contributes to healthy development of the

field. For example, the [Marketing Science Institute \(2002\)](#) has identified management of customer experiences and the role of products as a top-tier research priority. This article focuses on the marketing task of providing benefits and value to customers through a review of the literature and a synthesis based on it. It aims to make information in the existing knowledge base more assimilable. The text uses the terms 'World Wide Web', 'Web', and 'Internet' as synonyms.

The next three sections address tendencies in consumer behavior, and three aspects are highlighted: time, attention, and authenticity, all of which have been researched extensively. [Lewis and Bridger \(2000\)](#), for example, have analyzed this tripartite combination. Here, the focus is on how these themes relate to consumer online behavior. The article then goes on to discuss prior research results on consumer benefits and concerns. The

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findings show how research has handled attributes relating to time, attention, and authenticity, and also discusses the valuations revealed by empirical studies.

2. Perceived time scarcity

The first of the consumer behavior tendencies highlighted is perceived time scarcity. We often try to make the most efficient use of time by saving and compressing it; in other words, 'time is money'. [Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dubé \(1995\)](#) actually found that people are less willing to gamble with their time than with their money, since lost time is more difficult to recoup.

However, there are cross-cultural differences in how people experience time. [Hall \(1983\)](#) discusses this dimension of culture. Monochronic cultures are more obsessed with time and the scarcity of it and perceive time as linear and rushing onward. In contrast, polychronic cultures see time as a less tangible medium in which we are immersed. Monochronic time dominates most business in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Finland, and works cited in this section are from those countries. Additionally, in pragmatic terms, speed can be a relatively common value in busy cities. For instance, in Hong Kong, people often press the elevator 'close door' button almost as soon as the doors open.

The efficient use of time is crucial for sound customer service, and only the minimum amount of time should be expected of consumers. Customers will respect a business only if it recognizes the value of their time. The Internet can make everyday activities more convenient. In effect, as [Windham and Orton \(2000\)](#) argue, the perceived time deprivation dilemma is a precursor to acceptance of the Internet. Moreover, theoretical work by [Koivumäki, Svento, Perttunen, and Oinas-Kukkonen \(2002\)](#) suggests that the time saved in online shopping will lead to increased purchasing at Web shops.

There are also controversies about time efficiencies and technology. Saving time and labor is a conventional promise of consumer technology, yet buying, installing, using, and maintaining technology can consume time, in and of itself. Although information technology should reduce pressure and help in managing the workload, it often ties people even more closely to the job. Businesses may find that leisure customers want to spend time at a website, while business customers at the same site want to save it.

An accelerated time frame is another potential effect ([Rifkin, 1987](#)). [Gleick \(1999\)](#) argues that the acceleration of just about everything is reflected in the pace at which music is performed or in the turnover times of book titles sold in bookstores. In addition to the actual and measurable acceleration of human activities, the sense of both acceleration and expectation is important. [Beckwith \(2000\)](#) suggests that with the pace of life quickening and that of many services keeping up, consumers are no longer willing to wait as long as they did three decades ago. The faster things are done, the faster they are expected. Based on these expectations, the delivery of everything is heading toward real time and becoming instantaneous.

On the Internet in particular, [Pitt et al. \(1999\)](#) proposed immediacy as a defining expectation. In 1999, many Internet vendors believed that if users could not load a web page in a mere 8 s (referred to as the 'eight-second rule'), they might be likely to take their business elsewhere ([Zona Research, 1999](#)). In 2000, this was referred to as the 'eight-second three-click rule', implying that pages must load within 8 s and content must be within three clicks ([Feather, 2000](#), p. 214). In the same time frame, the actual average response took 17.63 s for most retail site home pages ([Zona Research, 2001](#)). Since then, broadband has gained ground and affected response times. More important is the gap between industry goals and what consumers experienced. The current estimate is that the tolerable waiting time for Web information retrieval is approximately 2 s ([Nah, 2004](#)), with the typical customer response to delay being frustration and potential site abandonment.

The above expectations and results regarding online experiences compare interestingly with research findings for offline behavior. [Underhill \(1999\)](#) argues that a minute and a half is the threshold for waiting time in a retail environment. When people wait up to 90 s, their sense of how much time has elapsed is fairly accurate. Anything longer, however, and their honest answer can often be a very exaggerated one. Research on people waiting for elevators has found a similar pattern. If someone claims to have waited 10 min, the real duration might have actually been 2 min.

Despite differences in tasks, it appears that acceptable and expected waiting times are shorter on the Web than offline. Another point worth considering is that there can be a threshold in waiting time, and this threshold may be explained through time awareness. Time awareness refers to individual thinking about the passing of time. [Conti \(2001\)](#) suggests that time awareness is accompanied by a tendency to think that it is later than it

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