Learning by doing: Teaching e-commerce with Mudah.my

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to report an initial study on the students’ experience in using C2C web site which is Mudah.my as a learning-aid. The web site is a useful tool for teaching basics e-commerce, because students can actually list items for sale, receive payments, and fulfill orders. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, Rayport and Jaworski 7Cs framework of the online customer interface is used. The elements of the 7Cs framework are commerce, context, content, community, customization, communication, and connection. The study used a questionnaire survey method to measure students’ responses to Mudah.my website based on the 7Cs elements. A total of 144 university students from UiTM Perak were recruited to participate in this study. The results revealed that students agreed that the Mudah.my exercise was a good way to learn the elements of online commerce, such as the characteristics of appropriate products, effective offers, effective web pages, context, content, customization, and connection.

Keywords: E-Commerce; Online Shopping; C2C; 7Cs online customer interface framework

1. Introduction

The Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) sites offer a platform where individuals can buy and sell their products and services via internet. One of the highly visited C2C website in Malaysia was Mudah.my with more than 5.2 Million unique visitors a month (Mudah, 2012). Anyone especially Malaysian can register and sell items on the website almost immediately and thereby reach potentially thousands of online buyers, and with no upfront investment or technical expertise. Mudah.my seller encounters many basic features of e-commerce, such as choosing an appropriate product, creating listing page, setting an initial price, illustrating a product with a photo,
communicating with potential buyers, accepting payment, and fulfilling the order. This paper describes how one can use Mudah.com.my to teach the basics of e-commerce.

Mudah.my was established in year 2007 is a brainchild of Mudah.my SdnBhd (formerly known as 701 Search SdnBhd), a joint venture between Singapore Press Holdings Limited and Schibsted ASA. The brand name Mudah.my derived from the word “Mudah” means easy or convenience in the local Bahasa Malaysia language. The PRO Niaga service was established specifically for professional advertisers with more than 84,000 storefronts that help SMEs and home based businesses to advertise their products and services on the internet (Mudah, 2012). In addition, it is the Malaysian largest online trading community with 9437 registered PRO Niaga users in 2012 (Mudah, 2012). It attracted over 4.9 million unique visitors in October 2011, putting it practically even with Lowyat.net and lelong.com.my as the most popular shopping sites according to the Malaysian Digital Association (2011).

This paper describes how Mudah.my could be a useful tool for an active-learning assignment in an e-commerce course. This exercise goes beyond using Mudah.my as an example, to using Mudah.my as a lab where students learn about e-commerce basics by becoming online sellers. The Mudah.my lab exercise is described next. Then, a discussion of how the Mudah.my exercise could be used to illustrate e-commerce basics, using the Rayport and Jaworski (2002) 7Cs framework.

1.1 Description of the exercise

The Mudah.my exercise was used as an assignment in an E-Commerce Marketing class. The undergraduate students took the course as an elective for credit toward a Marketing (hons) degree. The assignment contributed 20 percent of a student’s grade in the course. The Mudah.my exercise consisted of the following steps:

1. Brainstorm idea among group member of an item that could be sell via online.
2. Choose an item to sell on Mudah.my.
3. Photograph the item with a digital camera.
4. Search Mudah.my for a completed listing for a similar item. Use other seller listings to make comparison and get ideas for the item category, price, item description, and terms.
5. Write a description of the item, and include payment and shipping terms.
6. Create web listing (with photo) and list the item for sale on Mudah.my.
7. Send an invoice to the respective buyer.
8. Receive payment.
9. Fulfill the order by packing and shipping the item.

The Rayport and Jaworski’s 7Cs framework of the online customer interface here illustrates the basics of e-commerce. The elements of the customer interface in the 7Cs framework are commerce, context, content, community, customization, communication, and connection. The source of material quoted in this section is Rayport and Jaworski (2002).

