Abstract
Numerous companies are taking advantage of interactive technology to personalize their interactions with users. However, in contrast to the proliferation of personalized web services worldwide, Information Systems (IS) research on users' attitudes towards personalized service is minimal. It remains an empirical question as to whether online firms can use personalization as a marketing strategy to attract new users. Our research examines how users' web experience and their perceptions towards personalization influence their attitudes towards switching to a personalized website. A survey study with 238 subjects was conducted. The findings provide empirical evidence showing that if users have involved interactions with their current site, then personalized services are not attractive enough to motivate them to migrate from one site to another. Users want useful personalized services, but at the same time, they are concerned with the manner in which firms use their data for personalization. Practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: personalization, involvement, information accessibility, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, privacy

The Attraction of Internet Personalization to Web Users

SHUK YING HO

INTRODUCTION

What is Internet personalization?

In the past decade, many online firms have emerged in almost all industries. As the competition intensifies, customer relationship management (CRM) becomes crucial. Online firms are investing large amounts of money in providing better services for their users. To remain competitive, Internet businesses have been adopting differentiating strategies to attract and retain users (Bakos 1991). Figure 1 provides a taxonomy of CRM systems based on the level of automation and individualization. In this study, we focus on Internet personalization which is at the highest level in Figure 1. Personalization aims to tailor content to individual needs, and to have content arrive at the users at just the right moment. Its immediate objectives are to understand and to deliver highly focused, relevant content matched to users’ needs and contexts (Albert et al. 2004). The long-term objective is to generate more business opportunities.

Companies employ personalization agents in different ways to generate business opportunities. Some companies use the agents as advice-giving systems to provide recommendations to each individual and to generate up-sell and cross-sell opportunities. The main objective is to maximize online merchants’ revenue. One example is Amazon, which greets the users by name and lists some book recommendations on their individualized pages. The recommendations are generated based on the users’ previous purchases and the preferences of like-minded people, and no extra work is imposed on the users. Amazon continues to establish its personalization system, and more filtering mechanisms are being added to make the book recommendations more relevant and useful. As stated by Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, the mission of Amazon is to be the most user-centric company in the world (Anonymous 2002). Other personalization agents are used to (dynamically) structure the index of product pages based on click-stream analysis to minimize the users’ search efforts. One example is My Yahoo. My Yahoo provides a personalized ‘space’ for each user. It automatically generates personalized content based on the user’s profile. For instance, it provides information on the horoscope for the correct star sign matched with a person’s date of birth. Apart from automatic personalization, it also presents users with an array of choices and allows the

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users to select what is of interest to them. The users can personalize not only the content (e.g., weather, finance, sport), but also the layout (e.g., color, background). Recently, the My Yahoo service has been enhanced with personalized searching. That is, the users can save pages of search results to a ‘personal web’ and block URLs from appearing on the result list. My Yahoo is considered to be one of the forerunners among the growing number of personalized websites that have been emerging on the Internet over the past few years (Manber et al. 2000).

Existing information systems (IS) research on Internet personalization

The proliferation of personalized web services worldwide is drawing increased attention from IS researchers. Previous work related to personalization falls into three main categories. The first category includes applications of personalization technology. Personalization agents are found to be useful in different domains. These include information dissemination (Light and Maybury 2002; Loeb 1992), entertainment recommendations (Smyth and Cotter 2000), search engines (Manber et al. 2000), and medicine (Bental and Cawsey 2002).

The second category focuses on philosophical issues, such as privacy regulations and privacy ethics related to data collection and processing (Cingil et al. 2000; Kobsa 2002; Volokh 2000). In practice, website-tracking is performed in an unobtrusive manner without the awareness of the users. Although users demand more customized services, they are increasingly concerned about the threats to their privacy and how online merchants use their data. These studies address issues centred around this dilemma, which is not just a social science issue but also a concern for IS design as restrictions on data collection affect the web mining process. Further, this stream of work proposes technology frameworks to minimize privacy problems related to personalization. One of the well-known standards is the Platform for Privacy Preferences (P3P), which enables web users to specify their expectations concerning the use of their personal data, and websites to specify their disclosure practices of user data (Cingil et al. 2000; Kobsa 2002).

The third category focuses on technologies for mining the enormous amount of user transactions and deriving efficient rules to generate personalized content (Eirinaki and Vazirgiannis 2003; Perkowitz and Etzioni 2000; Ramakrishnan 2000). Works in this area concentrate on computational procedures to analyze transactions and personal profiles. While these studies investigate various aspects of personalization applications, little attention has been given to the basis for understanding the relationship between personalization and user responses.

