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Digital Information Flow Continuum: A Service Dominant-Logic Perspective
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Value-enhancing digital innovations are transforming service ecosystems and evolving the service provider and consumer relationship. Traditionally, value co-creation has been considered in light of business-to-consumer (B2C) interactions. The emergence of digital information platforms allowing consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communications is changing how service ecosystems establish and create value for service innovations. The communications regarding these innovations have transitioned from pure “one-to-one” communication and engagement processes to “many-to-many” informational touchpoints. Our study assesses these information flows in service ecosystems and how they influence decision-making of digital innovations. Using Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) as a theoretical lens, we observed digital information flows and how service providers and consumers co-create value within these platforms. We studied three types of information flows, business-to-consumer (B2C), consumer-to-consumer (C2C), and combinations of both (B2C/C2C), and the extent to which they influence value perceptions and usage likelihood across new digital innovations.

Service Ecosystems and Service-Dominant Logic

A service ecosystem is a system of actors, all involved in creating value through exchange and interaction. SDL is a theoretical perspective that places service exchange (not goods) and consumers (not producers) at the center of value creation. Under this perspective, value is defined and co-created by the consumer, and co-creation only exists if the consumer is actively involved in the process. There are three core principles of the SDL perspective that have implications when evaluating the usage and rollout of new digital innovations.

First, an emerging SDL service ecosystem perspective suggests that a complex network of actors exists involving interrelationships and communications among multiple participants that may not exist in a traditional service exchange. In other words, there are more people involved exchanging information with digital innovations. Second, SDL explains that each actor contributes operant resources to co-create value. Operant resources reflect the personal skills and knowledge each participant uses during the service exchange and serves as the primary basis of exchange. In the real estate context, the real estate agent contributes professional expertise and
market knowledge to serve clients in the real estate transaction process. The buyer contributes contextual information such as housing requirements, preferences, and financial capabilities. Value occurs at the highest level when actors maximize their usage of their operant resources. Finally, efficient resource integration and utilization of the limited operant resources available to service participants are critical to ecosystem value co-creation. Consumers experience information asymmetry in service ecosystems when they feel their providers and current social networks offer insufficient insights for making appropriate decisions. Consumers are likely to then seek out external information and resources to reduce information asymmetry to help judge the viability of service innovations.³

**Digital Information Flow Continuum**

Recent service research suggests that service ecosystems are entering a new era in which service providers, technologies, and consumers all play key roles in the creation, dissemination, and sharing of information for decision-making.³,⁴ The interactions between actors who are sharing their knowledge and resources are thus key contributors to decisions related to purchases and usage of new digital innovations. Traditionally, service providers viewed consumers as passive recipients of information. As digital platforms have evolved, there is a growing consensus that C2C communications play an increased role in decision-making. Information flows have thus transitioned from at-arms-length communication processes to interactive processes in which consumers access and share information from a multitude of digital sources. Specific to real estate, consumers have information from multiple sources including information created by their real estate agent (B2C), external sites such as Zillow that have agent created information and also offer C2C information sharing (B2C/C2C), and social media platforms where consumers share information with other consumers (C2C).

Successful rollouts of new digital innovations require multiple actors to share information and offer their expertise to maximize usage and value co-creation. Consumers are likely to seek out information from various sources to make decisions or consider utilizing a new digital innovation. Our research conceptualized this through our Digital Information Flow Continuum. The continuum captures B2C communications, combined B2C/C2C communications, and C2C communications. We examined the impact of each of these communication types on how consumers perceive value and then expected their usage of a new digital innovation.

Our findings indicate that all communication types (B2C, B2C/C2C, and C2C) in our Digital Information Flow Continuum directly or indirectly impacted usage likelihood of a new digital innovation. This indicates that service ecosystem decision-making and communications are complex, integrative, and collaborative. Many organizations view their communications with consumers as dyadic relationships. Our results suggest that communications should be viewed in light of a multi-actor service ecosystem in which there are diverse information sources influencing decision-making.
This research offers new insights into the ever-growing use of online communication platforms that affect decision-making. One surprising result is that the blended communication platform (B2C/C2C) was the only information source to directly impact usage likelihood without an indirect mediator. We would suggest that this is because in a blended communication platform consumers receive both trusted information from their provider, and at the same time, desire to receive insights from other consumers. This hybrid contains competencies associated with each endpoint of the Digital Information Flow Continuum that enable value co-creation.