Commerce is defined as the sale of goods, products, or services via internet (Johnston, 2003). Thus, by using Mudah.my exercise will provide the opportunity for a student to sell an item online. By listing a product on Mudah.my, a student could gain experiences on the basics of an e-commerce transaction, including selecting a product to sell, creating the offer, receiving payment, and fulfilling the order. Initially, students begin the exercise by choosing a suitable product to sell online. This task invites discussion among students and instructor on what products are suitable for selling online and the shipping processes. Students research the prospective product online by searching and evaluating for completed listing for their item on Mudah.my. Students could make comparison including the product category, listing title, suitable market price, seller terms and conditions, item description and photos. Thus, students could utilize this information to create a listing on Mudah.my for their item.

During the process, students would experience a variety of outcomes from the listings in Mudah.my, including listing with a prospective buyer and with no visits at all. Buyers respond in a variety of ways as well, including
paying using cash, by wired transfer, by online credit card, or by PayPal. This introduces the benefits, risks, and costs of various payment methods in e-commerce. Some buyers might refuse or fail to pay, which raises the topic of fraud and reputation ratings. In addition, students who receive payments for their items get to fulfill the order. This task motivates a discussion of packing techniques and shipping options. Based on Jergen (2010), the formula of successful packing are pick a reputable shipping company and secured packaging. Finally, by selling an item Mudah.my, students are inspired to think about e-commerce from the seller’s perspective. It could simulate the activities of a large-scale online merchant, from obtaining suitable products to communicating with customers.

**Content** focuses on what a site delivers. It comprises offering mix, appeal mix, multimedia mix, and content type. The content of Mudah.my is in continuously updated databases. The databases serve up the descriptions and photos on the listings, information available to all users and reference information. The Mudah.my exercise features an example of an online company whose customers generate much of the website content. Sellers, at no cost to Mudah.my, upload descriptions and photos of items, which in turn attracts buyers. Other examples of websites with visitor-generated content are product reviews at Lelong.com.my.

**Context** is defined as how the website is delivered to the audience. It consists of functionality, and look and feel features. Functionality deals with organizing content and providing users with a means of navigation. In addition, the look and feel features established by visual characteristics, including colors and visual themes that help deliver a message. The context of Mudah.my site has the look-and-fell features which it provides much product information and photos, easy web site navigation, simple graphics and attractive colour scheme. It is easy to use and by creating listings on the Mudah.my site, students could see that the site is very functional and less sophisticated.

**Community** concerns the interaction between site users (i.e., buyer and seller communication), including a feeling of membership and a sense of involvement. This includes the use of instant messaging, chat rooms, email capability, message boards, and member-to-member e-mailing lists. The Mudah.my site encourages interaction among its users via email or mobile phones. Communication between sellers and buyers is important in order to make sure the transaction run smoothly. The goal of Mudah.my is fostering a community of buyers and sellers via online business. The company claims to provide a virtual place that allows anyone to buy and sell conveniently and delivers remarkable user experience (Mudah, 2012). A seller may communicate with a buyer in a variety of ways, including via email, Facebook, text messages and in some cases by telephone. A buyer will contact a seller while a listing is ongoing to be reassured that the seller is responsive and to get a feel for the person as a trading partner.

**Customization** refers to the site’s ability to tailor itself (tailoring) or to be tailored by each user (personalization). It is the ability of a site to be modified to display content, or an assortment of content, that reflects the preferences of the user. Users could customize their site by inputting personal data and selecting a set of features or services to meet their preferences, such as with the Mudah.my ProNiaga user profile page. In addition, users are able to modify their listings according to their needs such as creating the online store, seller’s profile, link to personal website, product information and photos. Users also are able to create a wanted list for a product or services they desire. As a seller, they could use the my ads page to track visitors counter, edit and delete their listings as well as to manage the payment and fulfillment process with buyers.