Examples of commercial personalization software packages/systems

Many commercial software packages for personalization are available for small-sized and medium-sized companies. Examples include One-to-One (Broadvision), Dynamo Relationship Commerce Suite (Art Technology Group), Personalization Manager (Net Perceptions) and ADAPTe (ResponseLogic), all of which supply the full range of e-commerce personalization applications. These packages use artificial intelligence and rule-based systems to specialize applications such as personalization of advertising and product recommendations at online sites. They provide one-to-one marketing and sales solutions and customer-driven websites with targeting engines. The e-businesses can ultimately operate more efficiently by aligning supply chains with data concerning the composition of the market and purchase patterns to build user profiles, which in turn determine personalized recommendations (see Figure 2).

The concept of personalization is not limited to online stores, and it can be applied to search engines. In 2004, two personalized search engines, A9.com by an Amazon subsidiary and MyJeeves by Ask Jeeves, were launched to let users store individual search results and then provide personalized web searches. Search engine analysts expect other major search engines, such as Google and Yahoo, to soon follow suit with their own personalized services. Global investment in personalization technologies will grow from USD500 million in 2001 to USD2.1 billion in 2006 (Anonymous 2001).
Motivations and research questions

There is much publicity about delivering personalized services over the web and the stakes are high for vendors selling related products. In spite of that, our understanding of the impacts of Internet personalization is far from conclusive. Advocates of Internet personalization claim that personalization agents have changed the web into a personal communication medium. By providing individualized content, offerings and services, Internet personalization helps to control aimless surfing activity (Light and Maybury 2002; Pitkow et al. 2002; Shahabi and Banaei-Kashani 2003). Also, personalizing web content empowers online merchants to deliver user value and to achieve profitable growth (Greer and Murtaza 2003; Peppers and Rogers 1997). It has been reported that e-commerce websites using personalization technology have seen annual revenue increases of up to 52% (Parkes 2001).

But there remains scepticism on the prospects of Internet personalization. Nielseni (1998) claimed that Internet personalization was highly over-rated. Personalization technology is unnecessary if the web architecture is well-designed and content is well-organized. Festa (2003) remarked that online merchants seeking to personalize their websites in the hope of boosting online sales are not getting the expected payback. It costs about four times as much to personalize a website than to run a comparable adaptive site. A recent report by Jupiter Research (2003) indicated that only 14% of users think that personalized offers or recommendations on shopping websites lead them to purchase more frequently.

Is Internet personalization an effective marketing strategy to attract new users? What are the reasons that users switch to a personalized website? Our work conducts a survey study among web users to address these questions.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: the following section provides the theoretical background and states the research hypotheses. The study is then introduced, followed by a consideration of the implications of the study. A conclusion and discussion of some limitations of the study are presented in the final section.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Website switching occurs when a user or group of users switches their allegiance from one website providing a certain type of services/products to another. This website switching may be temporary or permanent. For instance, if the Amazon website is not available, a user may browse or even purchase from Barnes and Noble. The switch may be limited to just this one occasion, or it may be longer lasting.

In this research we develop a model of website-switching behaviour to study the situation in which users currently use site A that has no personalization, and to see whether they will switch to site B that does have personalization. We believe the features of both the current website and the available website are determining factors influencing users’ switching behaviour. On one hand, users rely on experience and their often long-held attitudes about the current website. Personal
Experience with current websites

This category of variables focuses on the features of the current websites. Marketing literature on brand switching considers two groups of variables, satisfaction derived out from the website and involvement level (Shukla 2004). Thus, our study explores how users’ pleasant navigation experiences and their involvement in the current website influence their switching decision. We anticipate that unpleasant experiences caused by difficulty in locating relevant content at the current website and low involvement will lead to a higher tendency toward website switching.

**Level of involvement (I).** User involvement is of interest to researchers because of its potential impact on willingness to revisit the website. Prior research shows that users’ level of involvement has a direct, positive and significant impact on their willingness to purchase (Gammack and Hodkinson 2003), their motivation to process the information (MacInnis and Jaworski 1989), the way they process information (Johnson and Eagly 1989, 1990; MacInnis and Jaworski 1989), and their switching behaviours from one brand/product to another (Keaveney and Parthasarathy 2001). Involvement is a motivational factor. If users are involved in a website, then they recognize the good features of the site easily, and prefer and insist upon using it. Ultimately, they repeatedly visit it with little thought, and this leads to higher reluctance to switch to other websites.