**Real Estate Implications**

Digital innovations have changed the way real estate customers receive information and make purchase decisions. Our research offers a number of insights for real estate professionals. First, as real estate professionals seek to rollout new digital innovations with their clientele, such as a new document signing software or video tour platforms, they should consider how they communicate with clients to encourage usage. The communication strategy should include multiple approaches within the Digital Information Flow Continuum. For example, to maximize utilization of a new digital innovation, a real estate organization should consider communications directly with their customer (B2C), through some sort of combined platform (B2C/C2C), and point their customers to other customers reviews (C2C). If the real estate organization only directly communicates to their customers (B2C), the customer will then likely seek out C2C information on their own before deciding to adopt or use.

Our research also offers insights into the decision-making process of customers in a real estate transaction. Most customers will likely seek and receive information from all elements of the Digital Information Flow Continuum (B2C, B2C/C2C, C2C). Therefore, agents should be very cognizant of the various platforms from which customers are viewing information about their personal agent profile and also any listings that may be on various digital platforms. Information is coming from multiple sources to customers, and agents need to be proactive updating and cultivating that information across the continuum.

**Recommended Reading**

References


About the Authors

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Dr. James Peltier (PhD – University of Wisconsin-Madison) is a leading researcher and national voice in the sales and marketing practices. As an active author, Dr. Peltier has over 150 referred journal publications and conference presentations. His research has been published in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, and *International Journal of Advertising*, among many others. Dr. Peltier’s sales expertise lies in developing buyer-seller relationships, understanding students’ intent to pursue a sales career, database requirements for the sales force, and successful relationship marketing practices.

Dr. Peltier directed the launch of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Institute for Sales Excellence in 2012 and has led it to national prominence as an institution and as a sales competition powerhouse. Dr. Peltier is a Past-President of both the University Sales Center Alliance and the American Marketing Association Collegiate Chapters Council (twice). He has received life-time Achievement Awards from the AMA, the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation, and is the only person to have received UW-Whitewater’s top three Lifetime Awards, including the Roseman Teaching Excellence, University Research, and University Service Awards. Dr. Peltier has been faculty advisor for UW-Whitewater's AMA chapter since
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Dr. Andrew Dahl’s (DBA – University of Wisconsin-Whitewater) primary areas of research are digital marketing, value co-creation, internal marketing, transformative consumer behavior, and health care marketing. Dr. Dahl has published in *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, *Journal of Financial Services Marketing*, *Progress in Transplantation*, *American Journal of Transplantation*, and others. Andrew serves as the primary advisor for Creative Marketing Unlimited, the student-run marketing consulting branch which provides UWW AMA members extensive professional development experience. Under Andrew’s direction, UWW student teams regularly participate in marketing strategy and digital marketing competitions such as the Collegiate ECHO Marketing Challenge (including a 2014 Silver ECHO Marketing team featuring UWW AMA members) and the International Digital Marketing Competition. In addition to teaching digital marketing courses, Dr. Dahl has over fifteen years of marketing consulting experience and is the Director of Research/Partner at Applied PhD Research & Marketing, LLC. Beyond helping hundreds of clients establish database marketing efforts, launch products, or evaluate marketing/branding efforts, Andy served as the program director of a four-year international social media campaign raising awareness and support for organ donation. He has served since 2017 on the AMA Collegiate Chapters Council, including serving as the Council President in 2020-2021. He is also one of six Google Academic Panel members from around the world.

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Dr. Eric Swan’s (DBA – University of Wisconsin-Whitewater) primary areas of research includes healthcare marketing, sales, value co-creation, and digital marketing. Dr. Swan has published in *Journal of Business Research* and *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*. Prior to academia, Swan spent his career working in hospitality sales and healthcare marketing.