

# Research on Website Usage Behavior through Information Search Perspective: A Comparison of Experiential and Goal-Directed Behaviors

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**Abstract.** Along with the rapid growth of the Internet, online information search has become a prevalent Internet activity. However, little research has addressed the factors and website features that influence website information search behavior. Prior studies investigate factors that affect consumer preferences in online shopping websites. And, seldom distinguish between pre-purchase and post-purchase experiences and tend to focus on post-purchase assessment only. Therefore, this study aimed at the Internet users' searching behavior, and further probed into users' willingness of continuous websites use. But when purchasing tourism products, Information search is even more important than information search before buying manufactured goods. Tourism products and services are seldom routine purchases (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999). Choices of tourism products usually involve considerable emotional significance and perceived and actual risk for the individual (Xie, Bao, & Morais, 2006). Based on the prior literatures (Lee, 2005; Lin & Chen, 2009) a model was proposed and empirically tested to gain a better understanding on Internet users' search behavior. The results showed that Internet user's willingness to revisit was mainly influenced by his/her involvement and satisfaction toward the website, and these two factors were affected by website information quality, website interactivity, and hedonic value. Also, the research model was moderated by goal-directed and experiential behavior.

**Keywords:** On-line Shopping Website, Information Search Behavior, Interactivity.

## 1 Introductory

The growth of interactive media, especially the Internet, inspires an examination of the impact of marketing communication using new media (Klein, 1998). Even though many practitioners and researchers suggest that interactivity is a boon for marketing

communication (e.g., Chen et al., 2005; Wu, 2005), some find negative consequences of interactivity (e.g. Bezjian-Avery et al., 1998; Bucy and Chen-Chao, 2007; Sundar and Kim, 2005; Kim, Spielmann, & McMillan, 2012).

Besides, the internet has influenced human lives in numerous ways over the past years, having become a mainstream information resource that people turn to for information and communication. To better understand information searching behavior and information retrieval interaction, researchers have emphasized the importance of the difference of searching behavior.

Information search is a stage of the decision making process in which consumers actively collect and utilize information from internal and/or external sources to make better purchase decisions.

Human factors and individual differences were recognized as a key aspect for understanding user search behaviors (Egan, 1988; Nielsen, 1993). Novak, Hoffman & Duhachek (2003) pointed out, one fruitful focus of research on online consumer experience has been on two distinct categories of consumption behavior—goal directed and experiential consumption behavior. Drawing distinctions between these behaviors for the Web may be particularly important because the experiential process is, for many individuals, as or even more important than the final instrumental result. However, the general and broad nature of flow measurement to date has precluded a precise investigation of flow during goal-directed versus experiential activities (Novak, Hoffman & Duhachek, 2003).

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Internet Users' Searching Behavior**

Information search has been one of the most enduring issues in consumer behavior research (Beatty & Smith, 1987). For marketing departments, it is crucial to understand the determinants of information search behavior for designing effective marketing communication.

Previous research on information search behavior has identified a number of factors affecting this construct, such as, the nature of decision making (Fodness & Murray, 1999), residency (Pennington-Gray & Vogt 2003), family life cycle (Fodness, 1992), socio-economic status (Fodness & Murray 1999), involvement (Cai et al., 2004), travel expenditures (Snepenger et al., 1990), prior knowledge (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004), and search cost (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004).

When purchasing tourism products, information search is even more important than information search before buying manufactured goods. Tourism products and services are seldom routine purchases (Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999). Choices of tourism products usually involve considerable emotional significance and perceived and actual risk for the individual (Xie et al., 2006).

Pan and Fesenmaier (2003, 2006) first consider internet-based tourism information search from the perspective of the search process. Based on the mental model which

emphasizes information search behavior from the cognitive information retrieval perspective and the knowledge structure of information searchers, their major research findings are that tourists' vacation planning online follows a hierarchical structure of episodes, and the information searchers use information hubs containing many links to other related Websites to facilitate the navigation process.

Currently, social media not only constitute a significant portion of results for online tourism information search, but also demonstrate their increasingly important role as an information source (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

## 2.2 Goal-Directed and Experiential Behavior

In marketing, the distinction between goal-directed and experiential behavior has long been formally noted. Indeed, it underlies the entire purchase/consumption process, beginning with the consumer constructs of extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Celsi & Olson, 1988; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992) and situational versus enduring involvement (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 1986; Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001).

