4.14 Quality Assurance Framework for b2c E-Commerce Web Sites

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ABSTRACT

A Web site is one of the main information sources in digitally enabled world, and activities of different Web sites vary from each other depending on the purpose of the site. E-commerce is one of the core domains among those purposes. A Web site could improve its activities by speedy communication, offering a more convenient services to users, cost reduction etc. One of the main marketing channels to reach end customers is B2C (Business to Customer) e-commerce where a business transacts with an individual consumer online. Currently a large number of Web sites provide B2C e-commerce services. However, many B2C e-commerce Web sites have a short lifespan due to number of reasons including issues relating to quality of Web sites.

According to past research it is observed that there is a positive relationship between the online shopping behavior of a customer and quality of a Web site. This is mainly due to positive customer experience depends mainly on the quality of Web sites. As a result of poor quality Web sites companies may face a fewer number of visitor thus reducing sales. Therefore it could be concluded that the quality of B2C e-commerce Web sites is vital for customers as well as for companies.

The main objective of this research is to identify factors that influence the quality of a B2C e-commerce Web site and develop a framework. The framework provides a set of guidelines in order to ensure that a Web site achieves a specified quality level. According to ISO standards there are three views of the quality of Web sites; namely, managers' view, users' view and developers' view. Users are interested in the quality in use which is mainly an external factor including sustainability, ability to install, functionality, adaptability, ease of use, ability to learn, interpretability, reliability, safety, security, correctness and efficiency. However, developers and managers are more interested in internal quality characteristics such as maintainability, testability, flexibility, reusability and portability of a Web site. Therefore, quality of a Web site could be evaluated from both view points of users and managers/developers. However, seeing a Web site from users' eyes is paramount as users are the ultimate judges of a Web site quality. Hence, this research focuses on the external quality of a Web site.

A comprehensive literature survey was carried out in order to identify the factors affect the quality of e-commerce sites. The literature survey revealed that information content, ease of use, usefulness, download delay, navigation/ organization, interactivity, responsiveness, reliability, security, design/ visual appearance are as main quality factors.

This is an ongoing research at the Department of Industrial management, University of Kelaniya. It is expected to validate the developed framework with success and failure stories of B2C e-commerce Web sites and users' feedback. The proposed framework can be applied to other types of Web sites such as Business to Business (B2B), information providers etc. with slight modifications.

Keywords: Web site quality, E-commerce, B2C