



Understanding the role of an IT artifact in online service continuance: An extended perspective of user satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Given increasing investment in an IT (information technology) artifact (i.e., online service website), it is becoming important to retain existing customers. In order to help link website design and investment decisions to the strategy for retaining customers, we propose a model by extending the user satisfaction perspective into research on online service continuance. We empirically tested the model within the context of a social network service. The analysis results found that website information satisfaction and system satisfaction play key roles in forming continuance intention through perceived usefulness and perceived enjoyment. It is also noted that computer anxiety serves as an important moderator toward continuance intention. Theoretical and practical implications are offered for better understanding of the role of the IT artifact in online service post-adoption phenomena.

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1. Introduction

Because of advanced IT in business and personal settings, we live in the most revolutionary of times. The increasing popularity of the Internet has led to the emergence of a new kind of online service delivered by a website such as online blogs and communities. This online service is an essential ingredient in any electronic business. Every company faces the problem of creating company-wide benefits from this emerging service. Such service, called e-service (Chea & Luo, 2008; Featherman & Pavlou, 2003; Rust & Kannan, 2003; Rust & Lemon, 2001) or Internet-based self-service (Bobbitt & Dabholkar, 2001; Dabholkar & Bagozzi, 2002; Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000), is distinguished from traditional e-commerce primarily based on e-retailing of physical goods. An increasing number of companies are making more investments in their online service websites in order to successfully provide their core service such as online banking, as well as supplementary service such as customer support (Cenfetelli, Benbasat, & Al-Natour, 2008; Zhuang & Lederer, 2003). Faced with this new and complicated situation, wise managers are attempting to formulate the strategy for retaining their existing customers in order to attain success and sustainability (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Gefen, 2002; Kang, Hong, & Lee, 2009; Reichheld & Scheffer, 2000). Now more than ever, business occurs through online service, providing managers with a distinct challenge. Clearly, it becomes increasingly important to uncover the role of the IT

artifact that can promote vibrant online service. Here, the IT artifact represents a man-made online service website.

What separates great online service from the merely good one? Research from the user satisfaction literature provides guidelines for online service website design and investment (DeLone & McLean, 2004; McKinney, Yoon, & Zahedi, 2002; Molla & Licker, 2001; Negash, Ryan, & Igarria, 2003), whereas online service continuance research from the customer satisfaction literature helps explain and predict its continued use (Bhattacharjee, 2001a, 2001b; Cenfetelli et al., 2008; Chea & Luo, 2008; Lin, Wu, & Tsai, 2005; Thong, Hong, & Tam, 2006). Here, user satisfaction represents attitudes toward a target website (Wixom & Todd, 2005) and customer satisfaction means online customers' affect with (feelings about) prior usage of the website (Bhattacharjee, 2001b). What has been left relatively unexplored, however, is to build theoretical logic that links user satisfaction to online service continuance from the customer perspective. Practically, this linkage is important because with the tremendous investments in both time and money to design, implement, and manage the IT artifact, it is critical for firms to decipher the interrelationship among website investments and design, customer perceptions, and continued usage behaviors (Cenfetelli et al., 2008; Ortiz de Guinea & Markus, 2009; Piccoli, Brohman, Watson, & Parasuraman, 2004).

This paper attempts to address this knowledge void by posing the following research question: How may the attitudes toward a website influence online customers' behavioral beliefs and continued usage behavior? In answering this question, our goal is to develop a research model by extending the user satisfaction perspective into the research on online service continuance within

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the context of customer satisfaction. Integrity between the two research streams is critical. The extent to which technology is used hinges on people's belief that they can satisfactorily rely on the technology to do what they are going to do. Our proposed model will hypothesize that website information satisfaction and its system satisfaction, whose respective antecedents are website information quality and its system quality, influence perceived usefulness, perceived enjoyment, and customer satisfaction, respectively, leading to changes in continuance intention. In addition, the right time to implement the technology of the network would be after the right characteristics of people have been identified. Therefore, our model attempts to explore how computer anxiety moderates the effects of website information satisfaction and its system satisfaction on customer satisfaction.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides a theoretical background for our research model. In Section 3, we conceptualize our research model and advance hypotheses. The subsequent section illustrates our research method. Section 5 presents the results of the empirical test. Section 6 presents implications and limitations of our study. The final section provides the concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Extension of user satisfaction with technology acceptance

Perceptions of information systems (IS) success have been primarily explored within the context of user satisfaction (e.g., Bailey & Pearson, 1983; DeLone & McLean, 1992, 2003; Melone, 1990) and technology acceptance (e.g., Davis, 1989; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). The user satisfaction literature provides a useful diagnosis for system design and implementation by explicitly enumerating information and system design features (e.g., information reliability and system availability). In contrast, the technology acceptance model or TAM (Davis, 1989) explains and predicts target behavior (system usage) by linking the behavior to attitudes and beliefs that are consistent in target and action with the behavior of interest. Because of the successful application of the two research streams in the exploration of IS success, IS researchers have investigated e-commerce success from these two perspectives (e.g., DeLone & McLean, 2004; Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003; Molla & Licker, 2001; Pavlou & Fygenson, 2006).