**Hypothesis 1:** If a user is highly involved in a website, then it is less likely that he/she will switch to a personalized website.

**Accessibility of relevant information (R).** Internet users lack physical contact with the stores or products. Thus, users’ experience is based purely on website information. This causes users to rely heavily on technology and information quality to keep them interested and serviced as they explore the site with ease and pleasure (McKinney et al. 2002). The design elements of the site, such as ease of navigation, can, therefore, be a crucial factor affecting their web experience (Wolfinbarger and Gilly 2001).

An important website design element is the organization of information (Garrett 2002). The tremendous amount of information released on the web creates the problem of information overloading. This greatly reduces the navigation capabilities of online users, which in turn negatively affects their satisfaction towards the website. Thus, IS researchers proposed and confirmed that information relevance (McKinney et al. 2002) and accessibility (Yang et al. 2005) are important web quality factors affecting user satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, personalization is a newly developed technology which aims to solve the above problem. That is, personalization tailors content to individual needs, reduces the amount of delivered content and increases information accessibility. This aligns with the claims by Jeff Bezo, personalization can dramatically improve their users’ chances of finding what they want (even if they didn’t know it was what they wanted) from a 1,000 to 1 chance in a regular bookstore, to a 50 to 1 chance at Amazon.com (Anonymous 1998). Thus, we anticipate that the low accessibility of relevant content of the current website is a factor motivating one to move to a personalized site.

**Hypothesis 2:** If a user cannot access relevant content in the current website, it is more likely that he/she will switch to a personalized website.

Perceptions of the personalized website

This category of variables covers how web users perceive the new personalized websites. Compared with a physical channel, e-commerce moves the information technology to the foreground and web users interact with the technology directly (Koufaris 2002). Thus, the two variables of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis 1989), perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, are included in our study. In addition, since personalization arouses a list of social ethical issues, we also include a construct called ‘privacy concerns of the users’ and study its effects on users’ switching decision.

**Perceived usefulness (U) and perceived ease of use (E) of Internet personalization.** In IS literature, innovation adoption research provides a theoretical framework with which to identify the innovation-related factors in order to assess their impacts on adoption decisions. One of the established models is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which has been applied extensively to identify factors that facilitate or inhibit the adoption of an innovation (Al-Gahtani and King 1999; Bajaj and Nidumolu 1998; Chin and Gopal 1995; Venkatesh et al. 2003). In this study, two of its constructs,
perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of personalization services, are studied. Perceived usefulness is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his/her job performance (Davis 1989; Venkatesh et al. 2003). In the context of a personalized website, perceived usefulness is regarded as the level of matching between personalized offers and one’s preferences. Perceived ease of use is defined to be ‘the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort’ (Davis 1989; Venkatesh et al. 2003). The ease of use of user-centric software is very important (Agarwal and Karahanna 2000). In our context, it refers to the ease of operating a personalization agent on the client side. The following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3: When a user perceives personalized services to be useful, he/she will switch to a personalized website.

Hypothesis 4: When a user perceives personalized services to be easy to use, he/she will switch to a personalized website.

Privacy concerns (C). Apart from the technological factors, much IS research also focuses on ethical issues related to personalization, and related technical solutions (Caulfield et al. 2000; Cingil et al. 2000; Kobsa 2002; Kramer et al. 2000; Stewart and Segars 2002; Volokh 2000). Users face a dilemma: although they demand more customized services, they are increasingly concerned about privacy infringements and how their information is being used by online merchants. There are concerns that their purchase histories and navigation behaviours could be analysed and abused (Nash 2000; Pitkow et al. 2002). Thus, we hypothesize that these concerns will affect the probability of switching.

Hypothesis 5: Privacy concerns discourage a user from switching to a personalized website.

The Study Methodology

Samples

A self-administered survey was conducted. The questionnaire consisted of 45 questions and all questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The time required to complete the whole questionnaire was 20 minutes. In order to have a larger coverage, we disseminated the survey in two ways: electronic survey and paper survey.

