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Technology, ‘Engaging’ Web-Service and Transcendent Consumer Experiences: the Case of Chocolate

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Purpose: This paper aims to address how Internet service can be designed to enhance consumers’ Transcendent Customer Experiences (TCE). We call this kind of Internet service- ‘engaging’ web-service. Our case study of online chocolate design service is used to illustrate the process of developing ‘engaging’ web-services.

Background: Consumers can have flow and/or peak consumption experiences (TCE) (Schouten, et al., 2007, P. 358) in their interactions with technology. In order to understand consumers’ TCE experiences with technology, various kinds of engagement need to be considered, such as ‘Cognitive absorption’ (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000) and ‘phenomenological’ technology-mediated engagement for example ‘existential’: human actions and their involvement with their world and ‘hermeneutic’: human experiences and interpretation of the reality (Verbeek, 2002). ‘Cognitive’ engagement is associated with the absorption with task through using the tool; ‘existential’ engagement is associated with activities in their local practices, and ‘hermeneutic’ engagement occurs when experiencing the use of the tool per se. We propose that ‘engaging’ service can be developed to enhance consumers’ TCE when focussing on various types of engagement.

Design/methodology/approach:

We conducted an UK EPSRC funded project; one aim of which was designing ‘engaging service’ through developing chocolate web-service. The research consists of three stages. At stage one, we conducted 27 phenomenological interviews, exploring consumers’ chocolate experiences and the meaning of chocolate; and designers’ experiences in general and in using 2D or 3D design software. This stage of research aimed to gain insights into cognitive, existential and hermeneutic aspects of consumers’ engagement with chocolate and 3D design tools.

At the second stage, by applying the TCE construct, ‘engagement’ concepts and the first stage research findings, we developed Internet service-‘Cocoworks’ website, which integrates 3D software for chocolate design and other web-services (such as voting, competing, gallery, community).

At stage three, we are currently conducting a quantitative survey in order to evaluate

the anticipated engagement the service can create for users and consumers' experiences.

Findings:

The interview of consumers' chocolate experiences revealed 10 chocolate consumption practices. The interview with designers suggested people enjoy design because of the creative process, interaction with the tool and other people, and the realisation of ideas.

The 3D chocolate design software aims to increase consumers' 'cognitive' and 'hermeneutic' engagement; to enhance their 'cognitive absorption' and state of 'flow' psychologically; to mediate consumers' experiences of chocolate designing and to increase the chance of peak experiences. Other web- services surrounding the 3D tool and design aims to increase 'existential' aspect of the engagement, the web-service can become 'focal', a focus or centre for people (such as designers and commentators); gathering their various local practices (such as voting, competing) and forming a community sharing experiences; enhancing consumers' actions and their involvement with their world and potentially increasing consumers' peak experiences.

Originality/value: The research contributes to service design by empirically developing the method for 'engaging service' design. It also contributes to marketing practice by demonstrating how Transcendent Consumer Experience (in CCT) notion is utilized to design 'engaging' service. Theoretically, this research extended consumers' 'engagement' with technology from 'cognitive absorption' to including phenomenological engagement. It also contributes to Schouten's TCE notion by investigating the origins of TCE in different contexts.

References:

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