

Converting browsers to buyers: exploring what drives consumer choice in internet e-commerce

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ABSTRACT

Why do internet users behave as they do, are their activities solely determined by website design? Or do they create their own pathways as a response to designated systems. For many, internet design is about the imposition of schemas, predetermined flows and consumer motifs, allowing the shepherding of an understood and mapped user towards buying products and services. However if this were true then every browser would also be a buyer. The underlying concepts of current website design rely on a number of pretexts which, when reviewed in relation to human activity and interaction, become questionable in their veracity.

KEYWORDS

Ethnography, Information-Scent, E-Commerce, Cognitive, Narrative, Lexical.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is recognition [16] that there is limited information in the understanding of the reciprocity of attitudes and behaviour constituting the relationship between internet shoppers and e-commerce websites. This is in contrast to commercially driven usability and web metrics companies who assert their findings based upon activity patterns often using statistically small samples [15]. Developing an understanding of the relationship between users and websites is key to determining patterns of interaction. Patterns of interaction are currently under investigation in two distinct ways, by using reflective and diagnostic methodologies. Reflection upon measurable activity, clicks, information foraging [5] and sales provide compelling insights for business metrics, can be limited by their subjective constituents. In turn diagnosis based on reviewers or heuristic interpretations with little user involvement [15] produce contentious results. This study will attempt to combine both forms of investigation with a large participant group study producing empirical data to be reviewed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The main area of this research is to gain an understanding of how people use technology as an extension of their world [10], specifically in the mode of consumer e-commerce. This world view is augmented by a representation of social constructs by an evolutionary process of active agents of transformation [4] in technology and specifically the creation of an electronic media habitus. This constituency maintains its own cultural capital and produces a parallel distinctive counterpoint to popular and consumer cultures. The nature of human computer interactivity, it's cultural, educational and gender attributes has a key influence on the

unification of money, knowledge and technological aspiration. These factors are also represented in technological deprivation and the personalised safety of internalised ignorance.

To relate instances of electronic media habitus a combination of activity biography [1], [12] and negotiated conventions [7] enable the development of an activity definition index. The cultural disposition of technology, interactions and resultant pathways remain difficult to interpret without recourse to such a framework.

3. REFLECTIVE METHODOLOGY

Existing methodologies produce results that use complex mathematics to create algorithms [6], create subjective rules of design [15] or usability inspection tools [3]. Which are normally only used with existing websites, only reflecting upon current interactions.

2.1 Information Scent

The cognitive walkthrough of the web has evolved based upon the notion that users decide on their course of action based upon cues, which derive behavioural patterns of interaction then form guide routes of information scent [3]. Information scent has also been developed using aspects of information foraging both structured and unstructured [6]. The Bloodhound project seeks to establish a clear method showing consistent, measurable elements that provide benefit in the design of websites. However there is contention in the effectiveness of this methodology [14] by commercially driven consultants.

2.2 Internet Statistics

There remains a problem with accessing "actionable statistics" [8] for businesses, and while their credibility and measurability remains opaque there will be a question regarding their veracity [18].

4. DIAGNOSTIC METHODOLOGY

The general interpretation of an open and untamed [2] source of information like the World Wide Web (WWW) requires a systematic review of actions. Actions and user activity [11] in relation to an observable world require a common representation to determine navigation and related target acquisition. Ethnographic studies related by an in-series testing system can reduce the anomalous results associated with subjective reflective data. Ultimately a lexical definition of activity is needed; in the interim the term narrative enables an interpolative review of data which will provide a clearer definition of activity.

3.1 Narrative

The understanding of human interaction can be viewed as participation in the creation of personal historical elements, which allow dispersion in potential trajectories [10] evolving of a self imposed narrative. This narrative can be observed in linguistic and engendered functions which require definition and contextualisation. However to effectively map these functions a lexicon approach [9] as associated with endangered languages, would allow the use of rational linguistic dimensions including orthography, morphology, syntax and semantics. The creation of a lexical basis [17] makes individual actions communicable aspects of communities of actions with related compound, processed and adaptive meanings.

Several hypothetical goals, adaptations and conventions can be derived from this research which will further refine and delineate additional aspects of narrative behavior to produce foundational lexical and activity indices.

3.1.1 Goals

Goals can be a descriptor of predetermined final destinations which can subsequently be reduced to a form of knowledge morpheme. These inter-related sub-rationale units while distinct and finite offer an activity based response to catalytic impositions by addition and adaptation.

3.1.2 Adaptations

Adaptation allows the extension of narratives [13] creating alternative perspectives on the same object or situation. Further modifications can be made in a process of engagement, by determining the user's perceptions or discernment of active adversity which produces redirection.

3.1.3 Conventions

Conventions allow the use of avatars [7] to create nodes within lexical frameworks, providing index points in a narrative activity. Agreement of conventions in social, emotional and commercial arenas for completion, enable a measurable resolution to tasks.

5. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper is being gathered through a three tiered research process. The target group for this research is consumers who purchase online, non-experienced WWW users based in the United Kingdom.

An initial pilot survey link has been introduced onto a number of United Kingdom based online shopping directories. Control questions have been used to define the target group and acquire basic demographic information. The survey consists of open ended questions with text areas to allow user to express their opinions on their online purchase experiences.

The main survey will be derived from the pilot by asking detailed questions related to the pilot results. This survey will use menu and dropdown tools with text areas to create both quantitative and qualitative primary data.

The final counterpoint survey will involve twelve participants (six consumers and six heuristic users) working on a series of scenario based activities derived from the main survey results. This ethnographic study will allow interactive testing and appraisal of user preferences, requirements and actual activity.

6. CONCLUSION

While this paper seeks to review and define the boundaries of an ongoing associated data gathering exercise it has also produced a number of testable hypotheses to be reviewed after data acquisition.

The linking of action cues with ethnographics has the potential to define activity components, constituents, usage and compound derivatives which will allow measurable patterns of formation and defensible narrative component interpretation.

The use of lexical representations will provide a framework for the indexing of interconnected activity components which currently operate under diverse notations.

The ability to interpret interaction will form the basis of other studies to better understand and design e-commerce sites based on human interpretive activity.

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