First, we sent emails to 350 full-time staff and students in a public university. The subjects were invited to take part in the study and to complete the questionnaires online. From these 350, 205 (58.57%) completed responses were returned. Since users who use emails for communications generally have higher computer knowledge, the results would obviously be biased towards intensive Internet usage and active web behaviours. To reduce this bias, we distributed a paper survey on the university campus. We had a random sample of 200 people, and collected 33 (16.5%) responses. Overall, we collected 238 completed responses.

Of the respondents, 160 were male and 78 female. A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no significant differences in the gender ratio (approximately 66% males and 34% females) of subjects across the two methods of data collection. Their average age was 26.39 years old. All subjects were computer users. On average, they spent 4.32 hours on computer work or web browsing every day and they had 4.17 years of Internet browsing. At a 5% level of significance, F-tests showed that age, Internet experience, and Internet usage of the subjects did not differ significantly across the two groups.

Nearly all of them had general knowledge of online shopping, online payment and e-banking, and 70.59% (=168/238) reported that they had shopped online, such as movie tickets purchase and grocery shopping from online supermarkets. More than 60% had experience with or had heard about personalized websites, such as Amazon and My Yahoo.

Measurements of variables

The statistical analysis was performed with SPSS version 9.0. To assess convergent and discriminant validity, we factor-analysed the items for the instruments. Table 1 shows results of the factor analysis and reveals that the item loadings were consistent with five distinct theoretical constructs. A five-factor solution was obtained with all component eigenvalues greater than one. The factors were level of involvement (I), accessibility of relevant information (R), privacy concerns (C), perceived usefulness (U) and perceived ease of use (E) of Internet personalization. These factors explained 68.23% of the total variance in the survey. Items loaded highly (>0.70) on their associated factors. The Cronbach alpha values for the constructs are shown in Table 2. Consequently we concluded the instruments were statistically valid and reliable.

Results

A multiple regression was conducted, with the likelihood of switching to a personalized website as the dependent variable. The R-square of the model was 0.316. Table 3 shows the regression model.

Involvement with the current website was a significant factor that influenced whether users switched to a website or not. Users who were highly involved in the website showed higher resistance against switching to a
new website. The result was consistent with Hypothesis 1 ($t = -2.95$, $p < 0.05$).

Inconsistent with Hypothesis 2, accessibility of relevant information is not a significant factor affecting users’ decision ($t = -0.695$, $p > 0.1$). That is, users would not switch to a personalized site from a site whose content was difficult-to-access or badly organized. There can be two reasons. First, users do not consider personalization agents to be a tool to solve the information-overload problem. Second, in addition to personalization agents, there are many other alternatives, such as search engines and taxonomy hierarchies, to facilitate their user searching, so that the accessibility of relevant information would be greatly increased. Personalization is not necessary.

Participants who perceived personalization to be useful were willing to switch to a personalized website ($t = 3.53$, $p < 0.01$), supporting Hypothesis 3. Generally, the score of the usefulness of a personalization agent was not high (mean = 2.66), and the standard deviation was large (SD = 1.59). This illustrates that the subjects had various opinions on the usefulness of the agents. To probe further into the topic, we asked some subjects to specify their expectations of the functionality of a personalization agent, and compared the expectations from subjects who perceived the agent to be useful and those who perceived it to be useless. Those perceiving the agent to be useless had high expectations, including recommendations matching contexts and tasks, and layout customization. Those perceiving the agent to be useful had general expectations, including preference-matching recommendations, personal purchase history tracking, and delivery-tracking. A large difference in expectation of functionality leads to a large difference in usefulness perception.

Table 1. Rotated matrix component from factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$U$</th>
<th>$E$</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$C$</th>
<th>$I$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I1</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I2</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.124</td>
<td>-0.042</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R1</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>-0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R3</td>
<td>-0.119</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>-0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R4</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U1</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U2</td>
<td>0.920</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U3</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U4</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U5</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.910</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>0.248</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>0.222</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td>0.184</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 2. Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of involvement (I)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of relevant contents (R)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived usefulness of Internet personalization (U)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived ease of use of Internet personalization (E)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy concerns (C)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.945</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contradictory to Hypothesis 4, ease of use was not a significant factor ($t = -0.64, p > 0.1$). Usefulness dominated ease of use, and this aligns with some IS studies (e.g., Davis 1993; Elbeltagi et al. 2005). From a practical point of view, it may imply that users use a technology mainly because of the usefulness of the technology itself. From a research point of view, the difference between the findings of prior studies (significant influence of ease of use on behavioural intention) and this study (insignificant influence) may be due to the nature of the sample. Web users today are generally more computer literate than their counterparts five to ten years ago. This was supported by the descriptive statistics. The subjects perceived personalization agents as not difficult to use (mean $= 4.51$, SD $= 1.44$). Hence, ease of use may have been less of an issue for this sample than it would have been for the samples used in prior studies. Owing to this general improvement of computer literacy among web users, the relationships found to be valid in prior work may need to be re-examined.

