

## **Chapter 10**

# **Exploring Consumers' Willingness to Contribute to Internet Web Sites**

Benedict G.C. Dellaert  
Tilburg University, The Netherlands

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most interesting opportunities when introducing e-commerce in producer consumer networks is that the new information technology structure may be used to empower consumers to be more active participants in the economic value creation process (e.g., Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Alba et al., 1997). Consumers may for example create their own personalized version of a Web site or services, or communicate with other consumers about products they have bought. Many Internet-based firms have recognized the potential benefits of these opportunities and are encouraging consumers to make contributions to their Web sites. Some examples of Web sites encouraging various types of consumer contributions are presented in Table 1.

Allowing consumers to contribute more actively to different stages of the supply chain can create three main types of economic benefits. First, consumers can assist producers in achieving lower production costs and creating higher consumption utility for the consumer's own benefit (e.g., by lowering transaction costs or by allowing producers to make more customized products). Secondly, they can also assist producers in generating similar benefits for other consumers. Thirdly, the Internet can be a vehicle through which consumers can generate additional value for each other, directly and without business intermediation (e.g., by providing suggestions for new product designs or by sharing information about past consumption experiences).

*Table 1: Examples of Internet web sites encouraging consumer contributions*

<i>Type of Web site</i>	<i>Internet location</i>	<i>Suggested consumer contributions</i>
Auctioning	Ebay.com	“Sell your item” “Get news and chat” “Leave your feedback [about this seller]”
Books	Amazon.com	“Write an online review” “... jump into the world of electronic commerce today by joining the Amazon.com Associates Program”
Computers	Dell.com	“Point, click, configure, buy. It doesn't get any easier” “Support your Dell: Documentation, troubleshooting, files and more...”
Portal	Yahoo.com	“Join a chat” “Customize your My Yahoo Headlines to see only the news of interest to you” “Start a club”
Travel	Expedia.msn.com	“E-mail a free spring break card to a friend” “Share your travel experiences and tips in bulletin boards and chats. [...] Read and share romantic travel tips!”

The success of such potential additional value creation depends of course on consumers' willingness to make such contributions to Internet Web sites. However, little is known about what drives consumers' decisions whether or not to contribute to Web sites. Therefore, the current study analyzes the impact of some potentially important drivers of such consumer contributions to value creation on the Internet. Based on household production theory (e.g., Kooreman and Wunderink 1997), hypotheses are formulated on the relationships between consumer, product and exchange process characteristics and the likelihood of the consumer choice to contribute to Internet Web sites. The validity of these hypotheses is explored drawing on data from the 10<sup>th</sup> GVV WWW survey on Internet usage (Georgia Tech Research Corporation, 1998).

## THEORY

Household production theory is based on the notion that consumers will only participate in those activities that will increase the total value of their consumption experiences. In this view on consumers' contributions to Internet Web sites, the key question is whether or not consumers will benefit from making such contributions and if so, what costs are attached to making the contributions.

Three main types of variables are distinguished that may determine whether or not consumers will wish to contribute to Internet Web sites. They are consumer characteristics, product characteristics and exchange process characteristics. The

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