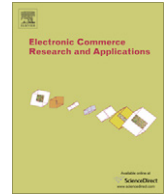




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Intimacy, familiarity and continuance intention: An extended expectation–confirmation model in web-based services

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ABSTRACT

To date, plenty of theories, such as the expectation–confirmation model (ECM), have been proposed to explain why and how consumers are motivated to continue to use web-based services. In particular, various affective factors have been proposed to explain user satisfaction and continued use of web-based services recently in the IS community. In IS continuance research, several affective factors, such as perceived playfulness, perceived enjoyment and pleasure, have been examined. Affective factors discussed in the existing continuance intention-related studies are mostly short-term emotional factors like this. However, if a user's continued usage of a web-based service can be interpreted as a long-term relationship between a user and the service, then the factors such as familiarity and intimacy which are the emotions created accumulatively over time based on an established relationship with the user can be helpful for better explaining the user's continuance intention. Also, if relationships between consumers and web-based services have been built up due to repetitive usage, then we can assume that both affective and cognitive factors may explain consumers' continuance intention. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to propose an extended ECM. We focus on two new constructs, familiarity and intimacy, as persistent affective factors. To investigate how cognitive and affective factors are interrelated in continuance intention, we conducted surveys focusing on users' continued intention to use web-based services. The results indicate that continuance intention is affected conjointly by cognitive factors, such as perceived usefulness, and affective factors, such as familiarity and intimacy. However, the effects of affective factors such as intimacy were larger than those of cognitive factors such as perceived usefulness. In addition, the results indicate that intimacy, a purer affective concept than familiarity, affects users' continuance intention more than familiarity.

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1. Introduction

Web-based services have been used by a growing number of consumers for more than a decade. Web services in virtually every area of business—banking, travel, social activities, and more—have continued their rapid spread, gaining increasing importance in the lives of a wider range of the population. However, many companies are facing fierce competition due to the evolution and proliferation of web-based services; they are struggling to find strategies to retain their existing customers to ensure the company's success and overall sustainability. Also, web-based services have low entry barriers by its nature, if one service is created, then a number of comparable alternative web-based services follow, resulting in a high switching rate between those services by users (Vatanasombut et al. 2008). In fact, to date, a tremendous number of web-based services have appeared and disappeared. Thus, web-based service

providers are very eager to identify the conditions that lead to long-running web-based services.

Accordingly, continuance intention has become an important subject of study in the information system (IS) research area. IS continuance intention describes the user's decision to continue to use a specific IS that he or she has already been using. This is different from the user's first-time usage of the IS. IS continuance is crucial because the long-term viability of an IS and its eventual success depend on its continued use rather than first-time use (Karahanna et al. 1999, Bhattacherjee 2001a). IS continuance at an individual level has been regarded as crucial for sustainable web-based services such as online retailers, banks, and travel agencies.

Continuance intention has been understood based on the expectancy–confirmation model (ECM). In this model, users' continuance intention is decided by their satisfaction with IS usage and perceived usefulness of continued IS usage. Other researchers have extended the ECM by incorporating new factors. In the existing ECM-related studies, factors influencing users' continuance intention have been suggested from two perspectives. First, we see several cognitive factors dominating the studies: perceived

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usefulness, perceived quality, perceived usability, subjective norm, subjective task value, loyalty incentives, and others.

Second, a few studies have supported the affective perspective relating to continuance intention in the ECM (Lin et al. 2005). Even though this perspective has received less attention than the cognitive factors, some affective factors such as perceived enjoyment, pleasure, and arousal have recently been proposed as major predictors of corresponding research models such as the ECM (Lin et al. 2005, Thong et al. 2006, Min and Shenghua 2007). However, these factors are relatively temporary and change easily according to the context; they may not be adequate to explain continuance intention behavior fully, especially behavior that lasts for a longer time. Hence, there must be other, relatively more persistent affective factors at work.

Recently, researchers in psychology have confirmed that familiarity and intimacy are emotions that develop cumulatively over time, formed quite persistently and differently from short-term affective factors. For example, Gobbini et al. (2004) argued that familiarity accrues naturally with years of social interaction, and James (1992) showed that familiarity has to have time to grow. In addition, Cordova and Scott (2001) insisted that intimacy is not based on a single event, but instead on an accumulation of events over time. Bagarozzi (1997) explained that intimacy evolves over time. These findings are compatible with the notion that familiarity and intimacy are potentially related to continuance intention. However, in the IS community, this theory has not been empirically tested yet.

