



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Electronic Commerce Research and Applications

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ecra

Utilitarian motivations in online consumption: Dimensional structure and scales

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 May 2013

Received in revised form 31 January 2014

Accepted 22 February 2014

Available online 5 March 2014

Keywords:

Online consumption
 Utilitarian motivations
 Full dimensional structure
 Measurement scales
 Validation

ABSTRACT

To date, the utilitarian benefits of online consumption have only been partially investigated. This study undertakes an exhaustive approach to fully delimit the dimensional structure related to the utilitarian motivations for online consumption. First, an in-depth literature review is carried out, in order to allow the proposal of an aprioristic base structure of eleven categories of utilitarian motivations. Next, qualitative analyses (focus groups and personal interviews) are applied to assess and eventually refine the structure of utilitarian motivations proposed after the literature review, their labels and respective measurement scales. Finally, this qualitative phase concludes with ten motivational categories and 46 items. Then, quantitative analyses (exploratory and detailed confirmatory factor analyses) are applied, based on a questionnaire administered to a sample of 667 Internet users, to keep refining and to eventually validate both the dimensional structure of motivations and the related measurement scales. Finally, a structure of 9 utilitarian motivations (and corresponding set of 36 items) is established, with the following labels: assortment, economy, convenience, availability of information, adaptability/customization, desire for control, payment services, anonymity, and absence of social interaction. The nomological validity of this structure is satisfactorily tested using a second-order factor model. The article finishes by discussing some implications for practitioners.

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1. Introduction

In this era of the information society, in which technological development is on the rise and globalized access to the Internet is ubiquitous, consumers are dedicating more time and resources to online consumption and, particularly, to shopping. Currently, ICT-related sectors have demonstrated greater resistance during the economic crisis than other key sectors of the economy (OECD 2012). The production data for ICT services shows how, despite the crisis, a number of countries experienced positive growth for almost the entire period of 2008–2012, with South Korea being just one example. Furthermore, the magnitude of the fluctuations in growth rate has been significant.

E-commerce companies experienced an annual increase of 31% in average revenues over the period 2000–2011 (OECD 2012). In addition, the number of target customers is growing, with more than 30% of the people living in the OECD purchasing goods and services over the Internet. In the United Kingdom, nearly 64% of the population has carried out e-commerce-based transactions. Countries whose numbers approach those of the UK include Australia, Denmark, Germany, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, with ratios of over 50%. As more consumers operate online, the size of the B2C electronic markets grows, and, consequently, there is an increase in business volume. EU countries such as the UK and France exceeded 30 billion Euros in B2C e-commerce sales in just one year (Ystats 2011). China, on the other hand, enjoyed an increase of over 130% in online transactions compared to the previous year. In general, the global volume of B2C e-commerce comes to approximately 1 trillion US dollars (IMRG 2012).

In this context, it becomes necessary to understand the benefits that consumers look for when they forego physical environments

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and use the Internet as an alternative means of consumption. In other words, companies should be aware of the motivations behind the individual's use of the Internet in his or her consumption processes. Motivations are an important component among the aspects which define people's behaviours. They stem from unmet needs and represent, through concrete actions, the benefits which people hope to achieve (Schiffman 2005, Pieters 1993). In online consumption, there are two large categories of motivations (Martínez-López et al. 2006): utilitarian and hedonic. Utilitarian motivations are related to functional, economic, rational, practical, or extrinsic benefits, while hedonic motivations have more to do with emotional or experiential aspects which make the shopping experience and eventual purchase agreeable and pleasant. In this study, we focus on the utilitarian aspects of online consumption.

Within the context of physical markets, utilitarian motivations have been studied extensively, using partial and complete approaches. However, they have not been completely defined within the context of electronic markets yet. One of the first of a few remarkable attempts was made by Childers et al. (2001), who based on the Technology of Acceptance Model (TAM) to approach the utilitarian and hedonic factors explaining consumers' attitude towards online shopping. Nevertheless, rather than a delimitation and empirical analysis of motivations, the authors focused on the role played by a few instrumental utilitarian (and hedonic) factors related to the adoption of a technology in more utilitarian vs. more hedonic web-based forms of interactive shopping. The study by Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2001) is really the first to focus on delimiting motivations in online shopping. They mainly based on a qualitative research (focus groups), to establish four categories for utilitarian online shopping: convenience, selection, information availability and lack of sociality. Years later, To et al. (2007) took this four-motivation structure as a base and proposed adding two more (cost saving and customization of product/service), which turned out to be non-significant in a structural model predicting the effects of consumers' motivations in their search and purchase intention in internet shopping. However, though all these studies are meritorious, they failed to start with a thorough theoretical delimitation of the utilitarian motivational categories in (online) consumption; this limits the completeness of the proposed dimensional structures. Neither do they specifically focus on the utilitarian motivations in online consumption, nor propose, evaluate and validate a full dimensional structure with its respective measurement scales.

