

A Hermeneutic Investigation of Online Consumer Decision Making

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

This is a multidisciplinary information systems thesis with a strong sociological focus. Theoretically it uses the technical concerns of human-computer interaction as the background to consider the separate theories of consumer decision-making and the diffusion of innovations. Emphasis is placed on understanding how consumers make sense of the Internet and come to define the role and use of the Internet in their lives.

A practical framework for hermeneutic investigation was created to access the unreflective thoughts and actions driving online consumer decision-making. Implicit within hermeneutics is the prospect of transcendental interpretations and the ability to investigate *in situ* new avenues of research that emerge as a result of anomalous comments or findings. Hence, this thesis presents two different, but inter-related, research inquiries and their associated findings.

Initial interest was centred on consumer behaviour and interface design. Specifically, can a dedicated ‘consumer interface’ be designed using principles based on consumer perceptions of online convenience. The resulting data analysis created a framework of advice that interface designers can use to improve their understanding of the nature and limitations of convenient interfaces and associated consumer decision-support technologies.

A second research theme emerged from the data analysis which broadened the focus into a consideration of online consumer behaviour as a distinct issue. Specifically, a new form of interactive behaviour prevalent in electronic retail markets was identified and, following a second literature review, labeled “surrogacy”. Related in form to the personal shoppers found in traditional marketplaces, surrogacy differs from electronic intermediaries with regard to (i) the motivations of use and (ii) the symbolic and functional benefits of usage. The emergence of this phenomenon suggests that interactions between individuals (as consumers) and Web-based systems are maturing, albeit in a non-predictable manner.

Together, the methodological refinements presented here with the accompanying research findings provide a reference point for further work in the following three areas: interface design for electronic marketplaces; Web-based consumer decision support technologies; and the development of interpretive approaches suitable for socio-technical investigations.

Keywords: *Interface Design, Hermeneutics, Consumer Behaviour, Intermediaries, Surrogacy.*

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father.

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Setting the Scene

1.1 Background

Convenience is a term used to describe the advantages of Internet shopping (Alba *et al*, 1997; Loshe *et al*, 1998, Turban *et al*, 2002). It refers to the unique characteristics of Internet technology enabling consumers to do one, or several, of the following: shop when it suits them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; access a wider selection of goods and services than would be possible on the High Street; and obtain price reductions through mechanisms such as electronic auctions and direct sales (Kalakota and Whinston, 1996). Each of these characteristics enables a person to manage their time more efficiently.

But does time efficiency mean time reduction? None of those characteristics listed above imply the ability to purchase goods and services more quickly. A consumer may be able to transfer money out of normal banking hours, but the process may take the same amount of absolute time (Chen, 2000). Similarly, a person may place an order online but have to wait days for delivery, and then hope that it is what they ordered (Li *et al*, 2000). Internet shopping may be convenient, but it is not necessarily faster. If anything, Internet technology encourages consumers to spend increasingly longer periods of time online browsing for a product to buy (Turban *et al*, 2002).

So, how has this contradiction between the reality of Internet shopping as a time-consuming activity and the popular conception that it is a time-efficient tool arisen?

Initial academic research sought to identify the types of people engaging in online consumer behaviour. Early Web adopters were found to have little discretionary time and labelled 'time-starved' professionals (Bellman, *et al* 1999). Familiar with Internet technology, these people used the Web as a tool to minimise their time spent on chores and repetitive purchases such as grocery shopping. It was deemed easier and quicker to click a button than actually visit a physical store (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997; Li *et al*, 1999).

Subsequent studies found that the ease and speed of Internet technology also posed a significant threat to online shopping (Kehoe *et al*, 1999; Kraut *et al*, 2000). Many potential online consumers were overwhelmed by the amount of information available at the touch of a button (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997; Bellman, *et al*, 1999). Not only was their universe of product possibilities increased, but their ability to compare between alternative selections was also reduced (Alba *et al*, 1997).

In response, some researchers argued that online sales required the development of technology which supported a consumer's decision-making process (McEachern and O'Keefe, 1999). Interface designers interpreted this to mean sites that could support rapid processing rather than considered action. As a result, web-sites that could minimise consumer frustration by simplifying their transaction processes were held as examples of best practice (Cole and O'Keefe, 2000).

And yet, these interfaces lacked the ability to support the demands for considered action required by consumers. This is where the contradiction between the reality of Internet shopping, and attitudes towards it, remain. The ability to make value judgements about complex products and non-routine purchases such as a car for example, is poorly supported by technology. Potential consumers often spend hours browsing sites, comparing product attributes and gathering pertinent information prior to purchase (Li *et al*, 1999).

So what do consumers *themselves* mean when they refer to Internet shopping as convenient? Gaining some understanding here may help interface designers create a dedicated consumer interface: one that is able to support the divergent decision-making needs of consumers - speed and deliberation.

1.2 Problem Area

The aim of this study therefore, is to investigate the belief that online consumers use the Internet to purchase goods and services because it is convenient, where convenience is defined as processing speed. As such this study has the following objectives:

1. To investigate those characteristics associated with convenience in relation to Internet shopping;
2. To investigate the possibility of describing online behaviour by reference to the display of any characteristics or traits unique to Web usage;
3. To investigate whether any of these characteristics could be used as the basis for a framework of advice in the design of a 'consumer interface'.

As such this study expands the current knowledge base in three ways:

1. It focuses on the motivations driving online consumer behaviour rather than the directly observable acts of online shopping;
2. It considers the dynamics between the physical and electronic shopping environments from a consumers perspective instead of a business perspective;
3. It considers online behaviour as a separate entity possessing its own characteristics and traits rather than viewing it as an extension of personal behaviour.

The result is a study that seeks to complement existing research by offering some explanation of *why* online consumers interact with the Internet to purchase certain products and not others. This involves an examination of *how* online consumers use the Internet to fulfil their goals. In so doing, it provides an explanation, however incomplete, of emerging Internet behaviour that may be of interest to others in the IS community.

1.3 Scope of this Research

This study is bound by two assumptions which determine both the field of reference and associated range of activity. First, it is assumed that users are fundamentally different to consumers in their interactions with computers. Secondly, it is assumed that different types of consumers are adopting the Internet as a shopping channel with implications for interface design. Together, these assumptions inform the choice of literature to be reviewed. Hence, theories of consumer decision-making and technology adoption are considered in the context of interface design as a means of identifying elements of online convenience.

In terms of the range of research activity, the assumptions reflect a concern with the diversity of consumer attitudes to online convenience. Consequently, participants were required who differed according to their age, socio-economic backgrounds, familiarity with Internet technology and frequency of making online purchases. From amongst these categories participants were needed who could offer interesting comments about their daily interactions with the Internet. Novel, contradictory or detailed commentary offered greater opportunities for uncovering consumer attitudes towards online convenience and associated emergent behaviours than a desire for representativeness and the ability to generalise statements to a wider population.

The in-depth focus adopted in this study also meant that the number of participants involved would be limited. This was done for logistical and analytical reasons. Several rounds of conversational interviews were anticipated to allow for clarification and detailed questioning. Each round required time to be allocated for the interview, transcription and subsequent reflection prior to the next round. A large data set would make this process unwieldy, especially given the heterogeneity of participants.

1.4 The Research Approach

The dominant motivation for choosing an interpretive research approach was the ontological belief that knowledge about our reality is gained through language, consciousness and shared meaning (Klein and Myers, 1999).

Philosophical Basis	Positivism	Objectively measured
	Interpretivism	Socially constructed
	Critical Analysis	Alienating conditions
Methodologies	Action Research	Overcoming practical concerns
	Case Study	Shallow immersion in social context
	Ethnography	Deep immersion in social context
	Constructivist Hermeneutics	Transcendental Interpretations
Modes of Analysis	Hermeneutic Circle	Meaning of text
	Semiotics	Meaning of signs and symbols
	- content analysis	- structures and patterned regularities
	- conversation analysis	- context of exchange
	- discourse analysis	- 'turn-taking' & language games
	Narrative & Metaphor	Meaning of stories

Table 1 Qualitative Approaches to Research

There are several interpretive research approaches that could have been used for this study such as ethnography and case study, (see table 1 for a breakdown) but hermeneutics was chosen because it offered the greatest challenge. A relatively novel research approach in IS, hermeneutics presented an exciting means of investigating unconscious attitudes during points of transition (from the old ways of shopping to the new forms of electronic purchasing).

Unlike any other research method, hermeneutics aims to transcend existing notions about some phenomena (in this instance online convenience) by actively challenging the perceptions of both interviewer and subject as they move towards a new, shared understanding (Walsham, 1995). As such, hermeneutics provides a real means of engaging in transcendental interpretations (with its prospects for future applications) rather than attempting to resolve the immediate practical concerns of interface designers (as per action research).

Perhaps the greatest benefit offered by hermeneutics is the freedom to pursue anomalous comments or findings. Rather than concentrating on the determination of textual meaning (e.g. semiotics and narrative stories), a researcher using the hermeneutic circle is able to put their interpretation on the data being analysed as a basis for further discussion and future understanding. As a result, new avenues of research can emerge and be *immediately investigated* in ways not possible using other research approaches.

1.5 Relevance of Research

This study is the result of opportunities created by the rapid diffusion of the Internet in UK households at the start of the new millennium. The degree of interest created in the potential of the Internet to offer convenient online purchasing, coupled with the transition from first to second generation Internet consumers, provided unparalleled opportunities to explore the motivations and attitudes of this largely unknown user group.

Understanding some of the ways in which online consumer behaviour has evolved, and the attitudes driving it, could provide interface designers with new insights. Specifically, the findings of this study provide a useful and timely retrospective of Internet behaviour, at a time when research into consumer interface design is stagnating. For example, the design formats and rapid transaction processing systems pioneered by sites such as Amazon and e-Bay are increasingly being used as standard business practice.

Equally, efforts at supporting online consumer decision-making by reducing the consideration set have also floundered (Bonet, 2001). Personalisation technologies and sophisticated data-mining software continue to recommend inappropriate products for consideration (Hyam, Chumki and Davidson, 2000). Understanding some of the vagaries of online consumer behaviour may help explain why existing consumer decision support technologies are not producing the convenience benefits that were envisaged.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is structured in the following manner. A detailed description of the research method employed is offered in Chapter two. Because hermeneutics is a philosophical approach it lacks the methodological definition present in other interpretive approaches. The purpose of chapter two is to demonstrate the manner in which key philosophical terms were incorporated into a structured research framework. This should enable the reader to better understand the manner by which the data was collected and analysed.

The third chapter reviews the literature on consumer decision-making, technology adoption and interface design. The purpose of this chapter is to de-construct *my understanding* of the elements of a convenient interface design for customers, i.e. a 'consumer interface'. As such, this chapter does not offer an idealised construct but tries to identify and present my research prejudices as a basis against which future explanations and interpretations can be benchmarked. For this reason, chapter three represents the first stage of the hermeneutic circle: the deconstruction of the 'whole' into its component parts.

Chapter four uses the identified parts to examine their viability as functional descriptors. Put simply, do others agree with the selection of convenience characteristics I judge to be important elements in the design of a 'consumer interface'? An analysis of the first round of transcripts is presented which examines this point. Where new characteristics are identified their relationships between each other and how they relate to a consumer interface are discussed. Consequently, chapter four represents the second stage of the hermeneutic circle: the reconstruction of the parts back into the whole, where the whole reflects a more sophisticated appreciation of its nature.

Inherent in the process of re-construction is an element of challenge. Specifically, this occurs when aspects of phenomena are identified that cause a *breakdown* in the researchers own worldview. In this case, anomalous comments regarding the nature of convenient behaviour were identified that could not be easily categorised or incorporated into my existing mental schema. Chapter five thus signifies a change in

the direction of the research focus – from online consumer behaviour towards online behaviour in general. As such it represents a second turn of the hermeneutic circle. Transcript evidence is presented and supported, by further investigations in the form of a second literature review, in an attempt to understand and explain this new phenomenon.

Chapter six presents a third set of transcript analysis which results in an entirely new interpretation of consumer behaviour in a networked economy. Here the properties of the emergent online behaviour identified in the previous chapter are examined and refined into a coherent whole. As such, this chapter moves the discussion of convenience and online (consumer) behaviour to a different level.

Fusing the different interpretive findings, or horizons, into a coherent whole and placing them within a broader context of research is the purpose of the final chapter. Here three levels of reflection are offered which help the reader to: (i) understand the limitations of the interpretations presented; (ii) evaluate the viability of the design guidelines offered; and (iii) better appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of this research method should they wish to use it themselves.

Creating a Framework for Hermeneutic Investigation

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain to the reader the hermeneutic research framework devised to capture and analyse emerging user (as consumer) appreciations of their own interactions with the Internet. Consideration of the framework is presented here, in chapter 2, because the research adopts a non-standardised presentation format: cycles of reflection have replaced the linear development of analysis. As such, this chapter acts as an instruction manual helping readers to make sense of the different spirals of reflexive interpretations presented to them in subsequent chapters.

The prevailing use of hermeneutic theory within the IS community falls into one of two perspectives: epistemological or methodological. Responding to positivist criticisms of interpretive research, researchers such as Walsham (1995) and Klein and Myers (1999), have sought to explain hermeneutic principles as a means of informing research design. Such discussions advocate the use of hermeneutic principles as criteria against which interpretive research can be evaluated. Other researchers, such as Boland (1991), Lee (1994) and Orlikowski (1991), have applied hermeneutic principles as a means of analysing textual data produced using non-hermeneutic methods.

In contrast, this chapter will describe a hermeneutic framework able to inform both research design *and* data analysis. The following section will define hermeneutics and outline the different strands of hermeneutic philosophy including constructivist

hermeneutics. The third section will describe the core elements of constructivist hermeneutic thought – structure of understanding, the hermeneutic circle and fusion of horizons. These elements then form the basis for constructing a framework for hermeneutic research. The fourth section explains how these abstract concepts have been operationalised into practical techniques for conducting the research process. The final section considers the coherence and validity of the proposed research design.

2.2 What Is Hermeneutics?

Put simply, hermeneutics is a theory of interpreting texts. An ‘interpreter’ is one who renders words intelligible and meaningful. This may require some point of clarification or additional commentary, particularly when the original meaning of the text is in dispute or remains hidden because it is “unfamiliar and alien” (Boland, 1991, p.429). Hermeneutics is consequently engaged in two tasks: ascertaining the exact meaning-content of a word or phrase; and defining guidelines to facilitate interpretive explication (Bleicher, 1980).

As with many philosophical traditions, hermeneutics is an umbrella term for many different approaches. Butler (Butler, 1998) and Bendiktsson (Bendiktsson, 1989) have categorised modern hermeneutics according to their defining characteristics and philosophical emphases (see table 2). Hence, the methodological ‘rules’ aimed at uncovering the ‘one true meaning’ embodied in a text advocated by Betti were challenged by Heidegger’s emphasis on existential understanding and Gadamer’s articulation of tradition: ‘lived experiences’ were viewed relative to an individual’s time and place and therefore not constant elements able to be objectively translated (Palmer, 1969).

Reacting to the stress placed on the subjectivity of understanding, Ricoeur (as the leading exponent of the phenomenological approach) argued that true understanding required a person to ‘distanciate’ the meaning of a text from its context. Critical hermeneutics such as Habermas have extended this notion by arguing that language

should not be accorded special rights whilst postmodern thinkers such as Derrida attempt to uncover a meaning beyond that intended by the author (Lawlor, 1992).

Philosopher	Butler's Type	Bendiktsson's Type	Differences
Betti	Conservative	Hermeneutical Theory	Uncover original meanings as intended by the author. Believes in objectivity – there are correct interpretations not bound by history or context.
Gadamer	Pragmatic (Constructivist)	Hermeneutical Theory	Enter into the interpretive norms of the community. Consider the historical contexts of the interpreter and interpreted.
Heidegger	Pragmatic (Constructivist) is best fit	Hermeneutical Theory	
Wittgenstein	Pragmatic (Constructivist)		
Apel	Critical	Critical	Promotes emancipation through the de-privileging of language (Denzin, 1989)
Habermas	Critical	Critical	
Ricoeur	(Discussed but not classified)	Phenomenological Hermeneutics	
Derrida	Radical (Deconstructionalist)		Text and social action are treated as an endless play of signs that reveal and conceal knowledge through the play of difference and contradiction. Hence, the true meaning of the work is not necessarily the meaning that the author intended.

Table 2 Different Approaches to Hermeneutic Investigation

2.2.1 Constructivist Hermeneutics

One of the primary aims of constructivist hermeneutics is to enact a methodology based on the recognition that every research act is an act of interpretation (Maturana, 1980). Whereas phenomenological hermeneutics aims at a faithful description of the lived experience and is accomplished by a bracketing of the researcher's frame of reference (van Manen, 1997), constructivist hermeneutics acknowledges the embedded nature of the researcher's frame as the beginning point in the process of coming to understand and interpret the phenomena under study.

From this perspective, knowledge (as understanding) is viewed as a self-regulatory process; a continual conflict between existing personal models of the world and discrepant new insights (Fosnot, 1996). New worldviews are constructed through social discourse and debate in a process Denzin (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) called 'interpretive interactionism.'

In contrast to attempts by critical hermeneutics to uncover meanings that have been hidden or disguised, constructivist hermeneutics seeks to illuminate and articulate what generally goes unnoticed because it is ubiquitous, common-place, and everyday (Packer & Addison, 1989). Achieving these forms of insights requires an appreciation of the intertwined nature of description and interpretation that can be found in Geertz's approach that promotes 'thick descriptions' of meanings that result from human experiences (Geertz, 1983).

2.3 Components of Constructivist Hermeneutic Thought

The following sections describe key elements of constructivist hermeneutic thought. Together, these sections provide the philosophical background used to develop a framework for hermeneutic research.

2.3.1 The Structure of Understanding

According to Heidegger, understanding is structured by a hermeneutic triumvirate of time-meaning-Being. 'Being' refers to the way in which human's come to know their world. Phenomena are perceived and understood according to how they are encountered in everyday routines and tasks. As the level of familiarity with different phenomena increases, so the degree of interpretation needed is reduced: conscious knowledge is replaced by a largely unreflective and automatic grasp of familiar situations. For example, if a person were to switch the hand holding a toothbrush when cleaning their teeth, previously unthinking actions would now require conscious effort and control. With practice however, using the opposite hand to clean teeth would, once again, become an automatic and unconscious action.

Implicit within the concept of Being is the notion of Time: our understanding of a situation is based on a degree of pre-understanding accumulated from experience. In other words, we understand new events in the context of what we already know. Acceptable values and experiences supporting these pre-understandings are transmitted through time and history via social and cultural mechanisms which provide reassurance in times of uncertainty. For Gadamer, this 'Tradition' of lived experience provides the contexts of understanding and contributes to the formation of prejudices: the attitudes and values we hold result from our existence in a particular time and place. Nowhere is this more evident than in the different cultural and religious values held by people throughout the world.

Our prejudices (or pre-understanding about something) are critical components in the *anticipation of meaning*: new phenomena are explained in terms of what we already understand. Aspects of phenomena we judge to be important, or significant, ultimately depend on the interplay of Time and Being, what Gadamer called our 'effective-historical consciousness.' This will differ according to the individual and represents their personal circumstances considered against the broader socio-historical context. Hence, our prejudices are grounded in two places: our *world* and in our *lived experience*. They are passed on in the language and the images of our own times and of our generation's experience of the world. For example, an elderly Western lady familiar with phones as devices for communication may view Internet-enabled mobile phones in a similar manner and ignore their broader entertainment potential.

Together, time-meaning-Being provides a methodologically relevant formulation of understanding-explanation-interpretation. (See Figure 1.) The interpreter appropriates what is already understood creating an 'in-order-to' structure of projected understanding: future behaviour is based on the present understanding of past actions. From this perspective, understanding is no longer concerned with grasping facts but with apprehending a possibility of being – a concept Heidegger called *Dasein*.

2.3.2. The Hermeneutic Circle

With Dasein, Heidegger (1976) suggests a hermeneutic circle of unconscious understanding and situated behaviour. Spirals of understanding arise from interpretations of an executed action or comment. The aim is to reflectively accept or reject those aspects of experiential fore-knowledge (our prejudices), which can be re-specified for theoretical development (Butler, 1998).

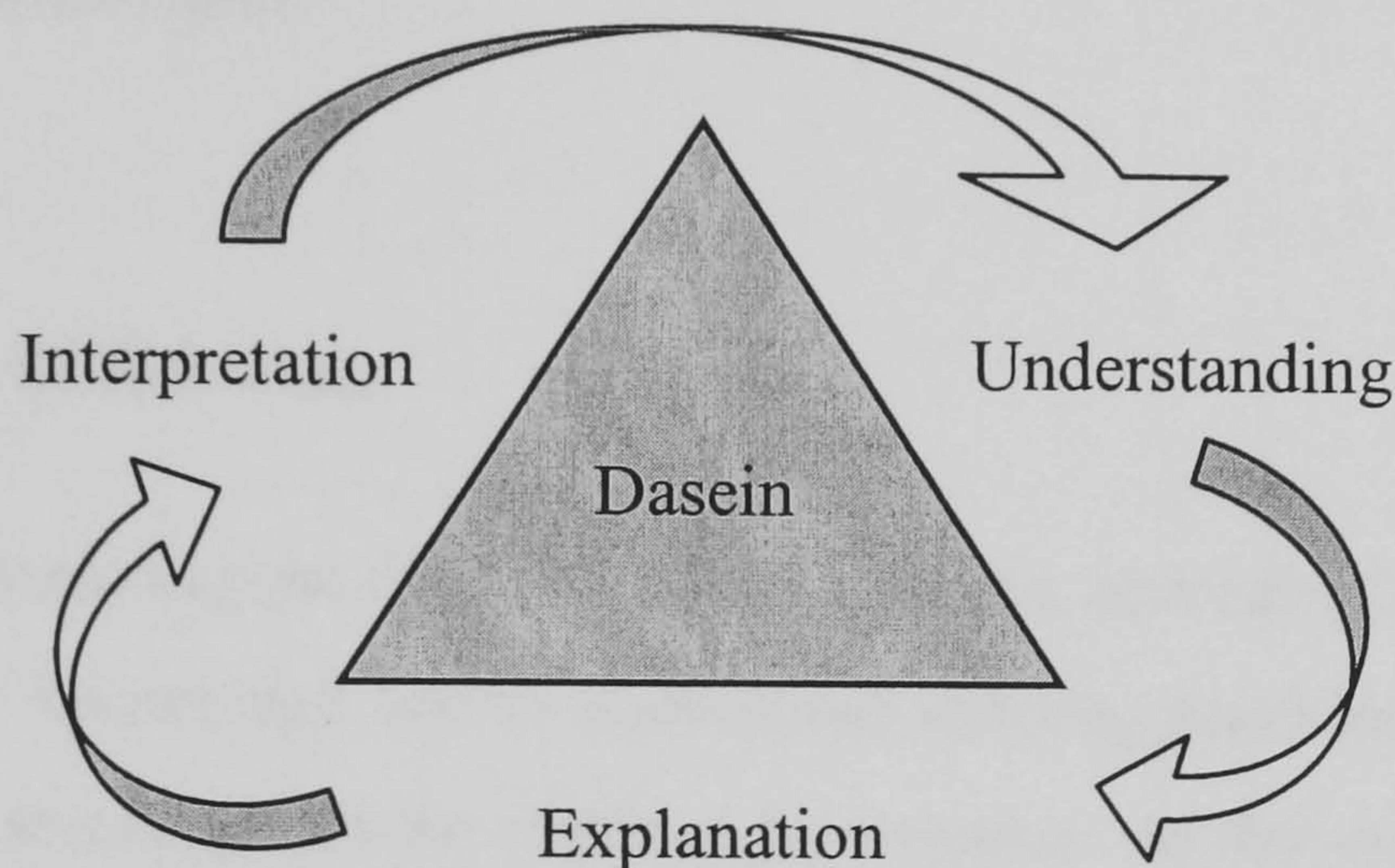


Figure 1 The Structure of Understanding

Understanding component aspects of phenomena however, can only begin when their relationships with the 'whole' have been established. The determination of these relationships is, itself, guided by an expectation of meaning arising from the preceding context. For example, we interpret the presence of men hitting a ball as 'sport' though determining which sport (golf, tennis, snooker, hockey, etc) requires an examination of the specific aspects before us (surface, hitting implement, team numbers, etc).

Thus, when a phenomenon is familiar (i.e. 'present-at-hand') to an actor, they will possess a prejudice-laden pre-understanding of it. Through a dialectic process of inquiry with the phenomena they will identify its parts. Operating from a holistic perspective each part will be interpreted and its meaning and relationship to the whole consolidated into an emergent understanding of the phenomenon. Gadamer called this a 'subjective reflex' adopted by an actor towards the phenomenon – the

intuitive anticipation of the whole and its subsequent articulation in the parts (see figure 1).

As Gadamer comments: (1975, p.68)

The movement of understanding always runs from the whole to part and back to the whole. The task is to expand in concentric circles the unity of the understood meaning. Harmonising all the particulars with the whole is at each stage the criterion of correct understanding. Its absence is failure to understand.

2.3.3. Fusion of Horizons

The aim of negotiating the circle of Understanding, according to Heidegger, is not to seek out 'new' knowledge but to understand existing knowledge better. Increasing levels of understanding can be obtained by exposure to the values (or prejudices) of others through social discourse and a dialectic of shared understanding.

Gadamer notes however, that the 'lived experiences' of individuals are unique and create temporally based limits, a concept he calls 'horizons of understanding' (Gadamer 1975, p.269). The hermeneutic problem, therefore, is not the search for one best interpretation but rather the co-emergence of perspectives that result from an active merging of boundaries, or the "fusion of horizons", by researcher and participants.

It is to this end that the researcher strives, by means of reflexive immersion in the data, and by paying close attention to their prejudices, recognising that their knowledge will be necessarily incomplete and transitory (Gadamer, 1975). Rather than trying to corral prejudices within brackets, they are accepted as the personal backdrop from which understanding and interpretation operate in the migration to higher viewpoints (Gadamer, 1975).

The aim of this approach therefore is not simply to understand better an author's intentions by deciphering the world-view behind them. Rather, the process is to

move beyond original meaning by reaching a shared understanding between researcher and subject regarding some 'part' of the whole phenomena. In contrast, Verstehen represents the fusions of horizons regarding the totality of parts. Here, understanding is to understand differently from the initial concepts of either the subject or the researcher.

2.4 A Practical Framework for Hermeneutic Research

The following sections describe the operationalisation of key elements drawn from constructivist hermeneutic thought and are represented diagrammatically in figure 2. Discussion of elements is treated logically and represents one revolution of the hermeneutic circle – from understanding through explanation to interpretation.

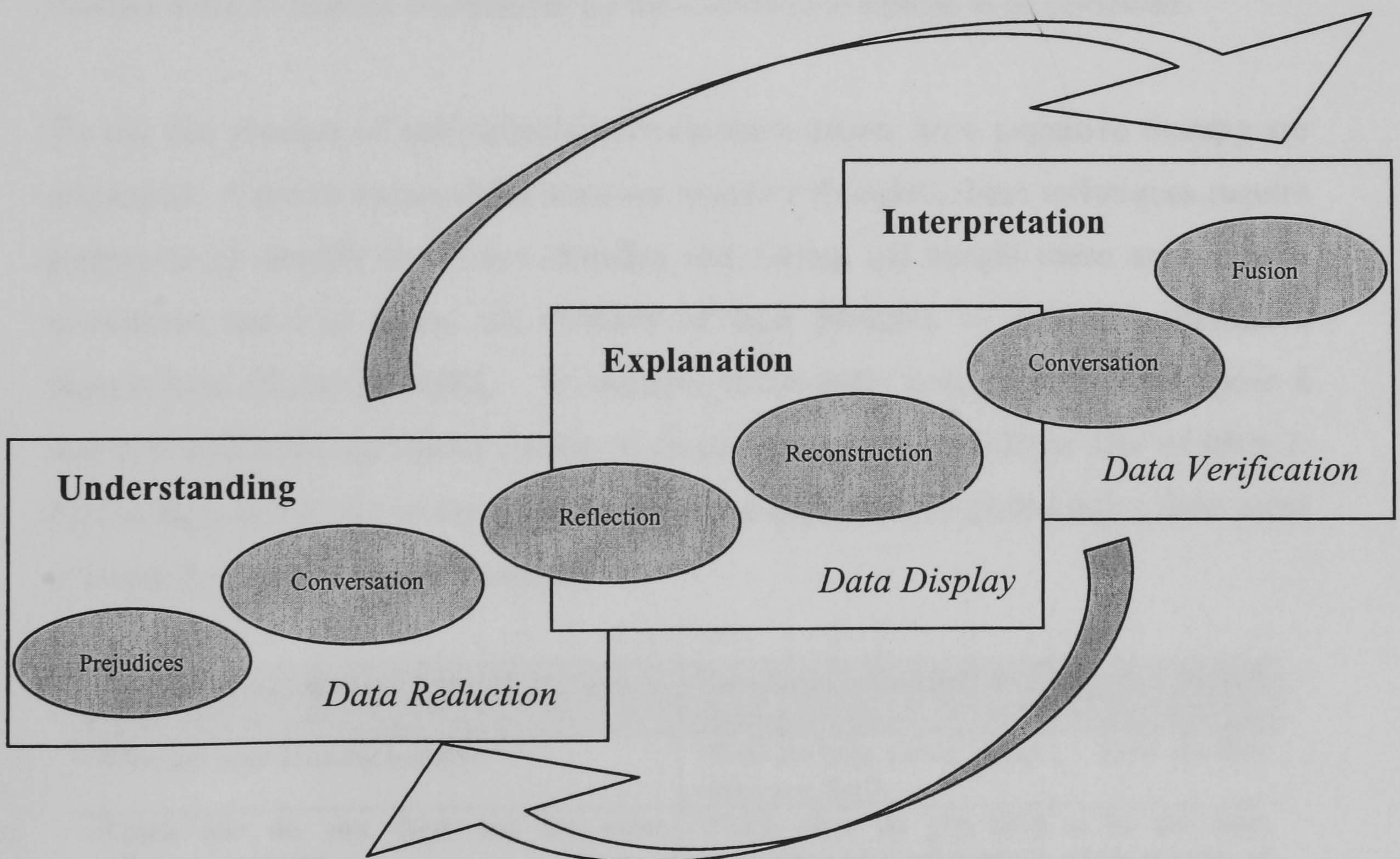


Figure 2 A Hermeneutic Framework for Practical Research

2.4.1 Stage One: The Explication of Prejudices

The first stage of any research process is to establish a research focus and transform masses of data into useful and condensed forms of intelligence (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 1998). Miles and Huberman (1994) call this process data reduction. For researchers using constructivist hermeneutics, this involves clarifying one's presuppositions, i.e. the explication of prejudices. The aim of this process is to allow the researcher to better *understand* their interpretive lens *prior* to data collection and analysis.

The explication of prejudices devised for this framework follows a two-stage process. The first stage is to clarify one's position relative to the phenomena of interest, i.e. gain an appreciation of "the whole". This is achieved by attempting to uncover the dominant motivations and interests of the researcher, which in turn, enables them to impose boundaries on the choice of literature to be reviewed.

To aid this process of self-reflection, techniques drawn from cognitive therapy are employed. Used to successfully uncover negative thoughts, these techniques require people to (i) identify their core attitudes and values; (ii) weight these according to conviction and (iii) assess the viability of their thoughts by outlining alternative perspectives (Gaskell, 2000). To achieve these ends, cognitive therapists pose a series of reflective questions similar to those listed on the left-hand side of table 3. On the right-hand side of the table are the same questions translated into a form more relevant for generic research inquiry.

Questions Drawn From Cognitive Therapy	Questions Translated for Generic Research Inquiry
What are your limiting beliefs?	What are your views about ... How do they make you feel?
Which one do you think has the most influence over you	Which view do you hold to be the most important and why? Rate the others in order of importance.
Why do you hold this belief? What evidence do you have to prove that it is true?	What evidence do you have to support your hierarchy of views?
What evidence do you have to prove to yourself that this belief is <i>not necessarily</i> true?	What evidence do you have to prove to <i>yourself</i> that your views, and arrangement of views, are not necessarily accurate?

Table 3 Types of Reflective Questions

Two aspects of constructivist hermeneutic thought – Tradition and effective-historical consciousness - can be used to inform this reflective process. Whilst Tradition directs the researcher to consider their lived experience as a social and cultural construct, effective-historical consciousness spotlights the motivations, inclinations and skills that constitute the researcher’s personal world. Ultimately the aim of this process is to sensitize the researcher to the comments and actions of others – by either improving their ability to empathise with another or recognise discrepant information.

The second stage of explication involves creating a level of critical self-awareness, however incomplete, about the researcher’s interpretive horizons. This can be achieved by entering into a dialectic with the literature chosen for review, i.e. by deconstructing “the whole” into constituent “parts”. Example questions could include: “what values are being supported by the theory under review and do they challenge my perceptions?” And, “does the reviewed literature accurately constitute my (emerging) worldview?”

2.4.2 Stage Two: Formulating Lines of Inquiry

Developing reflections using these considerations should help the researcher to create a richer appreciation of their interpretive position (relative to the whole) and associated research horizons (relative to the parts). Unlike other qualitative research approaches, such as grounded theory and phenomenology, constructivist hermeneutics uses the products of explication – the deconstructed parts - to inform the lines of inquiry and drive the research process. Specifically, the “parts” determined *by the researcher* to be key elements of the “whole” are used as the themes for discussion whilst collecting data during active interviews.