Privacy infringement from personalization impacted negatively on users’ decisions to switch to a personalized website, supporting Hypothesis 5 ($t = -2.12, p < 0.05$). The subjects were concerned with how online merchants used their purchase transactions to generate the personalized recommendations (mean $= 3.41$, SD $= .76$). Some subjects raised questions about how much data were tracked by online merchants. Some even questioned whether the merchants would sell their profiles and transaction details to some marketing survey companies or other online merchants.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

In contrast to the widespread adoption of personalization software and the strong advocacy by management gurus (Albert et al. 2004; Bakos 1991) on the use of personalization services as a differentiating strategy, little has been done to assess the effectiveness of Internet personalization. The current work is among only a few pioneering efforts (Moe 2003) that empirically assess the effects of Internet personalization. We believe that the findings of the current work are applicable to a wide range of web-based services that target the attraction of users. There are five practical implications:

1. **Our work indicates that personalization can be a successful marketing strategy in some types of website only.** The nature of the interactions occurring among web users and their sites was an important factor. If the interactions are frequent and involved, web users are more reluctant to switch to a new site, even though the new site provides personalized services. Those e-businesses cannot use personalization as a marketing strategy to attract new users from a high-involvement site to a personalized one. Examples of high-involvement websites included network games and online chat rooms. Online stores selling high-involvement products, such as cosmetics, are also included.

2. **Content overloading is not a reason to incorporate a personalization agent into a site.** Examples of content-overloading sites include knowledge-based websites (e.g., Microsoft.com) and online stores with millions of products (e.g., eBay.com). This aligns with the argument by Nielsen (1998). If the owners of content-overloading websites plan to facilitate the navigation of the users, to retain the users and to increase their satisfaction, they could choose to restructure the information architecture of the site or to use a search engine, rather than to employ a personalization agent.

3. **Our empirical findings show that perceived usefulness of personalization is a significant factor in attracting new users.** Thus, it is worthwhile for firms to invest in data mining to analyse the transaction patterns among like-minded people. However, web visitors may not look for a product for purchase. They navigate the web for different purposes, such as random browsing to kill time. Thus, simply analysing the transaction log may not generate the

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**Table 3. Multiple regression model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Std Coeff</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>3.880</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td>7.342</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Involvement (I)</td>
<td>$-0.270$</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>$-0.184$</td>
<td>$-2.952$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility of Relevant Contents (R)</td>
<td>$-0.047$</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>$-0.043$</td>
<td>$-0.695$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Usefulness (U)</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.220</td>
<td>3.525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Ease of Use (E)</td>
<td>$-0.005$</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>$-0.004$</td>
<td>$-0.064$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy Concerns (C)</td>
<td>$-0.143$</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>$.132</td>
<td>$-2.123$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Future Research

To summarize, our work investigates the motivating and inhibiting factors for online users to switch to a personalized website. Our work provides empirical evidence showing that users want useful personalized services, but at the same time, they are concerned with the manner in which firms use their data for personalization. If users have involved interactions with their current site, then personalized services are not attractive enough to motivate them to migrate from one site to another. It provides insights to online merchants who plan to incorporate personalization tools in their websites.

However, this study has three limitations. First, although we conducted both email and paper surveys, the number of respondents for the email survey was much more than for the paper survey. Hence, there might be a significant bias in favour of IT use and expertise. This might also be the reason why our sample considers personalization agents to be easy to use. Further studies on how different groups of users (e.g., IT experts vs. IT novices) evaluate personalization agents in different contexts (e.g., online shops vs. information websites) would be interesting. Second, this paper only addressed users’ decisions to switch to a new website. Would they rely on the personalized recommendations after switching to the new websites? Would they purchase more? Future studies on the difference in exploration between personalized and general content could be interesting. Third, since our work focuses on whether personalization influences users’ behaviours to switching to a personalized website, we do not know how the users behave after switching to a personalized site. Can personalization services retain them? Would they develop a sense of loyalty and trust in the long run? Or would they switch back to a website providing general content? A longitudinal field study might contribute much to this area of research.

References