Therefore, we are presented with a clear opportunity to investigate this topic more thoroughly. In this regard, our aim has been to provide an exhaustive delimitation of the dimensional structure which defines the utilitarian motivations for online consumption. To this end, we have made use of the protocol proposed initially by Churchill (1979) and later expanded upon by other authors, including: Anderson and Gerbing 1988, Bagozzi 1980, Bentler and Bonett 1980, Churchill 1979, Nunnally and Bernstein 1994, Peter 1981. First, and based on an extensive review of the literature, an a priori dimensional structure of 11 categories is proposed for the utilitarian motivations in online consumption, along with the corresponding measurement scales. Following this initial phase, a qualitative study (focus groups and personal interviews of experts) is conducted. At this point, both the dimensional structure and the measurement scales are evaluated and refined (Section 4), concluding with a motivational structure of ten dimensions and a total of 46 items for their measurement scales. In Section 5, an exploratory factor analysis is first conducted in order to analyze the previous dimensional structure and the scales; this analysis, in turn, facilitates another subsequent refinement. Then, confirmatory factor analyses are applied in order to validate the dimensional structure defining the utilitarian motivations of online consumption. We end up with a structure of 9 utilitarian

motivational categories with their scales (36 items in total). To the best of our knowledge, this is the most exhaustive delimitation of the utilitarian motivations in online consumption published so far. To finish, some concluding remarks and practical implications are indicated.

2. Background

2.1. A brief overview of the dichotomy in online consumption motivations

Two significant lines of investigation into Web-based consumption motivations exist. One line focuses on the way in which consumer motivations may influence a commercial website's particular attributes and vice versa. Research in this area demonstrates the predictive importance of different perceptions of value of the online media in consumers' motivations to shop online (Alba et al. 1997, Childers et al. 2001, Foucault and Scheufele 2002, Swaminathan et al. 1999, Teo et al. 1999, To et al. 2007, Verhoef and Langerak 2001). The distinguishing characteristic of the second line of research, on the other hand, is the development of a typology of online shoppers (Donthu and García 1999, Moe 2003, Parsons 2002, Rohm and Swaminathan 2004, Wolfenbarger and Gilly 2001). This group of studies aims to profile different shopping types in terms of their underlying motivations.

Most of the points of view found in the reviewed literature have been inspired by studies into the motivations of consumers in physical markets, and most of these studies acknowledge and analyze the duality of said motivations (e.g. Bridges and Florsheim 2008, Childers et al. 2001, Moe 2003, Parsons 2002, To et al. 2007, Wang et al. 2007, Wolfenbarger and Gilly 2001). A number of significant, major classifications of consumption motivations originate in the following areas of research: (1) studies on motivations in human behaviour: *intrinsic* vs. *extrinsic* motivations (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 1989, Eiser 1986, Malone and Lepper 1987); (2) studies on motivations in the consumer behaviour discipline: *functional* vs. *non-functional* motivations (e.g. Sheth 1981, Eastlick and Feinberg 1999); *economic* vs. *recreational* (Belenger and Korgaonkar 1980); (3) analyses of one or both of the meta-dimensions (i.e., *utilitarian* and *hedonic*) of consumption motivations in physical markets (e.g. Arnold and Reynolds 2003, Babin et al. 1994, Bhuian 2001, Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000, Donthu and Gilliland 1996, Fiore and Kim 2007, Hirschman and Holbrook 1982, Voss et al. 2003).

In conclusion, the above classifications can be grouped according to the following dichotomy in online consumption: motivations of an extrinsic, functional type, driven by purely economic and rational criteria, which in the case of online consumption may be summarized as *utilitarian motivations*; and motivations of an intrinsic, non-functional and emotional type, which may be summarized as *hedonic motivations* (see Martínez-López et al. 2006).

2.2. The importance of utilitarian motivations in online consumption

The first studies on motivations in online consumption focused their attention mainly on the utilitarian aspects of online shopping. In Table 1, we provide a summary, in chronological order, of the most noteworthy contributions made early on in this regard.

In addition to the studies indicated above, a number of research papers on consumer perceived value have contributed to the study of motivations in online consumption. In this regard, particularly relevant contributions are made by Blake et al. (2005) and Keeney (1999), who point to the influence which certain values, mainly utilitarian, have upon electronic commerce. Likewise, Bridges and

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