When crafted, the first line of inquiry serves as *the* reference criterion for the study. This imposes structure on the research design helping to assure consistency of focus across subjects, time periods and different analytical stages. For example, it resolves sampling issues *prior* to data collection by clarifying the focus of interest. Appropriate data sources and analytical strategies are chosen relative to the focus

rather than vice versa. The researcher is also better placed *during* an interview to identify when 'drift' is occurring and/or be sensitive to anomalous comments relative to the reference criterion. This is particularly critical in projects where the multiplicity of meanings both within, and across subjects, is generated at exponential rates.

Should anomalous comments be identified during data analysis, the reference criterion helps to structure the researcher's interpretative response: new information is assessed relative to what was understood before, and what can be explained now, in terms of what this means for the future.

In this way, lines of inquiry provide the mechanism for moving between the different analytical stages of the hermeneutic circle: from deconstruction (as understanding) to analysis (as explanation) to interpretation (as understanding differently) and so on. Accordingly, it becomes possible to trace both the direction of emerging interpretations, and their defining points of fusion, against the spiralling lines of inquiry.

2.4.3 Stage Three: Conducting the Active Interview

The "active interview" considers the interviewer and interviewee as equal partners in constructing meaning around an interview event (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Technically, the active interview is unstructured: it comes close to an everyday conversation but is directed using an interview schedule with the themes listed but with few specific questions and no fixed questions (Kvale, 1996). The aim is to delve beneath the surface of superficial responses to obtain true meanings that individuals assign to events, and the complexities of their attitudes, behaviours and experiences. This is achieved by getting the participant(s) to reconstruct their experience within the theme under study (Seidman, 1991).

The active interview is theme oriented: two people talk about a theme that is of interest to both. The main task of this type of interview is to understand the meaning offered by interviewees. Consequently, this requires the researcher to use empathy

(i.e. a heightened level of self-awareness derived from the articulation of prejudices) to collect data that can appreciate the intentionality of meaning as opposed to the observable existence of actions and reported thought. It must be noted however, that complete empathy may never be achievable because the researcher, living in the here and now, may never be aware that a possible distance may exist between them and their interviewees (despite the collection of demographic data to ascertain particular Traditions).

Because a conversation is a dynamic situation where meanings are fluid, complex and ephemeral, the key is to focus on nuanced descriptions that depict the many differences and varieties of a phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). There are two techniques for uncovering and then verifying the (non-reflective) understanding of a 'notion' in a conversation: contrast structures and declarative statements (van Manen, 2000). Contrast structures are used to identify 'normal' and abnormal behaviours. Declarative statements however, are used as reality creating activities through which behaviours, circumstances and persons are cast in instances of cultural and technical significance. For example, "I don't mind when the receptionist answers the phone instead of talking to me".

2.4.4 Stage Four: Analysing A Priori Codes

Having collected data through active conversations, the fourth stage of the framework displays the data for the purpose of reflection and reconstruction: shared meaning is interpreted anew. The reason for data display, according to Miles and Huberman (1994) is to categorise data and identify connections as a means of explanation. Where understanding is characterised by empathy and discernment, explanation refers to the act of making something plain, or intelligible, through a rich description of the relevant structure, operation or context.

Interpretation is structured systematically via constructed prejudices: the themes identified for organising data collection are re-used as codes for data analysis. The aim is to produce a thick description (Geertz, 1983) of the phenomena and its constituent parts rather than an explanation of how those parts are connected.

Hence, analysis is focused on descriptions of lived experience that help the researcher perceive the tapestry of meanings supporting particular elements of the phenomena of interest.

Consequently, the structural analysis of text, typified by talk-in-interaction (conversational analysis) and the speech act (ethnomethodology), is but a minor part in a more empathic process of meaning construction. Achieving this requires the analysis of two types of data: feelings reported surrounding the interview event in the form of an interview journal, and the transcribed interview itself. Cross-referencing researcher perceptions prior to interview with reflections following the interviews helps the researcher to identify the presence of different horizons of interpretation. When considered in-tandem with the 'text' itself, the extra contextual detail supports the researcher's ability to perceive, and appreciate, the varied elements of the phenomena.

Methodologically, the different sources of data were analysed using a selective reading approach. A piece of text is read several times asking: "what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the subject's prejudices and/or the phenomenon or experience being described?" To help appreciate the tapestry of feelings and their attendant meanings, four concepts drawn from Heidegger and Gadamer are used as guides for reflection: spatiality (the lived space); corporeality (the lived body); temporality (the lived time); and communality (lived human relation). These concepts help maintain the focus of analysis on the circular presupposition of hermeneutics (that the whole precedes the determinant of the details and through the details we construct the whole). They also help to integrate different data sources by treating them as a singular totality.

As a result, data is analysed as it supports, or contradicts, the *researcher's* conceptions surrounding the codes. The researcher decides which elements are significant. In extremis this could result in a single comment supporting a categorical description. In contrast to accepted modes of interpretation that require theoretical saturation (multiple examples of the same thing) to support the validity of a code, the verification of analysis for researchers using constructivist hermeneutics is achieved through further conversational interviews. The number of conversational

rounds ultimately depends on the degree of variance between the preconceptions /interpretations of the researcher and their subject(s).

2.4.5 Stage Five – Breakdown in Prejudices

Achieving a shared meaning requires exposure to alternative lifeworlds on the part of the researcher and their participants. Expanding one's appreciation of different attitudes and behaviours however, may provoke a 'breakdown' in the researcher's unconscious understanding about a particular issue or theme. Different to the miscommunication of meanings that characterise active interviews, *breakdown* refers to the discrepant experiences, or theoretical anomalies, that may appear during data analysis.

At this stage of reflection, breakdown requires the researcher to re-assess their particular understanding of the nature of component phenomena. Instead of moving towards interpretation, the researcher is left trying to make sense of the new information before them. This process involves a reductionist approach: phenomena are (artificially) restricted to a finite set of occurrences or issues that can be explained, and subsequently, understood.

According to constructivist hermeneutic thought, we attempt to understand this new information within the context of what we already know. Re-conceptualising our understanding of a particular phenomena following *breakdown* encourages the use of a pre-formulated categorisation scheme. Hence, the original prejudices articulated to deconstruct the phenomena of interest are used to (partially) identify new sources of knowledge. Here the researcher may 'borrow' preconceptions used to explain other phenomena as a bootstrapping exercise or highlight additional sources of literature for review.

Ultimately the researcher attempts to construct a new (to them) explanation of the anomalous phenomenological elements ready for 'testing' through further conversation interviews. Specifically, the researcher seeks to verify their partial

explanations and develop their incomplete understanding about some previously taken-for-granted aspect of the phenomena.

2.4.6 Stage Six – Fusion of Horizons

The final stage of the framework, *Verstehen*, is achieved when a consensus of shared meanings are *distilled* into an interpretation that is more informed, and sophisticated, than any predecessor meanings, including those of the researcher's initial assumptions. The aim is to create, through shared meanings, new concepts that transcend originally held meanings. It is these transcendental meanings, agreed by both the researcher and subject that represent Fusion.

Importantly, the researcher needs to be able to distinguish between partial fusions (as they relate to specific themes or issues) and *Verstehen* (an understanding of the complexity of issues as a whole). Partial fusions occur as reflexive mid-way points towards the final interpretation and provide the researcher with a richer description of some "part". *Verstehen*, on the other hand, represents a fusion of horizons between the researcher and subject regarding a multiplicity of issues that constitute the 'phenomenon' as a whole.

It must be noted, that communicating the process of *Verstehen* – as writer for reader – acts as another stage of interpretation. Here, the researcher begins to combine elements of the research process into a story. Weaving this story involves large amounts of intuitive decision-making regarding elements of emphasis. In presenting the story to the reader, the researcher-as-author continues to refine, reject, and highlight different elements into a coherent whole. Consequently, the framework explicitly acknowledges that interpretation of the data does not stop with the data analysis but is also a part of the presentation and discussion of that data: interpretation also occurs in the rendering of material *understandable to others beyond the participants used in any proposed study*.

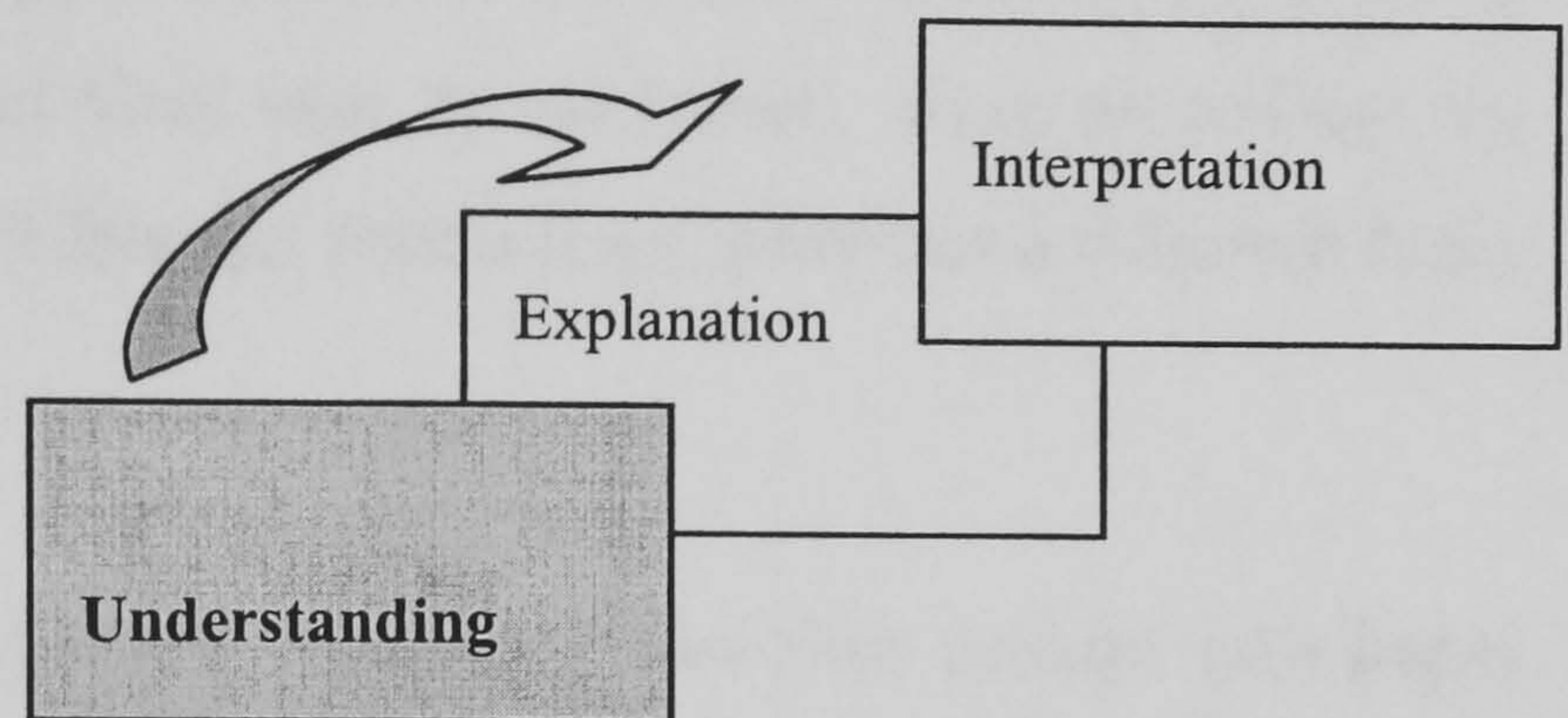
2.5 Reflections on the Framework

Unlike grounded theory, constructivist hermeneutics does not aspire to build a theory that can explain the relationships between a set of propositions about some phenomena that have been repeatedly tested, or that are widely accepted. Instead, attempts are made to develop a framework of understanding which outlines a set of assumptions, concepts, and practices that constitute a way of viewing reality.

From a constructivist hermeneutic perspective, reality is better understood in relief: the ability to grasp and interpret the meanings of others first requires the researcher to be clear about their own personal and theoretical preconceptions. Explicating prejudices thus becomes the foundation of the research process: (i) they structure the construction of meaning by identifying themes for discussion during interview and (ii) guide the analysis of data by re-using themes as codes for generating thick description about component phenomena. When used to understand anomalous behaviours or attitudes, constructed prejudices provide the benchmarks against which further understanding and interpretation can be made.

Viewed as an analytic technique then, explication of prejudices (within the context of the hermeneutic circle of understanding) supports consistency of focus and judgement: researcher 'bias' is used in a methodical manner to lift the level of ad hoc insights towards a more systematic formulation. As such, the framework outlined above stands apart from other modes of interpretive inquiry that view the role of the researcher in the practical creation of knowledge as problematic.

Deconstructing the Consumer Interface



3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with deconstructing the concept of a ‘consumer interface’. The aim is to identify the component elements of this concept by reviewing literature on consumer decision making and interface design. The nature of convenience is used as the mechanism organising these elements into a framework of understanding.

As such this chapter has a two-fold purpose. First, it provides the basis for testing my perception of convenience in electronic retail domains against the views held by others. Second, it helps me, as the researcher, to uncover my interpretive stance. That is, immersion in various literature domains and the selection of appropriate topics has forced me to become aware of my assumptions when selecting topics for inclusion.

These assumptions are presented in highlighted boxes throughout the chapter. They are not necessarily rational, linear, or scientifically grounded. Nor are they presented as ‘facts’. Instead, they represent the mental filtering system used by me as participant researcher when selecting and considering particular issues. This simple annotated device helps the reader to better understand my evolving interpretive position in relation to the subject matter.

The focus of this research is to assess the viability of consumer behaviour terms (routine and non-routine decisions) in the context of interface design. Emerging approaches have viewed interface design from a usability perspective focusing on the technical elements of interface design irrespective of user context – navigation, scroll bars, use of leading edge technology (Nielsen, 1999). This study takes similar issues such as task completion in terms of speed and effort but from a different perspective – that of the consumer as user rather than user as consumer. Fore-grounding the context of use, rather than the user of Internet technology, provides a different basis for investigating interface design.

The chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section introduces theoretical models of consumer decision-making and looks at the different elements that constitute the decision-making process. This leads into a consideration of the drivers for consumer adoption of the Internet in section two. Section three examines some of the threats to Internet adoption by examining issues about the usability of the Web interface. The two core platforms of Web usability – purpose of use and ease of use - are introduced and discussed from the perspective of consumer use. Section four outlines elements of convenience taken from the discussed literature which is then used to construct a framework for a ‘consumer interface’ in section five.

3.2 The Process of Consumer Decision Making

The starting point in any analysis of decision making involves a determination of whether a decision needs to be made. The first step is to identify the gap between the desired state and the current situation: I am thirsty so I need a drink. Up to this point, the process is fairly simple; it is choosing the best alternative that becomes complicated. Do I want a hot drink or a cold one? do I want water or pop?, etc.

Consumer purchasing behaviour is a goal-directed activity involving several stages. Various models of consumer behaviour have been articulated (Guttman *et al*, 1998). The following is a rudimentary model of consumer decision marking consisting of 5 key stages as outlined by O’Keefe and McEarhern, (1998).

1. **Need recognition.** Customers recognise that they have a need which can be satisfied by making a purchase;
2. **Information Search.** Customers search for a product or service which can satisfy this need according to a set of more or less specific criteria for a desired product. This involves identifying appropriate retail outlets.
3. **Evaluation.** Consumers compare prospective goods and services using decision heuristics. Often comparison will require simultaneous and relative assessments of products on a number of criteria: price, product attributes, returns policies, etc.
4. **Purchase.** The customer places an order, pays and arranges delivery, or installation.
5. **Post-purchase Evaluation.** Customers evaluate purchases with a view to future decision making.

The following sections describe in greater detail the nature of information searches conducted and the opportunities and risks of using the Internet as a search and evaluation tool for online shopping.

3.2.1 Pre-Purchase Activities – Type of Information Search

Having recognised a *need*, the consumer will undertake a series of pre-purchase activities in the form of an information search. This can take two forms: an internal search (drawn from memory) and an external search (drawn from outside resources). When the internal information search is insufficient – that is, the individual does not have enough knowledge of the product category to be able to make a choice – an external search is undertaken.

The type of information search conducted depends upon the type of decision being made. A consumer makes a limited decision when they are already familiar with the product class and simply want to update their information. This is typical behaviour for someone who is replacing a car: they have become dissatisfied with the existing product and are seeking a better alternative. Here the consumer is only looking for

something that overcomes the perceived problem with the existing product. In the car example this could be fuel consumption rates or in-car entertainment facilities.

Extended decision making occurs when the consumer is unfamiliar with the product class, form and brand. Buying a mobile phone for the first time would require the consumer to conduct a fairly extensive information search before committing to a telephone or network.

In most cases, search efforts are not very extensive, even for major purchases like houses, because of the amount of time and effort that has to be expended (Kiel and Layton, 1981). Usually consumers will continue to search until they find something that satisfices (adequate to meet the need) and will then not look any further (Blythe, 1997, Foxall *et al*, 1998).

3.2.2 Perceived Risk

When extended decision making is undertaken, it is caused by unfamiliarity of the product and a desire to reduce the risk associated with such purchases (Dowling & Staelin, 1994). The amount of perceived risk a consumer experiences depends on two factors: (i) the degree of severity associated with the negative consequences of the purchase and (ii) the probability that the negative consequences will occur (Urbany *et al*, 1989; Stone & Gronhaug, 1993; Mitchell, 1999).

The severity of negative consequences is determined by the type of risk faced by a consumer (Table 4). In the Internet environment, the concept of risk has been extended to include concerns regarding privacy and trust (Kollock, 1999; Hoffman *et al*, 1998). Unlike traditional types of risk, privacy and trust are concerns related to the (online) seller rather than the product. The inability to allay consumer fears regarding the suitability of a product prior to purchase is particularly acute in e-retailing (Alba, 1998 Jarvenpaa *et al*, 1999). This is because the digital nature of the Internet prevents consumers from being able to physically inspect prospective goods and services. In these environments, product purchases require increased levels of

trust in the Web retailer and a leap of faith in the product bought (Liang & Huang, 1998; Egger, 2000; Geissler, 2001).

Type of risk	Explanation	Examples
Physical	Fear of injury from the product	Defective parts; harmful ingredients.
Financial	Losing or wasting money	Credit card fraud, none-delivery of goods.
Functional	Discovering the product will not do the job it was bought for	Incomplete software downloads and associated hardware
Psychosocial	Fear of looking foolish	Buying a product with a poor reputation.
Privacy	Fear of information abuse	Loss of anonymity; selling click-stream data to unknown third parties;
Trust	Fear of deceit	Delivery of incorrect goods; false third party validation

Table 4 Types of Purchasing Risk

The main way in which consumers reduce purchasing risk is by increasing their knowledge about the product category and, by association, the (Web) retailer. In electronic retail domains this can lead to extensive information searches on both the desired product, and, the web retailer selling the product, (Ward & Michael, 2000). Consumers will often spend a great deal of time and effort shopping around, acquiring the necessary knowledge to reduce risk.

The ease of browsing for information on the Internet coupled with the quantity of information available can lead to disorientation and information overload. Historically extensive information searches would enable a consumer to narrow the scope of inquiry and deepen their knowledge on a particular product class. However, Internet 'reach' provides consumers with limitless possibilities to expand both the scope and breadth of available information. Overloaded with product (and seller) information, consumers become incapable of making a value judgement (Moorthy *et al*, 1997). Perversely, this has meant that many online consumers will spend longer periods searching for product information compared to their offline counterparts (Rowley, 2000).

3.2.3 Involvement Purchasing

Another way in which consumers reduce online purchasing risks is by reducing their affective involvement (Dholakia, 2001). Affective involvement refers to the perceived importance or personal relevance of an object or event. Put another way, it is the degree to which the consumer feels attached to product or brand. For example, a car owner might say, “I love my VW Beetle”.

High product involvement will come about if the consumer feels that product attributes are strongly-linked to *values*; low involvement occurs if the attributes only link to *function* and have limited consequences.

Levels of involvement are influenced by two sources: *personal* and *situational* (Solomon *et al*, 2001). Personal sources (also called intrinsic self-relevance) link a consumer’s end goals with a product’s attributes. The greater the belief that a product’s attributes, such as a smart suit, effect important end goals like job promotion, the greater involvement in the purchase. Situational sources of involvement are concerned with aspects of the immediate social or physical surroundings of the consumer. For example, experience of cold weather, or the type of ski resort chosen as a holiday might cause an individual to become strongly involved in the choice of a ski jacket.

Involvement does not necessarily rely on positive outcomes; a consumer may take greater care choosing a product that will help avoid unpleasant outcomes. Equally, involvement does not always equate to price. A low involvement product is not necessarily a cheap one – for some people a car is simply a means of getting from A to B.

The leading types of products bought online tend to be high-tech electronic products such as digital cameras, computer hardware, etc (Net ratings, 1999). These product types are frequently high involvement purchases because there is a high level of personal relevance involved. Given the level of self-image considerations, the low

frequency of purchase and the rapid development in electrical goods, engage in extended problem-solving behaviour when purchasing such products (Blythe, 1997).

Low involvement purchases are generally low value commodities or products bought on a repetitive basis such as groceries. Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, quickly recognised that low value commodities, such as books, are 'perfect' products for online retail. Books are small-ticket items (having few negative consequences); require almost no inspection prior to purchase and are related to function (e.g. text book) than values (a consumer's self-image).

3.2.4 Type of Decision – Routine/Non-routine

Marketing literature identifies two types of decisions made by consumers:

1. Routine (or programmed) decisions. If a desired state occurs often, a routine procedure (or heuristic) is usually developed. These types of decisions are programmed to the extent that they are repetitive in nature and an automatic cognitive procedure has been developed by the consumer for making them. For example weekly grocery shopping usually involves a list of staple items bought on a routine basis.
2. Non-routine (or non-programmed) decisions. These refer to new purchases that are novel (unfamiliar product), known (infrequent purchase) or impulsive. In each case the purchase decision lacks an established 'if... then' decision-making rule. This rule, or heuristic, can apply to procedures for *search* (finding out information); *evaluation* (judging products); and *choice* (evaluation of alternatives).

Within the Internet environment a third type of decision can be identified:

3. Technically-guided decision. In many cases, the evaluation between alternative products is guided by technical factors beyond the control of the consumer. Many Web retailers are using personalisation technology to narrow the choice of appropriate products offerings.

In each case heuristics are used to simplify decision making: they allow a consumer to reach rapid decisions without overstressing their cognitive capacities. The extreme use of heuristics leads to habitual behaviour – a situation that does not involve any real decision making at all (Hoyer, 1984).

3.2.5 Factors Affecting Extended Search

According to Blythe (1997), the extent and nature of the external search for information will depend on the following range of factors: the consumer's situation, the value and availability of the information, the nature of the decision being contemplated, and the nature of the individual. (See figure 3)

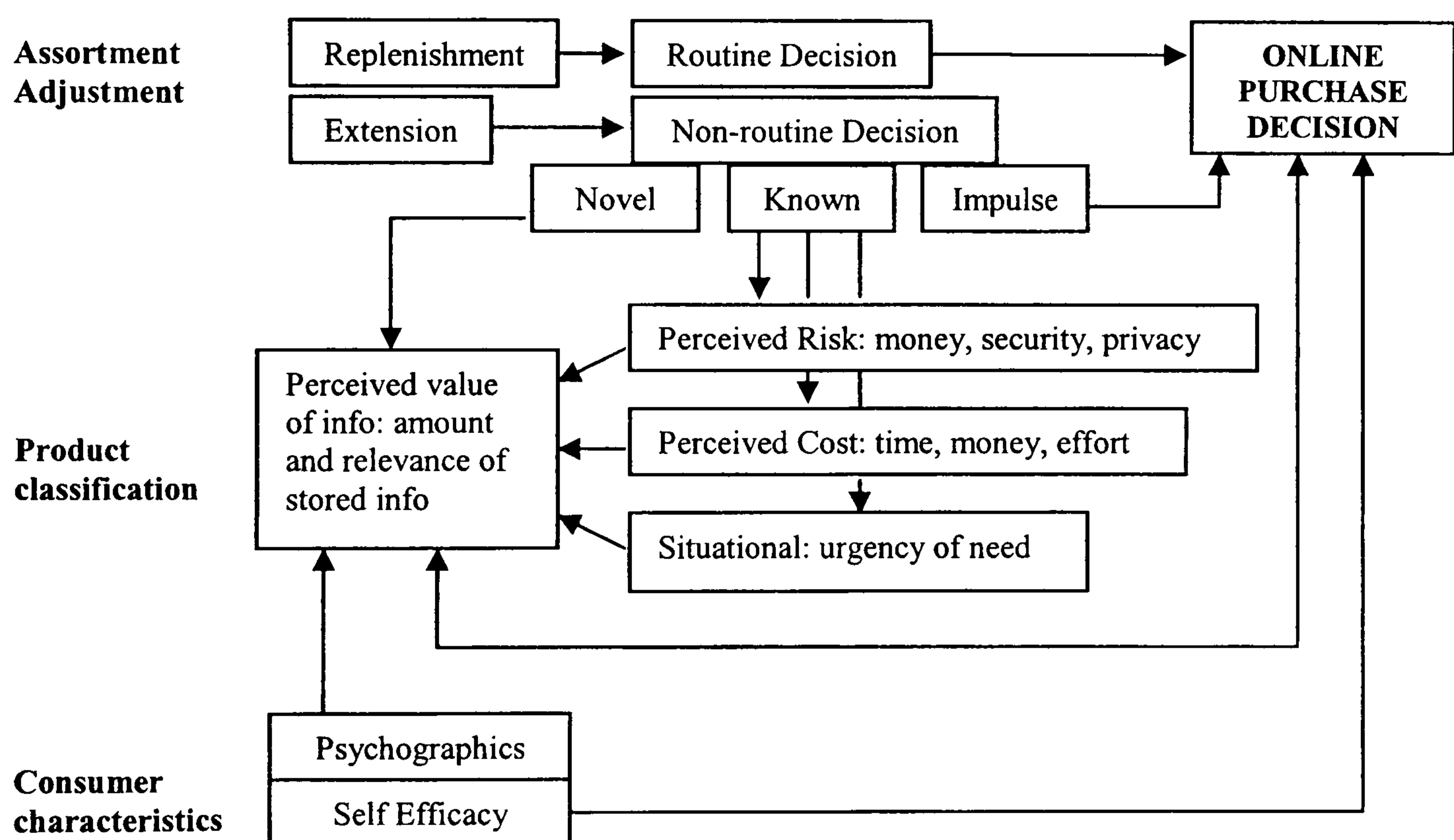


Figure 4 Factors Affecting External Information Search on the Internet
(Source: Adapted from J. Blythe, *The Essence of Consumer Behaviour*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall, 1997)

Assortment extension occurs when consumers add to the range of products already owned. Because these products tend to be unfamiliar to the consumer, assortment extension is more likely to lead to extended information searches. In terms of

product classification, non-routine decision making involves three issues: perceived risk, perceived cost and situational context.

Internet, studies have shown that perceived costs are significant inhibitors of online purchases. *Time* is a cost relating to search (Alba, 1997, Hoque and Loshe, 1999; Phau and Poon, 2000). It is sometimes measured in opportunity cost, or in terms of what the person could be doing instead of spending their time searching the Web. For example highly paid people with little discretionary time may value and can afford the benefits associated with online shopping compared with poorer consumers.

Money costs are the out-of-pocket expenses of searching. Clearly a consumer who wants to buy olive oil might compare different brands at Tesco's, but is unlikely to drive to Sainsbury's to check their prices, and would certainly not cross the Channel to check prices at Eurocamp in Calais (even though olive oil would certainly be cheaper in Calais).

The *psychological* costs of the information search include frustration and information overload (Jacoby, 1984). In these cases the consumer is unable to reach a decision either because of partial information or too much information. Sometimes the reverse happens however, and the consumer actually enjoys the shopping experience as an entertainment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2001). However, this type of product knowledge augmentation refers to ongoing search and is quite different from an external search. Here information search is conducted for fun rather than a genuine need to buy something (Bloch *et al*, 1986).

Common to each of these perceived costs is an inability of a consumer to determine either the relevance of the information acquired (is it out-of-date) or its potential value (the intangibility of the purchasing medium). In each case a consumer's inability to accurately judge and evaluate the information found, increases the perceived costs associated with Internet purchases. The time saved by not physically visiting travel agents is eroded by the time taken browsing the range of alternative holidays available online. Information overload reduces the ability to make a decision and leads to increased levels of consumer frustration and uncertainty. In

turn, this results in further time being spent online attempting to reduce the consideration set.

Prejudice

Browsing for product-related information is a common online activity (Kraut, 2000). However, the type of product purchased online has characteristics more in common with a programmed decision requiring limited problem-solving.

So a key issue for shoppers engaged in online decision making is the management of search criteria. This occurs when a prospective buyer encounters information that prompts them to alter their search criteria. This may vary from a slight refinement of their current criteria (software capability of a particular digital camera) to the specification of a wholly new search (new product needs are generated in addition to current purchasing goal). Understanding how this can be supported through interface design requires some understanding of how the Internet has been promoted, and subsequently adopted by a particular society, in this instance the UK population.

3.2.6 Browsing as Undirected Searching

In hypertext theory (and practice), browsing is often used as a synonym for navigation. In a narrower sense, browsing means an intuitive and exploratory way to encounter information in a hypertext, analogous to leafing through books or window shopping (McAleese, 1999). Popularly termed 'surfing', users move through hypertext following what appears to be interesting or useful as opposed to systematic searching that is a goal-directed activity characterised by specific queries (Kendall and Kendall, 1999). When a consumer browses the Internet, information search and evaluation are conducted on the basis of interest rather than (consumption) need. Although a less efficient technique for satisfying consumption requirements than searching, browsing is useful for highlighting goods and services a consumer may not otherwise have been aware of.

For the purpose of this study, browsing has been defined in the context of online consumer behaviour as “the casual exploration of the Internet without seeking any particular product or possessing an intention to purchase”. Unlike routine and non-routine decision making, browsing separates the intention to purchase from the purchase act: a consumer can browse without this automatically resulting in a purchase.

3.3 Diffusion of Innovations

The most extensive discussion of the diffusion of innovations is in the work of EM Rogers (1995). Rogers defined diffusion "as the process by which (1) an innovation; (2) is communicated through certain channels; (3) over time; (4) among the members of a social system."

In order for diffusion to occur, there must be an information exchange among individuals. There are two ways this happens: interpersonal and mass media communication channels. Together, these channels help to inform the general population regarding the technological nature of the Internet as an instrument of change. They also help to create and spread the idea of online purchasing as an entirely new mode of shopping. By framing the Internet's unique technological characteristics of speed and reach within the more familiar activity of shopping, the mass media and early adopters were able to rapidly convey the idea of the Internet as a tool of convenience.

According to Rogers (1995) different factors are important at different stages in the development of a technology due to the changes in the customer base (see figure 5). In the early days, innovators and early adopters (or ‘technology enthusiasts’ as Norman, 1998 refers to them) drive the market; they demand technology. For this group of consumers all that matters is better, faster, cheaper and more powerful technology.

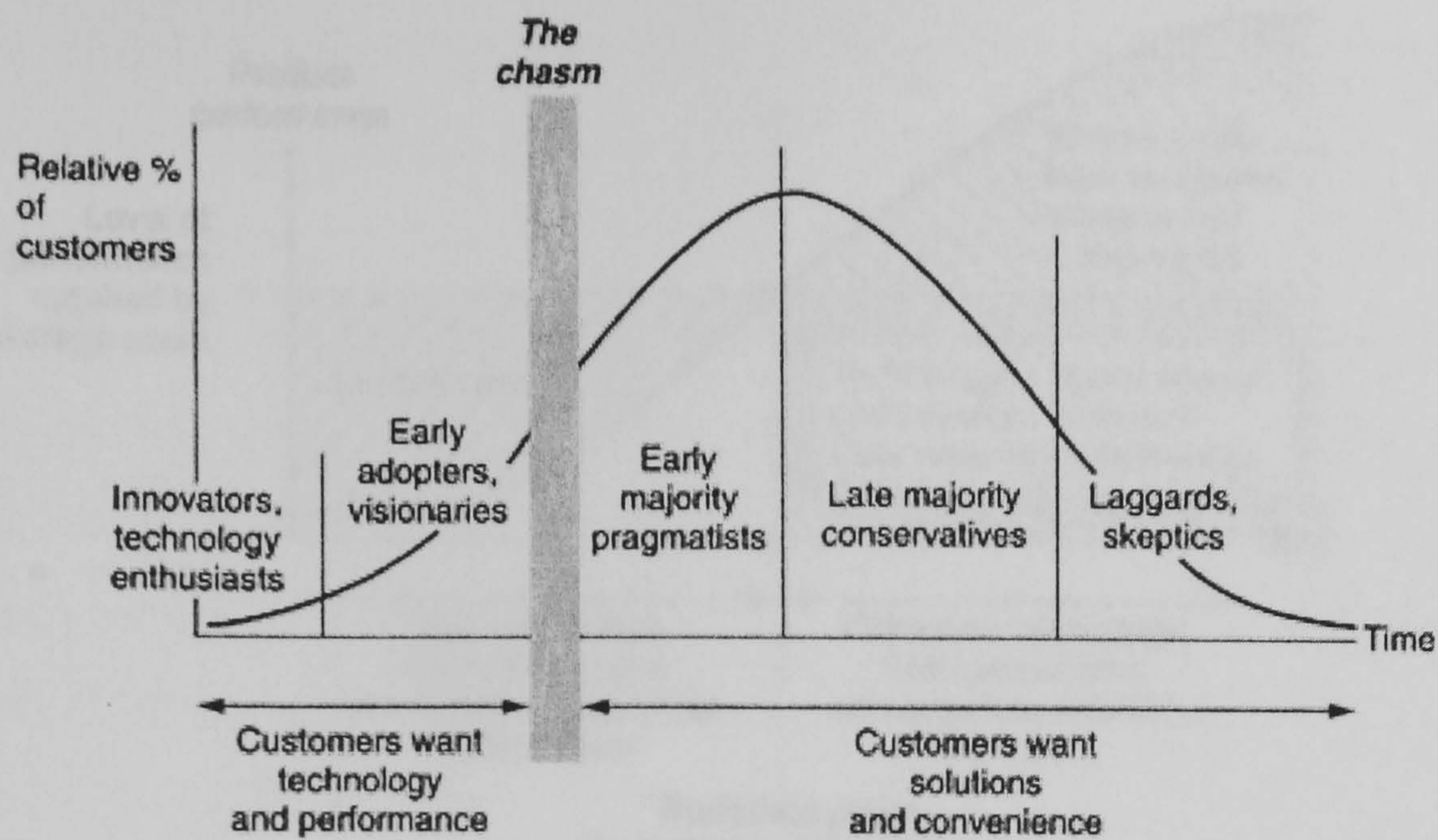


Figure 4 Stages in Technology Adoption (Source: Rogers, 1995 adapted from Christensen, 1991)

As the technology is spread through the mass media and word of mouth, the pragmatists and conservatives dominate; they want solutions and convenience. Here marketing dominates. In the final, mature stages, where the technology is a commodity adopted by sceptics, user experience dominates (Norman, 1998). Moore (1991) illustrates this point with reference to Swatch which sells its watches for their emotional appeal, not their accuracy: accuracy is taken for granted.