Drawing these distinctions between goal-directed and experiential behavior is particularly important in online environments, because the experiential process is, for many individuals, as or even more important than the final instrumental result (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

**Table 1.** Distinctions Between Goal-Directed and Experiential Behavior

<b>Goal-Directed</b>	<b>Experiential</b>
Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation
Instrumental orientation	Ritualized orientation
Situational involvement	Enduring involvement
Utilitarian benefits/value	Hedonic benefits/value
Directed (prepurchase) search	Nondirected (ongoing) search; browsing
Goal-directed choice	Navigational choice
Cognitive	Affective
Work	Fun
Planned purchases; repurchasing	Compulsive shopping; impulse buys

Source: (Novak et al., 2003)

## 2.3 Website Interactivity

Effective communication with customers is the key to successful business. One of the most important factors for effective communication is known as interactivity (Yoo, Lee, & Park, 2010). Interactivity is central to Internet marketing communication.

On the Internet, consumers no longer interact with salespeople or have a direct physical experience of a store and its products. Instead, their experience is mediated through the web, using a graphical display without any face-to-face interaction with the e-vendor. Therefore, understanding users' communication behavior in these emerging Computer Mediated Environments is important.

Although there have been many studies on interactivity under various contexts and disciplines, researchers still have mixed views on the concept of interactivity (Yadav and Varadarajan, 2005).

Zeithaml et al. (2002) distinguish communication with people via a computer from interacting with the website through a computer. They defined interactivity as “the extent to which website users can (1) communicate with the people behind the website, (2) interactively search for information, and (3) conduct transactions through the website.” (Yoo et al., 2010)

Previous research by Lee (2005) has particular relevance to the current work. Lee identified (1) user control, (2) responsiveness, (3) personalization, and (4) connectedness as important components to interactivity in a mobile commerce setting. User control refers to the user’s ability to control the information display and content. Responsiveness refers to the site as being able to respond to user queries. Personalization concerns the mobile Internet site that enables the purchase of products and services that are tailored to the user and unique desires. Finally, perceived connectedness refers to whether customers share experiences regarding products or services offered with other visitors to the mobile site. We adopt these three components: user control, responsiveness, connectedness, to fit on the website environment.

## 2.4 Website Quality

The World Wide Web is a very complex information technology network currently consisting of several hundred million web pages and over a hundred million users. Each day, users search websites in order to find the most convenient, relevant, and up-to-date information they need.

On the web, users typically forage for information by navigating from page to page, along web links. The content of pages associated with these links is usually presented to the user by some snippets of text or graphic. Based on the above-mentioned, quality management concepts and models, I propose to identify values and criteria enabling a website surfer/user to evaluate and select websites and pages.

As companies have become more effective in their use of websites, they have become more complex. For some organizations, they serve as repositories of information for various stakeholders and the public. For others, websites also offer transaction capabilities, providing an additional mechanism from which to serve customers.

Studies examining website quality have found the construct to be multidimensional, Zhang and von Dran compiled an extensive list of 42-scale items grouped a priori into eleven dimensions: (1) information content, (2) cognitive outcomes, (3) enjoyment, (4) privacy, (5) user empowerment, (6) visual appearance, (7) technical support, (8) navigation, (9) organization of information, (10) credibility, (11) impartiality.

## 2.5 Website Satisfaction

Since websites serve as an important point of contact for most companies, assessing their effectiveness or quality of the website is important as a way to understand

whether the company is providing the type and quality of information and interaction to satisfy website users. This is especially true for companies selling goods and services on their websites. Customers must be satisfied with their experience with the website or they will not return.

Satisfaction is a post-consumption evaluation based on the comparison between the expected value in the pre-consumption stage and the perceived post-consumption value after the purchase or after the use of services or products (Oliver, 1981; Ravald and Gronroos, 1996).

## **2.6 Involvement Theory**

Research on advertising and on consumer behavior is paying an increasing amount of attention to the 'involvement' construct. Cognitive Dimension researcher proposed that psychological functions affected by involvement. These functions relate to the cognitive notion of information processing (e.g. Krugman, 1965; Houston & Rothchild, 1977).

