



Drivers of user loyalty intention and commitment to a search engine: An exploratory study



Deepak Sirdeshmukh, Norita B. Ahmad, M. Sajid Khan, Nicholas J. Ashill*

Department of Marketing & Information Systems, School of Business Administration, American University of Sharjah, PO Box, 26666 Sharjah, United Arab Emirates

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Search engines
Internet
Value
Innovation
Satisfaction
Loyalty intention
Commitment

ABSTRACT

Based on consumer value and technology usage research, we propose a conceptual model linking search engine performance to search engine value, user satisfaction with the search engine and search engine reputation for innovation, and ultimately to user loyalty intention and commitment. The results of a study based on data collected from search engine users provide support for a majority of proposed relationships. Functional performance of the search engine affected search engine value. Value was found to be a full mediator of the relationship between functional performance and user satisfaction and between functional performance and reputation for innovation. Aesthetic performance did not affect search engine value but did have a significant effect on reputation for innovation. User satisfaction and search engine reputation for innovation, included as backward looking and forward looking antecedents respectively, influenced user loyalty intention and commitment as anticipated. Implications of the results are discussed and future research avenues are offered.

1. Introduction

Web search engines have revolutionized the process by which individuals search for information. A significant majority of consumers engage in web searches during one or more stages of product or service purchase decisions (Vuylsteke et al., 2010). In turn, search engine optimization has emerged as an important method for acquiring and retaining consumers for companies of all sizes (Dou et al., 2010; Rangaswamy et al., 2009; Ratchford, 2015). Nabout and Skiera (2012) report that search engine marketing accounted for 47% of global online advertising spending. Google Search, Google Inc.'s search engine stands out as the dominant search engine, accounting for almost 13 billion searches in a given month (Comscore, 2013) and a commanding global share of about 75% of all searches throughout 2017 (Smart Insights, 2018).

In light of the pervasive influence of search engines on consumers and on marketing practice, there is a surprising dearth of research examining the determinants of consumer loyalty and commitment to search engines. We argue that in a highly competitive online context, understanding those factors that drive user loyalty and commitment are crucially important for firms. Many online markets, especially those with no monetary costs such as search engines, have generally low search costs and consumers are likely to have better product knowledge and a higher degree of brand familiarity (Wu and Padgett, 2004). Search engines engage in fierce competition in their efforts to attract

new users and to keep current users in order to increase traffic to their respective sites (Garnier, 2009; Shi et al., 2014). Garnier (2009) notes that search engines as utility tools are more prone to repeated or frequently performed behavior. Frequently performed behavior is said to become habitual over time (Foxall, 1992; Kim and Malhotra, 2005) and is characterized by minimal awareness, in that individuals do not attend closely to what they are doing when they act habitually, and thus automatically repeat prior behavior. The literatures on habit and familiarity suggest that people tend to perform behaviors automatically because of (non-associative) learning (Kim, et al., 2005; Limayem et al., 2007). A typical non-associative learning involves response patterns induced by stimulus repetition whereas in classical conditioning several stimuli are used in association (Wathieu, 2004). Although using a search engine has become a regular online activity, we conceptualize user loyalty intention towards a search engine as being distinct from the habitual behavior. Since consumer behavior is goal directed, we argue that using a specific search engine for surfing behavior is a rational choice that leads to a specific consumer experience (Baumgartner et al., 2008; Garnier, 2009). This experience produces significant outcomes in the form of a comparative gain or loss (Lafley and Martin, 2017) e.g., higher/lower quality search results, which in turn affects future behaviors such as user loyalty and commitment.

The above arguments find support empirical support in the search engine literature. Studies examining search engine switching behavior demonstrate that a user's decision to select one search engine over

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dsirdeshmukh@aus.edu (D. Sirdeshmukh), nahmad@aus.edu (N.B. Ahmad), mskhan@aus.edu (M.S. Khan), nashill@aus.edu (N.J. Ashill).

another is influenced by reputation, search effectiveness and interface usability. For example, Mukhopadhyay et al. (2004), Juan and Chang (2005) and Savenkov et al. (2013) concluded that search engine users do not use the same engine for all queries and may switch based on the perceived poor quality of results generated from the original search engine, desire for verification or additional coverage, and user preferences. White and Susan (2009) using data from two complimentary methods (survey data and large-scale log analyses) found that half of all users in the log sample and two-thirds of survey respondents engage in search engine switching behavior. Similarly, Dan and Davison (2013) showed that users mostly choose to defect from one search engine to another due to dissatisfaction with the results, while Kitchens et al. (2014) found that Google produces higher quality results in response to individual's queries as compared to a non-Google search engines.