For Christensen (1997) the transition from a marketplace dominated by early adopters to one populated by late adopters is akin to 'crossing the chasm'. Unwilling to overlook product instability, difficulty in use and an inelegant appearance, late adopters demand efficiency, pleasure and convenience. This in turn requires a very different form of product development than can be used in the early stages of a technology. For example, new technologies are marketed that deliver less than the customers require. As a result, customers demand better technology and more features, regardless of the cost or inconvenience. A transition occurs when the technology reaches the point where it can satisfy the basic needs. (See figure 5).

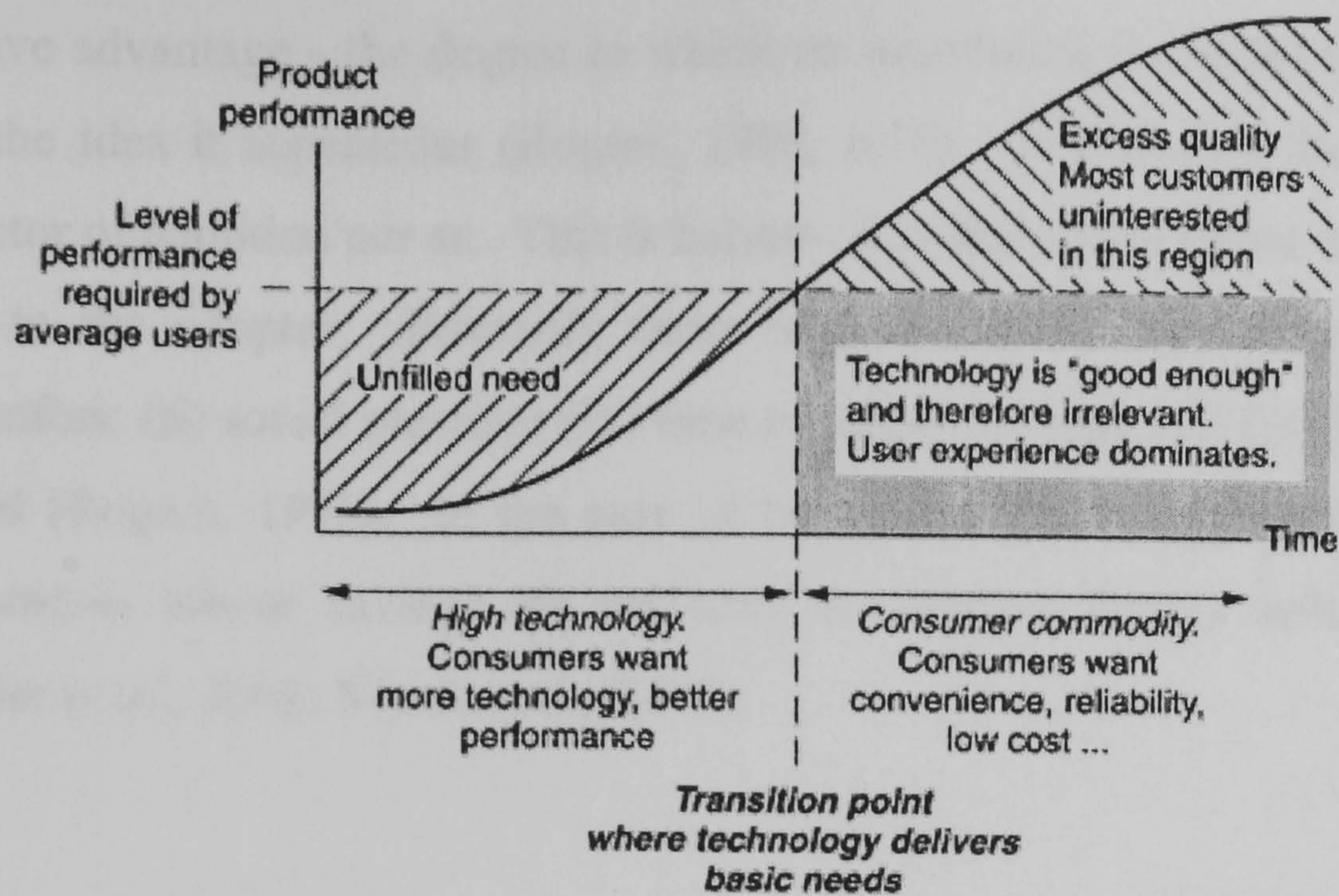


Figure 5 Needs-Satisfaction Curve (Christensen, 1997)

Hence, the transition point (or chasm) represents the point at which the technology has proved itself sufficiently to meet the requirements of the majority of customers: those who desire the technology but are unwilling or unable to pay a high price for it. From this point onwards, the technology has become a consumer commodity in which user experience dominates (Norman, 1998).

Prejudice

Ordinary people are in equal parts over-awed and unimpressed by the 'power' of new technological innovations; that technology is used as a tool to complete some task. As such the perceived utility of the Internet is measured solely in terms of the increased levels of comfort and time it permits individuals to enjoy *offline* with other people.

3.3.1 Rates of Adoption

Understanding the nature of transformation involves assessing the relative speed in the adoption of an innovation, such as the Internet. This can vary between members of the same social system. The reason, according to Rogers (1995), is because innovations possess different characteristics which influence the rate of their adoption. With regard to the Internet, three characteristics have exerted influence on the rate of adoption: relative advantage, compatibility and complexity.

Relative advantage - the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes (Rogers, 1995, p.16) - is probably the most important predictor of adoption per se. This is because it is defined in terms of the benefits and costs to the adopter. Primarily these take the following forms: (i) decrease in discomfort; (ii) social prestige; (iii) time or labour savings and (iv) immediacy of the reward (Rogers, 1995). In the case of household technology such as the Internet, time and/or labour savings are probably the biggest factors influencing adoption (Kiesler *et al.*, 2002; Kraut *et al.*, 2002).

3.3.2 Lifestyle Orientations

Compatibility defines how closely an innovation fits in with existing values, past experiences and needs of potential adopters. It decreases the uncertainty of adoption by helping the individual feel that the innovation is meaningful and applicable to his life. This makes the innovation seem familiar to the individual. Compatibility of the Internet with societal norms, previously introduced ideas, or the felt needs of the individual positively affect the rate of diffusion and adoption.

Prejudice

The saturation media coverage of developments in Web retailing coupled with aggressive marketing campaigns - "anytime, anywhere, any place" - was creating the misperception of the Web as a channel for convenient shopping.

Within the relationship marketing literature, these elements (norms, ideas and felt needs) have been encapsulated into a single classification system referred to as lifestyle orientation. These orientations play an important role in a consumers' propensity to engage in Internet shopping (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Shopping orientations are related to a general predisposition toward acts of shopping and include self-perception, peer influence and attitudinal behaviour. (Rogers explains these with the following variables: receiver, social system and perceived characteristics. (See figure 5). They are conceptualised as a specific dimension of

lifestyle and operationalised on the basis of activities, interests and opinion statements pertaining to acts of shopping.

Studies of Internet shoppers have identified four distinct lifestyle orientations. (Li *et al*, 1999; Swaminathan *et al*. 1999, Bellman *et al*, 1999, Hoffman, 1996). See table 3.3. *Time-orientated* people generally have small amounts of discretionary time. As the total number of hours worked increases, there is less time to search for and buy goods and services in the traditional way by visiting high street stores. Bellman *et al* (1999) noted that this phenomenon of ‘time-starvation’ is particularly acute amongst dual-income households. The desire to reduce the time and effort spent on routine chores (e.g. grocery shopping) increases the perceived benefit of the Internet as a shopping channel. Thus, Bellman concluded that people shopping online are primarily seeking convenience as opposed to social interaction or cost-savings.

<p>Net-oriented style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. frequency of using WWW browser 2. amount of time using WWW browser 3. comfort with Web-based decision support technologies 4. internet-related skill
<p>Price-oriented style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. severity of financial costs/charges without this Internet retailer 2. attractiveness of special rewards and discounts from this Internet retailer 3. overall happiness with this Internet retailer’s price 4. offering of a good economic value from this Internet retailer
<p>Time-oriented style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. efficient way to manage personal time by using the Internet for routine chores 2. minimises time and effort spent on the actual activity of shopping 3. frees up time to spend on more pleasurable activities. 4. provides greater flexibility in my schedule
<p>Recreation-oriented style</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ease of customising information 2. degree of interactivity 3. enjoyment of online entertainment 4. extent to which can ‘play’ with the technology

Table 5 Online Consumer Lifestyle Orientations (Li *et al*, 1999)

People who have used the Internet for several years can be classified as *net-oriented* according to Li *et al* (1999). They generally receive a large number of e-mail messages daily; they work on the Internet in their offices every week; and they tend to agree that the Internet and other developments in communication technology have improved their productivity at work. As consumers adopt a more ‘wired lifestyle’

and become comfortable with Internet technology, their perception of risk decreases and their perception of benefit increases.

Price-orientated shoppers are people that actively search for and buy products on the Internet in order to obtain lower prices. According to Forrester Research (1999) this segment of price-sensitive consumers is made up of bargain-hunters, i.e. seeking lower relative prices, and the thrifty, low income households seeking lower prices in general. As consumers become more price-conscious their perception towards the benefits of online shopping increases.

Recreationally-orientated people comprise two distinct segments. Those types of people who enjoy browsing electronic catalogues and making new discoveries; and those who enjoy hobby-based digital products such as music, software, and other forms of multi-media interactivity (Burstein and Kline, 1995). The Internet acts as the mechanism for instant gratification as digital products can only be experienced or 'consumed' online (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

3.3.3 Technology Acceptance Model

The third characteristic which exerts influence on the rate of adoption is complexity. This defines how difficult an innovation is to understand and use and *negatively* impacts adoption of an innovation. Writing in 1989, Davis developed a model of technology acceptance (TAM) which sought to explain complexity in relation to computer-usage behaviour.

The theoretical grounding for the model is Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA). According to TRA, beliefs influence attitudes, which in turn lead to intentions, which then guide or generate behaviours. Davis conceived that user acceptance of IT is modelled through TAM on this belief-attitude-intention-behaviour relationship.

Davis asserted that perceived usefulness (PoU) and ease of use (EU) represent beliefs leading to technology acceptance. Perceived usefulness is the degree to which a person believes that a particular system would enhance their performance (i.e., by

reducing the time to accomplish a task or providing timely information). Perceived ease of use is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989). See figure 6.

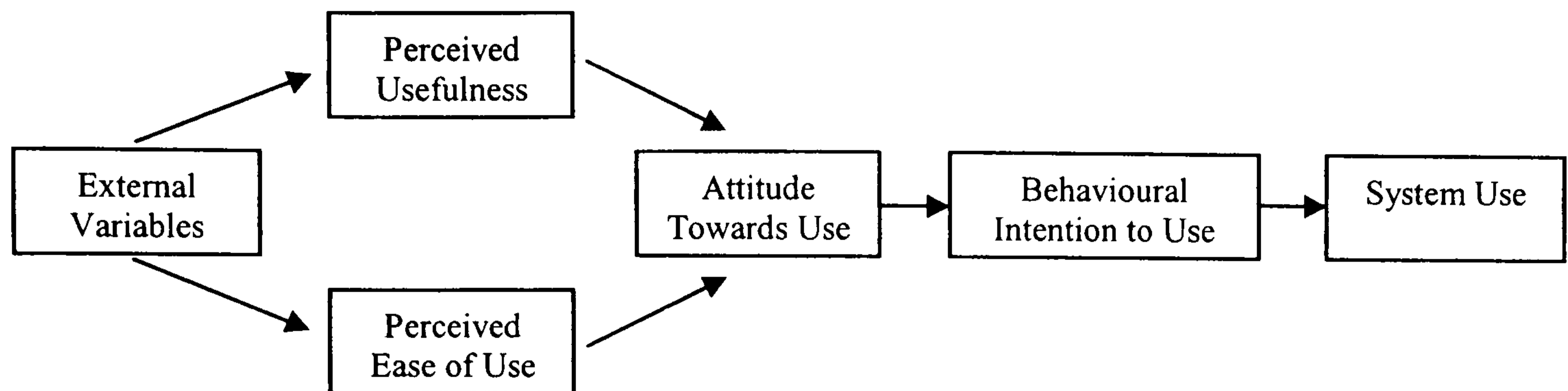


Figure 6 Technology Acceptance Model, (Davis 1989)

Two other constructs in TAM are attitude towards use and behavioural intention to use. Attitude towards use is the user's evaluation of the desirability of employing a particular information systems application. Behavioural intention to use is a measure of the likelihood a person will employ the application (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

3.3.4 Ease of Use and Usefulness on the Web

Many researchers have discussed features related to the perceived ease of use of the Web. The Graphic, Visualization, and Usability (GVU) Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology has conducted Web user surveys every six months since 1994 (Pitkow and Kehoe, 1998). The results from the most recent survey identified navigation as a key ease of use problem. Specifically they noted problems such as: being unable to find a page that they knew existed, organize the pages and information they gathered, find a page once visited, and visualize where they had been and could go to find information.

Other studies (Bellman *et al*, 1999; Lightner, 1996) have highlighted the problem of content. Many potential online shoppers found difficulty searching for specific information; suffered from information clutter and time delays due to images and the general unreliability of some retail sites; and experience frustration due to incomplete category searches.

In response, the HCI community has identified a variety of usability principles for good web-site design. An early but ground-breaking study by Levi and Conrad (1996) advocates the following eight principles: speak the users' language (use words, phrases, concepts familiar to the user); consistency (similar concepts, terminology, graphics, layout, etc.); minimize the user's memory load (do not force users to recall information across documents); flexible and efficiency of use (accommodate a range of user sophistication and diverse goals); aesthetic and minimalist design (visually pleasing displays with no irrelevant or distracting information); chunking (short documents with one topic ideally on a single page); progressive levels of detail (organize information hierarchically with general information before specific detail); and navigational feedback (allow user to determine document position).

More recent studies have sought to offer guidance to online retailers. Awad (2002) suggests that an online shopping experience should include the following elements: a quick route to buy; secure handling of credit card information; order acknowledgement with stated delivery date; order tracking; stated returns policy; trade body certification; privacy of data statement and appropriate use of cookies. Here emphasis is placed on supporting a consumer's purchase by making the process transparent, trustworthy and time-efficient.

Fewer details are available regarding the perceived usefulness of the Internet as a shopping channel. Where data does exist, it looks at the perceived usefulness of the Internet as a whole. In this manner, the GVU survey (1999) listed the most common uses of the Internet as browsing (79%), followed by entertainment (64%), work (52%), and shopping (11%). These figures had changed by 2000 with goal-directed behaviours such as shopping (25%) and work (63%) increasing at the expense of general surfing. Communication was another perceived usefulness identified by a cross-cultural survey conducted by O'Keefe *et al* (1999).

Reflection box

Consumer behaviour is dependent on three factors inherent to the individual consumer: retail orientation; channel knowledge; and perception of channel utilities (Bellman *et al*, 1999). Each factor is positively related to the others (Peterson, *et al*, 1999).

Question – Is it possible to possess a negative score on one, or more, factors but still engage in goal-directed consumer behaviour on the Web? E.g. unfamiliar with Web-based decision support tools or Web-site designs, but still able to search, locate and purchase goods and services online.

3.4 A Synthesized Definition of Convenience

Convenience as a phenomenological concept is ephemeral: its ‘essence’ is difficult to identify with certainty, and even harder to convey with clarity. It is a concept that has a multitude of meanings that are subject to random change given different situations. Referring to Internet shopping as ‘convenient’ says little given the range of possible meanings that people attach to the term. And yet, ‘convenience’ as a concept has emerged as the key driver of Internet purchases (Bellman, *et al*, 1999). So how is convenience interpreted by the IS community in relation to the Internet and supporting consumer decision-making online? From the preceding discussion on technology acceptance and Internet adoption, three themes emerge as usable proxies for convenience:

1. **Time** – defined as the least time taken to complete a task; or the completion of a task at a suitable or agreeable time.
2. **Effort** – defined as freedom from discomfort, difficulty, or trouble; something that increases comfort or saves work.
3. **Orientation** – defined as personal advantage and enjoyment.

Each theme reflects a unique characteristic of Internet technology. Hence, time relates to a computer’s information processing speed; laborious and time-consuming activities (e.g. searching for a new car or transferring monies from one account to another) can now be done at the click of a button. Plus, the asynchronous nature of

Internet communication exchange enables people to place orders for products out of normal retail hours without constraint.

This in turn highlights the ability of a computer to reduce the level of effort needed by the individual engaged in online purchasing activities. Internet navigational skills are not difficult to learn and free the online shopper from the discomfort associated with traditional high-street shopping: over-crowding, queues, general travel expenses, etc.

Clearly, some people enjoy the hustle and bustle of shopping malls and dislike the inability to touch and try-out products in-store. As a result, a person's orientation towards Internet technology, the level of enjoyment they receive from the degree of interactivity offered by a web-site is a key factor in determining a person's view of convenience. Somebody that derives pleasure from playing with a virtual avatar such as MyModel at Landsend.com will experience a greater sense of 'flow' than somebody who is frustrated by the intangibility of digital products. Similarly, people that have an affinity for technological advances will gain more personal enjoyment from the Internet than technological sceptics.

Prejudice

Convenience is an unthinking, automatic response given by consumers to questions about usage. It bears little resemblance to their actual online behaviour.

3.5 Developing a Consumer Interface Model

Using the preceding discussions, the concept of a consumer interface can be broken down into several elements. The arrangement of such elements forms the basis of a series of propositions regarding the construction of a 'consumer interface' in a world of electronic convenience.

The first proposition concerns the separation of consumer decision support from interface design. De-coupling the goal-directed character of consumption from the

purchasing medium allows two distinct, but inter-related, constructs to be conceived – CDSS and ID. Each construct is made up of three elements which, when taken together, represent the two aspects of a ‘consumer interface’. For this reason, CDSS is related to the type of consumption activity pursued online whilst the interface design conveys electronic modes of convenience. (See figure 7 below)

The second proposition concerns the positioning of the constructs themselves. It is proposed that purpose of use precedes ease of use. This is because the reasons for choosing to shop online generally determine perceptions regarding ease of use (see technology adoption model and O’Keefe and Machern, 1998). For example, purchasing a rare book online may involve the use of unfamiliar search algorithms and complicated consideration sets, but this is deemed ‘easier’ than a comparable search offline.

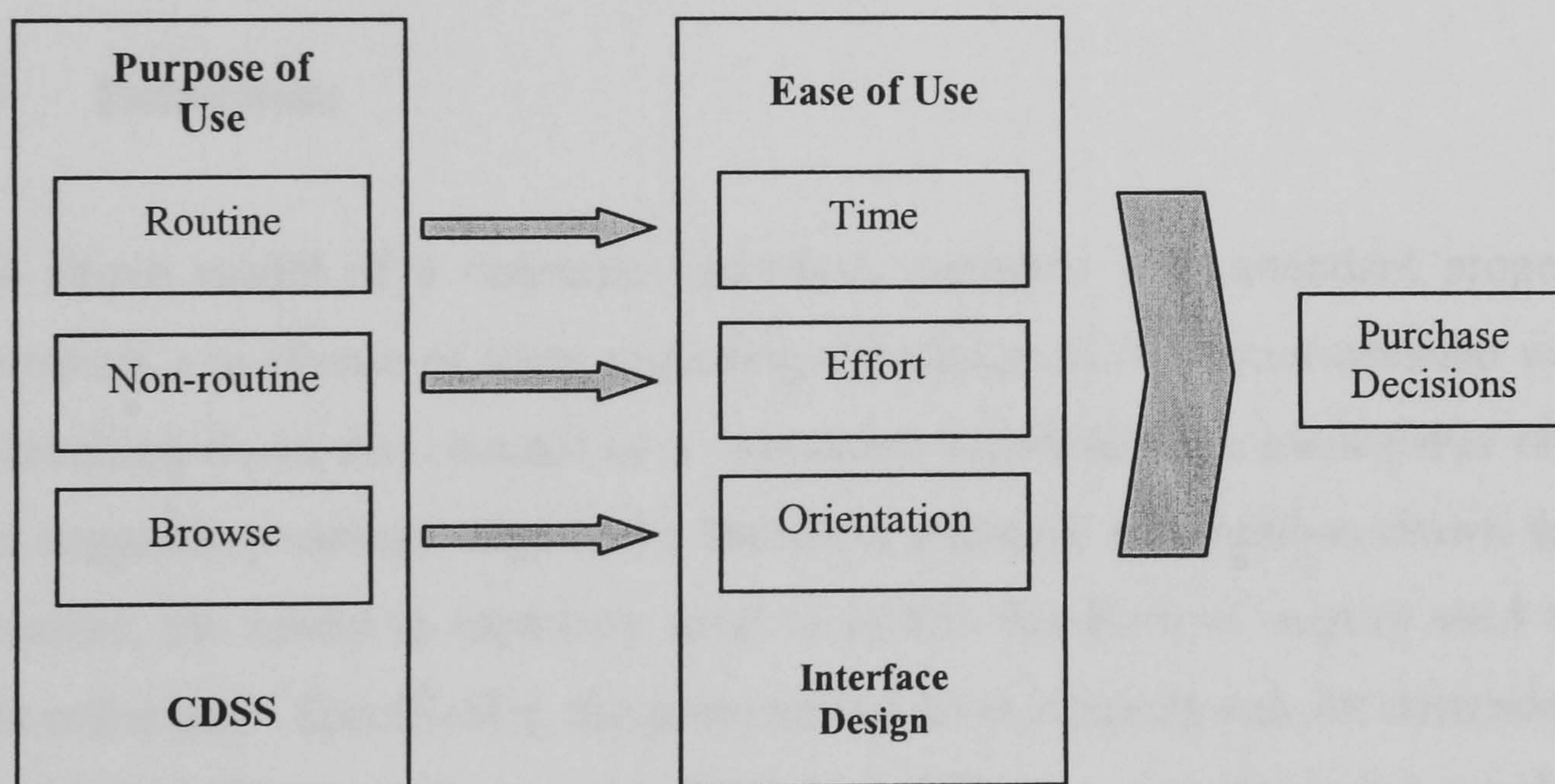


Figure 7 Deconstructing the Consumer Interface

The third proposition concerns the arrangement of components in each construct. There are three main types of consumption activity pursued by consumers: routine decisions, non-routine decisions and browsing. Each activity involves different stages of decision-making that require specific modes of support. Hence, CDSS, purpose of use and decision type are presented as one construct. Similarly, three types of convenience have been identified: time, effort and orientation. Each convenience type is related to a consumer’s interaction with a web-site’s particular

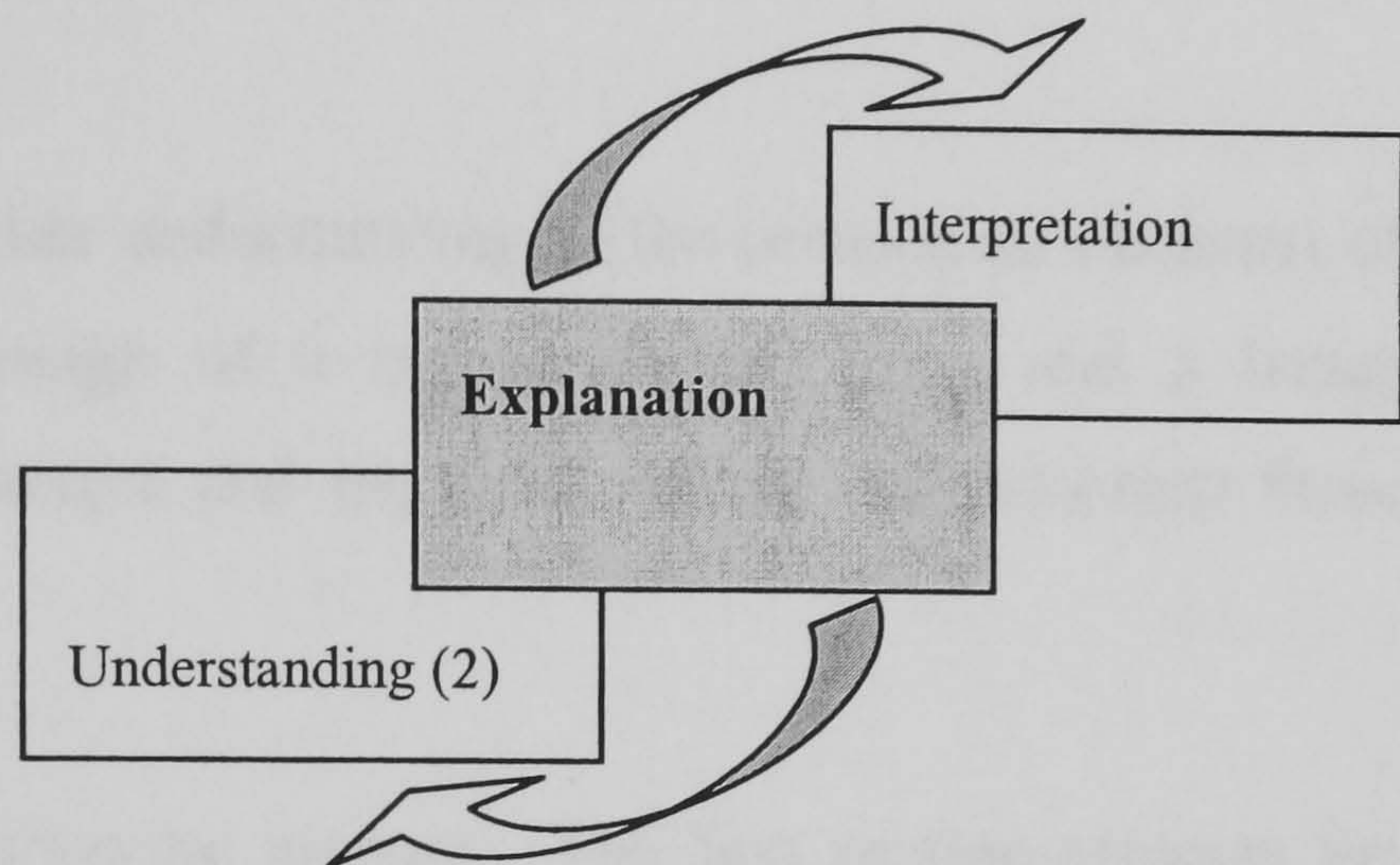
interface design and is rated according to overall ease of use. Hence, interface design, ease of use and types of convenience are presented as one construct.

The fourth, and final, proposition concerns the relationships between elements across constructs. It is proposed that paired relationships exist between components from different constructs. Represented linearly by single arrows, three relationship pairs are offered for consideration. The first pair links routine decisions with a time element: where purchases involve little cognitive effort it is suggested that speed of purchase is preferred. The second pair links non-routine decisions with effort: here it is suggested that time is considered secondary to effort required when purchase decisions require greater cognitive effort. The last pair of elements link the activity of browsing with technological orientation: the more a person enjoys digital interactivity the more, it is suggested, they will engage in aimless 'surfing' activities.

3.6 Reflections

The above model of a consumer interface, complete with attendant propositions, represents a synthesis of ideas regarding the design of consumer-oriented websites. In breaking down the concept of a 'consumer interface' into identifiable elements, and suggesting various alignments based on tentative assumptions drawn from the literature, the model is explicitly used to inform the lines of inquiry used to drive data collection. Specifically, the propositions form a benchmark for determining the consistency of known 'facts', where facts are defined as something that is believed to be true or real, rather than something that is demonstrated to exist. Such a determination is outlined in the following chapter which presents an analysis of the data based on the model outlined above and offers a re-consideration of its elements and supporting propositions.

Reconstructing the Consumer Interface



4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to understand the viability and possible interactions that may exist between the six elements identified in chapter three. This is achieved by investigating the perceptions of convenience offered by a small number of consumers experienced in electronic retail domains using the bespoke research approach outlined in chapter two. Findings from this investigation are then used to reconstruct the consumer interface as a more comprehensive framework of understanding.

Reconstructing the consumer interface follows a two-stage process. Firstly, a discussion on the 'essence of convenience' as understood by the participants is presented. Each subject is analysed and presented as a single 'voice' akin to within-location analysis. The aim here is to understand the varied nature of convenience as manifested in the contexts of consumers' Web usage. This could take the form of a deeper understanding of existing parts, or, the addition of extra elements as they relate to convenience in e-retailing.

The second stage of analysis and reconstruction is to look for recurring themes that might emerge across participants (similar to between-location analysis). Analysed as a group, new themes or issues may emerge that are not obvious when treated singly and serve as links between components. This supports the explanatory power of the framework by demonstrating a richer appreciation of the interactions between the identified components.

The final reconstruction offers a richer understanding of the component elements of convenience (as related to the design of a consumer interface), and a better explanation of the interactions (positive and negative; within and between) these components.

This chapter is structured in the following manner. The first section presents the lines of inquiry used in the first round of conversational interviews. Consideration of the analytic codes used to sensitise the researcher during data collection and subsequent analysis are presented. Section two describes the sampling criteria and demographic background of the participants chosen. This is followed by an interpretive discussion and thematic analysis of each individual subject. The fourth section presents those themes that emerged across participants and reflects how this alters the preceding findings. The final section presents a reconstruction of the consumer interface. A new model is presented that demonstrates the modifications made with associated explanations.

4.2 Lines of Inquiry

As with experimental research, interpretive studies require stated research objectives that act as mechanisms for determining the direction of investigation and act as a benchmark for analysis (Cole & Fenwick, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Dey, 1993). In interpretive research these mechanisms are called lines of inquiry (Schwandt, 2000). They are less deterministic in focus and looser in language than classical hypotheses, serving as points at which phenomena are approached rather than measured (Dennett, 1989).

4.3 Data Collection

For this study the propositions stated at the end of the previous chapter are re-worded into two different but complementary lines of inquiry. Whilst the first line of inquiry focuses on the nature of convenience, the second line investigates the mechanistic elements of convenience.

Line 1. Convenience is a relative term and will differ according to the type of decision taken, situational context, and orientation of the individual consumer. For example, What does it mean to have ‘convenience’? What is conferred with ‘convenience’? and “Are there unique elements to convenience in e-retailing? In other words, how do online consumers themselves understand the term convenience in relation to their online retailing activities?

Line 2. The marketing literature views convenience in absolute terms. However, if considered as a relative issue, then different questions are raised. At what point in the consumer interface is convenience conveyed? Can it be lost? If it can, then is convenience the product of a series of interactions or simply a single component? Put another way, what are the relative weightings and alignment of the component elements previously considered.

These lines of inquiry serve a two-fold purpose. First they set the parameters of inquiry. Paradoxically, by setting the boundary of investigation, an interpretive researcher becomes open to phenomena occurring outside that boundary (Cole & O’Keefe, 2002). Secondly, they act to form the basis of the coding protocols used to analyse the data collected (van Manen, 1997).

Prejudice

Hermeneutics is concerned with the mediating effect of technology on a person: how a person affects technology, and is in turn, affected by it. The (unconscious) analytic focus is, therefore, sensitive to behavioural modifications.

4.3 Data Collection

Three rounds of conversational interviews were held over a 2-year period, with one set of conversations taking place in each calendar year. The format of the interviews included two sets of individual interviews and a final set with couples. The first two rounds of conversations were held within a relatively short time period: between October 2000 and May 2001. The 7-month pause between interviews was to allow for transcription and reflection by the researcher on what had been said. It also gave the participants time to become aware of their behaviour relative to the Web. A slightly longer period of time was left between the second and third round of conversations, which occurred in December 2002. Extra time was needed to research new domains of interest that emerged from the first round of analysis and interpretation.

Because this is an exploratory study investigating the assumption that different forms of convenience exist and can be discerned by talking to different types of people, the need for representativeness was removed. Instead, the aim was to find participants that differed demographically and in their adoption of technology: the greater the differences between the participants, the greater the possibilities of uncovering different perceptions of convenience.

A convenience-based chain strategy was employed to identify possible information-rich participants. Here, information-rich participants were sought through recommendations from friends, colleagues and family. The result was a range of participants that varied in terms of their life experiences, Web expertise and general educational backgrounds.