However, user satisfaction has a limited ability in predicting system usage (Davis et al., 1989; DeLone & McLean, 1992; Melone, 1990; Seddon, 1997). This limitation results from the fact that beliefs and attitudes about objects (such as an information system) are generally poor predictors of behaviors using the objects (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Davis, 1993). In contrast, the technology acceptance literature provides only limited guidance about specific IS attributes which influence system usage. For example, the TAM model provides designers with general feedback regarding ease of use and usefulness, but it does not provide actionable feedback about important aspects of the IT artifact itself.

In order to overcome these limitations of the two research streams, Wixom and Todd (2005) attempted to integrate the user satisfaction and technology acceptance literature based on the correspondence principle (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Fishbein & Coombs, 1974). According to this principle, attitude-behavior correlations will be high if the attitude and behavior measures correspond in their target and action elements. In other words, the principle asserts the beliefs and attitudes that are most closely correspondent to the behaviors of interest should be the most proximal predictors of those behaviors. For this reason, attitudes and beliefs toward using objects have been related more strongly to the specified

behaviors than attitudes and beliefs toward the objects (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Davis, 1993; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For example, attitudes toward attending church are related more strongly to church attendance than attitudes toward church.

For the above extension, Wixom and Todd explicitly distinguished object-based beliefs and attitudes found in the user satisfaction literature from behavioral beliefs and attitudes found in the technology acceptance literature. Based on this separation, they demonstrated that object-based attitudes (information and system satisfaction), which are weak predictors of system usage, influence the usage through behavioral beliefs and attitudes. Specifically, information and system satisfaction were proved to strongly affect perceived usefulness and ease of use, respectively. These results confirm the applicability of information and system satisfaction as external variables to the traditional TAM beliefs about usage behavior.

Given ever increasing investments in online service websites and the significance of predicting online user behaviors, it is important to apply the synergy effect created from the extension to the context of online service. Furthermore, this extension needs to be sharpened through research on continued usage of online service because retaining existing customers is a central feature of sustainable great companies.

2.2. Research on online service continuance based on customer satisfaction

Superior continuance over a sustained period of time may be the ultimate mark of online service. Online service continuance does not improve until it becomes part of a company's work process. Recently, IS researchers have explored online service continuance on the basis of habit (Cheung & Limayem, 2005; Kim & Malhotra, 2005; Kim, Malhotra, & Narasimhan, 2005; Limayem & Cheung, 2008; Limayem, Hirt, & Cheung, 2007) and customer satisfaction (e.g., Bhattacharjee, 2001b; Cenfetelli et al., 2008; Chea & Luo, 2008; Kang et al., 2009; Liao, Chen, & Yen, 2007; Lin et al., 2005; Thong et al., 2006). The habit perspective helps deepen our understanding by showing the moderating role of habit in post-adoption phenomena, and the role of that as a determinant of post-adoption beliefs and future use (Cheung & Limayem, 2005; Kim et al., 2005; Limayem et al., 2007). In contrast, the customer satisfaction perspective helps grasp a firm understanding of online service continuance by identifying customer satisfaction, perceived usefulness, and perceived enjoyment as determinants of online service continuance intention. Customer dissatisfaction is widespread and, because of customer empowerment, increasingly risky. Companies that systematically monitor customer satisfaction can take important actions to improve their bottom line. Therefore, the customer satisfaction perspective is important for reinforcing the integration of the user satisfaction with technology acceptance literature. For this reason, we will review the customer satisfaction perspective in further detail.

Expectation-confirmation theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1980) hypothesizes that satisfaction with a product or service is the primary motivation for its continuance. Online service may culminate in either satisfaction or disappointment and defection. Therefore, customer satisfaction has been found to be an antecedent to continuance intention of online service (see Table 1).

According to empirical studies about the relative effects of perceived usefulness and ease of use during the pre-acceptance and post-acceptance stages of IS use, usefulness affects attitude substantially and consistently during both stages, while ease of use seems to become insignificant in the later stages (Davis et al., 1989; Karahanna, Straub, & Chervany, 1999). Therefore, usefulness seems to be a primary determinant of customer satisfaction and continuance intention of online service (Bhattacharjee, 2001a, 2001b; Cenfetelli et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2005). However, in the case

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