Chapter III
User Satisfaction with E–Collaborative Systems

Jeffrey Wong
University of Nevada, USA

Kevin Dow
Kent State University, USA

Ofir Turel
California State University, USA

Alexander Serenko
Lakehead University, Canada

ABSTRACT

E-mail is a critical component of most e-collaborative environments. This chapter describes an application of the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) framework to model the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction with e-mail systems. The ACSI framework is an established methodology in the marketing literature and appeared to be useful to assess the antecedents and consequences of individual satisfaction in many more circumstances than external customer purchases. We surveyed e-mail users to gather data to utilize in an ACSI model modified for e-mail systems. Our findings indicate that the ACSI model can yield useful insights into factors that contribute to and result from user satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Information and communication technologies are the foundation for collaborative efforts that allow geographically dispersed individuals to work as a team (Kock, 2005). E-mail is one such ICT. The widespread use of e-mail technologies demonstrates its importance as a communication medium. For example, in 2003, 31 billion e-mail

messages were sent daily worldwide with an average of 56 e-mails per e-mail address and 174 e-mails per person (Industry Canada, 2004). Furthermore, over 600 million people worldwide were using e-mail systems by the end of 2004 (Radicati Group Inc., 2004). The phenomenal number of users was brought about partially by the declining costs of computing, fees for long-distance communication (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991), and advances in computer and telecommunications technologies. Continuing advances in technology and the globalization of business will likely increase the widespread use of e-mail.

The prolific use of e-mail has also introduced some problematic situations. For example, user overload has resulted from the widespread use of e-mail as a communications medium (Sherwood, 2002). At the same time, the increasing number of unsolicited commercial e-mail messages (typically regarded as junk mail or spam) has exacerbated the information overload problem. Unwanted communication has been credited as being one of the most critical components of e-mail overload (Hinde, 2002).

The number of unsolicited messages is growing significantly and may soon account for more than half of all e-mail traffic (Krim, 2003). One explanation for this growth is that senders find it more expensive to target their e-mail messages to potential customers rather than simply send the same message to large distribution lists (Gopal, Walter, & Tripathi, 2001). Additionally, there are insufficient and ineffective antispam regulations in place. At the moment, only 26 countries have mandated antispam laws, leaving the opportunity for legal spamming activities in more than 100 other countries.

From the perspective of e-mail service providers, the negative effects of spam may hinder customer retention and acquisition. The magnitude of e-mail communication represents a potentially lucrative business opportunity for e-mail service providers. For them, the volume of e-mails and subscribers can translate into advertising dollars and in some cases, user fees. Accordingly, it is believed that spam can have crucial effects on both users' use of e-mail and on e-mail service providers' profitability. Our study seeks to contribute to the literature by studying the antecedents and consequences of user satisfaction with e-mail, and to explore the potential impact of spam on user satisfaction.

To survive in the competitive environment of technology services, it is essential to both attract and retain customers. User satisfaction is a critical factor in the determination of loyalty to a service provider (Reichheld, 2003). Customer turnover can be costly because of resources expended to replace customers lost, and the possibility of damage to an e-mail provider's reputation. Findings from empirical studies suggest that when customers perceive a firm is providing superior products or services, those firms enjoy higher financial returns than firms with less satisfied customers (Anderson & Fornell, 2000).

We employ the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model developed in the 1990s (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996) in our study. The ACSI was created by leading researchers in customer satisfaction, Claes Fornell and Eugene Anderson, to measure overall customer satisfaction in a way that can be compared between companies or between industry segments. Customer satisfaction has increasingly become important as companies have become service oriented, and customers are faced with many alternative providers from which to choose services and products. The ACSI has become one of the most frequently utilized satisfaction measures in the marketing literature.

The value of customer satisfaction measured by the ACSI is derived from the premise that without satisfied customers, current and future revenue streams are jeopardized. The ACSI was designed to measure customer satisfaction in a standardized way that would provide insights into the consumer economy for companies, industry trade associations, and government agencies. The developers

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