Because of the manner of selection, the participants were known to me, as the researcher, but were not personally close. This offered two distinct advantages: (i) a minimum level of familiarity existed prior to the investigations which supported rapport-building and overcame potential problems of distrust (Whitley & Inrona, 2000); and (ii) lacking detailed knowledge of another's life enabled free-ranging conversations and the probing of topics that would have been precluded through

social conventions (impolite) and prior researcher knowledge (Burns, 1994; Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Raw data was collected using active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) which encourages participants to discuss their perceptions through narration. This in turn provides contextual clues to the researcher regarding a subject's underlying assumptions and attitudes driving observable behaviours.

Each interview began with a short introduction re-stating the purpose of the study and outlining the method being used. Assurances were given about the anonymity of findings. Each interview opened with the collection of demographic data including length of time using the Web and the frequency of online purchases made.

Interviews opened on the topic of convenience by discussing the types of products that participants had previously purchased online, including items such as groceries, holidays, computer software and clothes. Further discussion centred on three of the concepts identified in the CI framework: time, effort and orientation. The theme of time was explored by discussing whether time was saved when purchasing particular products via the Internet. This helped to raise ideas about the perceptual nature of time. This theme was continued through discussions of how participants experienced 'saved' time and how they reacted to it, raising issues about the situated context of consumption and the disposition of the online shopper. Discussion was opened by asking "how do you save time by making purchases via the Internet?", and, "where is time lost when making online purchases?"

The theme of effort was raised by asking "explain how you would use a web-site to make a regular online purchase". This facet of convenience examines the number and type of decision stages utilised by a consumer when making an online purchase. Further discussion looked at the ease of using Web interfaces and associated decision aids by asking "describe your frustrations when shopping online" and "how do you overcome, or minimise, your Web-based frustrations?" The last measure of convenience concerned orientation, which was prompted by stimulating a discussion about the future of traditional shopping, i.e. "how do you feel when people remark

that the Internet has replaced traditional shops?”

Discussions moved on to consider the type of purchasing decisions participant's typically made in electronic markets. The theme was developed through asking “how would you characterise the purchases you make online?” and “describe your approach to making purchases online and explain why.” The ‘why’ component of the question was prompted by my interest in the possible limitations of Internet technology vis-à-vis consumer behaviour. This was put into context by discussing the decision aids used to support consumer behaviour by asking “how do you feel about the new innovations helping you purchase goods and services via the Web?” A more general discussion also took place aimed at reflecting on the meaning of comments already made by asking “Given what you have said about your online purchase behaviour, how do you understand the Web in your life?” and “What sense does it make to you?”.

4.4 Data Analysis

The interviews were audio-taped for ease of data capture and to encourage a naturally free-flowing conversation without excessive stops for note taking. Data was collected and analysed following the bespoke research framework outlined in chapter two.

Stage one of the data analysis occurred immediately after each interview and sought to expand the content of the interview draft by recording the interviewer's reactions to the interview and its context. McCracken's (1988) technique of imaginative reconstruction was used to recreate the interview in the mind of the interviewer. The objective at this stage was to create as detailed a record of the interview as possible and avoid premature evaluation of the content. Notes consisted of the context and process of interactions as well as the interviewer's thoughts and feelings (Koch, 1996).

The second stage of data analysis took place after each round of interviews had been conducted. Each interview was considered first in isolation and then by comparing observations across interviews. Once the researcher was confident that the interview was documented as thoroughly as possible, interview notes were further examined to develop observations, so that the implications and possibilities could be more fully explored in subsequent interview rounds. This examination generated further observations, patterns and themes, which emerged as the properties of the data were examined. Once themes were identified, some of the interrelationships between them were considered with the objective of creating broad networks of association.

Two strategies were used to structure the interviewer's judgement in the generation of themes. First, broad themes informed by the theories of technology diffusion and adoption were used to consider socio-cultural contexts and individual perspectives. These then provided the background to a specific consideration of the six elements of a consumer interface identified in chapter three.

It is useful to reiterate at this point, that the choice of themes presented for consideration implicitly reflects the interpretive stance of the hermeneutic methodology employed and the views of this researcher, i.e. the mediating effect of technology on human becoming and a cynical view of the Internet's revolutionary power respectively.

The final stage of analysis is represented by one complete revolution of the hermeneutic cycle of inquiry. Here, the researcher's interpretations of the findings are presented as the basis for further discussion in a second round of interviews. In this way, the participants themselves assess and monitor the accuracy of a researcher's findings.

4.5 Findings

Three participants agreed to be interviewed: they differed in terms of their ages, educational status, acknowledged Web expertise and stage of Internet adoption. Of

the three participants only one was male and he conformed to the marketing stereotype of an Internet consumer.

Age Range	Occupation	Education	Gender	Web Expertise	Adoption Category
26-35	Secretary	High School	Female	Intermediate	Early Adopter
36-45	Systems Programmer	University	Male	Expert	Innovator
60+	Hairdresser	Professional	Female	Novice	Laggard

Table 6 Demographic Breakdown of Participants

The following sections relate to the six components identified as core elements in a consumer interface. Each component is considered in entirety and includes comments from each of the participants.

4.5.1 Routine

Not all participants bought routine products via the Web. Of the three participants interviewed, two (participants A and B) confirmed that they bought items requiring little consideration prior to purchase. The list included a range of products commonly viewed by marketing analysts as typical Internet purchases: software, groceries, and books. For example participant A noted "I tend to download software drivers I need to upgrade my pc" whilst participant B commented "I'll do my weekly shop [sic] online."

During discussions of products such as groceries and e-banking services participants observed the unpleasant character of many of their routine purchases which have migrated online. For example, participant B referred to grocery shopping as a 'chore' because "I buy the same food week in and week out". Task frequency was also noted by participant A commenting, "I check my [online] bank balance every week, and several times a day when I'm making a money transfer".

Music, although enjoyed by all respondents, e.g. “I tend to buy one CD every month” (participant B) was not viewed as a routine purchase, despite it being a small ticket item. Participant C observed that they “had the radio on at work” whilst another “listens to my daughters CDs” (participant A). Discussion revealed that all participants were aware of the different ways of purchasing music via the Web. For example, both participant A and B noted the emergence of digital music as distinct from buying CDs whilst the third participant “had heard of digital music” but hadn’t listened to it. Music downloads were considered unduly cumbersome because “you need special adapters and audio equipment to listen to it” (participant B) whilst sharing music clips was perceived as requiring advanced Internet skills (participants B and C). The disadvantages of making a bad purchase here were deemed unacceptable “I don’t want to get a virus from trying to buy some music or watch a movie” (participant A).

Participant	Response - Routine
Participant A	Apriori purchases Frequent
Participant B	Small ticket items Migration of Chores
Participant C	None – suspicious of Internet technology requiring regular transactions such as e-banking and stock replenishment Dislikes the removal of social interaction involved in activities such as grocery shopping

Table 7 Participant Responses to Routine Purchases

4.5.2 Non-Routine

All participants have made purchases that have required extensive evaluation of product alternatives. None of the participants have bought products that are entirely new to them via the Internet. Where non-routine purchases have been made, they have generally been in product categories familiar to the consumer. For example, participant B purchased a holiday via the Internet with the intention of “offering something slightly different to what we are used to”. A different perspective was

provided by participant C when they commented that the Internet enabled them “to create a detailed route” for a self-drive holiday.

Participant A and B make the distinction between commodities and bespoke products. Product evaluation occurs when goods are perceived as commodities. As participant A comments “you can’t go wrong with a tin of beans. They are the same wherever you go”. However, intangible products or those products with unique characteristics like “the fit of a pair of trousers” (participant B) or “the look of a piece of meat and “the smell of a new car” require a degree of personal judgement that is “not possible with current Web technology” (participant A).

Discussions of the frequency of non-routine purchases made in a particular time frame provided the opportunity for respondents to talk about the situated nature of online shopping in ways not open through questions directed at general online consumption patterns. Questions asked whether a consumer’s online product evaluation lead to an online purchase. Three different responses occurred: using the information search facilities of the Internet, the product attributes of a particular item, e.g. “a washing machine”, were thoroughly evaluated online “before I buy it in the shop” (participant A). Conversely, participant C used the Internet to check for alternatives amongst online products only: “I use the Web for Internet purchases and the shopping mall for everyday purchases”. Here, evaluation was conducted on product categories that were generally new to the consumer, e.g. “anything digital, or electrical/IT I leave to the Web”.

A third perspective was offered by participant B commenting that “I’ll visit clothes shops and try on different outfits... but buy the one I want at home through the Web”. In this instance, a non-routine evaluation pursued at a traditional high street store lead to an online purchase. Participant B also noted that “I’ll look up products I’m not familiar with, like MP3 players, on the Web” but “when I want to buy one, I’ll do it at a shop”.

Further discussion looked at the reasons for the variations in attitude towards non routine purchases. Questions addressed the issue of product involvement and the

risks associated with making a 'bad' purchase. Participant C offered no opinion on this issue. The remaining two participants dismissed the issue of negative financial consequences associated with making a 'bad' purchase, arguing that online evaluation meant that "I know more than the shop assistant" (participant A) and reduces the chances of being "bamboozled and pressured into buying a product I don't want" (participant B). Greater knowledge of the marketplace achieved through online product evaluations increased the bargaining power felt by participant A vis-à-vis the retailer, e.g., "can you match the price offered by so and so". Evaluating intangible products such as clothes in high street stores reduced the negative social consequences associated with making a 'bad' purchase online for participant B.

Participant	Response – Non-routine
Participant A	Extend product knowledge Limited use of consumer decision supports – others judgement of importance; type of purchases makes online precludes such technologies. Offline purchase
Participant B	Extend existing product knowledge and investigate new products. Offline and Online purchase Limited use of decision supports – unaware of functions
Participant C	New products Investigated Online purchase No use of decision supports – low self-efficacy, min Internet skills

Table 8 Participant Responses to Non-Routine Purchases

4.5.3 Browse

Not all participants stated that they have browsed the Internet. Participant A, having used the Internet the longest and a self-proclaimed Web expert "does not surf" and is proud to claim that "I have never surfed the Web in my life". Conversely, participant C has the least familiarity with the Internet enjoys surfing and spends "most of my time clicking from one site to another wondering what I will find".

Between these extremes of Internet familiarity is participant B. An early adopter, this volunteer has observed a decrease in the length of time spent surfing the Web: “I used to surf a lot when it was new [to me]” but now browses aimlessly “when bored” and then ‘for only about 5 minutes’. Discussion looked at understanding why a user, who professed increasingly levels of Internet self-efficacy, would choose not to browse for consumption goods. According to participant B, browsing a large dataset, such as the Internet, is a tedious activity “once the novelty has worn off”. Disappointment and frustration are the reasons given by participant A: “why waste time guessing what you might want, and then not come away with anything”.

Participant	Response – Browse
Participant A	Never
Participant B	Dwindling
Participant C	Mostly

Table 9 Participant Responses to Browsing

4.5.4 Time

Two out of three participants confirmed that the Internet offered real time savings when engaged in the purchasing process. Only participant C found the Internet to be “a blackhole” when making Internet purchases, but this was attributed to the purpose of use e.g. “I spend ages surfing the Web for different holidays” and low self-efficacy, “this Internet thing is still new to me.”

Discussions of the nature of ‘saved time’ provided the opportunity for respondents to talk about the role of Internet technologies in ways not open through questions directed at the ease of using online interfaces. Participants were asked to consider the ways in which the Internet increased their amount of free time. Four themes emerged: processual, situational, perceptual, and task related.

Participants who expressed a familiarity with the Internet highlighted processual benefits i.e. less time was needed to complete an online purchase process compared

with the same process offline. For example, participant A commented “completing a loan application online is quicker than filling the same form out by hand” because of Internet technologies such as “automatic recall and short-cut controls”. Participant B however, appreciated the ability of Internet technology to shorten the purchase process: buying staple groceries can be “reduced to checking a list of saved preferences. All I have to do is click a couple of buttons, literally, and I’ve re-ordered my entire weekly shop” (participant B).

Emphasizing the broader increases in discretionary time gained by making online purchases, participant A remarked: “when you tot it up, you’re looking at most of the afternoon wasted to do a simple thing like get a loan”. However, this perspective was tempered with the benefits offered by immediate purchase consumption. For example participant A would “often look for a piece of hardware online but pick it up from the store on my way home.” In a similar vein, participant B still goes to the supermarket, despite buying groceries online, because “...you get great satisfaction of ‘going to the shop’”.

Discussion revealed that all participants perceived time differently according to the nature of the purchase task. Where buying goods and services was considered a chore such as “grocery shopping” (participant B) or “paying bills” (participant A), the Internet was useful for “reducing the amount of time spent on tedious jobs” (participant B). Where the process of buying products was perceived as a pleasurable activity, such as “listening to recently released CDs” (participant A) or “checking travel offers” (participant C) the Internet enabled participants to either (1) increase the amount of free time available to enjoy their hobbies or (2) extend their enjoyment spending time repeating certain stages of the purchasing process. For example participant B will “look and try on clothes in Next [clothes shop] but buy the outfit at home on the Web.”

Further discussion looked at the reasons for the variations in task-oriented behaviours amongst online consumers. Questions addressed the different stages of consumer decision-making and considered the length of time taken to complete each stage. Of the five stages of consumer decision making identified, participant A used two –

information search and purchase. This reflected participant A's dislike of shopping and the opportunity to expedite the process: "why waste time...I know what I want to buy and I buy it!"

Participants B and C engaged in all stages of the decision making process except product evaluation when using the Internet. Products that required an element of personal judgement or product comparison were "best looked at offline" (participant B). Two different reasons were given in explanation. Participant C considered the navigational structure of Internet shopping cumbersome: "you have to keep switching between different web pages on the same site and between different sites... it's difficult...and confusing". Emphasizing the limitations of decision support tools, participant B observed "I couldn't describe the perfect piece of meat or the perfect fit of a pair of trousers in sufficient detail to convey what I wanted – especially as I don't know what I want until I see it." In both cases, the amount of time needed to evaluate products online was considered "excessive" (participant B) and produced "frustration" (participant C).

Participant	Response - Time
Participant A	Speed - Ability to complete tasks quickly
Participant B	Context - depends on their familiarity with technology and task at hand
Participant C	Unaware - time is a black hole online as grapples with new modes of interaction, enjoys flow provided by surfing (pursuing new experiences)

Table 10 Participant Responses to Time

4.5.5 Effort

Only one participant considered the Internet physically and cognitively difficult to use, but this was attributed to a lack of familiarity with the required modes of interaction e.g. "I can't control the mouse very well yet" and the effort needed to "get to grips" with the Internet as a shopping channel. The remaining participants expressed a degree of self-efficacy in using the Internet and considered making Internet purchases "straightforward"(participant A) and "easy to use" (participant B).

During discussions on the ease of using the Internet as a shopping channel, participants A and B made the distinction between the level of effort required for making routine compared with non-routine purchase decisions. Knowledge of the intended purchase reduced the cognitive effort needed to buy products online according to participant A e.g. “because I know exactly what I am looking for, I can run a specific query on the sites search engine, so I don’t end up trawling through irrelevant stuff”. Familiarity with the interface design reduces the frustration associated with being “lost in cyberspace” according to participant B.

All participants agreed that e-retailers using template interface formats popularised by Amazon.com required little effort to use. For example participant A “you know that the site is going to have common navigational aids like a search engine or a site map; and that the text is going to be laid out in a particular way”. Participant C offers a different perspective on standardised interface designs: “I feel more confident, and can generally find what I want, when everything is set out the same way at different sites”. Participant B considered idiosyncratic interface designs “unnecessarily frustrating”. This was because “[grocery] products were given different category headings to what I was used to and they changed the meaning of some of the symbols. It took a bit of getting used to.”

Discussion of the level of effort required to purchase non-routine products enabled participants to talk about the role decision support aids in ways not open by questions directed at navigational strategies of online consumers. Problems included a lack of awareness of the functionality offered by consumer decision aids either because “technology is advancing so fast that I just stick to what I know works for me and ignore the rest“(participant A) or through fears of adverse consequences. Participant C was concerned that “these newfangled things might make me do something I didn’t want to do” whereas participant B distrusted the commercial motives of such aids relating that a particular consumer site had “sold information about my purchases to some other company which started pushing stuff at me that I didn’t want”.

All participants made the distinction between passive recommendation aids based on data mining technology and active recommendation agents designed to offer tailored recommendations. Amongst the two types of consumer decision aids, the participants uniformly felt that recommendation agents were “useless”. Participant B considered agent based recommendation to be ineffectual because “it rarely included any products that I was interested in, or expressed an interest in, when I filled out a personal profile form”. Conversely participant A finds the lack of personal judgement involved in product selection restricting “how does this piece of software know what I will find important or relevant to make a decision?” Participant C summarised the problem: “I wouldn’t leave my shopping to my husband let alone a stranger. He’d run amok buying unnecessary and overpriced stuff”. Passive agents that showed what other people had bought were considered “informative” (participant A), “interesting” (participant B) and “reassuring” by participant C.

Participant	Response - Effort
Participant A	Minimal - Very familiar with Web technology and available decision aids. Little cognitive or physical effort.
Participant B	Context – depends on her familiarity with technology and task at hand
Participant C	Max – unfamiliar with Web technology; not developed an appreciation of shopping strategies online or tasks suited for online environments. Extensive cognitive effort required as everything is new.

Table 11 Summary of Participant Responses to Effort

4.5.6 Orientation

All participants considered the Internet to be an important part of modern living. Only one participant disputed the notion that the Internet was an integral part of a consumer’s everyday decision-making activities: “my son often has to remind me to use the Web to look for things when I can’t find them in the High St” (participant C).

Discussion revealed that none of the participants used the Internet for dedicated

leisure and hobbies such as virtual communities, digital music or online chat. Only participant C engaged in surfing as a form of entertainment, but this was because “everything is new to me on the Web” and “it’s fascinating what you can find”. Conversely, participant B “used to surf the Web but it gets boring after a while if you haven’t got anything specific you want to look up”.

Further discussion looked at the nature of enjoyment derived from using the Internet for consumer decision-making. Two out of three participants derived a negative enjoyment from Internet use. Both participants A and B spotlighted the increased sense of satisfaction experienced by reducing, even removing, mundane shopping frustrations. For example participant A found the purchase process “easier” online as “normal obstacles such as long queues, hyperactive kids and idiot shop assistants are missing”. In a similar vein, participant B enjoyed the freedom gained from transferring purchase chores, such as grocery shopping, to the Internet because “it gives me more time to indulge in window-shopping”.

During discussions of the positive enjoyment gained from using the Internet for consumer decision making, participant B noted the ability of the Internet to extend the pleasurable elements of shopping. For example, “I’ll look and try-on clothes in the store” avoiding the disadvantages associated with the intangibility of electronic products and “then buy them on the Web when I get home”. Similarly, routine purchase decisions such as groceries are placed online enabling participant A to “enjoy browsing the local supermarket for special offers”.

Participant	Response - Orientation
Participant A	Negative Pleasure – reduce frustration; finds easier therefore experiences a sense of ‘flow’. Views Web as optimum shopping mode.
Participant B	Combination – negative pleasure: routine decisions reduce time and frustration associated with shopping chores - positive pleasure: extends shopping contentment
Participant C	Sense of wonderment and bafflement Likes the novelty but still wedded to the pre-Internet modes of interaction

Table 12 Summary of Participant Responses to Orientation

4.6 Discussion

Several observations emerge from reviewing the presented data and concern the identification of emerging behavioural strategies. First, there is evidence to suggest that consumers perceive the activity of shopping differently with Internet use. Purchase activities are being divided according to the degree of tedium associated with a consumption task. The greater the perceived tedium associated with a particular product purchase, the more such purchase activities are being transferred to the Internet. Repeat purchases of small item commodities, such as groceries and electronic banking, involving personal discomfort (overcrowding and queues) and little cognitive engagement (habit purchases) are good examples of product types that have successfully migrated to the Internet.

Equally, consumers also demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of the limitations of Internet technology with regard to certain products and shopping activities. These include an inability to experience the 3D nature of the world. For example the Internet does not allow consumers to smell the leather of a new car, touch the fabric of a sofa or taste fresh food. These are unique products with variations in standard attributes. In this instance the purchase decision is reliant upon a consumer's visceral response to a product; purchase is emotive rather than rational. The more a product is dependent upon emotive decision-making, the less likely such decisions will be made online. Internet technology is not good at supporting non-rational, even illogical decision making.

The inability to conduct complex product evaluations online is another drawback of Internet technology. Whilst the Internet's information reach expands a consumer's choice of products and depth of product knowledge, it overloads the consumer's ability to meaningfully compare the extended consideration set. As a result, the greater the perceived need for considering multiple information sources simultaneously, the more a product will be evaluated offline.

Attempts at resolving this problem, with software algorithms designed to recommend products based on self-administered profiles, or past purchases, are perceived as an

ineffectual consumer decision support tool. Consumers are either: unaware of their purpose; the software agents have recommended products irrelevant to consumption need/desire; or such technologies have removed the option for personal judgement.

The ability to weigh different product attributes, and change parameters as needed, requires time to consider various actions and make personal judgements, including the ability to return to previously discarded selections. This often requires multiple consideration events, occurring at various intervals over an unknown period of time. This is a decision-making response peculiar to consumer behaviour, and runs counter to the Internet's perceived key benefit of saving time by conducting processes at greater speed. Where there is a greater desire to take time re-considering products, the less likely such decision tasks will occur online.

Taking time to browse and compare product selections in a physical store also offers consumers a different form of consumption gratification to that experienced with Internet purchases. With the Internet, gratification is felt as satisfaction that a tiresome job has been dispatched with efficiency; it is externally focused and related to process. Conversely, with classical shopping, gratification is felt as pleasure and enjoyment of finding the 'perfect' product (according to needs); it is internally focused and related to feelings. The different forms of consumption gratification stems from the degree of involvement a consumer has with the product prior to purchase. The intangibility of the Internet and lack of personal interactivity (other than digital media) reduces the level of involvement experienced by consumers and subsequently alters the type of consumption gratification felt online.

A further observation can be made regarding the nature of time. Contrary to marketing promoted conceptions of time as an absolute factor, it appears that time is a perceptual construct and is context dependent. The classic conception that it is quicker (i.e. more convenient) to shop online appears flawed as there are suggestions that time-based convenience depends upon the stage of consumer decision making. For example, given the reach of the Internet, searching for information, particularly when faced with uncertain consumption needs or unfamiliar products, could involve a tremendous amount of time. Similarly, evaluating such products online, in the

absence of suitable decision-support software, could take longer, in absolute terms, than conducting the same stages offline.

Even repetitive purchases from routine decisions, which can be done in less than 5 seconds, can be too long depending on consumption need. Last minute purchases, such as wine for an impromptu bar-be-que or software for a business presentation tomorrow, are better purchased in-store on the way home from work.

In a similar vein, the construct of orientation needs to be reclassified from enjoyment online towards an online/offline distinction to account for the contextual nature of online consumer behaviour. Originally conceived as a concept relating to technology adoption and diffusion, on reflection, it is better classified as orientation towards purchase consumption rather than orientation towards Internet technology per se. This represents a subtle shift away from the interface and associated Internet technologies, towards the consumer. Such is the degree of shift in attitudes displayed towards ease of using the Internet, that usability could now be classified as a hygiene factor. That is to say, usable interfaces can be considered essential for surrounding a consumption task which can prevent discontent and dissatisfaction, but will not in themselves, contribute to perceptions of benefit or convenience.

These observations suggest that consumer behaviour is becoming 'technologised' in that using the Internet for various consumer-related activities it has become an automatic response. Consumers, in their use of the Internet as a complementary shopping channel, are both defining the Internet, and in the process, being defined by itself. There is evidence that some consumers are selectively choosing Internet technologies for the benefits these can offer when integrated into classical shopping activities. The result is a modification in consumer behaviour that leverages the benefits of both channels to create a situation where monotonous consumption tasks are conducted online (taking advantage of speed and personal comfort) freeing consumers to engaged in more varied, and enjoyable consumption tasks offline (taking advantage of tangibility, involvement and consumption gratification).

4.7 Reconstructing the Consumer Interface

Using these observations it's possible to make the following comments regarding the composition of a consumer interface incorporating a new understanding of convenience:

1. Convenience is a contextual construct dependent upon three inter-related elements: decision stage, purchase task and consumption need. Purchase task has emerged as key driver of online consumer behaviour. This is then supported by classic conceptions of decision-making stages: routine tasks short-cut certain stages of decision-making and require specific types of support. In these instances product evaluation is removed and one-click™ shopping is the preferred ideal.
2. Convenience, as it relates to online consumer behaviour, possesses a task-oriented character: processes and technologies are positively appreciated when they support a consumer's ability to efficiently and effectively satisfy their consumption needs online. As such, convenience can be viewed as freedom from inconvenience. For example: the absence of obstructions, expedited checkout facilities, guaranteed product availability and staple product checklists. Viewed from the perspective of task-orientation, convenience-based purchase strategies should seek to leverage the benefits of Internet technology as they relate to consumer behaviour – specifically, processing speed, memory and 24hr access.
3. Usability is negatively appreciated by consumers in that it is a necessary element of online consumer behaviour but does not contribute to convenience, only feelings of inconvenience. The degree of inconvenience experienced depends on both the purchase task and than decision type. For example, a routine decision can be frustrated by poor interface design, whilst a complicated product evaluation can become a straight-forward activity if appropriately supported.
4. Extrapolating from the previous two points, the concept of convenience appears to possess two distinct elements: positive and negative. Viewed positively, convenience is regarded by consumers in absolute terms; something is either convenient or it isn't. However, viewed negatively, consumers appear to experience

degrees of inconvenience online. Such negative perceptions occur, and are limited to, the stages of a consumer's decision-making. Excessive support for a routine decision increases processual frustration (defined as time and effort needed to complete a task) and reduces the perceived degree of convenience enjoyed. Conversely, the lack of support for a non-routine purchase heightens consumer indecision. Depending on the nature of the purchase query, confusion reigns as greater product choice is not accompanied by appropriate tools to support product evaluation and criteria management.

5. Orientation, conceived as the enjoyment derived from interacting with computers, is an outmoded perspective given the evolution of online consumer behaviour. Specific behavioural strategies adopted in response to the Internet's processing speed have limited online consumer activities to necessary, but largely unfulfilling activities, whilst rapid technological diffusion has reduced its novelty; enjoyment is no longer an issue.

6. Browsing, defined as non-directed searching for casual information (colloquially known as surfing), has become a redundant online consumer activity. The inability to engage with a product in ways similar to high street 'window shopping', coupled with the difficulty of organising disparate information sources into coherent evaluation system has rendered 'surfing' unsuited to the purposive nature of consumer behaviour.

Using these comments a different conceptualisation of a consumer interface emerges from that proposed in chapter three. This re-conceptualisation not only addresses the viability of the component elements but also their arrangement when considering a consumer interface from the perspective of consumer-perceived convenience.

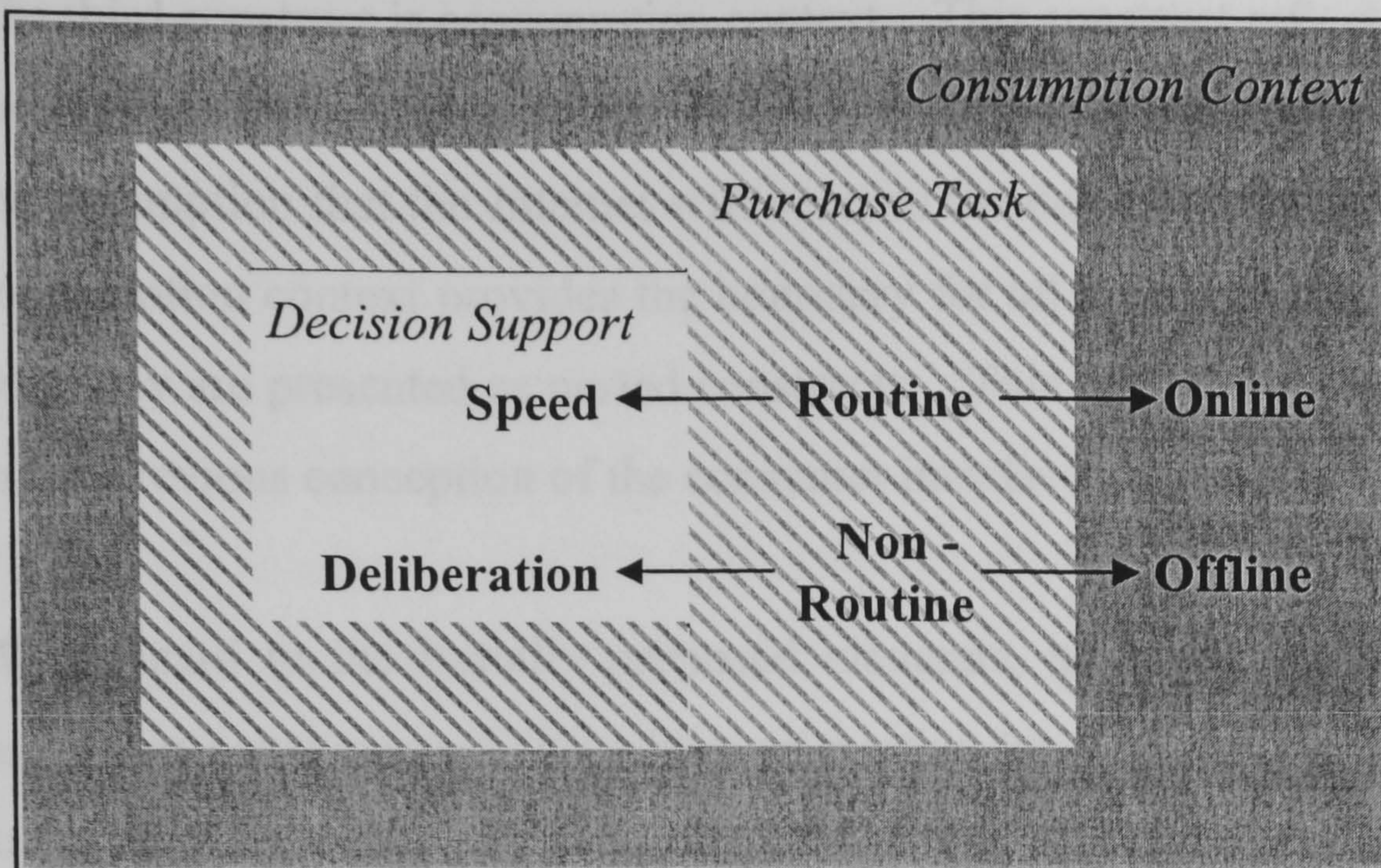


Figure 8 Reconstructing the Consumer Interface

In response to a new understanding of the neutral role usability has on consumer behaviour, interface design and decision support has been merged into one construct. This reflects an acknowledgement that the artificial separation initially proposed could no longer be sustained. Instead, three new constructs are proposed. (See figure 8).

The first construct is decision support. This includes, and seeks to enable, the interface design issues of time and effort. These elements have been re-classified as speed and deliberation respectively to emphasise the specific form of decision support required. For example, viewing a decision task as deliberation highlights the time needed to reflect on different product attributes, rather than the effort invested in obtaining a consideration set.

The second construct is purchase task. This includes those elements previously regarded as decision support. Re-designated, and re-aligned according to task, they represent the purposive nature of consumer behaviour. As such they reflect an awareness that a consumer's stages of decision-making can be curtailed depending upon the task at hand. This in turn highlights the need to support the task, rather than the decision stage.

The third construct is consumption context. This construct reflects the emergence of the Internet as a complementary shopping channel and represents a radical change in the assumption that the Internet will become the dominant purchasing channel. The consumption context provides the boundary for all other activities; hence the reason why they are presented as nested constructs. This provides a dimension not present in the previous conception of the consumer interface.

With regard to the initially proposed elements, browsing has been removed as a redundant consumer activity whilst orientation has been re-classified and subsumed under the dimension of consumption context. The linear relationship between decision type and appropriate supporting technologies remains and is supported by the inter-relationships identified between consumption context, purchase task and decision support, where purchase task is viewed as the driving force. Consumption context and decision support thus respond to the purposive nature of consumer behaviour - hence the two-way direction of arrows.

