

# MEASURING WEB SITE SUCCESS: AN INTRODUCTION TO WEB SITE USER SATISFACTION

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## ABSTRACT

More and more company resources are expended in the design, development, and maintenance of commercial web sites. However, in most cases marketers and/or I.T. professionals set up a web site based on their intuition and preferences. No science-based measure of success of a web site is available. Yet, an instrument that captures target users' evaluations of the company's web site would seem desirable, as the marketer can then gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the current web site.

Therefore, the research objective is to introduce the concept of web site user satisfaction by (1) defining the construct; (2) deriving its dimensionality; and (3) developing its nomological network. Our focus is on goal-directed behavior on the Internet. Hoffman and Novak (1996, p. 62) state that "the optimal design of a CME site [e.g., a web site] differs according to whether the behavior is goal-directed or experiential" and that "goal-directed behavior is relevant for task-specific use of a CME, such as prepurchase deliberation."

## Literature Review

Since, to the best of our knowledge, there is no marketing literature where user satisfaction with a company's web site is investigated, we draw on the rich literature on user information satisfaction in the field of Management Information Systems (M.I.S.). Moreover, given our instrumental, utilitarian focus, the M.I.S. literature is deemed to be relevant to our study because of the goal-directed, task-specific use of a M.I.S.

The measurement of M.I.S. success is a key issue. Throughout the last two decades a myriad of M.I.S. success measures has been proposed. Because of the difficulty in assessing the impact of a M.I.S. on the individual decision making process and on resulting organizational performance, user satisfaction has become the prevailing construct (Melone 1990). Consequently, various instruments for evaluating user satisfaction with an organization's M.I.S. have been developed (e.g., Bailey and Pearson 1983; Davis 1989; Doll and Torkzadeh 1988; Gallagher 1974; Ives, Olson, and Baroudi

1983; Larcker and Lessig 1980; Palvia 1996; Swanson 1974; Zmud 1978).

## Exploratory Pilot Study

Given the specific characteristics of the World Wide Web, we felt that the review of M.I.S. literature would not suffice to disclose the full dimensionality of the web site user satisfaction construct. Therefore, an exploratory pilot study was conducted.

Each member of a purposive sample of 14 professional users of courier services was asked to evaluate a limited set of courier companies' web sites, one at the time, from a goal-directed perspective. According to the type of user different objectives were pursued. In order to reveal the evaluative thoughts of a respondent, either concurrent or retrospective protocol analysis (Ericsson and Simon 1980, 1984; Russo, Johnson, and Stephens 1989) was used. In addition, the respondent's navigational behavior was unobtrusively filmed. Tape-recorded transcripts were made of each interview. The 300 pages of protocol data were analyzed through thematic content analysis (Holsti 1968). The video material was used to support the open coding of the transcripts.

## Results

By integrating the results from the content analysis with the findings from the M.I.S. literature search, web site user satisfaction is defined and 12 underlying dimensions are suggested. In addition, the construct's nomological network is developed. A computer-mediated communication perspective (Hoffman and Novak 1996; Steuer 1992) is taken in order to organize the relationships between the structural components affecting web site user satisfaction. Furthermore, a contingency approach is adopted, taking into account the context of the computer-mediated communication process.

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