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EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF CONSUMER EXPERIENCE ONLINE

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SUMMARY

This paper explores consumers' perceptions of their online experience beyond website interface issues. Using Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1955) this research identified twelve themes including; aesthetics, customer orientation, customization, dependability, entertainment, functionality, identification, informative, innovative, price, product/service offer, and social. These findings build upon those reported in existing literatures on Web site quality. Specifically, this study captured identification and social aspects of online experience as important issues.

Increasingly, customers are using the internet for hedonistic rather than utilitarian purposes. The majority of customer experience research conducted to date has focused on the web site interface or specifically on the consumer's feelings or state of mind. The Web site quality literature predominantly considers the interface between the consumer and the Web site. The main consideration of the customer experience literature has been the customer himself. In order to explore this gap in the literature this paper considers the perceptions of consumers' experiences online.

This study draws from George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory (1955). Originally designed as a psychological instrument for exploring patients' perceptions of interpersonal relationships the approach was adopted by

marketers looking to explore consumers' perceptions of market offerings (Guttman 1982). The methodology is qualitative exploring consumers' perceptions of products or services through a process of comparisons between objects. Initially participants are asked to select three websites and note, "how two are immediately similar but different from a third in terms of your online experience." The answers to this triadic sorting are noted as a pair of "constructs" which then forms the basis of a rating scale. Web sites are then rated against the two "construct poles" and the process resumes with a new triadic sort. Once saturation is achieved, the results are collated and coded drawing out patterns of similarities and differences resulting in the derivation of key themes.

The sites used in this study were taken from an open poll of graduate and undergraduate students who comprised the sample frame for this study. Seventy-seven Internet Marketing students were asked to identify most frequently used sites. The results were collated and the ten most frequently cited chosen. The ten sites used were; Amazon.com, Dell.com, Netflix.com, Walmart.com, BestBuy.com, eBay.com, Google.com, iTunes.com, and Facebook.com.

Overall the study revealed twelve key themes and 601 pairs of constructs denoting the samples perceptions of their experience with Web sites (1202 construct poles). References are available upon request.

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