4.8 Reflections

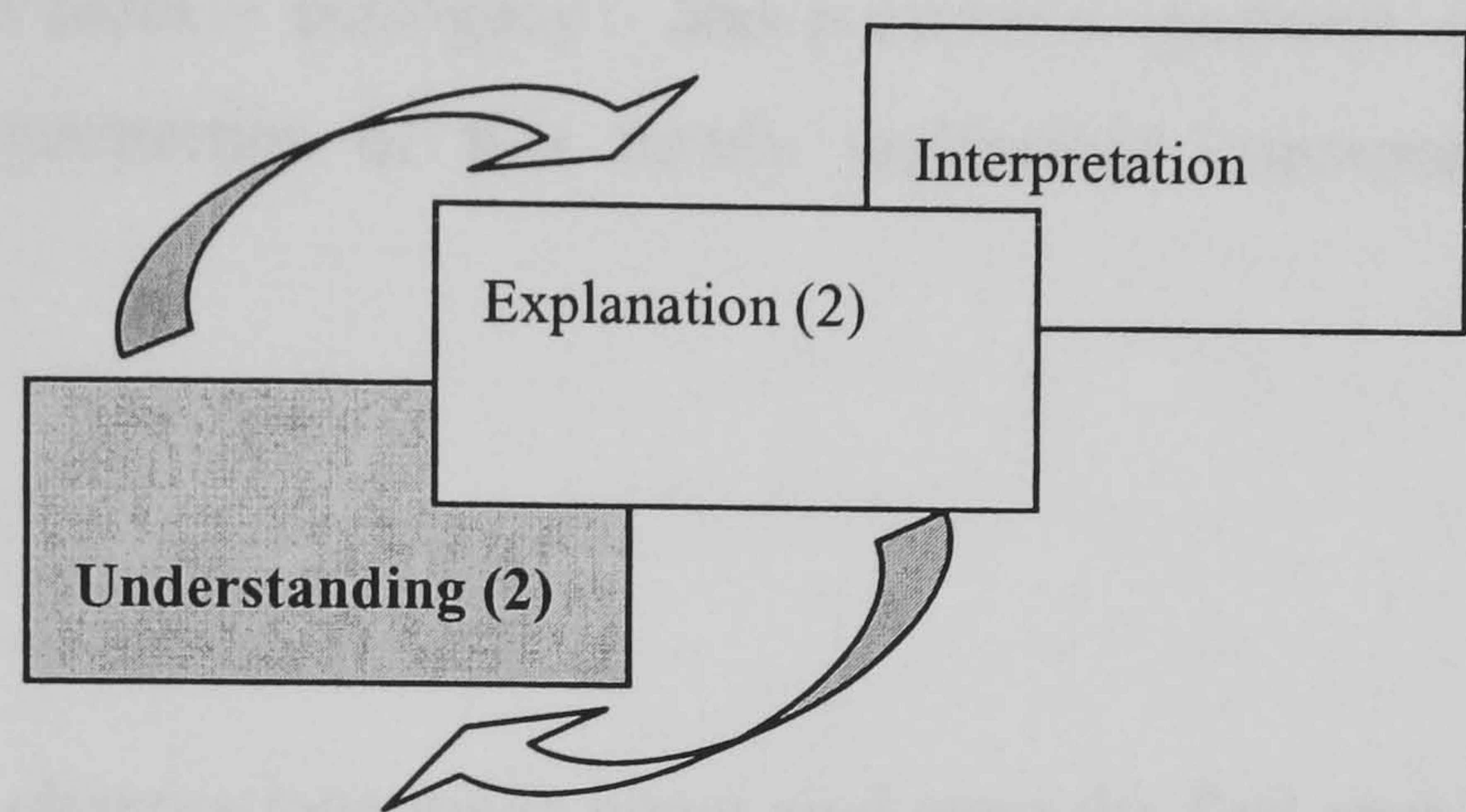
This chapter represents the culmination of the first complete round of hermeneutic conversations investigating perceptions of electronic convenience and consumer decision-making. As such, the framework and associated propositions presented in chapter three were used to limit the scope of inquiry and focused the collection of data on two constructs: decision type and interface convenience. Each construct contained three elements creating a 3x3 matrix. These elements were used as the basis of a thematic analysis. Interpretation of these themes resulted in the (re)construction of a new consumer interface framework.

This new framework differs from the original conception in several ways. First, one element from each construct was removed. Both elements – browsing and orientation – are casualties of maturing online consumer behaviour. Second, the remaining elements have been re-aligned and constructs re-designated following a better understanding of the relationship between decision support, purchase task and

consumption context. The final difference is the introduction of a consumption context missing in the original framework. Rapid diffusion has made the Internet a commonplace technology to be used and incorporated into daily routines. For consumers, this means that the Internet has become a complementary shopping channel rather than a substitute channel perceived by many early industry watchers.

However, interpretations of the convenience-related themes also highlighted a set of unaccountable behaviour. This behavioural form specifically relates to browsing; the participants noted that whilst they did not engage in browsing activities for themselves, they did on behalf of others. The idea that a person will engage in various consumption-related purchase tasks when requested by others radically challenges my mental model that a direct relationship exists between the consumer and Internet, i.e. the person who is looking for a product online is the person who will be consuming that product. Attempts at rectifying this breakdown in my worldview of online consumer behaviour formed the basis of a new literature review aimed at understanding this anomalous behaviour and is presented in the next chapter.

Anomalous Online Consumer Behaviour



5.1 Introduction

So far, this dissertation has investigated consumer perceptions of convenience when making online purchase decisions. Literature reviewed from three inter-related subjects - consumer behaviour, technology diffusion and human-computer interface – led to the creation of a consumer interface framework (chapter three). Components of this framework were then used to collect interview data on consumer's perceptions of electronically-mediated convenience (chapter four). An unfamiliar mode of online consumer behaviour - users browsing the Internet on behalf of consumers – was found whilst conducting a hermeneutic analysis of the data. This discovery challenges my idea that a direct link exists between the online decision-maker and the offline consumer.

The aim of this chapter therefore, is to repair the breakdown that has occurred in my mental model of online consumer behaviour. This will be achieved using the hermeneutic research approach outlined in chapter two. The outcome of this process is to 'fix' this unfamiliar consumer behaviour with a label that allows others to make sense of this new behavioural form.

This chapter is structured in the following manner: the first section will present the findings of this anomalous consumer behaviour. These findings are then interpreted anew within the context of the reconstructed consumer interface and associated literature. This follows the pattern of ‘breakdown’ where new information is considered in the context of pre-existing knowledge. The third section introduces new literature to account for any remaining gaps in understanding. The final section culminates in the assignment of a label – surrogacy - and presents a synthesis of ideas regarding the nature and properties of this newly understood consumer behaviour.

5.2 Data Findings

The following findings stem from observations made when analysing the first round of interviews. They result from analysis strategies aimed at comparing perceptions across participants for possible similarities (or differences) in thought or action. Because these findings are a by-product of the initial research focus – identifying the components of a consumer interface - they are used to identify avenues for further research, rather than seeking to explain the anomalous consumer behaviour itself.

5.2.1 Direction of Request

Two out of the three participants engaged in consumer-related tasks online on behalf of other people. Both of these participants confirmed regular and extended use of the Internet as a shopping channel. In contrast, participant C adopted the Internet late, in response to peer-pressure, and has limited familiarity with Internet technology. Participant C prefers to use “people who know what they are doing with computers” to satisfy personal consumption needs.

Subject	Direction of Request	Adoption Stage
Participant A	By Others	Innovator
Participant B	By Others	Early Adopter
Participant C	Requests Others	Pragmatist/Laggard

Table 13 Direction of Request

5.2.2 Access

All participants had access to a computer both at home and at work, however participant C delegated use of the Internet to her son “because he knows what he is doing with a computer and I don’t”. Both the remaining participants acknowledged that they were the dominant users of the Internet at home. For example, participant A commented that whilst his wife “watches TV at night, I’ll be using the Internet to sort out my finances or look for information for work“. Where physical access to the Internet at home is not a problem participant B notes that her husband “leaves the computer to me” because “he can’t be bothered learning how to use it”. Access to a computer at work was not identified.

5.2.3 Expertise

Two out of three participants highlighted the role their technical skill played when engaged in consumer-related tasks for others. For example, participant A used the “Lycos search engine” when looking for information on childcare because his wife “didn’t know which sites she needed” and participant A “didn’t know anything about childcare”. Skill in using Internet decision-support tools was also highlighted by participant B: “I tend to be able to find sites that are relevant that others can’t”. Conversely, unconfident use of the Internet prompted participant C to request others to use the Internet to find product-related information. For example, “it takes me ages to find stuff on the Web and then it’s not really what I want. [My son] is much better at finding things than me.”

5.3 Interpretation of Findings

Despite the paucity of data findings, two interpretations are offered for further consideration. First, there appears to be a “designated Internet user” emerging within the home environment. This is the person others in the family unit turn to when they want to use the Internet to fulfil one, or several, purchase-related tasks. For example,

finding websites that offer discounted holidays (participant B), or comparing the reviews of new hair products (participant C).

Becoming a designated internet user appears to be a product of the physical environment (only one computer with Internet connection is available) and personal orientation (the person enjoys using the Internet), or other peoples' disinterest in the Internet. Consequently, when access to an Internet connection is limited and one person has dominant use, it is easier, and quicker, to ask them to look up information than wait until the computer is free.

Extended use of the Internet also improves a person's technical proficiency and general familiarity with consumer-related websites. As a result the designated Internet user is assigned the title and role of "Internet expert" by their peer group: they possess Internet-based skills that exceed the ability of others when looking for product information, or comparing product alternatives. This leads to the second interpretation, that friends and family delegate their use of the Internet to the recognised 'expert' by entrusting the designated user with the responsibility for satisfying a particular consumer need.

At this point, it is useful to re-visit the theory of diffusion to understand why a person would actively delegate their consumption needs to another. In particular, this theory may provide some insights on behavioural responses to technology adoption.

5.4 Diffusion of Innovations - Revisited

Rogers (1995) differentiates the diffusion process from the adoption process in that the diffusion process occurs within society, as a group process; whereas the adoption process relates to an individual. Thus, whilst Rogers (1995) highlights the creation of behavioural practices that imply approval and favourable reception, adoption implies personal choice and assent.

5.4.1 The Innovation-Decision Process

Rogers (1995) breaks the adoption of an innovation by individuals into five stages: (1) knowledge about the Internet as a shopping channel and (2) the formation of an attitude about its relative merits. From this (3) a decision to adopt or reject it is made followed by (4) the implementation of the Internet in their daily lives leading to (5) a confirmation of their decision. Each stage aids the individual to process information regarding the new technology, in this case the Internet as a shopping channel, in order to reduce uncertainty concerning its meaning and relevance to the individual.

5.4.2 Rejection v Discontinuance

An innovation may be rejected during any stage of the adoption process, where rejection is defined as a decision not to adopt an innovation. However, rejection should not be confused with discontinuance which refers to rejection that occurs *after* the innovation has been adopted. (See figure 9).

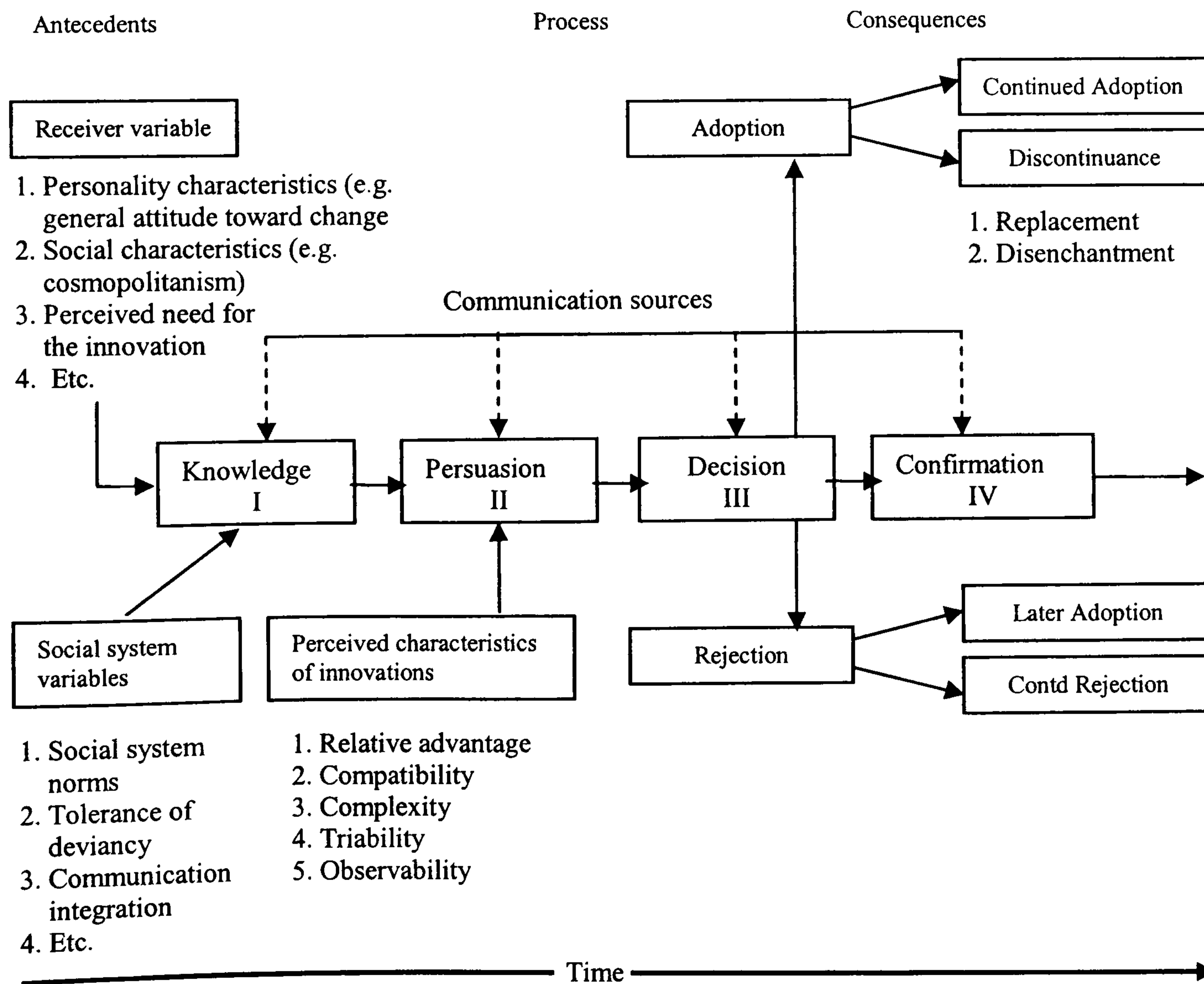


Figure 9 Diffusion of Innovation Model, (Rogers 1995)

Reflecting on the fact that late adopters have twice as many discontinuances than earlier adopters, Rogers (1995) suggests that there are two types of discontinuance: (i) disenchantment where a decision is made to reject an innovation as a result of dissatisfaction with its performance, and (ii) replacement where a decision to reject an innovation is made in order to adopt a better idea or technology.

Participant C as a late adopter of the Internet is representative of a consumer who, having installed and used the Internet, has opted to discontinue their personal use. However, requesting others to engage in consumer-related tasks on their behalf suggests that this consumer perceives certain advantages in the continued use of the Internet – although by novel and indirect means.

To understand why consumers could be dissatisfied with the performance of the Internet, the data and interpretations regarding the components of a consumer interface presented in chapter four are reviewed. Specific attention is paid to negative observations made regarding problems, or obstacles, preventing the satisfaction of consumer-related tasks online. Where these occur, consideration is given to the form of disenchantment experienced by the consumer, and whether such dissatisfactions can be alleviated, or replaced, by modifying patterns of consumer behaviour in ways similar to the anomalous behaviour previously identified.

5.5 Revisiting Convenience and the Consumer Interface

Roger's theory of discontinuance is used as a guide for reviewing data regarding consumer perceptions of convenience and the consumer interface. During this review, particular attention is paid to the comments made by participant C whose late adoption of the Internet, coupled with the 'delegation-of-use' comments, fits the model of discontinuance suggested by Rogers. The remaining participants however, have, through their continuing personal use, affirmed their decision to adopt the Internet. Consequently, data presented from these participants is reviewed for the degree to which they inversely support, contradict, or add to, an understanding of the anomalous consumer behaviour.

5.5.1 Finding - Reduce Information Overload

Participant C identified information overload as the greatest source of disenchantment when using the Internet in pursuit of consumer-related tasks. The inability to find appropriate information on which to base a decision was highlighted on three separate occasions. For example, “I spend ages surfing the Web for different holidays” with most of the time spent “clicking from one site to another wondering what I will find.” As a result participant C tends to “get swamped by too much information”.

During discussions on the type of consumer-related information sought online, participant C “used search engines” to look for non-routine information. Relating one shopping incident, participant C noted “because I didn’t know much about dress corsages I just typed the word into Yahoo’s search engine. This produced a list with the word corsage but I couldn’t make head nor tail of which one to choose”. Unable to choose between the proffered list of websites, participant C began to “work my way through them systematically” but found this a “particularly time-consuming activity. Eventually I forgot exactly what I was looking for, or what I’d looked at, because I’d seen that many sites.”

This is a situation familiar to participant B: “there’s nothing worse than facing a list of hits that look relevant but that when you click on them have nothing to do with what you want”. Unlike participant C however, both participants A and B noted their abilities to skilfully navigate the Internet: “if you know how to use the Internet properly, using specific search terms and such, it’s fairly easy to cut through most of the crap found on the Internet” (participant A). In a similar vein participant B commented that “you get a feel for different sites and whether they will be any good” that is to say “giving you the information you want, or linking you to a site that will”.

5.5.2 Interpretation - The Expert Advisor

This finding highlights the difference between information sources that are relevant to the query task and those which are appropriate to consumer needs, where

appropriateness is defined as suitable for a particular consumer. A consumer's ability to make online purchase decisions could decline through infrequent use and weak self-efficacy. Ignorance of advanced navigational strategies, such as Boolean search queries for example, makes searching for information an unwieldy and tiresome task.

Frustrated in their efforts to benefit from the Internet, but reluctant to forgo perceived consumption advantages, disenchanted online consumers may seek out the expertise of others. Thus, the disenchantment experienced by the online consumer is not only removed, but is replaced with a better solution. By leveraging another person's technical expertise the burden of sifting through excessive amounts of information is removed and the consideration set is shrunk to manageable proportions. In this way, consumers pursue a satisficing strategy: the consideration set is sufficient to satisfy the minimum requirements necessary to meet a particular consumption need. That is to say, using another person creates a consideration set that is "good enough although not necessarily the best" outcome (Herbert Simon, 1957).

Satisficing action such as this can be contrasted with maximising action which seeks outcomes that are the "best", or produce the most favourable result. In the context of consumer behaviour, the 'best' consideration sets would be those that are the most relevant to a consumer's particular needs. Relevance, as it relates to consumer decision-making, is highly subjective and involves the use of non-rational, value-laden judgements.

The ability to determine the relevance 'of something' is a skill in itself and suggestive of another form of expertise: the ability to frame the consideration set in ways the end consumer perceives as meaningful. Offering an opinion that others consider worthy of consideration implies a greater role for a third-party Internet user, in the context of online consumer decision-making, than was initially conceived from the data reviewed above. To gain an appreciation of the nature and scope of this role requires a review of literature concerning intermediaries in electronic commerce. The aim of this review is to better understand the benefits conveyed, and limitations encountered, when using a third party to facilitate the online decision-making process.

5.6 Electronic Intermediaries

An electronic intermediary is as a third party agent commonly found in electronic marketplaces (Bakos, 1998). An electronic marketplace refers to a technologically mediated exchange between buyer and seller in the form of an auction (Leebaert, 1998). The aim of an electronic intermediary is to bring buyers and sellers together by offering a service to either side (Bailey & Bakos, 1997).

Bakos (1998) identified three functions of an intermediary in electronic marketplaces (i) matching buyers and sellers; (ii) facilitating transactions and (iii) the institutional infrastructure. Each function consists of sub-functions which indicate the value added to their service. (See table 14). In non electronic markets, the first two functions are typically performed by intermediaries, although Giaglis *et al* (2002) noted contingent intermediary roles for governments in support of the institutional infrastructure.

Building on the work of Bakos (1998), Giaglis *et al* (2002) identify three primary functions for intermediaries (see Table 14). These functions, described in Giaglis, Klein and O'Keefe, (pp. 234-236) are briefly reproduced below.

<i>Primary Market Function</i>	<i>Sub-Functions</i>
Matching Buyers and Sellers	(a) Determination of Product Offerings (b) Searching (c) Price Discovery
Facilitation of Transactions	(d) Logistics (e) Settlement (f) Trust
Institutional Infrastructure	(g) Legal (h) Regulatory

Table 14 Functions of intermediaries (Giaglis, Klein and O'Keefe, 2002)

5.6.1 Matching Buyers and Sellers

Determination of product offerings - Sellers use the information provided by markets about current and future buyer demand levels to determine their product offerings. Intermediaries can help sellers determine the most favourable product mix by remaining close to buyers; being able to receive and interpret market signals in a more timely fashion (by analyzing customer preferences) and by alerting sellers regarding changing market dynamics and emerging consumption trends (Bakos, 1998).

Searching – Buyers select their purchases from the available product offerings, after considering factors such as price and product attributes. However, buyers face definite search costs (in the time and effort expended) to obtain and process this information. In a similar way, sellers may incur significant costs as a result of efforts spent attracting potential buyers to their products (for example, in marketing and advertising). Intermediaries can help buyers reduce their search costs by providing a single contact point for their information gathering and market transactions (e.g. travel agents). Indirectly, intermediaries can also help sellers in their search for prospective buyers by providing access to a pool of ready buyers.

Price discovery – Bakos (1998) describes price discovery as “the process of determining the prices at which demand and supply ‘clear’ and trade occurs”. The current mechanisms for price discovery include auctions (e.g. stock markets), negotiations (e.g. ‘open’ street markets) and fixed offers (e.g. retail stores). An intermediaries’ role will vary according to the price discovery mechanism used. Giaglis *et al* (2002) suggest that an intermediaries’ role is generally more significant in auctions (where the intermediary provides the entire infrastructure and logistical support) and less so in negotiations and firm offers (where price discovery can take place directly between buyer and seller).

5.6.2 Facilitation of Transactions

Logistics – This refers to the transfer of purchased goods and services following an agreed sale. This may involve physical activities such as shipping, distribution and warehousing (for products), or electronic activities such as licensing, booking and subscriptions (for services). Here, the intermediary is concerned with reducing the overall processing and co-ordination costs associated with payment processing and delivery handling.

Settlement – Here the buyer has to transfer payment to the seller in order to complete, or ‘settle’, the transaction. In this instance, the intermediary is usually a third party agent facilitating or monitoring the transaction (for example a bank).

Trust – Certain monitoring mechanisms have been established to protect both buyers and sellers from the opportunistic behaviour of other market participants (Bailey and Bakos, 1997). Third parties such as banks, credit-reporting bureaux and rating agencies may facilitate trust mechanisms (by preventing unethical behaviour or insuring against non-payment, or delivery, of goods and services) and can be considered as intermediaries in the trust-building market function (Giaglis *et al*, 2002).

5.6.3 Legal and Regulatory Infrastructure

The institutional infrastructure of markets specifies the laws, rules and regulations that govern market transactions and provides mechanisms for their enforcement. Here, intermediaries refer to governments, regulatory bodies and legal agencies.

Clearly, intermediaries are in a position to provide a variety of value-adding services, to both sellers and buyers, which can offset the negative effects of the additional cost that intermediation is supposed to introduce into the value-chain (Wigand & Benjamin, 1995); Bailey and Bakos, 1996). The next section reflects on the pertinence of this literature for consumer-intermediation occurring in non-negotiated markets dominated by firm retail offers.

5.7 Consumer-Intermediation: Reflection of Theory

Inherent within the intermediary literature is an equal consideration of the benefits an intermediary offers to both the buyer *and the seller* during a negotiated sales environment. Whilst the recently reviewed data relating to the consumer interface suggests a mediating role for another Internet user, it is evident that the mediator is operating on behalf of the consumer – and not the seller. Additionally, “consumer-dependent” intermediaries exist in marketplaces that make firm offers rather than negotiated settlement, creating a situation that may radically alter the role and functions of the intermediary.

Consequently, the generalised literature describing the role of intermediaries in electronic marketplaces needs to be considered from the particular context of online consumer behaviour.

<i>Market Function</i>	<i>Sub-Functions</i>	<i>Potential Added Value to Customer</i>
Matching Buyers and Sellers	(a) Determination of Product Offerings	Intermediary passes information from regular scans onto consumers, increasing need recognition
	(b) Searching	Reduce search costs for consumers by providing ‘one-stop-shop’ for information gathering, filtering and translation
Facilitation of Transactions	(c) Trust	Guarantee to consumers against the non-opportunistic behaviour of sellers Provide guidance in the early stages of decision-making
	(d) Consumer Interface	Diagnoses validity of vendor trust mechanisms and passes them onto consumers, increases confidence
Domain Familiarity	(e) Decision-Support Tools	Determines saliency of vendors attributes, increases relevancy

Table 15 The roles of consumer intermediaries operating in markets with firm offers (modified from Giaglis *et al*, 2002)

Table 15 outlines the roles of intermediaries when considering the needs of online consumer’s operating in markets that make firm offers only (i.e. electronic stores).

Three sub-functions – price discovery, logistics and settlement – are deleted on the grounds they lacked a suitable connection to the topic “online consumer behaviour”. Hence, price discovery, defined as the point at which demand and supply clear, relates more to the market mechanism auctions instead of firm offers, whilst logistics suggest roles for organisational third-parties (e.g. transport carriers). Financial settlements that involve banks are more representative of large volume transactions compared to the individual purchases made by a consumer for personal use.

The market function - institutional infrastructure - has been re-designated technological familiarity to reflect the changed focus towards (individual) consumer behaviour and away from (structuring) electronic marketplaces. The consumer interface and decision-support tools are included as sub-functions. These elements represent a degree of continuity in focus and research purpose – between that which has gone before and that which has yet to be discovered. Like the institutional infrastructure function, technological familiarity provides the context within which the other functions exist, form and develop. The remaining sub-functions, outlined in table 15, are considered from the perspective of a disenchanted consumer and discussed below.

5.7.1 Determination of product offerings

Information is exchanged between the consumer and intermediary regarding prices and product offerings. This takes the form of directed searching from the consumer to the intermediary. However, it is possible to conceive of a reversed flow of information, from the intermediary to the consumer.

Regular scans (in the form of ongoing information searches) by the intermediary, as part of their daily Internet use, may highlight products, or sites, the intermediary considers pertinent to the needs of a consumer, even though such information has not been specifically requested. Derived from unsolicited browsing, this form of exchange could constitute a form of need recognition – where the consumer perceives a gap between the ideal state and the actual state – that is *presented to* the consumer rather than *sought by* the consumer. New types of consumption need are created in a consumer as a result, or that would exist without such a service.

5.7.2 Searching

Online consumers encounter serious costs (in time and effort) searching for product-related information (Alba et al., 1997). An intermediary can reduce, even eliminate, such costs by searching for information on their behalf (Bailey & Bakos, 1997; Bakos, 1997; Malone, Benjamin, & Yates, 1987; Sarkar, Butler, & Steinfield, 1995). Specific information searches, for example, free a consumer to engage in other activities.

Reduction in information costs can be contrasted with the value an intermediary can add when acting as an information gatekeeper in the decision-making process (Metoyer-Duran, 1993). An information gatekeeper possesses two profiles: broker and information professional. Respectively, the broker's value-added is access to different sources of information, whilst the value of the information professional stems from their ability to integrate such diverse information sources (Resnick, Zeckhauser, & Avery, 1995)

Inherent in the gatekeeper function are two related actions: (i) the selection, or filtration, of relevant information sources followed by (ii) the translation of this information to facilitate knowledge transfer (Brewer *et al*, 1996). Rendering specialised information understandable to non-technically minded consumers improves that consumer's ability to make an informed purchase decision.

5.7.3 Trust

The relationship between a consumer and intermediary rests upon the level of trust invested in the intermediary's ability to satisfy the consumption need felt by the consumer. Since many consumption needs are vague and ill-defined locating relevant information sources requires the intermediary to possess an ability that extends beyond mere technical skill. Tacit knowledge, based on an intimate understanding of a consumer's unique consumption context is also needed. This form of trust is located in the personal relationship between the intermediary and consumer, rather than impersonal trust mechanisms found in traditional electronic marketplaces. Hence, when the purchase process is complex, the advice offered by

an intermediary can protect the consumer against the opportunistic behaviour of retailers, assuage a consumer's privacy and security fears and instil confidence in their decision-making.

5.7.4 Internet Familiarity

Although a legal framework for e-commerce is important, it is not a failsafe (Rappa, 2002). Many online retailers lack a brand that consumers know and trust. As a result illegitimate, damaged or incomplete products could be sold to the unwary, without recourse or recompense.

An intermediary however, is familiar with the online retail domain and acquainted with the pitfalls that can befall inexperienced consumers. Extensive Internet experience enables intermediaries to develop 'a feel' for vendors that are likely to be reliable and trustworthy. The ability to discriminate between vendors requires the intermediary to (i) process diagnostic information (e.g. the presence of trust mechanisms and consumer feedback) and consider (ii) salient attributes (e.g. product importance and degree of relevance). Whilst the former action increases a consumer's confidence in placing an order, the latter action increases the prospect that the purchase will satisfy the consumption need.

5.8 Surrogacy versus Intermediary

It is evident from the above discussion that third-party Internet users approached by a consumer do not possess many of the characteristics traditionally associated with an electronic intermediary. Specifically, suppliers are ignored whilst the primary arena for intermediaries – auctions - is disregarded. This does not necessarily preclude the designated Internet user from being labelled an intermediary, since it could be a mutation of form, similar to the contingency models observed by Giaglis *et al* (2002).

What does prevent third-party Internet users from acquiring the label intermediary is a belief, derived from a consideration of the data and literature reviewed above, that consumers are replacing themselves with third-party Internet users in their decision-making process. This type of replacement is not an ersatz substitute but, in accordance with Roger's theory of diffusion, a better alternative. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this form of substitution can be called surrogacy.

Briefly defined, a surrogate is an expedient replacement for oneself. In this case, a surrogate would refer to the third-party Internet user to whom a consumer delegates gatekeeper responsibilities (of information selection and translation). As a result, the surrogate offers a superior alternative to the consumer during the early stages of online decision-making. On the one hand, the consumer is able to remove the negative experiences associated with consumer decision-making online (such as information overload and product indeterminance). On the other, they are able to enjoy greater advantages by leveraging the ability (knowledge and experience) of another. Ultimately the consumer benefits twice: Internet-based frustrations and indecision are removed whilst new consumption opportunities are created that surpass anything they, themselves, could have produced.

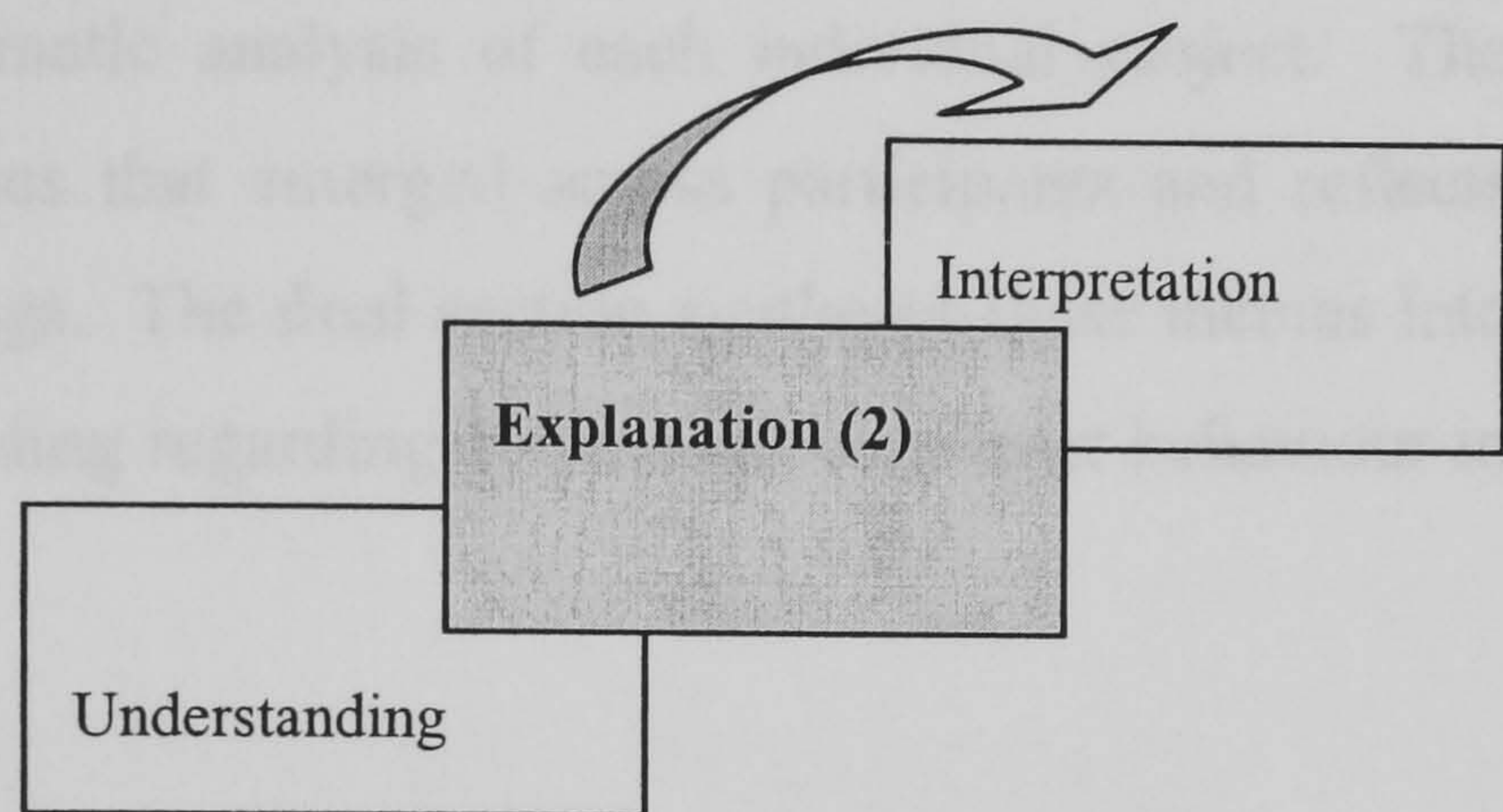
5.9 Reflections

This chapter repairs the breakdown in my assumption that the person engaged in online consumer decision-making will be the same person enjoying the fruits of such decision-making: that consumer and surfer are one and the same. To make sense of this anomalous consumer behaviour, a strategy of iteration (data-literature-data, etc) was pursued. Hence, the first round of iteration revisited the literature on technology adoption which spotlighted the needs of disenchanting consumers. This in turn highlighted the mediating role of other Internet users in the decision-making process and led to a consideration of a new area of literature concerning electronic intermediaries.

A new understanding of online consumer behaviour emerged from this iteration process that was not tied to interface design. Instead, the analytical focus has, by examining the literature on electronic intermediaries, been expanded to encompass Internet-facilitated consumer behaviour. This subtle change in current understanding and future research direction is signified by the identifying label surrogacy. Representing a synthesis of theoretical ideas on technology adoption and intermediation and combined with extrapolations from data, the label surrogacy is significant because it conveys a particular form of online consumer behaviour whilst simultaneously defining key behavioural characteristics.