Consumer loyalty, indicated by the intention to persist with a provider, and consumer commitment, indicated by an unwillingness to switch providers in the face of external pressures are essential for firms seeking long run profitability (Crosby and Taylor, 1983; Dick and Basu, 1994; Pritchard et al., 1999). While a handful of studies have addressed important strategic aspects of search engines such as variations in web search behaviors across countries (Vuylsteke et al., 2010), business impact of search engines (Rangaswamy et al., 2009), and brand positioning through search engines (Dou et al., 2010), the literature is largely silent on processes underlying consumer loyalty and commitment toward search engines. Three studies provide some limited insights into these processes. Wu and Padgett (2004) examined consumer evaluations of search engines against a set of search engine attributes such as accuracy, ease of use, layout, and speed, overall satisfaction and user preference. Veloutsou and McAlonan (2012) examined several antecedents of online loyalty and disloyalty including perceived innovativeness of the search engine, the quality and speed of results, and user satisfaction. Finally, Garnier (2009) studied the link between commitment and loyalty intention and the moderating role of both functional characteristics (whether the search engine is practical, effective and functional) and hedonic characteristics (whether the search engine is fun, thrilling and exciting) on this linkage.

Our in-depth review of these three studies highlights a number of important research gaps. First, none of the above mentioned studies examine the potential role of search engine value in understanding loyalty and commitment towards a search engine. Delivering customer value to customers has become increasingly important in gaining a competitive edge by strengthening relationships with customers (Leroi-Werelds et al., 2014). Previous work in the marketing literature suggests that customer value is a key concept to explain satisfaction, loyalty and commitment yet this variable has been ignored in existing studies of search engine behavior (Lam et al., 2004). Perceived value has emerged as a key outcome of technology judgments and as a

determinant of consumer technology acceptance and usage (Kim and Kankanhalli, 2009; Turel et al., 2007). Second, with the exception of Veloutsou and McAlonan (2012), there is scant literature on the role of reputation for innovation in predicting user loyalty and commitment. Miklosik and Dano (2016) note that it is crucial for search engines to continually introduce innovations to keep their positioning intact in the marketplace. In technology markets, emerging research suggests that a reputation for innovation can influence consumer behavior (Barone and Robert 2013; Gürhan-Canli and Batra, 2004; Henard and Peter 2010) over and above the influences of transactional experiences. In online markets that are fast moving, a provider's past performance measured through traditional backward-looking measures such as consumer satisfaction may not be robustly predictive of future behavior (Zeithaml et al., 2006). In such markets, we argue that forward-looking measures accounting for the consumer's judgment of the future, are more likely to cohere with behavioral intentions. Therefore, the user's perception of the search engine's reputation for innovation, may play an important role in leveraging user loyalty and commitment. Finally, in studies of search engine behavior, we note that outcome variables have largely focused on loyalty that utilize items that capture the user's intention to continue to use a search provider and the inclination to recommend the search engine to others (Garnier, 2009; Veloutsou and McAlonan, 2012). There is scant literature on user commitment which is a distinct construct from behavioral loyalty. Following Gustaffson, Johnson and Roos (2005) we suggest that commitment provides a forward looking measure of consumer relationships, and provides additional insight beyond measures of behavioral loyalty.

Against this backdrop, and noted research gaps, we expand current research on search engine behavior by introducing in a conceptual model search engine value, user satisfaction, search engine reputation for innovation and both user loyalty intention and commitment as endogenous variables. We incorporate the complex interrelationships of all these constructs and test them in a search engine setting. Understanding how various factors relate to search engine value, user satisfaction, reputation for innovation, and user behavior can help managers derive initiatives involving those factors that directly affect these endogenous variables.

2. Conceptual model

Our conceptual model is shown in Fig. 1 and draws on research in the areas of consumer shopping technologies (Hoque and Lohse, 1999; Montoya-Weiss et al., 2003), the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Devaraj et al., 2002; Hong et al., 2013; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000), trust and online brand experience (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013), search engine loyalty (Dan and Brian 2016; Garnier, 2009), consumer/user satisfaction (Bhattacharjee, 2001; Cenfetelli et al.,

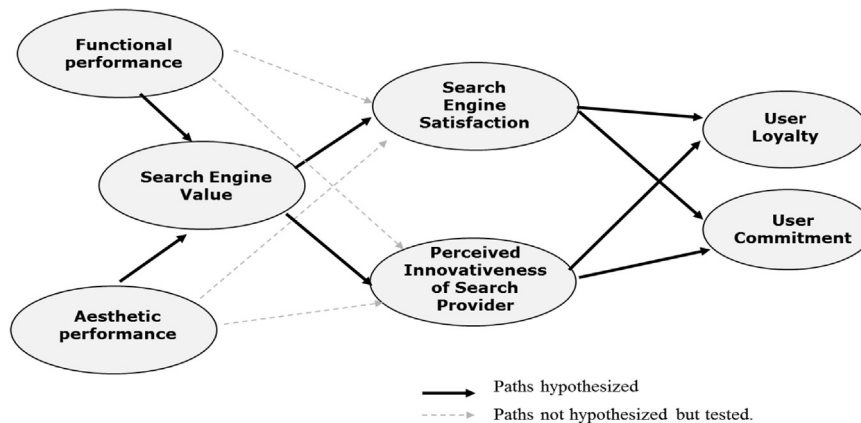


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of User Loyalty Intention and Commitment to Search Engines.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7433240>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7433240>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)