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AN AGENDA FOR ELECTRONIC COMMERCE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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Abstract

In this paper, we address electronic commerce Customer Relationship Management (e-CRM) from the perspective of five IS research areas. Our purpose is to define a model to examine the relationships among and between these five research areas within e-CRM and to propose how they might be integrated to further research in this area. We begin with a discussion of each of the research areas, followed by a brief review of relevant literature. Next we present a framework that focuses on e-CRM from the five research perspectives. We present a model of e-CRM in terms of the five research areas and how they affect processes and outcomes. Lastly we propose our research agenda for e-CRM and present research questions in e-CRM and an integrated approach for examining those questions.

E-commerce Customer Relations Management (e-CRM) Research

Electronic commerce (e-commerce), coined by Kalakota and Whinston (1996), continues to be a significant, pervasive issue for both enterprises and customers. Furthermore, Kalakota and Whinston (1996)] articulated e-commerce as being comprised of three relationship types: those between enterprises and customers; those between and among enterprises; and those within enterprises. In this paper we addresses relationships between enterprises and customers. However, it should be noted that a significant amount of research on relationships in traditional "*Market Channels*" has been done and is underway (See Cannon and Perreault, 1999; Geyskens et al., 1999, for examples).

Fundamentally, e-CRM concerns attracting and keeping "*economically valuable*" customers while repelling and eliminating "*economically invaluable*" ones. Keen (1999) asserts we are on the threshold of a shift from a transaction-based economy to a "*relationship-based economy*". The increasing importance of managing customer

Figure 1. e-CRM Research Framework

relationships in e-commerce is the stimulus for this paper. We suggest that there are five major non-mutually-exclusive e-CRM research areas: e-CRM within markets; e-CRM within business models; knowledge management for e-CRM; e-CRM
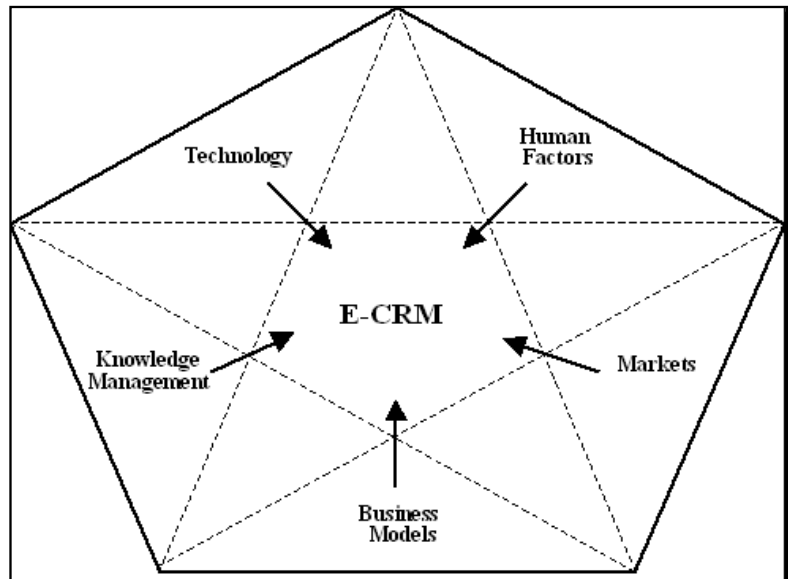
technological issues and e-CRM human issues. Each major area is composed of minor ones, due to the complexity and richness of e-CRM issues that need to be researched. The five research areas thus form our basic framework (Figure 1).