These characteristics, presented as roles and functions identified in table 15 are used to inform the lines of inquiry driving the second round of interviews. The purpose of this next round of data collection is to confirm, or reject, the idea that consumers are using surrogates in their online consumer-decision making process. Following the format presented in chapter 4, the findings from the second round of data collection are presented in the next chapter.

Explaining Surrogate Consumer Behaviour



6.1 Introduction

This chapter represents a second ‘turn’ of the hermeneutic cycle. The aim is to explain the relationship between the end consumer and their designated online ‘surrogate’ using the insights generated from the review process presented in chapter 5. As such, this chapter signifies a change in research focus: the narrow role of convenience in the design of a consumer interface (chapters 3 and 4) has broadened into a consideration of convenient consumer behaviour in a networked economy.

By emphasising the network economy, as opposed to the Internet, this study recognises the blurring of boundaries occurring between the electronic consumer domain and its high street counterparts. Today, consumers can purchase a product online and collect it in-store; they can return goods purchased through the Internet at local shops; and even download various digital products, such as music and photos, at various stores on the high street. Viewed from this broader perspective, surrogacy (defined as the “delegation of decision-making tasks to a designated third party Internet user”) can be seen as a sophisticated form of convenient consumer behaviour: tedious, or difficult, purchase tasks are delegated to others, thereby increasing the degree of consumption gratification enjoyed by the end consumer.

This chapter follows the same structure used to present the first round of data analysis in chapter 4. The first section presents the lines of inquiry used to guide the next rounds of conversational interviews. Consideration of the themes used to sensitise the researcher during data collection and subsequent analysis are then presented. Section two describes the changes in sampling criteria and outlines the demographic background of the additional participants chosen. This is followed by an interpretive discussion and thematic analysis of each individual subject. The fourth section presents those themes that emerged across participants and reflects how this alters the preceding findings. The final section synthesises these themes into a coherent framework of understanding regarding convenient consumer behaviour in the networked economy.

6.2 Lines of Inquiry

The optimising strategies suggested at the end of the previous chapter are used to form two different but complementary lines of inquiry. Whilst the first line of inquiry focuses on the motivations for using a surrogate, the second line investigates the surrogate's reasons for acting as a dedicated consumer intermediary. Each line of inquiry is stated as a proposition. Taken together they are examined in the context of the decision-making process and the value that is gained by each pair in the purchase relationship.

Line 1. Motivation for surrogate use differs according to the nature of convenience sought by the end consumer. For example, “Does the scope of surrogate influence differ according to the purchase task?” “In what ways do consumption needs affect the type of aid sought from surrogates?” And, “does a surrogates’ task change according to the stage of decision-making a consumer requires help?” And are these elements necessarily exclusive? In other words, how do online consumers *themselves* understand the term surrogacy in relation to their online decision-making activities?

Line 2. The intermediary literature emphasises the economic rewards of third party intervention but these appear to be absent in the case of consumer-related surrogacy. What then are the possible reasons for surrogate help? Is it related to the nature of the task? Are there unique elements in the relationship between surrogate and consumer? Or are there other 'symbolic' benefits enjoyed by the surrogate? Put another way, what benefit does the surrogate gain from this relationship?

Following the same format outlined in chapter 4, these lines of inquiry set the parameters of investigation. As such, they also provide the basis of the coding protocols used to analyse the collected data.

Prejudice

A surrogate has an interdependent relationship based on personal ties with their end consumer. The special nature of this relationship changes a surrogate's motivation for action: monetary payment is replaced by socially driven motives.

6.3 Data Collection

Following the initial round of interviews held during 2000 investigating perceptions of convenience and the consumer interface, a second interview was held in May 2001. Taking the form of a short telephone interview, participants were asked to confirm, or reject, the behavioural anomaly (as yet not labelled or understood) noted during the first round of data analysis. The purpose of this contact was simply to assess the accuracy of the researcher's finding and provide legitimacy for further study. After reviewing new literature aimed at making sense of the now confirmed anomalous behaviour, a third round of interviews were held in December 2002.

The number of participants interviewed during the third round of data collection increased to six, double the original complement of three. This enabled differing perspectives on the surrogacy phenomena to be captured from both parties – the end consumer and the surrogate themselves. Because the aim was to explain how various elements of the surrogate relationship interacted, the original participants were asked to nominate a person who either acted as a surrogate for them, or to whom they acted as a surrogate. These people were approached by the researcher and agreed to be interviewed.

Each ‘surrogate pair’ was interviewed jointly, rather than separately, to facilitate natural discussion of concepts between the pairs. The aim was to triangulate participant subjectivity by allowing the participants to act as natural checks and balances in their understanding of the other’s point of view. In this way, areas of disagreement would be more apparent than if interviewed individually, and particular ideas, or themes, could be expanded organically in the course of the conversation.

Following the format adopted for the first round of interviews and described in chapter 4, raw data was collected using ‘depth interviews’ (McCracken, 1988). Each interview began with a short introduction re-stating the purpose of the study and outlining the method being used. Assurances were given about the anonymity of findings. Each interview opened with the collection of demographic data including Internet access and the frequency of online purchase requests made.

Interviews opened on the topic of surrogacy by discussing the types of requests participants made to each other, including items that related to products, work and social communication. This theme was developed by asking “how would you characterise the requests you make to, or receive as, a surrogate?” and “describe your approach to making your online requests and explain why.” The ‘why’ component of the question was prompted, as in chapter 4, by my interest in the possible limitations of Internet technology vis-à-vis consumer behaviour.

The discussion then moved to focus on the three elements of ‘convenient consumer behaviour’ identified in chapter 4: purchase task, decision-making stage and consumption need. The theme of purchase task was explored by discussing the nature of a routine purchase request as opposed to a non-routine request. Participants were asked “how would you characterise the level of interaction needed for different types of requests?” This helped to raise ideas about the communication issues associated with surrogacy. This theme was continued by discussing the ways participants communicated their consumption wishes, raising issues about the situated context of surrogacy and the disposition of the end consumer. Discussion was opened by asking: “explain how you convey your consumption needs to your surrogate” and, “what happens if they misunderstand you?”

The theme of decision-making stage was raised by asking “when do you seek the assistance of a surrogate?” and “describe the type of help you give to the consumer.” This facet of convenience examines the functional roles adopted by a surrogate during different stages of delegated decision-making. Discussion then considered the scope of surrogate influence by asking participants to “describe the level of flexibility given to the other during a purchase request” and “explain how important it is to retain control of the purchase request and say why.” The why part of the question is prompted by my interest in the relationship between different consumer-types and corresponding surrogate roles.

Discussion then considered the forms of added value enjoyed by both the end consumer, and the surrogate, by asking each to “describe how you benefit from this relationship” This question was designed to encourage reflection of non-economic benefits. To gain an opposing view, participants were also asked “what benefits do you think the other gains from this relationship?” Further discussion looked at the problems associated with using, or being, a surrogate by asking, “describe your frustrations when engaged in a surrogate relationship” and “how do you overcome, or minimise, these frustrations?”

The last measure of convenience concerned consumption need. Participants were asked “how would you characterise the urgency of the request?” and “what happens

if the other person is unavailable?” The interview finished with a more general discussion aimed at reflecting on the meaning of comments already made by asking “Given what you have said about your consumer behaviour, how do you understand the role of the surrogate in your life?” and “What sense does it make to you?”

6.4 Data Analysis

The procedure for data analysis followed exactly the process described in chapter 4 (see pages 59-60 for a fuller description). To recap briefly, interviews were audiotaped and analysed in two stages. The first stage of data analysis recorded the researcher’s reactions to an interview immediately after it had occurred, in an attempt to provide a richer picture and prevent premature data evaluation. The second stage of data analysis occurred when the third round of interviews had been completed. Each interview was considered first in isolation and then by comparing observations across interviews.

Two strategies were used to structure the interviewer’s judgement in the generation of themes. First, broad themes informed by the theories of technology diffusion and adoption were used to consider socio-cultural contexts and individual perspectives. These theories help maintain the consistency in research focus between the initial consideration of interface-designed convenience (chapters 3 & 4) and the subsequent inquiry into convenient consumer behaviour (chapter 5). As before, they provide the background for a specific consideration of the six elements of surrogacy outlined in the preceding chapter.

6.5 Findings

Six participants agreed to participate and were interviewed in pairs. Each pair differed in terms of their ages, educational status, acknowledged Web expertise and stage of Internet adoption. Of the three pairs, two possessed a familial relationship whilst the third was based on a professional relationship.

Surrogate Pairings	Age Range	Occupation	Education	Gender	Adoption Category	Relationship
Pair (A) - Consumer - Surrogate	36-45 36-45	Sales Clerk Programmer	College University	Female Male	Late Adopter Innovator	Family
Pair (B) - Consumer - Surrogate	46-55 26-35	Manager Secretary	University High School	Male Female	Early Adopter Early Adopter	Work
Pair (C) - Consumer - Surrogate	55+ 20-25	Hairdresser Hairdresser	Professional Professional	Female Male	Laggard Late Adopter	Family

Table 16 Demographic Breakdown of Surrogate Pairs

The following sections relate to the six suggested components of surrogacy. Each component is considered in entirety and includes comments from each of the participants.

6.5.1 Determination of Product Offerings

All participating surrogates (hereafter termed surrogates) had provided unsolicited information found during an Internet search, to an end consumer. The type of product information volunteered ranged from a “collection of sites useful for further investigation” (surrogate B) to “information about a particular hair product” (surrogate C) to “technical instructions for repairing a knitting machine” (surrogate A).

Discussions about the timing, and selection, of unsolicited information revealed that surrogates generally tailored their offerings to a pre-existing awareness of need. For example, surrogate A observed that “my mother-in-law spent half an hour talking about the problems she was having with her knitting machine when she visited.” Surrogate B also noted the role of general conversation as a guide to need awareness commenting: “we’d been chatting about the problems of finding decent holiday accommodation at the weekend.”

All participating end-consumers (hereafter called end-consumers) who received unsolicited product information used the information provided by the surrogate. The degree of information use varied from: reducing the consideration set by “eliminating the most irrelevant sites” (consumer A) to; facilitating product evaluation by “comparing reviews of different hair products” (consumer C); to making an online purchase. For example, surrogate B recounts, “my friend thought the information I’d given her was great” and as a result they “actually contacted one of the holiday companies I’d given her”.

One out of three surrogates stated they had volunteered product information unconnected with any expressed consumer need. For example surrogate C stated: “I told a friend about the increase in house prices in her area” and “there was a great Internet deal on washing machines that I mentioned to my girlfriend.” In each case the end consumer did not use the information offered because the information was either inappropriate: “she wasn’t interested in buying a washing machine at the time” (surrogate C) or redundant “what was I supposed to do with the information? It’s not like I’m looking to move.”

Discussions considering the motivation for providing unsolicited information gave respondents the opportunity to talk about the nature of surrogacy in ways not open through questions directed at modes of decision-support. Participants were asked to consider what surrogates gained from offering unsolicited product information. Two themes emerged: altruism and self-interest.

Participants who expressed a familial connection with the surrogate highlighted altruistic motives. For example, surrogate B commented: “I enjoy helping my daughter with her homework” whilst consumer C remarked: “my son is always looking out for me.” Consumer A however, suggests the lack of complaint as evidence of selflessness: “he doesn’t make a fuss or delay when I ask him to look something up for me”. In contrast, self-interest was the dominant perception when the connection with the surrogate was based on friendship or work. Consumer B for example, commented: “giving me associated travel information means she can go home earlier”. Similarly, surrogates A and C observe the benefits gained by them

when they influence others. For example, surrogate A commented “when I arrange things like the booze cruise we spend time doing what I want” and “I get a say in what we should buy” (surrogate C).

6.5.2 Information Search

All participants have either requested of another, or conducted for another, a search for product related information on the Internet. When requests have been made, surrogates have generally viewed them as time-ineffective because they “take longer than a normal search” (surrogate C). All surrogates noted the high level of communication required to conduct a search on behalf of an end consumer. This was variously attributed to “the lack of a clearly stated request” (surrogate B) or “I needed some idea how, or why, it was going to be used” (surrogate A) and even “zero knowledge about the product I was looking for” (surrogate C).

In contrast, none of the participating end consumers perceived time-related search costs. Making the distinction between absolute and relative time-savings, end consumer B remarked: “I could have done the travel search quicker myself, but delegating the task to my secretary allowed me to attend to more important things.” In a similar vein, end consumer C referred to their poor Internet ability stating; “it would have taken me longer to find the hair competition because I don’t know how to work the Web” whilst end consumer A emphasized the superior navigational skills of their surrogate: “even if it takes him longer than normal, he still does it in less time than I could.”

Further discussion looked at the impact of miscommunication on the task-oriented behaviours of both surrogates and consumers. Questions addressed the potential for a poor exchange of information during the information search process. None of the end consumers felt they had given incorrect information when making a request. Only surrogate B acknowledged they had misunderstood the search requests of end consumers resulting in “time wasted doing the search again.”

Emphasising the broader context of surrogate relationships, paired-participants B observed several instances when a surrogate could misunderstand the request of an end consumer. For example, surrogate B highlighted the lack of personal familiarity characteristic of work-based requests with the end consumer: “senior management assume I know what they want when they ask me to make travel arrangements for them”. Ignorance of a consumer’s purchase tastes can also frustrate the surrogate: “I didn’t tell her I was collecting air miles with British Airways” (end consumer B); as can being unaware of the end consumer’s consumption context: “I didn’t realise he was planning to meet with the Dutch team en-route to Chicago” (surrogate B).

Discussion then considered the roles adopted by surrogates when conducting information searches on behalf of other consumers. Four out of six participants highlighted the surrogate’s ability to act as an information broker. Surrogates B and C commented on their ability to “combine various different sources of information” (surrogate C) to give the end consumer a “comprehensive picture of the different products” (surrogate B). For example, surrogate A “double checks the spec’s [sic] for new software downloads listed on manufacturers websites” by “monitoring the comments posted by “techie’s” on specialist mail-groups.” Integrating electronic and non-electronic information sources as an aid to consumer decision-making was highlighted by end consumer B: “often, I will have a pack that contains an e-ticket bought online and a hotel and car reservation bought through a local travel agent” because “this gets round the information gaps sometimes found on the Web” (surrogate B).

Three out of six participants also observed a surrogate’s ability to translate online information into a format understandable by the end consumer. For example, end consumer C comments: “I always forget to include the cost of postage and packaging when I’m thinking about buying something via the Web” and “it was only when it was pointed out to me, that I realised the price was in dollars, not pounds, and I’d have to account for the exchange rate.” Instructing end consumers in the basic principles of business-to-consumer e-commerce is a theme echoed by surrogate A: “I’ve spent many a time explaining why some products are better bought online – faster delivery, cheaper or they have a better selection. But some products you just

need to touch or smell. And these are best bought offline.” End consumer’s A and C also highlight the “invaluable advice” (surrogate C) conveyed by the surrogate when communicating product information. Recalling the problems choosing a digital camera from the selection provided by a surrogate, end consumer A remarked: “he warned me that I would need extra memory for one of the cameras and a second battery charger for the other.”

6.5.3 Trust

Five out of six participants agreed that trust was “the foundation” (end consumer A) of their surrogate-consumer relationship. Only one participant, end consumer B, viewed trust as “an over-rated issue”, but attributed this perspective to the contractual obligations inherent in a working association commenting: “[my secretary] can hardly refuse my requests to search for product information” because “it’s part of her job description”.

Pointing to the moral obligation felt when friends and family make requests, surrogate B remarked “I find it very difficult to say no when friends ask me to search the Web for them”. In a similar vein, surrogate B recognises the constraining power of promises: “sometimes I say yes without thinking and then wish I hadn’t” but “unless you want to lose a friend, you have to do what you said you would.” In contrast, end consumer C relies on family duty: “he has to do it, otherwise he knows he’s going to get lots of earache.” Four participants note instances of obligations that are chosen rather than imposed. These types of obligations are seen as “favours” (end consumer A and surrogate B) where the surrogate has “offered to search” (surrogate A) instead of being asked or compelled.

Further discussion considered the types of trust present in the surrogate-consumer relationship. Questions asked participants to characterise their surrogate-based relationship and consider instances when trust was used. End consumer B spotlighted their “confidence in the ability” of their surrogate, which created an “expectation of ready-made success” (surrogate A). For example, end consumer A

remarked: “he can always find the information I need, even when others can’t.” whilst surrogate C will “usually manage to find something appropriate, even if it’s not exactly what they wanted.”

Emphasising the broader context of a trusting relationship, all participants note the impact of personal ties on the level of trust in a surrogate. For example, surrogate B highlights the “problems faced” by a surrogate when asked to look for information by “distant colleagues and unknown members of staff”. Lacking the frequency of association to “build up an idea of what they want” (surrogate B) or “create a level of trust in their actions” (end consumer B), the information provided is either “double-checked for accuracy” or “deemed insufficient for purpose” (end consumer B).

Conversely, paired participants A and C note “high levels of trust” (end consumer A) in surrogate relationships based on intimate knowledge. Surrogates A and C believe trust resides in having a “good understanding of what the consumer really wants” (surrogate C) or “knowing the reason for their request” (surrogate A). For example, surrogate A remarked that “because I knew what spec his PC was, I knew he didn’t have the memory for the software he wanted, so I suggested a different software that would do the ‘whizz-bang’ stuff he was after but on his current PC.” A different perspective is offered by end consumers A and C who point to the tacit knowledge of their surrogate as one basis for creating trust. End consumer C for example, remarks, “he knows what I mean by a ‘reasonable’ and ‘3-star hotel’” because the surrogate had “been to enough 3-star with me on family holidays.”

Discussion then considered areas of possible mistrust. None of the end consumers thought their surrogate had either lied about their efforts, or possessed a hidden agenda in their product selection, despite lacking supporting evidence. For example, where a surrogate had conducted a fruitless information search on behalf of another, such as, “the information hadn’t been published yet” (surrogate B), or they “couldn’t find that particular product” (surrogate C), the surrogate was regarded as “having tried their best” (end consumer C). Similarly, where the surrogate had presented products for consumer evaluation, such as “the choice of two digital phones from a possible 74” (surrogate A) or “a site dedicated to Treseme products” (surrogate C),

the surrogate was regarded as having “given the best possible options” (end consumer B) for consideration. In each instance, the end consumer believed their surrogate to be “truthful” (end consumer C), possessing “high personal integrity” (end consumer B) and “always reliable” (end consumer A).

6.5.4 Internet Familiarity

Five participants agreed that a surrogate’s familiarity with the online domain was a “large reason why I ask others to look for stuff on the Web for me” (end consumer A). Only end consumer B disagreed: “I’m a proficient Web user and able to find what I want, when I need to” but, “getting the secretaries to search for mundane information frees up my time”.

All participants made a distinction between a surrogate’s familiarity with the online shopping domain as compared to their familiarity with Internet technologies. For example, end consumer C “looks to [their surrogate] to protect me from the fraud scams that are everywhere on the Web.” Supporting this perspective surrogate C comments, “I instinctively look for the security padlock symbols which non-users miss or don’t understand.”

Minimising financial risk by guaranteeing the reputation of different online merchants was highlighted by surrogate A: “experience means I generally know which vendors are reliable and those which look too-good-to-be-true.” Discussion revealed that all participating end consumers trusted their surrogate’s assessments of the “truthfulness of published product claims” (end consumer C) and the “accuracy of vendor statements” (end consumer B). For example, end consumer A was “glad” they had “trusted the instincts of [their surrogate] not to buy from a particular site because it turned out the site was pedalling ‘knock-offs’, and we would have been liable.”

Further discussion looked at surrogate’s ability to provide relevant feedback for end consumer consideration. Questions asked participants to identify instances when the feedback was considered relevant and say why. End consumer B, points to the

“wealth of supporting information provided” whilst end consumer C, prefers the “accompanying advice” which “helps me make sense of it all.” All the participating surrogates offer a different perspective: expertise in Web navigation. For example, surrogate A comments “I know how to form a search query to produce relevant hits”. Surrogate B, who “uses a variety of different sources” to “avoid the pitfalls and ensure the information is as appropriate as possible echoes this perspective.

Discussion finally considered the motivation for using surrogates as part of a consumer’s online decision-making process. Questions addressed the value end consumers gained using an intermediary during this stage of decision-making. Two participants (surrogate A and end consumer B) emphasised the existing product-related expertise possessed by the surrogate making them “a natural choice to root out the bargains and avoid the white elephants” (end consumer B). Expanding this point, surrogate A notes, “even people who use the Internet a lot will ask me to look for, and download, certain software” because of his “reputation” as a multimedia expert amongst friends and family. Leveraging the “comparative Web expertise” of another was also suggested by end consumer C: “if I want a cheap flight to somewhere then I’ll ask my friend because she’s turned Internet holiday hunting into a hobby. But if I was thinking of buying a DVD player I’ll ask my son to look for me, because he knows the different makes.”

6.6 Discussion

Several observations emerge from reviewing the presented data and concern the adaptive nature of online consumer behaviour. First, there is evidence to suggest that surrogate usage is not limited to consumers with poor self-efficacy, i.e. people who lack confidence in their ability to use the Internet. Consumer-related tasks are also being divided between technically proficient Internet consumers according to assessments of relative expertise. One self-confessed ‘Web expert’ may approach another for example, if the latter is perceived to have a better understanding of a particular product, or familiarity with a particular Internet application. By allocating consumption tasks in this way, skilled Internet consumers are displaying

sophisticated division of labour principles: time, experience, knowledge and abilities are divided to produce the greatest efficiency gains without sacrificing ‘good’ outcomes.

Consumers also understand the value of the social prestige associated with using a surrogate. For those consumers that lack access to the Internet, using a surrogate allows the end consumer to retain their social place by “keeping up with the Jones”. For others, using a surrogate is a symbol of status. This occurs when surrogates are used to conduct search activities which the end consumer could have done more quickly on their own. This type of surrogate usage is most apparent in work-based relationships, where the delegation of tasks (by managers to their secretaries for example), heightens the standing of the end consumer relative to their peer group.

In addition to the perceived symbolic benefits of using surrogates, end consumers also receive a number of functional benefits. (A summary is presented in table 17). One benefit is the reduction in effort needed by consumers to make a satisfactory decision. Having used the navigational expertise of their surrogate to identify a relevant dataset, the end consumer also transfers the onus of making sense of this retrieved dataset to the surrogate. Consequently, it is left to the surrogate to determine the significance of different product attributes based on explicitly stated needs and an implicit understanding of a consumer’s values. In this context, the surrogate filters information to create a much reduced consideration set for appraisal by the end consumer.

The ability to leverage the creativity of human intelligence to achieve optimal consumption outcomes is perceived as another important benefit. Surrogates are able to intuitively combine different information sources to produce product offerings that exceed the expectations of the end consumer. For example, a surrogate may decide to combine different online formats to determine product suitability such as consulting product review sites and dedicated listserv’s. Equally, a consumer may seek to provide a composite picture of potential use (such as hotel proximity to local tourist attractions and public transport), by viewing several different websites simultaneously. A surrogate can also choose to combine the electronic information

domain with its non-electronic counterpart, ringing a travel agent to elaborate, confirm, or match flight prices found on the Internet for example. Each example represents the value a surrogate adds to routine and non-routine consumption requests.

For products which represent high involvement purchases, the ability of the surrogate to advise the consumer about the relative merits of competing products may be seen as an important benefit. Using tacit knowledge borne of close personal ties (with family or friends), a surrogate is able to create consideration sets that enhance a consumer's probability of making a 'correct' choice. This is because they are able to (i) tailor their findings to the *unspoken* consumption values of the end consumer and (ii) convey this information in a manner that can be easily understood by the end consumer. The translation of consumer-specific Internet jargon (e.g. JPEGs & MP3, wish lists, paypal, blogs, etc) is particularly useful when the end consumer is wary of the Internet as a shopping channel, and distrustful of making online purchases.

An end consumer trusts a surrogate in several different ways. At one level, the end consumer has confidence in the surrogate's ability to provide them with the benefits they desire. Relating to the complexity of the Internet domain and associated consumption tasks these benefits include: search and identification (of particular sites or products); combination of information sources (online formats and offline contexts); reduction of the consideration set to manageable proportions; and the provision of additional commentary to aid meaningful decision-making. Collectively these benefits represent a consumer leveraging the expertise and creativity of another to produce an optimal consumption outcome.

At another level, the end consumer can also *transfer trust* to the surrogate rather than *invest trust in* the surrogate's abilities (as outlined above). Trust is transferred when the end consumer has limited, or non-existent, knowledge of the online domain and requires a third party to authenticate the veracity of online merchants. Suspicious of technologically-based security mechanisms, and unacquainted with examples of Internet best-practice, end consumers rely on a surrogate's familiarity with the online

domain to inform their assessments about the reliability and credibility of various online merchants.

In contrast, negative perceptions of a surrogate's motives may influence a consumer's choice of surrogate, and even the decision to use a surrogate. If the consumer does not believe that the surrogate can provide salient functional or symbolic benefits, usage is unlikely. For example, some end consumers enjoy the activity of shopping, whilst others may prefer to maintain control over the purchase process. Still others, particularly those guided by aesthetic or self-expressive considerations, may have concerns that the surrogate would not know what they like.

Situational factors unique to a consumer's time and place may also affect the decision to use a surrogate. Restricted access to the Internet, either temporarily (by being separated from an Internet connection), or permanently (by not possessing an Internet connection), can encourage surrogate usage. In contrast, surrogate use can be discouraged if the time needed to sustain a surrogate relationship is limited. Delegating consumer-related tasks to another increases the amount of communication required between parties, and thus time spent on a particular consumption task.

Taken together, the three elements of surrogacy identified above – functional, symbolic and situational – represent the different ways a surrogate can add value to the end consumer. Different types of consumers pursue different types of value adding strategies: Web-phobic users are given the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of Internet shopping by removing the perceived hassle (mental effort, physical discomfort and financial expense) associated with Internet use. Meanwhile disenchanted consumers are given the ability to extend their consumption horizons by leveraging the expertise of others. Experienced Internet consumers however, seek efficiency gains by using the specific expertise of others to achieve results more quickly than they could themselves.

Value Added by a Surrogate	Examples
Symbolic	Status Social Acceptance
Functional	Expertise Advice Trust
Situational	Access Time (<i>negative</i>)

Table 17 Benefits of Surrogate Usage

The functional benefits listed above represent the different types of assistance provided by a surrogate when supporting the online decision-making processes of others. For example, unsolicited information is sometimes provided when the surrogate is aware of an implicit consumption need resulting from mundane conversations and everyday interaction with the end consumer. This helps the end consumer to recognise and develop a clearer understanding of their consumption need(s) creating the foundation for subsequent stages of decision making which may, or may not, include surrogate assistance. Passing on information in the absence of an implicit need is counterproductive. At best the information is ignored, and at worst the end consumer perceives an ulterior motive and sees the surrogate as manipulative.

<i>Functional Benefit</i>	<i>Form of Decision Support</i>	<i>Examples of Surrogate Assistance</i>
Expertise & Trust	Need recognition	Helps consumer recognise and develop a clearer understanding of need Basis of next stage of decision-making; confidence in surrogate choice
Expertise, Advice & Trust	Information Search	Act as gatekeeper – gather and filter information to reduce the consideration set to a manageable size Act as broker – translate information making the consideration set understandable
Expertise & Advice	Trust	Confidence invested in a surrogate's ability to produce expected results Authority to determine honesty of online merchants is transferred to a surrogate

Table 18 Types of Surrogate Assistance

When faced with an explicit consumption request the surrogate can assist in one of two ways. They can act as an information gatekeeper gathering and filtering information to reduce the consideration set to manageable proportions. Or, they can

act as an information broker rendering Internet jargon understandable to the end consumer. Although complementary, each search function can be pursued independently of the others depending on the type and needs of the end consumer. For example, novice Internet users may have a clear idea of the product they want to purchase online but are unfamiliar with the 'jargon' explaining product attributes. In contrast, skilled Internet users may require help accessing particular sites but are quite capable of making sense of the associated information provided.

The last, but possibly most important, form of surrogate assistance is the provision of guarantees given to the end consumer against the opportunistic behaviour of online merchants. Consumers who are generally suspicious of the behaviour of online merchants, or apprehensive of trust mechanisms designed to support online decision making, surrender their authority to determine the trustworthiness of an online merchant to a surrogate. This in turn requires the end consumer to have a high level of confidence in the personal integrity of their selected surrogate: unscrupulous action here could leave the end consumer facing a financial loss. When trust is reciprocated, a surrogate can help the end consumer overcome their indecision and reluctance to make online purchases.

6.7 Reconstructing the Consumer Intermediary As Surrogacy

Using these observations it is possible to reconstruct the roles and functions of consumer intermediaries (outlined in chapter 5) into the properties of surrogacy. As noted in chapter 5, surrogate activities are consumer-driven whereas intermediary actions are market-influenced. To reflect this change in focus, market function has been re-designated surrogate role. (See table 19).

Determination of product offerings replaces the market task of matching buyers and sellers. Two decision-support functions are sited in this role: need recognition and information search. Need recognition refers to the provision of unsolicited information by the surrogate to the end consumer. This action helps to clarify the consumption need and provides the basis for future search requests. Information

search however, refers to the provision of solicited information based on explicit requests made by an end consumer. In contrast to the notion of a “one-stop-shop” value-adding strategy presented in chapter 5, surrogacy splits decision heuristics into two distinct functions - gatekeeper and broker. Although complementary search strategies, separating these functions highlights the heterogeneity of consumer needs when using surrogates to search the Internet.

<i>Surrogate Role</i>	<i>Decision Support Function</i>	<i>Potential Added Value to Consumer</i>
Determination of Product Offerings	Need Recognition	Surrogate passes information to consumers based on implicit awareness of need, supports decision-making clarity
	Information Search	Reduce search costs for consumers by gathering and filtering information Increase consumption horizons by translating information
Facilitation of Transactions	Trust	Confidence invested in a surrogate’s ability and personal integrity Guarantee to consumers against the opportunistic behaviour of sellers
Internet Expertise	Technical Proficiency, Knowledge & Experience	Ability to produce satisficing outcomes, increases consumer trust and confidence

Table 19 The Decision-Support Functions of Surrogates

Trust emerges as an important decision support function for surrogates. A lack of confidence in either the ability or integrity of a surrogate can prevent a purchase decision (online or off) from being taken. Equally, providing guarantees against the opportunistic behaviour of online vendors is a function particularly valued by consumers when physical presence is absent. Such reassurances help consumers overcome their fears and distrust of the Internet as another shopping channel.

The artificial separation between the consumer interface and decision-support tools can no longer be maintained. A recognised proficiency in Internet use sufficient to warrant a reputation as a “Web expert” involves the ability to navigate the Internet successfully (using appropriate search engines and other decision-support tools) and the experience to discern the credibility of different websites (using clear transaction procedures and reliable security mechanisms for example). Possessing one type of expertise without the other leaves the end consumer vulnerable to sub-optimal outcomes or opportunistic practices respectively.

6.8 Reflections

This chapter represents a second turn of the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. Data, taken from a second round of conversations, is presented exploring the nature of surrogacy within the context of consumer decision-making in a networked economy. Synthesized constructs drawn from theories of electronic intermediaries and models of consumer decision-making, (outlined in chapter 5), were used to limit the scope of inquiry and focused the collection of data on four themes: need recognition, information search, trust and Internet familiarity.

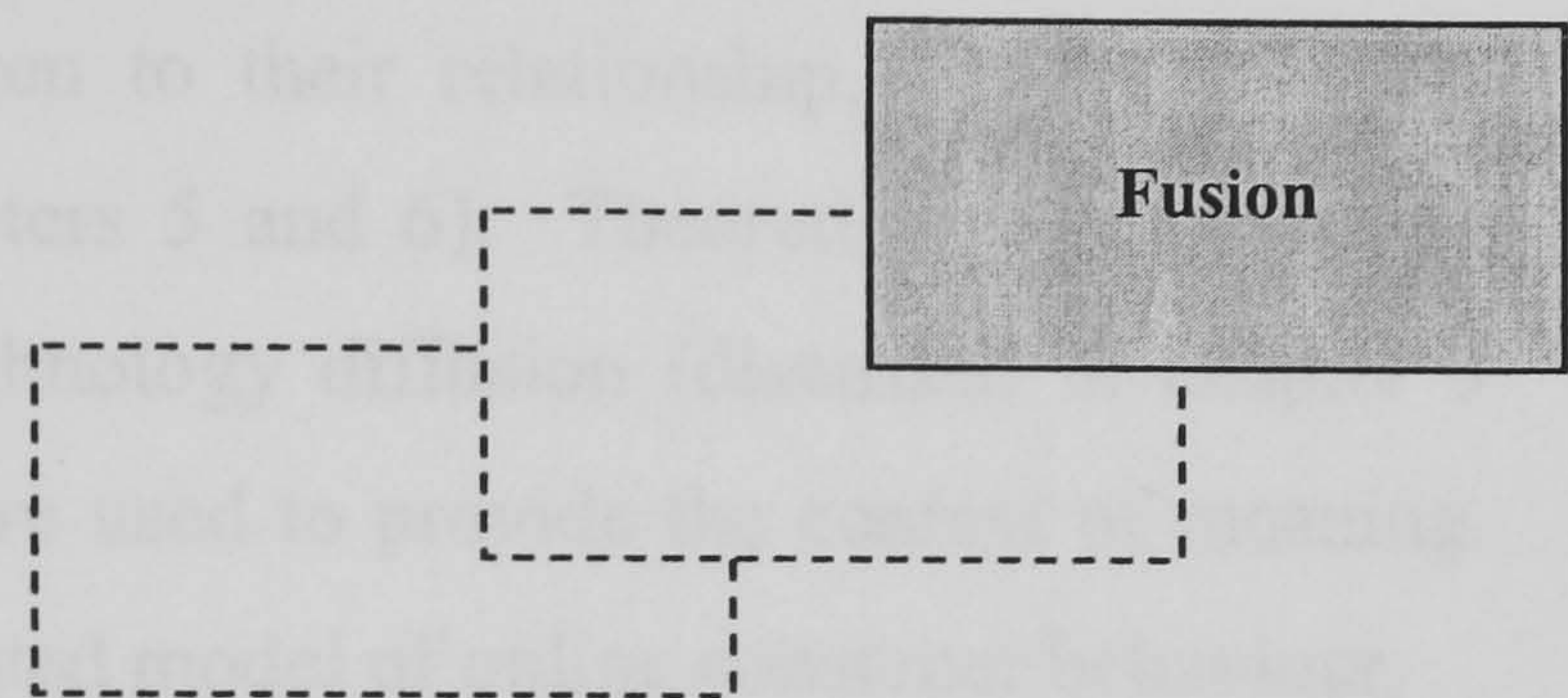
From an analysis of these themes, surrogacy was explained as a form of adaptive online consumer behaviour. Potential online consumers are approaching acknowledged 'expert' users of the Internet as a means of minimising (i) some of the technical complexity and limitations of the Internet as a shopping channel (information overload and risk); and/or (ii) leveraging the knowledge and experience of others. These motivations often blur given the proficiency and consumption need of the end consumer. As a result, surrogacy represents an optimising behavioural strategy aimed at maximising personal consumption utility: the end consumer would not be able to produce the same consumption fit without leveraging the creativity and expertise of their selected surrogate.