Lee and Benbasat (2004) defined communication as the dialogue between sites and their users that includes broadcast, a one-way information exchange from an organization to users (e.g., e-mail notification) and interactive, a two-way communication between an organization and a user (e.g., customer service request). A student can see vivid examples of customer contact by looking at the Mudah.my site for example online self-help resources and FAQ (frequently asked questions) database. One must navigate through a multi-step process of self-help options before contacting Mudah.my through email or phone calls.

**Connection** refers to the extent of formal linkage from one site to others. It is characterized according to the degree of linkage and the amount of information quoted from other sites: outsourced content, percent of home site content, and pathways of connection. (Lee and Benbasat, 2004). Students are familiar with portal web sites such as Yahoo.com that provide many connections to other web sites, and indeed they act as a gateway to other
online resources. In contrast, the Mudah.my site keeps its users in-house by offering few links to other web sites such as Google ads that contain other parties website that appear on the bottom page of the site.

2. Methodology and Results

The students responded to a set of questionnaire survey adopted from Johnston (2003) that asked their opinions on the exercise. A total of 144 feedback from the participants in the Mudah.my exercise were completed and used in this study. The group consisted of 36 male and 106 female, with an average age of 22 years. During the 14 weeks, all groups had sold an item listed in the Mudah.my website. The Cronbach Alpha value for 13 items in the questionnaire is 0.88, indicating that the measures are reliable (more than 0.60). All items were measured on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The sentence and completing phrases appear in Table 1 below, along with the student’s mean and standard deviation (S.D.). All responses are for 13 items regarding basic e-commerce (items 1–7 = commerce and items 8-13 = context, content, community, customization, communication and connection).

Table 1 Student feedback: Questions on 7Cs (basics of e-commerce)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regarding my learning of the fundamentals of e-commerce, the Mudah.my assignment was a good way for me to learn about............................</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the characteristics of products suitable to offer for sale online.</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the characteristics of an effective “offer” to sell a product online (price, product description, terms of sale, etc.).</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how to research other online offers to get ideas or facts to create an offer.</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the characteristics of an effective webpage to present an online offer (photos, title, etc.).</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>methods for receiving payments online.</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fulfilling an online order (packing, shipping, etc.).</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems with selling online (buyer fraud, shipping errors, etc.).</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the importance of the context of an e-commerce web site (the design template or “look-and feel” of the site).</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the importance of the content of a web site (the information presented to visitors).</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the methods of creating community among web site users (providing ways for users to talk to each other).</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the methods of customization of a web site for the users (or personalization).</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the importance of communicating with potential customers.</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the methods of making a connection between the company and the web site users (how a company and customers communicate with each other).</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on above table, generally students agreed that the Mudah.my exercise was a practical and good way to learn the fundamentals of e-commerce. The mean levels for basic e-commerce element, which is commerce, ranged from 3.80 to 4.15 with an average of 4.00, which indicates the level of agreement among the students. They rated high in term of product suitability, effective offer and product listings. Furthermore, for the remaining e-commerce elements (context, content, community, customization, communication and connection) the response mean ranged from 4.03 to 4.24 with communication score the highest. This revealed that students were enthusiastic about the exercise’s ability to teach basic e-commerce.
3. Conclusion

The theoretical implications of the findings are as follows. The Mudah.my exercise is an effective way to teach the fundamentals of e-commerce as they apply to an online business. This result corroborates the finding of Johnston (2003) which remarked the same level or agreement among students regarding the online exercise through C2C web site. The exercise provide students with the first-hand experience in dealing with e-commerce issues such as choosing products, crafting offers and web listings, receiving payments and fulfilling orders.

Two caveats apply prior to Mudah.my exercise. First, the instructor should have experience as a Mudah.my seller. This is to ensure a successful transaction, knowing the pros and cons of various listing terms, shipping options, and how to deal with potential buyers. An in-depth knowledge about selling online can only come from experience. Second, the exercise should be conducted in a computer lab or computer classroom. This is because students could best benefit from the instructor’s experience if it is shared as they make decisions about their listings.

References