Figure 2 presents a model for the study of e-CRM. We define five input variables: Markets, Business Models, Knowledge Management, Technology, and Human Factors. These general categories are consistent with models presented in other areas of IS research such as Group Support Systems. Together these input variables define both the human potential and the technological infrastructure for developing e-CRM processes to achieve valuable outcomes. The e-CRM process is continuous and evolutionary and consists of organizational members and individuals from outside the organization using e-CRM technologies to establish, develop, and maintain important successful customer relationships, which are the outcomes of relevant e-CRM processes. Within each component of the model an illustrative list of example concepts is provided. We believe that these are *some* of the most important areas for research in e-CRM within these five fundamental areas.
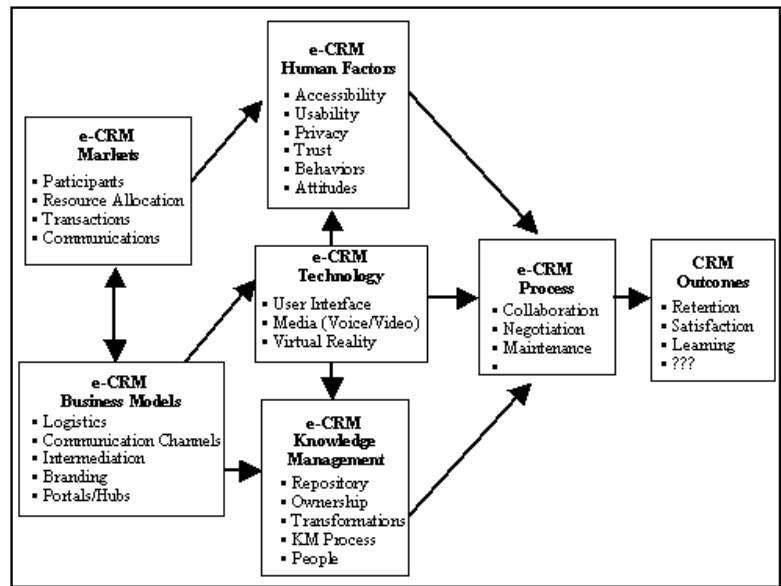

Figure 2. Model of Influences in e-CRM

Attitudes and opinions are extremely important in relation to e-CRM. Ho and Wu (1999) explain that Cyber Shopping Stores (CSS) present and even sell to customers "virtual products," which they need not have in inventory, by displaying only images. The web offers opportunities to market products through multimedia presentation capabilities such as animation, audio, and video. Such complex multimedia stimuli are perceived through the senses differently than verbal and written communication stimuli. Giner-Sorolla et al. (2000) assert that interpretation of evaluations as responses to most stimuli in the environment necessitates presentation of stimuli similar in form to objects perceived through the senses. Romano et al. (2000) demonstrated that new techniques can enable marketers to gather customer information anonymously through free form comments. Understanding how consumers think and feel about products, companies, and brands at a very detailed level may provide a competitive advantage in e-commerce Markets. Measuring attitudes and opinions in e-commerce will require new techniques and instruments and there is a great deal of research yet to be done in this area.

Conclusion

e-CRM is a topic on which there is a plethora of literature according to Romano (2000; 2001), but no overarching framework to guide and focus IS research in this area. We present research questions derived from the framework in Figure 2 and from an exhaustive literature review in the area. Thus, the issues we will raise have both theoretical and practical significance, and reflect a useful starting point for research. The specific variables in each category of our framework are not exhaustive, but reflect factors that are most likely to be relevant to e-CRM research and implementation. Research questions are raised according to the major framework components. In this paper, we propose a research framework for e-CRM composed of five underlying research areas and a model of how these five areas influence one another and both the process and outcomes of e-CRM. We will present research questions addressing open spaces, along with general explanations of the research methodology for addressing the appropriate research questions.

The unique contribution of this paper is its focus on e-CRM research from an IS perspective. The research framework provides a foundation for important questions to study, and points to key constructs whose operationalization will add value to this research area. The integration of the five research areas provides a novel approach to examine the emerging area of e-CRM. Finally, the notions of e-CRM processes and outcomes being affected by the five research areas provides a direction for theory development and empirical study in both the lab and the field that may yield meaningful and useful results with both theoretical and practical implications.

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