The role of social presence in establishing loyalty in e-Service environments

Dianne Cyr *, Khaled Hassanein b, Milena Head b, Alex Ivanov c

a Faculty of Business, Simon Fraser University, 15th Floor, Central City Tower, 13450, 102nd Avenue, Surrey, BC, Canada V3T 5X3
b DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ont., Canada
c School of Interactive Arts and Technology, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, BC, Canada

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Abstract

Compared to offline shopping, the online shopping experience may be viewed as lacking human warmth and sociability as it is more impersonal, anonymous, automated and generally devoid of face-to-face interactions. Thus, understanding how to create customer loyalty in online environments (e-Loyalty) is a complex process. In this paper a model for e-Loyalty is proposed and used to examine how varied conditions of social presence in a B2C e-Services context influence e-Loyalty and its antecedents of perceived usefulness, trust and enjoyment. This model is examined through an empirical study involving 185 subjects using structural equation modeling techniques. Further analysis is conducted to reveal gender differences concerning hedonic elements in the model on e-Loyalty.

Keywords: e-Loyalty; Social presence; Gender; Trust; e-Commerce; Technology acceptance model (TAM)

1. Introduction

In recent years, researchers have begun to explore similarities and differences between shopping for products and services in online versus traditional retail environments (for example, Burke, 2002; Eroglu et al., 2003; Koernig, 2003). Unlike traditional retail shopping, parties in an online encounter have no direct contact – in an environment with few social cues. When shopping online, the social proximity and face-to-face interaction with salespeople and other shoppers are replaced by a complex socio-technical system that is not well understood by the consumer (Riegelsberger et al., 2003).

In an online environment, transactions transcend time and space (Brynjolfsson and Smith, 2000). This separation of time and space is referred to as dis-embedding (Giddens, 1990), and is thought to create negative consequences for consumer trust, as well as hamper e-Commerce develop-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 604 552 9504; fax: +1 604 268 7485.
E-mail addresses: cy@sfu.ca (D. Cyr), hassank@mcmaster.ca (K. Hassanein), headm@mcmaster.ca (M. Head), alexi@sfu.ca (A. Ivanov).

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