Three benefits – symbolic, functional and situational – were suggested as motives for engaging a surrogate in an end consumer's online decision-making processes. Perceived symbolic and situational benefits relate to circumstances divorced from an online consumer's decision-making process. Functional benefits however, directly support a consumer's online decision-making. Here, the surrogate provides valued assistance in the form of expertise, advice and trust.

Transferring authority to determine the trustworthiness of a vendor from the consumer to another person represents a significant departure from classic models of consumer decision-making: trust in high street merchants is assured because potential shoppers can physically demand repayment in the event of opportunistic behaviour on the part of the vendor. The same is not true of the Internet where many

merchants are virtual. Such is the value gained by potential online consumers from this assistive role that the surrogate phenomena suggests the need to create a dedicated model of online consumer decision-making, one that includes the role of trust.

Squaring the Circle: the Internet, the Consumer and the Convenient Surrogate



7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a synthesis of ideas by combining the separate findings and reflections presented in the last 3 chapters into a coherent whole. As a result this chapter acts as a hermeneutic full stop, punctuating the cycle of reflection at a point where contextual meaning can be provided. In so doing, the reader is provided with a reflective framework enabling them to make sense of the contributions made by this study.

Achieving this type of ‘fusion of horizons’ involves three levels of reflection. The first level reflects on the findings produced. Questions asked here include: “are the findings and interpretations still relevant?” and “how do the various interpretations relate to each other?” The second level of reflection focuses on the method used to generate these findings and interpretations. Here, the relative strengths and weaknesses of the research framework described in chapter 2 are considered. The final level of reflection requires a re-examination of ‘me-as-researcher’. Questions considered here include: “how did I *personally* affect the research outcomes?”;

“would another person have produced different results using the same research framework?” and “does it matter?”

7.2 Reflection on the Findings

This section will appraise the relevance of the first set of findings, made three years ago, outlining the principal HCI components of a consumer interface (as described in chapter 4). Consideration is then given to their relationship, if any, with the surrogate phenomena (discussed in chapters 5 and 6). Theoretical notions drawn from consumer decision-making and technology diffusion (discussed in chapter 3 and referred to in subsequent chapters) are used to provide the context of meaning. From this blend of ideas emerges a dedicated model of online consumer behaviour.

7.2.1 Reflection on the Consumer Interface

To recap, it was proposed at the end of chapter 4 that the design of a consumer interface involved supporting a consumer’s perceptions of convenience online. This in turn required the consideration of three inter-related elements: purchase task, decision stage and consumption context. Today, it is possible to see these elements, to varying degrees and in different guises, in the decision-support tools and web-site design formats used by online vendors.

To illustrate the point, the web sites of two commercially successful online vendors, ebay.co.uk (a leading virtual business) and Tesco.co.uk (a leading ‘click-and-mortar’ business) are considered. Both online vendors serve specific consumer markets (auctions and supermarkets respectively) which require them to assess the form(s) of convenience valued by their customers and then develop tools and formats that can support these unique requirements.

Table 20 demonstrates that many forms of decision support exist depending on the consumption need experienced, and purchase task pursued, by the consumer. Some of these needs may be of a generic nature and relate to the broader issue of a

consumer's stage of decision-making. For example, searching for product information can generally be satisfied in one of two ways: via a direct query using a search engine or, by browsing product categories for relevant items. In contrast, some consumption needs are specific to a particular product or, in the case of ebay, a particular sales forum. Additional forms of interface-based decision support are required in these circumstances.

	<i>Design Elements of a Consumer Interface</i>	<i>Ebay.co.uk</i>	<i>Tesco.co.uk</i>
Generic CI Elements	New product offerings	✓	✓
	Sales promotions	✓	✓
	Recommendations	✓	✓
	Search Box	✓	✓
	Product Categories	✓	✓
	E-mail notification	✓	✓
	Viewing History	✓	✓
	One-click™ shopping	✓	✓
Unique CI Elements	Item Watch facility	✓	
	Repeat Product Checklists		✓
	Recipe Suggestions		✓
	Currency converter	✓	
	Seller ratings	✓	
	Product Ratings		✓

Table 20 Varying Guises of a Consumer Interface

For example, providing potential bidders with a facility to monitor bid items is invaluable for consumers seeking to manage their bid criteria on non-routine purchase items. However, this type of consumer interface is inappropriate for a grocery store such as Tesco's, where the bulk of their consumer purchases are low-involvement and repeat buys. Here, consumers are supported by reducing the effort of manually selecting routine products by presenting a checklist of pre-selected items to the consumer for a purchase decision.

Table 20 shows that a single 'consumer interface' does not exist. Generic forms of convenience-based decision support (including those listed above) can be seen on most successful interface design formats, especially those that have bought Amazon's layout franchise. But these will have to be supported by unique decision tools that support the specific convenience requirements of a vendor's target market. As such the broad elements of a consumer interface designed using the properties of

convenience (discussed in chapter 4) remain relevant, whilst the inclusion of specific modes of convenience suggest that there are an infinite number of ‘consumer interfaces’ possible.

Table 20 also highlights the lack of tools available that can support a consumer’s product evaluation needs. Most sites have limited evaluation capacity – the UK electrical store Comet allows online shoppers to compare 3 products side by side whilst Amazon provides lists of items last viewed but not their product attributes – but these tend to be within site applications. Where stores exist that allow a consumer to compare multiple sites, such as Kelkoo, returns are based on the relevance and recall of a particular product rather than specific attributes or compatibility.

7.2.2 Reflections on Surrogacy

A behavioural anomaly emerged from the data analysis relating to the design guidelines of a consumer interface incorporating the properties of ‘convenience’. This aberrant behaviour challenged notions of human-computer interaction by separating the end user (i.e the consumer) from the Internet domain (or potential purchase environment). Instead, consumers were using intermediaries to conduct, on their behalf, various stages of *online* decision-making. Following a systematic process of exploration involving a further literature review and data analysis (chapters 5 and 6) these intermediaries were given the label ‘surrogates’ and their properties described.

An initial thought concerning this peculiar online consumer behaviour was the possibility that surrogacy may represent the evaluatory ‘missing link’ in the development of a consumer interface. The idea was that people used the efforts of others as a labour saving device. Instead of trawling through and becoming overwhelmed by increasingly large sets of product information, the end consumer could delegate this stage of online decision-making to a known and trusted third party.

Whilst this activity is undoubtedly occurring, data analysis suggests that it is a side-effect of a more sophisticated behavioural strategy aimed at maximising personal utility rather than minimising personal effort. End consumers carefully select their surrogates based on an ability to provide a 'better outcome' than they could create themselves. Such outcomes could range from the creation of a reduced consideration set to the provision of additional information. In both instances, a surrogate's actions help facilitate a consumer's decision-making process, rather than simply managing information overload.

Surprisingly, the desire to leverage the expertise of others is not limited to consumers that exhibit poor self-efficacy, or that are disenchanted with the Internet as a shopping channel. It is also prevalent amongst self-confessed 'Web experts' seeking to enjoy the convenience benefits accruing from a division of labour: it is easier and quicker to approach another user whose expertise in a particular product domain, or software application, is known to be better than their own.

Using another human to engage in multi-dimensional information filtering is a highly effective strategy for overcoming the limitations of logic-based computer processing that characterise the Internet, and bedevil search efforts trying to clarify fuzzy consumption needs. Unlike computers, surrogates possess tacit knowledge of the consumption values prized by the end consumer. These values are based on shared personal histories and include subjective elements, e.g. understanding what is meant by 'value for money.' As a result, consumers gain twice – not only do they access the expertise of others but the consideration set created matches their unspoken needs.

As a behavioural strategy used by end consumers, surrogate usage merely extends the concept of convenient consumer behaviour into a networked economy. Leveraging the time and effort of others produces labour savings to the end consumer. In contrast to the first round of findings, where labour savings meant less time spent on tedious routine purchases, surrogacy means that less time is wasted conducting extensive non-routine searches.

These three factors – leveraging expertise, tacit knowledge and breadth of surrogate use – have widespread implications. These range from: the design of decision support tools (such as recommendation agents based on user profiling and browsing patterns); to issues of technology diffusion (which could be higher than currently thought); to the development of new models of consumer behaviour in a networked economy.

7.2.3 Fusion: A Dedicated Model of Online Consumer Behaviour

Following the consideration given to the individual findings, there appear to be areas of synergy between a consumer's decision-making processes (outlined in chapters 3 & 4) and the activities of surrogate support (discussed in chapters 5 & 6). When combined, these overlapping areas form a dedicated model of online consumer behaviour. The arrangement of component stages is outlined in table 21 below.

Decision Stage	Research Findings	Potential Added Value
1. Need Recognition	Consumer Interface	Consumer recognises they have a need which forms the basis of an explicit search strategy – either online or offline, conducted with a surrogate's aid or without.
2. Information Search	Surrogacy	Consumers adopt a sophisticated product information gathering and filtration strategy according to the desired purchase task. Surrogates are used to reduce the consideration set (act as gatekeeper) or provide additional information to support product evaluation (act as information broker).
3. Evaluation	Consumer Interface	Consumers compare prospective goods and services offline, at leisure, using decision heuristics.
4. Trust	Surrogacy	<i>Guarantee to consumers against the opportunistic behaviour of sellers. This includes transference of authority to a surrogate or awareness of trustee mechanisms and symbols.</i>
5. Purchase	Consumer Interface	The customer chooses to place an order themselves either online or in-store. In the event of online purchases the consumer can request the services of a surrogate to facilitate the purchase order or download.
6. Post-purchase Evaluation		Consumers evaluate purchases with a view to future online decision-making and surrogate involvement.

Table 21 The Six-stages of Online Consumer Decision-Making

An obvious difference is the increased number of decision-making stages (from 5 to 6) taken by an online consumer. This reflects consumer concerns with the virtual nature of the purchasing medium, specifically the perceived problems of security and privacy, when compared with purchases made on the high street. As a result, the issue of trust is both unique to the Internet domain and, as findings discussed in chapter 6 highlight, sufficiently important to warrant consideration by itself. In terms of the decision-making model, trust emerges as a factor located between product evaluation and purchase: although a consumer may have selected an online product to buy they abort the online purchase because they distrust the electronic medium, and/or online vendor.

The second difference relates to the change in descriptors used to convey the increased complexity of making online purchase decisions. Unlike purchase decisions made in-store, the Internet provides consumers with a greater choice of goods and services. Consequently, consumers are presented with expanded consideration sets requiring more sophisticated search and evaluation strategies. The resulting *depth of decision-making* faced by online consumers directly affects the second and third stages of decision-making - information search and evaluation respectively.

The electronic search for information affects the depth of an online consumer's decision-making by overloading the consumer with information on a specific product. Whereas manual information searches include the translation of product jargon within general information acquisition strategies, electronic searches are able to separate these into two distinct activities - gatekeeper and broker. Although complementary search strategies, separating these activities highlights the heterogeneity of consumer needs when using the Internet – a situation demonstrated during investigations of surrogate functions.

For example, a consumer may be proficient in searching for products and understanding the purchase requirements in one online vendor format, such as amazon for example, but require greater tuition and translation of purchase processes when using a different type of online merchant such as ebay. Only the consumer's

unique consumption context will determine the interplay between information strategies designed for information acquisition and/or translation.

The problem of electronic information overload is particularly acute when the consumer is faced with non-routine purchase decisions. Here, the desired product is unfamiliar to the consumer requiring greater levels of information acquisition and translation to inform the decision-making process. This results in unwieldy consideration sets requiring the consumer to juggle complex evaluation criteria. In these circumstances, time is needed to ponder different selections and change the criteria as required. Because deliberative evaluation is poorly supported online (as noted in chapter 4 following investigations into the creation of a consumer interface), these types of product evaluations generally occur offline, where the consumer is able to consider all elements of a proposed purchase at leisure.

The Internet also offers consumers a complementary shopping channel thereby expanding a consumer's *scope of decision-making*. Decisions are no longer limited to a consideration of different products and/or competing vendors but also require consideration of the most appropriate purchase channel given unique consumption contexts. For example, a consumer decides to buy a Pen-drive on the way home from work rather than wait for it to be delivered the following day so that he can work on an important report. Similarly, a consumer may decide not to purchase the shirt they had tried on at the mall, preferring to gain online discount points by adding it to other purchases made via the Internet.

The scope of online consumer decision-making most clearly affects the stages of need recognition and purchase. In both instances the consumer has to decide on their decision-making strategy when faced with several possible permutations. For example, do they complete all stages of decision-making (from need recognition to purchase) in one shopping domain (e.g. at the mall or on the Internet). Or, do they conduct several decision-making stages online but complete the purchase in-store, and vice versa.

Another permutation that adds a layer of complexity faced by the online consumer is the decision to constantly switch shopping channels as they move from one stage to

another. For example, high street 'window shopping' triggers the need for more information about an electrical product. This is conducted online in order to gather all available information, including product history, but the actual evaluation is made in-store where the customer can touch and see the product. Having determined the trustworthiness of the vendor, the consumer may seek to enjoy the financial discounts offered by making the purchase online.

Ultimately the electronic nature of the Internet - the speed of data retrieval, a lack of physical presence and specific modes of interaction – has forced consumers to adapt their decision-making behaviour to the online environment. When the twin issues of context (chapter 4) and complexity (chapter 6) are combined, online consumers pursue modes of decision-making that are sufficiently different, in form and degree, from classic models of consumer decision-making to justify the claim to a dedicated model of online consumer behaviour.

7.3 Reflections on the Process

A bespoke hermeneutic research framework was developed to explore consumer perceptions of convenience as a way of identifying characteristics that could be incorporated into a framework of advice for the design of a consumer interface. Whilst chapters 3 to 6 show the framework's exploratory ability, the question remains "how well did the framework accomplish the research tasks set?"

The first task was to understand the researcher's position, i.e. clarify my research assumptions relative to the issues of convenience, the Internet and consumer decision-making. Combining elements drawn from Heidegger's concept of 'being-in-the-world' with the self-evaluation techniques used successfully in cognitive therapy offered a practical means of explicating such prejudices. Although it is difficult to truly uncover all of one's research prejudices the process of self-evaluation created, at the very least, a heightened level of critical awareness which was used to deconstruct the consumer interface (chapter 3).

The second task was to use these research prejudices to build a theoretical construct of convenient online consumer behaviour (pgs 44-46) which drove the design and analysis of this study. There is a danger, at this stage, that the researcher could be creating a straw man by collecting data based on assumptions that are accepted (*by the researcher*) as true but which ultimately lack proof. The circular nature of hermeneutic inquiry however, removes this danger by providing opportunities to actively test a researcher's assumptions both during conversations with individual participants (querying differences of opinion) and across several rounds of conversational interviews (seeking comments on interpretations).

Using active conversations to construct social meaning in this way turns the 'interview' into a validating mechanism. Comments can be claimed to be accurate representations of a truth, where truth is defined as the agreement between participants regarding a particular belief or interpretation. It must be emphasized however, that this framework is not seeking to render objective subjective assumptions, nor to emphasise the subjectivity of objective claims. Rather, the aim of this particular framework for hermeneutic research is to promote mechanisms that reliably structure the creation of subjective agreement.

Prejudice-formed constructs are one such mechanism and support the research framework's third task: maintaining a consistent interpretive focus during the evolution of data. Designed to sensitize the researcher to analytic drift during an interview they also proved particularly useful for recognising anomalous comments during data analysis. When re-used as coding protocols, constructed prejudices help the researcher to be analytically consistent, especially in the treatment of anomalies when the assimilation of unusual information can lead to a dramatic change in research focus.

For example, this study experienced a 90 degree shift away from considerations about the consumer interface towards surrogacy. By using the bias about convenience this transition was managed in a credible way: the introduction of new material (intermediaries) could be understood and appreciated in the context of what had gone before (the consumer interface) and what had yet to emerge (surrogacy). The resulting interpretive assessments emerged logically to form new lines of inquiry

to be explored in subsequent rounds of interviews (as demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6).

Having dealt with issues specific to the framework itself, it is also useful to consider its qualities relative to other research approaches. In response to the question “could other research approaches have identified surrogacy?” the short answer is no. The research approach used throughout this study privileges the subjectivity of the researcher above all else. It is debatable therefore, whether another researcher using this framework and asking the same set of subjects, let alone another research approach, would have identified the simple act of surfing the Internet at another’s request as aberrant behaviour.

Despite its potential as a powerful IS research approach, hermeneutics is not a popular methodology. The lack of formal structures for conducting hermeneutic research; the difficulty in understanding and correctly using its technical language; and the time needed to learn ‘how to do’ hermeneutic reflection have reduced its attractiveness when compared with other approaches such as survey, case study and action research. And yet, its ability to investigate evolving behaviours by uncovering anomalous words or deeds makes hermeneutics highly suitable for human-computer investigations.

Although this study has developed structures to make hermeneutic research more accessible, its exploratory power ultimately rests upon the ability of the individual researcher. As such, the framework’s greatest strength (the identification and investigation of anomalies) can, depending on the investigator, also be its greatest weakness (the formation of opinions masquerading as interpretations).

7.4 Reflections on Me as Researcher-in-the-Process

As with any research, the hermeneutic investigator is responsible for establishing the trustworthiness of the research process and the truthfulness of his or her analysis.

While there is overlap between these two aspects, they will be discussed separately, because of their importance.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) the trustworthiness of a study can be endorsed if: the researcher ensures the perspectives of participants are represented as clearly as possible (credibility); readers are able to follow the decision trail of the researcher throughout the study (reliability); and the researcher corroborates their interpretations by returning to participants during the research process (confirmability). Findings should be informed by attention to praxis and reflexivity, understanding how our experiences and background affect what we understand and how we act in the world, including during the inquiry.

The bespoke framework developed for this study focused my approach more fully on the importance of recognising the influences I brought to the research and the impact of these in generating data. Using cognitive therapy techniques to identify core prejudices prior to data collection helped to outline my research horizons whilst maintaining an interview journal provided the means to monitor changes in these horizons. Together, these tools helped to reveal the ways in which I participated in making the data and show how my horizons worked during and shortly after interview, and the prejudices I brought and continued to bring to text analysis.

I acknowledge that the process of setting out my horizon can never be complete, or fully understood by others, but have taken this direction as far as possible in working towards the development of a fusion of horizons.

However, I also acknowledge that opportunities for gaining deeper levels of understanding were, on reflection, missed during the stage of 'breakdown'. The intense confusion when confronted by 'alien' thoughts and anomalous behaviours creates a powerful and instinctual desire to make sense of this 'thing'. At the very point we become aware of something new and thus truly open to a phenomenon, we impose conceptual limitations upon it by attempting to explain it.

Instead of simply monitoring changes in my existing research horizons, I could, during my attempts at repairing the breakdown in my worldview, have attempted to

uncover new prejudices by looking for alternative explanations in the light of new data. The degree to which this would support claims of improved reliability and researcher trustworthiness is debatable since a clear path of interpretation already exists. At most, these efforts would have contributed to a richer interpretation of surrogate phenomena.

Regarding the truthfulness of the analysis presented in this study, definitive comments are problematic for ontological reasons. Constructivist hermeneutists such as Gadamer argue that no statement is universally true, because no statement can escape the complexities of interpretation. Accordingly, objectivity (viewed as accuracy) in hermeneutic research cannot be solely achieved by faithfully representing interviews and associated texts as readers will interpret the research findings from their own horizons. It is at this point that the trustworthiness of the research process and the truthfulness of the analysis come together: judgements concerning the findings are part of the (reader's) interpretive processes.

7.5 Future Horizons

This study makes three contributions to knowledge:

1. it identifies a new form of online consumer behaviour, labelled surrogacy;
2. it demonstrates that a practical framework for hermeneutic study is both possible, and can be used to good effect in the domain of human-computer interaction and the wider IS field;
3. it provides a useful and usable description of "convenience" that technology developers can use to support a consumer interface.

Each contribution offers prospects for further research.

Taking each contribution in turn, surrogacy is an unusual form of online consumer behaviour but not an entirely new form of interaction in digital domains. It represents a snap-shot of consumer behaviour at one point in the maturation of the Internet as a shopping channel. As such it challenges preconceptions held in the IS community regarding computer usage in the business-to-consumer domain whilst

simultaneously providing the basis for new levels of understanding to develop as new forms of interactive behaviour emerge.

It would be interesting therefore, to test empirically, rather than explore analytically, the temporality of interpretations surrounding the surrogate phenomena. The elements identified as characteristics of surrogacy could be converted into statistical constructs and formally analysed. The purpose of a survey would be to determine the presence (or not) of surrogate behaviour and associated contexts of use in a wider population. The resulting findings could then be used to inform theories of technology adoption and adaptive use in maturing digital environments.

Similarly, the hermeneutic framework used in this study both challenges existing notions concerning the practice of interpretive research in the IS field, and presents opportunities for novel technological refinements. The drawback with any interpretive research, including hermeneutics, is the need to integrate many different types of data. These range from attitudinal data (relating to explication of prejudices) to descriptions of emotions and observations (noted in interview journals) to the interview texts themselves. When these sources of data are combined intuitive leaps in understanding occur: the researcher is able to transcend the meaning embodied in the data without moving beyond the data itself.

Determining why interpretative leaps occur, at which junctures of data analysis and at which points in time - the 'A-ha moment' - is extremely problematic when they are based on empathy and intuition. It would be interesting to see if technology could help interpretive researchers capture and chart their intuitive leaps. This would have a two-fold benefit. First, it could help the researcher achieve deeper levels of understanding in terms of themselves and the phenomena being explored. As a result, this would produce a second benefit by rendering the researcher's interpretive process more transparent to others.

The structure and techniques embodied in the research framework used throughout this study could provide a useful starting point for thinking about these sorts of issues. For example, existing technologies such as data storage and retrieval could be used in novel ways and combined with visualisation technologies that support

iterative reflection. Advances in software tools that support the interpretative researcher, as distinct from qualitative research, would be of interest not only to the IS field but also to the wider academic research community.

Finally, descriptions of consumer-defined forms of online convenience challenge the HCI community's notions regarding the dominance of usability in interface design. Paradoxically, downgrading the significance of usability (from primary motivator of use to a simple hygiene factor) opens up new avenues of research and development. For example, it would be interesting to work with technology developers to translate the guidelines suggested for consumer convenience into practical design specifications for decision-support and interface design. Developments here could lead to a diagnostic tool for evaluating the degree to which an interface is 'consumer compatible' which would be of interest and concern to both industry users and academic evaluators of IS. In terms of pure research, it would be fascinating to explore the usefulness of convenience, rather than usability, as a driver in the design and adoption of new technologies in a networked society. Revisionist histories of human-computer interaction could create different ways of looking at current problems and create different directions of future work.

7.6 A Concluding Thought

“And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

T.S. Eliot

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Appendix A

Explicating Prejudices Relative to Convenience and 'the Consumer Interface'

Reasons for Interest:

1. Intense media coverage charting rise of Internet sales and potential online consumer citing convenience as major driver in Internet adoption;
2. Employment on research project investigating cultural differences in 'the consumer interface'
3. People fascinate me; I'm mindful of the Northern phrase "I'll back the ordinary working man against any system."

Interpretive Values

1. The type of product purchased online has characteristics more in common with a programmed decision requiring limited problem-solving.

Evidence	Weighting	Counter-Evidence
Theories of consumer decision-making	6	Type of Internet consumer (time starved) than purchase behaviour
Leading Internet products are small ticket items; commodities	4	Bespoke holidays, car and furniture design, electrical goods etc
Personal experience – I haven't purchased any good or service over £100 – Don't know of others that have bought non-routine items via the Web.	8	Reported newspaper stories; success of high item bespoke products such as holidays

[1 = low conviction; 10 = high conviction]

2. Ordinary people are in equal parts over-awed and unimpressed by the 'power' of new technological innovations

Personal Experience	Weighting	Counter-Evidence
New technology over-priced and adds little functionality	7	

other than status; tends to breakdown		
Wary of new technology – haven't got a web-site	3	Others in the department haven't got web-sites; Know people that less educated than self that are gadget mad – digital photography and web-site design
Lack the IT skills to be able to do 'funky' things. Jealous of those that can. Jealous of people that have technical skills and can make computers 'do things' I can't.	6	
Conversations with friends and family about offline leisure activities – refreshingly un-IT.	9	Personal experience of limitations of current Internet technology

3. Marketing campaigns are creating the misperception of the Web as a channel for convenient shopping.

Evidence	Weighting	Counter-Evidence
HCI/IS research showing online shopping is a frustrating experience	4	Technology always has teething problems, many of these issues will be resolved
Personal experience that it takes time and effort to purchase goods on the Web compared with in the high street.	5	Increasing familiarity with a technology reduces simple processing mistakes.
Motivation to counter the hype of convenience – takes longer than people think. – What type of shopping is being referred to.	8	Existence of 24/7 shops establishing demand and existence of convenience retailing and convenience products.

Appendix B

Interview Journal: Carl H, October 2000

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

Personal knowledge of Subject	Son of mothers friend; several years older than me; not friends socially; know that his computer skills are regarded very highly by others; self-taught (knew more than the teacher); very bright man.
Attitudes to Subject	A little in-awe of him; scared he will use technical language I'm not familiar with
Attitudes to Research	Key themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- types of products purchases- feelings surrounding convenience (described behaviour versus reported attitude)- feelings re ascendancy of the Internet

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. Narrow conception of Internet – as a tool to help him complete tasks as quickly and competently as possible.
2. This extends to the choice of products bought online – e-banking example of product that offers max advantages out-of-hours.
3. And to choice not purchase – retaining control over decision-making (choice of meat cuts) v.important. Character trait perhaps?
4. Very concerned that I did not judge him as a surf – little contemptuous of surfers. Not sure why?
5. Also contemptuous of those less able than self – shop assistants. Superior attitude?
6. Predominant use of the Web as information resource (including e-banking) than shopping channel, though is aware of benefits of online purchases
7. These advantages viewed financially – costs to travel ergo convenience = discount?

Appendix B

Interview Journal: Alison M, October 2000

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

Personal knowledge of Subject	Colleague at previous job; not spoken to for over 2 years; friendly but not really socially known to me. Know that uses the Internet at work
Attitudes to Subject	Similar level of Internet experience as self; interesting to find out how use differs from mine, or not.
Attitude towards research	Keep in mind the difference between information searching and product purchases. Ask for more examples to provide descriptive clues. Ask for reactions and feelings as well as reported behaviour and attitudes.

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. More competent at using the Internet than she thinks – correct use of occasional jargon;
2. Sophisticated use of the Web for online shopping – possible future online consumer behaviour stereotype?
3. Integration of online/offline activities based on perceived max benefits: online for chores; offline for pleasure and me-time
4. Mix of convenience messages.
5. Convenience relative conception – online clothes purchases extended shopping pleasure into online domain? This is an interesting development not covered in the literature or found in my personal experience.
6. Possible explanation for why certain products are doing rather well online despite their tangible nature?
7. Still a lot of information searching occurring.
8. Navigation and usability doesn't seem to be a problem.

Appendix B

Interview Journal: Linda W, October 2000

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

Personal knowledge of Subject	Very little – my aunt’s hairdresser. Know that she was connected to the Internet recently because aunt was very interested about the why’s and wherefores.
Attitudes to Subject	Why adopt – media hype silver surf or other reason? Must watch jargon as I possess (?) better (?) PC skills.
Attitude towards research	Keep in mind the difference between this subject (older, novice) and the other subjects. Are there any marked differences or similarities. Look for types of products bought and approach to the Internet – how view as part of everyday life.

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. Very unconfident about using any deemed ‘new technology’
2. Relies a lot on son – motivation for adoption was to satisfy his demands. Not an intrinsic need.
3. Perhaps not used it enough to determine whether it would be useful in her life; e.g. stock replenishment.
4. But, adapt at multi-tasking (shopping with daughter and grandson) which removes need for Internet where can’t multi-task?
5. Emphasis on the inter-personal – consequence of age group and occupation (hair-dresser)?
6. Unaware of decision-aids. Not sure what to make of that – lack presence or because of low competence?
7. Sees the Internet as fun rather than work: convenience as choice than time savings
8. Products bought are non-routine than routine – novice or character choice?
9. Classic surfer – unsure whether will continue once novelty worn off.

Appendix C

1st Round Transcript: Carl H, 9th October 2000

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Before we get started can you answer a few standard demographic questions for me please?

CH: Fine.

MC: What age range are you: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 60+

CH: 36-45.

MC: OK, and what is your occupation?

CH: Systems Programmer.

MC: What your highest qualification?

CH: Degree.

MC: And you're male.

CH: Last time I looked...

MC: OK. And how long have you been using the Internet?

CH: Oh about 5 years.

MC: And how would you classify expertise with the Internet: novice, expert or intermediate?

CH: Expert, definitely.

MC: Why so certain?

CH: Well, in the first place I go online to do something specific, like find a specific book or download a new software driver so that I can upgrade my pc. Gormlessly clicking on different pages is for people that don't know what they are doing. I have never surfed in my life. And second, I was one of the first to move to the Windows

format, so I'm pretty good at using the shortcut technology – but then I have to be because of work.

MC: So what do you tend to use the Internet for?

CH: I started using it for e-mail and transferring files at work. Got an Internet connection at home around 2 years ago so that I could do my banking. I do everything online – pay my bills, standing orders, credit cards, everything. I never go to a bank, only to pay money in.

MC: Why online banking and not say telephone banking?

CH: It's more convenient for me.

MC: What do you mean by convenient? Can you give me an example?

CH: OK. If I want to pay my credit card for example, I don't have to bother getting an envelope and putting a stamp on it and going to the post box. It's all there on the PC.

MC: Can't you do the same things over the phone though?

CH: I could yeah, but I prefer the PC. Before my bank (The Royal Bank of Scotland) introduced their online facility I used the phone banking service. I can still use the phone banking service. But as soon as the PC banking service came out, I started doing things online.

MC: But why the Internet rather than the phone, when it looks like they offer the same service?

CH: I prefer the Internet, it's easier for me to do things. Yeah I know that at first you had to use the phone service to set up particular payments, like payments for the credit card. I had to ring them up and get them to set it up before I could start banking online, whereas now you can set that up on the pc as well. I mean when they first started it I think it was more trial and error, like, 'we have got this lets put it on and lets see what's missing from it and we will add it to it.' They were one of the first, may second to implement PC banking. Barclays was the first, but Barclays had a few limitations whereas with this was one you can do anything you want.

MC: You mean that you can do more online than in a High Street bank?

CH: No you can do everything that you can do within the bank. The web site is within the bank. I just find it more convenient; you can even apply for a loan.

MC: Convenient in what sense?

CH: Well I can do the boring stuff more easily and quickly. For example, I check my bank balance every week, and several times a day when I'm making a money transfer. And I can also do the less everyday stuff like get a loan online.

MC: That's not bad, but don't you find online applications incredibly tiresome?

- CH: No. I got my mortgage face to face, and I had to fill out the same forms, give the same answers over and over again.
- MC: True, but it does seem less irritating because they fill all the repetitive stuff out for you whereas online banks make you do it yourself.
- CH: You need to choose a decent online bank then! My bank for example uses auto-compile technology to remember everything you type in for any new forms that you fill in on their website. For me, completing a loan application online is quicker than filling the same form out by hand. But yeah, I can see you point. Each new website is going to require you to give them your details – just like each new bank you go to for a mortgage quote, or loan application, is going to want you to give them the same type of information.
- MC: So there's no difference between an online bank and its high street counterpart?
- CH: Well both are going to want you to give them the same sort of information but it's easier to do it online. I mean I recently applied for a loan and it was done in 10 minutes, which included my slow typing. Otherwise I'd have to drive into Rochdale, try and find a parking spot, wait in a queue for God knows how long for an assistant who probably hasn't a clue about the particular loan I want. Then I have to go through it all again with them, even though I've already filled it out. That could take up to half an hour. When you tot it up, your looking at most of the afternoon wasted to do a simple thing like get a loan.
- MC: Why do you think the assistant is going to be clueless?
- CH: Because they are. And I generally know more than the shop assistants because I've done my homework. Most of them don't know what products they've got on offer and try and flog me pricey loans or mortgage deals that would cost me more than I'm paying now!
- MC: So how would you characterise your banking activity?
- CH: Straight-forward transactions made out of hours.
- MC: Can you give me an example?
- CH: Well generally if I'm checking my balance or seeing whether a cheque has been paid then I'll do it at night when Beth has gone to bed and Jane is watching TV.
- MC: So only at night then?
- CH: I used to monitor my account and move money around at work but the firewall we've installed won't allow personal ID's through, so I can't pay my credit card bills at work anymore. But it's not a problem because I can still do it when I get home.
- MC: Easier than nipping into the local bank?
- CH: It's not that easy to get to my local bank because I'm on the road most of the time. What with working in Sheffield, living in Rochdale and sorting out network problems in Scotland – but the bills still need paying! And I don't see why I should give the banks extra money in interest rate charges just because I can't get to a bank.