Some other researchers claim that involvement is mainly a state of activation or arousal, and therefore motivational factors are more important (e.g. Mitchell, 1979; Cohen, 1983). They argued involvement is a state of arousal caused by some 'antecedents' and revealed by some 'consequences'. There are different kinds of antecedents: personal (needs, values, aims, etc. of the subject), situational (e.g. the time left to make a decision on the product to purchase), and stimulus-related antecedents (the physical features of a product, the content of the advertisement, etc.) (García, Olea, Ponsoda, & Scott, 1996).

Exploring the notion of searching behavior in internet, the factors of user involvement must be concerned.

# **3 Method**

## **3.1 Hypotheses Formulation**

Based on the above literature review, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Greater website involvement will correspond in greater willingness to use.

H2: Greater website satisfaction will correspond in greater willingness to use.

H3: Greater website interactivity will result in greater involvement of website.

H3a: Goal-directed users' perceived website user control will result in greater involvement of website.

H3b: Goal-directed users' perceived website responsive will result in greater involvement of website.

H3c: Goal-directed users' perceived website connectedness will result in greater involvement of website.

H3d: Experiential users' perceived greater website user control will result in greater involvement of website.

H3e: Experiential users' perceived greater website responsive will result in greater involvement of website.

H3f: Experiential users' perceived greater website connectedness will result in greater involvement of website.

H4: Greater website interactivity will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4a: Goal-directed users' perceived greater user control will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4b: Goal-directed users' perceived website responsive will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4c: Goal-directed users' perceived website connectedness will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4d: Experiential users' perceived greater website user control will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4e: Experiential users' perceived greater website responsive will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H4f: Experiential users' perceived greater website connectedness will result in greater satisfaction of website.

H5: Greater website quality will result in greater involvement of website.

H6: Greater website quality will result in greater satisfaction of website.

### **3.2 Method**

To test the hypothesis, an pilot test was conducted with 52 undergraduate students from a large vocational university in Taiwan. 23% were male and 77% were female.

To analyze the relationship among these variables and examine the fitness of the conceptualized framework, this study conducts Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and uses online tourism websites as the research sample. The operational definition of each variable is tailored to fit the characteristics of online tourism websites and shown in the table 2. The questionnaire is designed in Likert 7 point scale and adjusted according to the advices of 3 experts on e-commerce including 1 manager engaging in e-commerce business for years and 2 academic professors devoting in this field. Participants are asked to fill in the questionnaire and indicate their current situation for each variable item (1=strong disagreement and 7=strong agreement). The higher score the respondents indicated, the more they agree with these questions. 1 means that the subject disagrees highly with the questions while 7 signifies high agreement.

**Table 2.** Measurement scales

Items	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
<b>Searching behavior</b>			
Do you have fix habit to searching tourism information online?			
If you want to purchase tourism product, which website will visit to acquire information?			
Please write down the website address where you often to visit it.			
How often do you visit the website?			
Fix: one day one time, 2~3 times a week, 1 time a week			
No fix time			
<b>Website Quality Dimension</b>			
I felt that I getting information from the website was useful.			
I felt that I getting information from the website was complete.			
I felt that I getting information from the website was clear.			
When I clicked on the links for the website, I felt I was getting instantaneous information			
I felt that I getting information from the website was easy to understand.			
I felt that I getting information from the website was correct.			
<b>Website Interactivity Dimension</b>			
Customers share experiences about the product or service with other customers of this website ( <b>connectedness</b> ).			
Customers of this website benefit from the community visiting the website ( <b>connectedness</b> ).			
Customers share a common bond with other members of the customer community visiting the website ( <b>connectedness</b> ).			
Customers share experiences about the product or service with other customers of this website ( <b>connectedness</b> ).			
The information shown when I interacted with the site was relevant ( <b>responsiveness</b> ).			
The information shown when I interacted with the site was appropriate ( <b>responsiveness</b> ).			
The information shown when I interacted with the site met my expectations ( <b>responsiveness</b> ).			
I was in control over the information display format, condition when using this website ( <b>user control</b> ).			
I was in control over the content of this website that I wanted to see ( <b>user control</b> ).			
<b>Website Satisfaction</b>			
Overall this online searching experience was satisfying			
Overall this online searching experience was pleasant			
Overall I liked this online searching experience			
<b>Website Involvement</b>			
I felt that the website information is important to me.			
I felt that the website is closely to my live.			

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