Affective factors such as familiarity and intimacy have been regarded as essential for strengthening human relationships in consumer behavior. If relationships between consumers and web-based services develop due to repetitive usage, then we can assume that both affective and cognitive factors may contribute to explain consumers' continued use of web-based services. We intend to examine whether affective factors, which are created accumulatively over time, based on a prior relationship with the user and related to social bonds, could influence their continuance intention. Moreover, comparing perceived usefulness as a cognitive factor and familiarity and intimacy as affective factors in terms of their explanatory power for continuance intention is an interesting challenge, since perceived usefulness has long been regarded as a representative determinant of user satisfaction and continuance intention.

Hence, the purpose of this paper is to propose an extended ECM including two affective factors—familiarity and intimacy—to inform our understanding of continuance intention as it is related to web-based services. We focus on the fact that the continued use of such services is based on the continuous relationship between service or service provider and user. We introduce human relationship studies suggesting the affective factors related to relationship reinforcement among people, and extend Bhattacharjee's (2001b) ECM model, the most representative research model on continuance intention. In the extended ECM, perceived usefulness is also considered as a competing factor, allowing us to analyze the explanatory power of familiarity and intimacy.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background. The detailed research model and hypotheses are then described in Section 3. In Section 4, we present the research methodology of our empirical study. The results are then described in Section 5. Finally, in Sections 6 and 7, we provide discussion and then conclude the paper with a summary of future research plans.

2. Research background

2.1. Expectation–confirmation theory

Introduced by Bhattacharjee in 2001, the ECM is an IS-related early research model that has its origin in expectation–confirma-

tion theory (ECT). Originally this theory mainly was used to investigate consumer relationship satisfaction and repeat decisions in the consumer behavior literature (Oliver 1980, 1993). Bhattacharjee, however, focused on the congruence between individuals' continued IS usage decisions and consumers' repeat purchase decisions, and suggested the ECM in the IT literature to explain the idea of customers' continuance intention.

Bhattacharjee carried out an empirical verification of the ECM using a survey of online banking users to explain the process through which users develop continuance intention. The empirical analytical results were as follows: users' continuance intention was decided by their satisfaction with IS usage and their perceived usefulness of continued IS usage. Bhattacharjee's is a landmark study in that it brought attention to the differences between the behavior of a user accepting an IS, versus the behavior of trying to continue using it. It was an early theoretical study on the continued usage of IS, and brought to light new factors such as expectation fulfillment and user satisfaction.

We chose the ECM as the theoretical apparatus in our research for the following reasons. First, Bhattacharjee's was a representative study whose results were verified by several other studies (Lin et al. 2005, Thong et al. 2006, Min and Shenghua 2007, Limayem and Cheung 2008, Vatanasombut et al. 2008). Second, the ECM has been widely used to study post-adoption behavior in various web-based service contexts, such as online banking and e-learning (Roca et al. 2006, Min and Shenghua 2007, Chiu and Wang 2008, Limayem and Cheung 2008). In particular, applying the ECM framework was found to be appropriate even within the e-commerce context that is the empirical analytical context in this paper (Atcharyachanvanich et al. 2006, Liao et al. 2007).

2.2. Continuance intention

The concept of continuance intention has been variously described in the literature as “incorporation” (Kwon and Zmud 1987), “routinization” (Cooper and Zmud 1990), and “confirmation” (Rogers 1995). Despite these variations in terminology, however, studies agree that continuance behavior assumes institutionalizing IS use as normal, ongoing activity. Hence, continuance intention may be defined as continued usage of IS by adopters, where a continuance decision follows an initial acceptance decision (Bhattacharjee 2001b).

Post-ECM, numerous studies followed to explain users' continuance behavior in web-based, service domains. They are classified into two types: extended studies based on the ECM, but adding a new construct, and integrated studies that combine the ECM and another theory or model. For example, Lin et al. (2005) extended the ECM model by adding an additional relationship between perceived playfulness and satisfaction. Thong et al. (2006) expanded the ECM's set of post-adoption beliefs to extend the model's application beyond an instrumental focus. Limayem and Cheung (2008) extended Bhattacharjee's model by considering a moderating effect (IS habit) on continuance intention. Atcharyachanvanich et al. (2006) added a new factor, customer loyalty. Min and Shenghua (2007) combined the ECM with theory about perceived enjoyment of individual users.

Other studies attempted to integrate theories or models to explain users' IT continuance intention. Vatanasombut et al. (2008) combined Commitment-Trust Theory, the ECM, and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to develop a model of continuance intention. They showed that relationship commitment and trust are stronger predictors of continuance intention. Roca et al. (2006) decomposed the TAM based on Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). In the model, the perceived performance component is divided into perceived quality and perceived usability. Liao et al. (2007) developed an integrated model designed to predict and explain an individual's continued use of online services based on

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