MC: So money is an issue then?

CH: Wasting money needlessly is, yes.

MC: Do you think the Internet is a cheaper medium then?

CH: Well the running costs aren't cheap but you can get some products cheaper on the Internet than in shops. Come to that, some products are cheaper between different web-sites. For example every time I've want to buy a book, BOL have been cheaper than Amazon, only by a few pence but it is a few pence isn't it, why should I spend anymore than I have to.

MC: What kind of books are you buying form BOL?

CH: I bought Microsoft books, and the wife bought a childminding book. They were both educational texts, mine was for me MCSE, and Jane is doing a HMDF including childcare. I had to use the Lycos search engine because I don't know anything about childcare. So one was a book for her.

MC: They sound pretty specific purchases?

CH: They are hard to find anywhere else. You can buy the Microsoft technical books at PC world. But you pay through the nose, and they don't always have them anyway. Or you go to a specialist book shop but you have to travel to Manchester, which is a hassle, what with the organising the kids, finding parking and fighting the traffic. It's simpler to buy them online.

MC: Simpler? In what sense?

CH: Well normal obstacles such as long queues, hyperactive kids and idiot shop assistants are missing for a start. And the interface designs are pretty standard nowadays. If I'm looking for the information about a product I'm thinking of buying but don't know much about its not a problem You know that the site is going to have common navigational aids like a search engine or a site map; and that the text is going to be laid out in a particular way. Its just easier to find the information you want using the Internet.

MC: Do you ever simply browse the Internet?

CH: No. I've never surfed the Web in my life. If you know how to use the Internet properly, using specific search terms and such, it's fairly easy to cut through most of the crap found on the Internet. I use the Web to get things done, not spend hours clicking away all over the shop with nothing to show at the end of it. What's the point in that?

MC: Pleasure, fun, excitement...

CH: Nope. The Web is a tool, it's based on computers that are tools.

MC: True, but it can also be used to discover new things, sometimes by clicking on pages by accident.

CH: OK. I can see where you are going with this. But that's not how I use the Internet. Because I know exactly what I am looking for, I can run a specific query, either on Yahoo or a sites search engine, so I don't end up trawling through irrelevant stuff.

- MC: What about products that would be considered fun?
- CH: What like digital products. Well gaming is for kids not old folk like me. I enjoy listening to music but haven't bought any for ages and generally listen to my daughter's CDs. I don't want to get a virus from trying to buy some music or watch a movie.
- MC: So how do you feel when people say that the Internet is replacing traditional shops?
- CH: I think they've got it wrong. I mean you hear about people buying their groceries online but I certainly wouldn't buy my food off the Internet.
- MC: Why not?
- CH: If you buy an apple you want to have a look at it, you don't want a bruised one, or one with a couple of maggot holes, you are relying on somebody else picking your apple. I would buy a tin of beans over the web, but I would buy anything, I mean there is a quality aspect to it.
- MC: Because you are relying on someone else's judgement?
- CH: Exactly, whereas with a can of beans or a book it doesn't matter where you get the can of beans, or even a book, from they are the same. You can't go wrong with a tin of beans. They are the same wherever you go.
- MC: But what about product testimonials from other shoppers?
- CH: Doesn't matter, you are still relying on somebody else to say that's a manky apple but that's a good apple, he can have that one.
- MC: Do you think advances in technology could overcome this?
- CH: Not where there is variety. Then you would need to go and have a look, touch, feel. If somebody is buying me a steak I want to have a look at the specific steak I am buying, see how red it is whether it is laying in blood, it has got some nice fat around it that's is personal preference, somebody else putting a piece of meat in my basket then it is their personal preference not mine. I couldn't to describe a perfect piece of meat it is quicker to get in the car and nip down the supermarket and buy it, I wouldn't buy it on the net.
- MC: So how do you feel about sites using recommendation software?
- CH: Depends. Generally software that pushes goods at you is a load of rubbish. My Yahoo is terrible at the moment – it keeps highlighting products, like books on dieting and cheap lawnmowers that I'm just not interested in. I don't know why they think I would be because I've never bought a book on dieting or searched for lawnmowers. Software that just tallies up what others have bought, you know "customers who have bought this also bought these products" is nice and informative. Lets me make the decision and not some piece of junk software.

MC: Interesting, so what do you think about the latest craze of shopping for cars via the Web?

CH: Exactly the same problems. See with a car there is a variety of car, I mean graphics and flashy animations tell me nothing about the car at all. You have to be able to drive them and test them and see whether it's going to be comfortable. Because I have a short and long legs lots of cars are uncomfortable for me to drive, and as part of my job travelling 1,000 miles per week I need a comfy car. And the only way to find out if that car is comfy is to sit in it and drive it. If my knees hit the steering wheel will it move far enough up. I can't get in that and see where the steering wheel will move to with a picture.

MC: What about using the Web to search for information prior to buying a new car?

CH: Well if I was buying a car, and it was a new one I would ring all the Honda dealers for example, and say: "right you have got one shot because I am not going to ring you back, how much can you sell me a Honda accord model blah, blah", which I would of picked out by going to my local Honda dealer, and I would say, "you get one shot I am not ringing you back, and don't bother ringing me back. How much is it?" And then I would buy it from the cheapest.

MC: You wouldn't check dealership prices first on the Web?

CH: I suppose I might have a look, but I probably wouldn't. I would probably ring the dealer directly.

MC: Why?

CH: Don't know. I just would.

MC: Do you think it could be habit?

CH: Maybe, though it's probably more a time issue. Talking to the car dealer is more direct than passively searching autotrader. I can get an answer straight away with the dealer but not using the online car magazine. Hadn't thought about it before, but that's probably the reason.

MC: Are there other times when you have looked up products on the Internet for purchase offline?

CH: Today actually. I was looking at the technical specs for another driver I needed. I was checking out scussi cards to base my decision about which one to buy. I usually have a look at a couple of web sites to compare the prices, and then finish by going to PC world direct because they are usually cheapest anyway.

MC: Don't PC world have an online store?

CH: Yes but I'd go to the store and buy it because you don't have to wait. And quite often I am looking on works times anyway, and I will drive along and pass the store on my way home.

MC: So looking back on what you have said this afternoon, how do you view your Internet behaviour?

CH: Well I don't just click on links just for the fun of it, or just to have a look what's there because I find 99.9% of the stuff on the Internet is rubbish. It's either kids who are playing about and just want to make a web site, or it is porn. Neither of which I am interested in, so those sites just get a complete miss. I use the Internet when I need to do something and its quicker online. If I want to find information I generally know exactly where to go for it, and I just go there, get it and go. I'm the same in shops, I know what I want and I don't like wasting time looking around.

MC: OK, thanks for your comments and giving up some of your time.

Appendix C

1st Round Transcript: Alison M, 12th October 2000

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: To ease us into the interview can you answer a few standard demographic questions for me please?

AM: OK.

MC: What age range are you: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55

AM: 26-35

MC: Fine, and what is your occupation?

AM: P.A.

MC: And when did you leave education?

AM: Sixth Form.

MC: Gender?

AM: Female.

MC: And how long have you been using the Internet?

AM: 2 to 2 and a half years.

MC: And how would you classify expertise with the Internet: novice, expert or intermediate?

AM: Probably an intermediate.

MC: Why so?

AM: Well because I don't go on it regularly enough. I still get stuck when I get on there but an expert would be able to find their way around easily, I think.

MC: Why do you think you get stuck?

AM: Well I don't get stuck exactly, its more, well I still take ages looking for things and I reckon that an expert would always know where to find things. Take last week, I was trying to find one particular web-site I'd been told about that covered annual music festivals. It was supposed to really good, letting you buy tickets and book hotel rooms for events. But I couldn't find it. In the end I had to ask my friend to e-mail me the URL.

MC: How long were you looking?

AM: All one evening.

MC: That's a long time.

AM: Is it? Yeah I suppose it is, but it didn't feel it at the time though. I was too engrossed in trying to find the information.

MC: Not a particularly convenient way of booking a gig then?

AM: Oh I don't know. When I finally saw the site it had loads of events on that I didn't know existed and probably wouldn't have known but for it. No it was worth the effort.

MC: OK, earlier you said you didn't use the Web regularly. How often do you use it?

AM: A couple of times a week at home.

MC: What about work?

AM: Every day. I have to its part of my job; you know answering e-mails and sending attachments to people and looking up information for staff.

MC: How would you characterise your information searches?

AM: At work, they tend to be fairly specific because I'm after a particular piece of information. To be honest I only surf for about 5 minutes, normally it's when I'm bored. It's probably because the novelty has worn off. I prefer to plan solitaire now when I'm bored at work.

MC: What about at home?

AM: I really only use it to find out specific information. It's like I'll regularly check Virgin's music section to check which bands are releasing CDs. I tend to buy one CD every month.

MC: Over the Internet?

AM: Depends. If it's a band I'm not familiar with but happen to like one of their songs I've heard on the radio then I'll probably buy it in-store. At least there I can listen to the album before buying. You can't do that online – you just get this 30 second sound bite which doesn't really let you get any idea what the track is like. But if it's a band or artist, like Sonique, that I know really well, then I'll take the chance that I'll like it.

MC: What about downloading tracks?

- AM: Yeah I know that you can do it, but you need special adapters and audio equipment to listen to it. And I can't be bothered to install them, or more likely, I'll probably install them incorrectly and they'll crash my pc. It's just easier to buy the CD.
- MC: Easier?
- AM: Yeah, there's not the worry that I find when I have to use some advanced software.
- MC: How do you feel about buying other products online?
- AM: Fine. In fact I've started doing all my food shopping online now. It's really convenient. It gets delivered to my home without me ever having to leave the house, which is great. If I'm busy on Saturday say, I can shop Saturday night online and then have it delivered Monday evening at a suitable time when I'm home from work. Very convenient. But I do like going to the store because you miss things online like the special offers are easier to see on the shelves, or the buy-one-get-one-free markers are clear. On the Web they are terrible. And when you walk around the store you see things that you haven't got in your cupboard.
- MC: Do you do all your grocery shopping online?
- AM: No. My average week is to order my staples online and also go to Tesco's.
- MC: Why both?
- AM: Because I get great satisfaction from 'going to the shop'. More than I do from surfing. At the shop I can smell things, like the bread section and taste the cheese they have to cut up as tasters.
- MC: But isn't bread a staple food?
- AM: Yeah it is, but its nice to get out. You can't impulse buy on the Web, especially not on the Tesco site – its just not laid out properly, not like when you are wandering around the aisles and can see everything instead of lists of food items you can actually see them and touch them. It's just more inviting.
- MC: So you enjoy shopping in store.
- AM: Much more fun than shopping online. I mean take my food shop. What I buy online are the staples, food I eat week in week out. You know like cereal, bread, soup, milk, yoghurts etc. Since I've got it set up, it takes me less than 1 minute to buy food. All I have to do is click a couple of buttons, literally, and I've re-ordered my entire weekly shop.
- MC: So what benefit does Internet shopping offer you?
- AM: Well if you take the example I've just given you, it reduces the amount of time I have to spend on tedious jobs and gives me more time to indulge in window-shopping. I can reduce the chore of a weekly shop to checking a list of saved preferences, which is great, because it frees up my time to spend doing the stuff I enjoy, like browsing supermarket aisles for bargains and impulse buys. Everybody likes treats.
- MC: Would you characterise your online grocery shopping as convenient?

AM: Overall yes though sometimes I want something now. Then I'll go to the shops and won't wait to have it delivered or bother ordering over the Web. You have to be very disciplined to order your weekly shop online all the time and I'm not. I mean its not every Saturday that I will be busy, so it's only certain times that using the Web will be convenient. Basically I use it when I'm busy.

MC: Would you say that convenience is equal to time then?

AM: Yes. It wasn't the first time though because I had to go through the whole store online and keep checking to see what things I normally buy and find the name. When I buy stuff normally I just look at things and always buy that brand or colour or such, but I don't take much notice of the actual name. So I literally had to go through the cupboards and match up what I wanted and hadn't covered and what I wanted to order again. Once I'd have that, and you can give it a name or whatever, then you just go back and say I want that tin that I bought before so you don't have to remember and type the whole lot out again.

MC: So what's your view of the interface now?

AM: Once you've got it set up its very easy to use, though I do know their web-site quite well. I really struggled with Sainsbury's site the other day though. I was asked to buy some food for a management lunch meeting. Because we have a corporate account with Sainsbury's I had to use their web-site. It was totally different to Tesco's which is stupid and unnecessarily frustrating. A lot of the products were given different category headings to what I was used to and they changed the meaning of some of the symbols. It took a bit of getting used to.

MC: So how did you manage to get to grips with the site?

AM: Trial and error really. They've got this software tool that will recommend combinations of food which I thought was a good idea so I tried that and then wandered through the site map hoping to find the items I wanted. It was only when I was halfway through that I realised that Tesco and Sainsbury's don't sell the same items but similar ones. It just took time – its like picking up a new clothing catalogue: everything's the same but different.

MC: How is the Internet like catalogue shopping?

AM: Very similar – you can do it at your leisure and out of normal shopping hours and you have to wait for items to be delivered instead of being able to wear it that night.

MC: So how long have you been using catalogues?

AM: Must be a good 10 years and I tend to buy quite a bit of stuff from them. Quite often they give you their web-sites so I go and have a look on them to. It's a lot easier to get from them because you have obviously seen it in their shops, tried on clothes in the store then buy them on the Web when I get back home. Especially if I think 'Yes I like that outfit and I'd like to buy it now'.

MC: I suppose it helps that you know the outfit will fit?

AM: Absolutely. That's one of the greatest advantages of clothing retailers like Next: you know it's going to fit and how it's going to look because you've tried it on in-store. Whereas with a catalogue there's always that doubt that it won't look right and you will have to return it. This way, you get the best of both worlds, the chance to try

clothes on go away and think about it and then, when you decide, make the purchase online. And that's really convenient because you know that they will have the item you want in the size you want unlike the high street store where if you leave and return the following week they have sold out of your size. That's really disappointing when that happens.

MC: How are the websites better than the catalogues?

AM: The Next website is better than its catalogue because if they have new stock it will probably appear on the Web first. And you can check to see whether they have an item in-stock whereas with the catalogue you would have to ring up, and I don't like using the phone.

MC: What's wrong with the phone?

AM: Nothing, I just prefer to take my time and not be rushed into anything. Plus you need to remember all these identification numbers. It's easier online because the cookie software remembers for you. Lazy I know, but very handy.

MC: That's what I like about the Internet, it goes at your pace.

AM: That's right. When I've got lots going on it lets me take time out without any negative consequences.

MC: Time out?

AM: Yeah, you know when you are multi-tasking and doing loads of jobs at the same time. For example, when I'm cooking I'll start dinner and then go back to the Web, do a bit of surfing or something, then I'll check on dinner and come back again. The other day I was surfing for my partner. He wanted to know about different florists – he wants to send his mum a spray for her birthday -. So I look do a key word search for UK florists, go an start dinner, come back and see what the sites have come up, have a click around, finish off dinner and then print out the stuff I've found.

MC: Doesn't it take you longer to purchase products online this way?

AM: Maybe in absolute terms, yes but it really depends what I am doing, what else I can be doing and how familiar I am with the site.

MC: Can you give me some examples?

AM: Well, catalogue shopping websites, like Next, are great time savers because you know that you are going to get the items delivered within 2 days for the weekend, otherwise it means trekking all the way up to Leeds. Shopping at Sainsbury's online however took me about 45 minutes for a list of items that could have taken me 20 minutes, including getting there – but then I wasn't familiar with the site and I had to spend time looking for stuff. But when you compare it with my weekly shop at Tesco's online. That takes me just 5 minutes. Basically I click my icon list, check if anything needs to be added and send it through. If I was to do a normal shop around my local store it would take about 1 and half hours. It really depends on what I am trying to do.

MC: Can you give me an example when it would take you longer to buy something online than if you were to purchase it in-store.

- AM: Yeah, recently me and my partner bought a holiday online. There are so many different ways of buying a holiday: independently, travel agents, mix and match flights with hotels. It was crazy. It took us ages to work our way through it. It shouldn't have taken as long, but the recommendation software was useless. It rarely included any products that I was interested in, or expressed an interest in, when I filled out a personal profile form.
- MC: How did you minimise your frustrations then?
- AM: Well I found one web-site that seemed to be able to offer us something a little different, rather than the bog-standard 2 week holiday in Benidorm. Because Gary, my partner was a little unsure, we tended to fall back on what other people had said, the written testimonials, about the different tours to help us make up our mind.
- MC: How do you feel about using the Internet for looking up product information?
- AM: It's pretty easy really. I do it all the time with products that I don't know a lot about. Anything digital or electrical/IT I leave to the Web.
- MC: Can you give me an example?
- AM: Well a couple of months ago Gary was talking about buying an MP3. I didn't know anything about them so I checked them out on the Web. Think I went to Comet's web-site or somewhere and they gave me different types and prices and stuff and told me what extras I needed to buy with different ones.
- MC: How easy it was it to compare different products online?
- AM: OK, I suppose. Though it's not as easy as being in the store when you can see all the different product side by side. But the Comet site lets you compare three products at a time so that was OK.
- MC: And did you buy it online?
- AM: No I went with Gary to Currys and bought one there.
- MC: Why in a shop and not from the Internet?
- AM: Well first Gary wanted it not me, and he wanted to see one in the flesh. You know touch it and check how big it was. One of them that we both quite liked from the Web was way too big when we saw it in the shop. So that was really lucky really. Otherwise we would have spent a couple of hundred quid on a MP3 player that he couldn't use.
- MC: So it was more convenient?
- AM: Not convenient, I mean we didn't save time or anything because we had to drive there and Gary spent ages choosing which one he wanted. We were in the shop nearly an hour. But it was OK because at least he got the one he wanted and we weren't left with an expensive gadget that nobody used. Now that would have been very inconvenient!
- MC: Because you would have made a mistake?

AM: Yeah. Looking up information on the Web and going to the shop to buy the MP3 meant that Gary wasn't bamboozled and pressured into buying a product he didn't want.

MC: So what do you think when people say that the Internet will kill-off the high street shops?

AM: It won't be able to – people will always want to touch and smell different products. No amount of technological advances will let you do that; I'm never going to be able to describe the perfect fit of a pair of trousers to anybody let alone a computer. Also, I like shopping and wandering around stores, it's never boring. But the Internet is pretty boring once you get used to it.

MC: So how would you characterise your online behaviour and purchases?

AM: Fairly normal – I'm not buying everything online because I enjoying shopping but definitely turn to the Web if I want to find out information about something.

MC: Thanks a lot for your comments, very interesting.

Appendix C

1st Round Transcript: Linda W, 15th October 2000

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Before we start I just need to get some basic background information from you if that's OK?

LW: OK.

MC: What age range are you: 36-45, 46-55, 60+

LW: The last one.

MC: And you are a female.

LW: Yes.

MC: OK, and what do you do for a living?

LW: Own a hairdressing salon

MC: And what's your highest qualification?

LW: City and Guilds Hairdressing Level 5

MC: And how long have you been self-employed?

LW: 5 years.

MC: And how long have you had an Internet connection?

LW: At home or for my business?

MC: You have access to the Internet at both places?

LW: Only because of David, he's really into it. He's on it constantly at work and he can find all sorts of things, not like me. If I need to know the latest product information or such for the Salon I tend to ask David to look it up for me.

MC: So how long have you been connected at home?

LW: Well David arranged for NTL to sort us out about a year ago. If he hadn't done it I wouldn't have it in now. And he's in the middle of creating a website for my new hairdressing salon.

MC: So it happened at the same time?

LW: Yes, we got a great deal with NTL. Because we took out the premium business package they threw in the home connection for free for 6 months.

MC: What made you keep it?

LW: Well, once I got over my fear of using it I found it fascinating. You can find loads of stuff, everything and anything is on there. It's a bit of blackhole for me really. Peter, my husband, says that he likes it when I say I'm going to use the pc because he knows that I'll be gone for a good couple of hours and he can be in-charge the remote control!

MC: And this is at home. Can you describe what you do online.

LW: Most of my time is spent clicking from one site to another wondering what I will find. The other day I wanted to know about corsages for a wedding that me and Peter are attending soon, and I found out the history of them and the different ways you are supposed to wear them. Really interesting - I was totally engrossed.

MC: What about at the salon?

LW: I don't tend to surf there - I'm too busy seeing clients

MC: So you tend to do most of your surfing at home?

LW: Yes, but I'm not a proper surfer.

MC: What's a 'proper surfer'?

LW: You know, someone that's on it all the time.

MC: I take it that you are not then?

LW: No. I might go on it twice a week, if I remember, and I can't find what I want by talking to people. On Tuesday for example, I was chatting to a regular client about my 3rd wedding anniversary: me and Peter [husband] wanted to do something romantic. Well this client mentioned that she had got a really good deal through the Web. She told me the web-site and I went on it, and I found a really nice holiday in Scotland. Neither me, or Peter, had ever been, and I know that he has always wanted to, so I booked it.

MC: Through the Web?

LW: That's right. I sent them an e-mail and it comes straight through the computer on the printer. You send an e-mail out, they send an e-mail back and it was booked.

MC: Why not go to the local travel agents?

- LW: Because my client had suggested it, and she said that they had had a really good holiday. And I wanted something a bit special, what with it being an anniversary, not just a bog-standard holiday.
- MC: Couldn't you have found the same type of holiday with a travel agent though?
- LW: Probably. I'm not sure. This site was really good because it listed lots of different hotels throughout Scotland and Wales, and you could go on and it would tell you if a particular hotel was booked for the dates that you wanted it. So it was just, well I suppose it was a lot easier than going into Town. And Thomas Cook isn't very good for UK holidays. Peter got their brochure and it only listed really expensive hotels in the capital cities. Well we couldn't afford that, and Peter wanted to travel around Scotland, you know on one of these B&B drives, he quite fancied trying the different local distilleries. So Thomas Cook wasn't that good. But this website had loads of different types of accommodation at different prices across the whole of Scotland. We finished up in a lovely farm house hotel near Loch Lomond, and that was really nice.
- MC: So it was the range of products that you liked?
- LW: Yeah. Oh and we also had a map, A-Z thing, it gave us a map. Right from our door right to the hotel door, with how much mileage you had to go, to each point. Everything, right to the tenth of a mile that sort of thing. How long it would take to get there, the best routes and stuff, and what you could visit or see on your drive from one place to the next. Everything. Really good.
- MC: It's good when you get things you don't expect.
- LW: Isn't it? We couldn't have got all that from, you know, a normal travel agents like Thomas Cook.
- MC: So you only tried one high street travel agents – Thomas Cook?
- LW: No – me and Peter, spent one Saturday going from one travel agents to another in Town.
- MC: That must have taken a lot of time?
- LW: It did – but it wasn't that bad. I mean, most of the big travel agents are in Town Square so it's not far to walk. It was a bit of a pain though having to lug all their brochures around, after a while. You don't realise how heavy they are, until you have to carry them for a bit.
- MC: Did you talk to any of the operators whilst you were there?
- LW: Peter fancied one of the advertised breaks in Scotland in one of the Going Places brochures, so we sat down with one of the operators. But when we wanted to add extra bits, like hire a car it got really expensive, and they wouldn't let us add extra places onto the cheap break they were advertising. We had to start again, without the discount and that was really expensive. So they weren't much help really.
- MC: But the web-site was?

- LW: It was just easier, you know. Everything was there and we could make up our own route and stuff, and we didn't have to stay in really expensive hotels but could do our own thing. Much better.
- MC: My mother does similar, looking for what she calls different holidays, but uses the newspaper to find them. She had a great holiday to China this way.
- LW: No. I wouldn't like that. I like to know what I'm getting before I buy stuff. That's why I am not keen on buying things off the net, because I don't like the idea of giving my credit card details. Because I think there can be a lot of frauds.
- MC: But the holiday?
- LW: I did pay by credit card over the Web, but I don't think there was anything other way to pay for it.
- MC: What do you think about people that use the Internet to buy everyday items like food?
- LW: I wouldn't like that. I like to see what I am buying, and it's the only time that I get to see my new grandson is when I'm shopping.
- MC: Pardon? You've lost me.
- LW: On Tuesday afternoon I shut up the salon and then I Debbie [daughter] pick up & little Scott on the way up town. We do our shopping at Morrisons, you get bigger discounts if you buy in more so we put it through as one big shop so it doesn't cost us as much and then we go for a coffee and cake in the Town Square.
- MC: A mothers and daughters day?
- LW: More or less, except Debbie will come back to my house after shopping for an evening meal. It's nice though, we get to chat and I get to see Scott grow up. He was fascinated by the bread counter last week – they were selling something or other and he was waving his hands around and stuff.
- MC: Experiences you can't really get on the Web?
- LW: No. Definitely no.
- MC: So you don't see buying your groceries on the Web good for saving-time or anything.
- LW: Do you know, I wouldn't even think to use the Web for buying my weekly shop.
- MC: Why?
- LW: Don't know. It just wouldn't feel right. No definitely not. I'd miss my chats with Debbie and what would I do with the extra time? I know what I have to do every day anyway.
- MC: More leisure time?

- LW: Well I already go out twice a week dancing, and every other weekend I go and visit family. I couldn't afford to go dancing any more, and sometimes it's just nice to put your feet up, especially if it's been really busy at the salon.
- MC: Wouldn't like more free time generally?
- LW: I'm not sure what I would do with it, I mean I'd probably just waste it sitting on the sofa watching daytime TV.
- MC: But you spend time surfing the Web?
- LW: True – but then the Internet thing is still new to me. I still haven't got the hand of using the mouse properly yet.
- MC: Have you bought from any other sites?
- LW: Not bought, no. But I was looking at sites for wedding cakes the other week. A friend of mine, her daughter is getting married and she wanted to know about the price of different cakes. But that's about it – I haven't been on the Internet for a while.
- MC: A while?
- LW: Yeah – about 3-4 weeks. I only go on it when I want to find out about something that I can't find out about by talking with somebody.
- MC: And what about your hairdressing business. Do you ever buy products for the salon over the Web?
- LW: What, you mean re-stock hair products through the Web? No – I give my order to the rep when she visits once a month otherwise I'll ring her if I find that I'm running a bit short.
- MC: So you haven't bought anything for the salon via the Web?
- LW: No. I've got David to find out about the latest hairdressing competitions on the Web, because the rep doesn't know about them and it's useful to see the latest styles and showcase your own skill. But buying products – definitely not.
- MC: Why?
- LW: Because I start getting nervous about pressing things and what I will finish up buying and things like that. I can't afford to be buying the wrong product or ordering 100 times more of a particular shampoo than I need just because I've typed in an extra nought and haven't noticed. No – I'd rather talk to the rep when she visits.
- MC: Would you consider buying hair products via the Web?
- LW: No, probably not. Don't know. What I would probably do is get David to do it because he knows what he's doing with a computer and I don't. So he wouldn't make the mistakes that I would. You know, simple mistakes like buying twice of everything because I've pressed a button twice without realising. He'd know not to do that, but I wouldn't.

- MC: Do you know that you can set up your purchase profile and all you have to do is check it over and then click OK?
- LW: David has mentioned that too. But these newfangled things might make me do something I didn't want to, or even worse can't afford. No I prefer to do things the way I know.
- MC: So how do you feel about the Web?
- LW: Mostly it's fun, like checking for travel offers, or for information that I can't find about by talking to people.
- MC: So what do you think when people say it's frustrating using the Internet?
- LW: Well I can understand why some people would find it difficult, especially if you are trying to find something specific and you can't. I did that a few weeks ago looking for information of wedding cake prices. I must have spent several hours trying but kept getting American prices. I couldn't seem to find a local shop.
- MC: How were you trying to find the information
- LW: Well I'd type in "wedding cake prices" into the Ask Jeeves search engine.
- MC: Did you try another search engines or different queries?
- LW: I don't know any other search engines.
- MC: How about on a web-site, how do you find the information you want then?
- LW: By clicking on the different links. I feel more confident, and can generally find what I want, when everything is set out the same way at different sites. It's very frustrating when you come across a site and everything is different. That happened when I was looking for holidays. Practically every other web-site I brought up had a different layout – you don't get that in normal shops – and it really slowed me down, pointlessly. Why can't they standardise everything?
- MC: I know, but you can get round them by using the short-cuts.
- LW: Short-cuts? What are they?
- MC: They help you to navigate the web-site more quickly. Things like category headings.
- LW: Oh. I just tend to follow the links.
- MC: What do you think about software that recommends products to you?
- LW: I wouldn't leave my shopping to my husband let alone a stranger. He'd run amok buying unnecessary and overpriced stuff. I like to know what I am buying, not have it bought for me. You never know if there are other items out there that you have missed.
- MC: But you would take recommendations from others?

- LW: Definitely, like I did with the holiday. That way you know other people are happy with it. It's quite reassuring, especially when faced with something that I don't know much about – like the Scotland trip. It was the first time that either of us had done something like that. Normally we just get a packaged holiday abroad. This was something different for us so it helped knowing that other people had had a good time and some of the things that might crop that you might not like.
- MC: Reflecting on what you have said this last hour what are your feelings about online shopping.
- LW: It's got a place, I definitely use it, but not regularly and definitely not everyday. My son has to remind me to use the Web to look for things when I can't find them in the High street. So I wouldn't use it for everyday stuff. I use the Web for Internet purchases and the shopping malls for everyday purchases. I only use the Web for the things that I can't get anywhere else, really, or if I want something a little special.
- MC: OK, thanks for your time and comments. Very interesting.

Appendix D

2nd Round Transcript: Carl H, 19th May 2001

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Thanks for agreeing to talk to me via phone. I've analysed your responses and I'd just like to run through some of findings with you if that OK.

CH: Fine. I'm interested to see what you've found.

MC: Good, because if you think that I haven't captured what you meant originally, or that you disagree with the findings, now is the time say. And don't be worried about disagreeing with me – that's why we are having this second conversation. OK?

CH. OK.

MC: The last time we meet we discussed your attitudes and feelings towards Internet purchases; what type of purchases you made and the benefits you felt you gained.

CH: Yes.

MC: OK. Would you agree that you use the Internet frequently as a consumer to buy a limited range of products?

CH: Probably. After you'd gone I was talking with others at work and yeah, I'll use the Net a lot to look up product information like the best washing machines, but limit my online purchases to the odd book, posting my CV and checking my bank account.

MC: So you have a good idea of the type of purchases you would make online compared with offline.

CH: Yes – there's just some stuff that you can't really purchase online because the variables are just too great.

MC: Variables?

CH: Like touch and smell. Any item that has too many variables is impossible to buy online.

- MC: OK so would you agree that your online purchases tend to be routine but products that are unfamiliar to you tend to be bought offline?
- CH: Not always – I bought a new PDA over the Net the other day, but then I had spent time comparing the spec's and checked them out in the local electrical store.
- MC: So most of your non-routine purchases are made offline would you say?
- CH: Probably, haven't really thought about it that way before. But, yes I'd say that 99% of expensive goods, like the washing machine, or products where I need to see them in the flesh are bought offline.
- MC: OK, one of the things that became apparent to me last time was that you saw the Internet very much as a tool. Would you agree?
- CH: It is.
- MC: So would you equate convenience with speed, or better still the ability to complete tasks quickly?
- CH: Definitely, most purchases only take me a couple of mouse clicks and I can get on doing other stuff then, not wasting my time stuck in traffic jams or checkout queues.
- MC: So you don't think that the Internet is a black-hole time-wise or requires a level of familiarity with the technology?
- CH: It's only a black-hole if you want to mess around on it surfing for pointless stuff. And I've never had a problem with the technology so I can't comment really.
- MC: So you'd agreed that you don't find using online web-sites and making online purchases difficult or frustrating?
- CH: Not really.
- MC: So would you say that the Internet is your most favourable mode of shopping?
- CH: Umm... most favourable? Not sure about most favourable. It's probably the mode of shopping that I find least disagreeable because I can get on with what I need to quickly and little fuss. But I don't tend to enjoy shopping much anyway. Yes, least disagreeable.
- MC: One last question – do people still ask you to search the Internet for them?
- CH: Oh yes.
- MC: And do you?
- CH: Sure, if it's not interrupting what I want to do. I don't have a problem with it.
- MC: Thanks Carl.

Appendix D

2nd Round Transcript: Alison M, 21st May 2001

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Thanks for agreeing to talk to me over phone. I've analysed your responses and I'd just like to run through some of findings with you if that's OK.

AM: No problem. Did I say anything interesting?

MC: Of course, that's why I've come back to have another chat. What I'd like to know now is whether you agree or not with my conclusions. And don't be worried about disagreeing with me – that's why we are having this second conversation. OK?

AM: OK.

MC: The last time we meet we discussed your attitudes and feelings towards online shopping and explored the type of purchases you made and the benefits you felt you gained.

AM: Yes, I remember we talked about concerts and clothes shopping.

MC: That's right. Well would you agree that your online purchases tend to be low-priced items?

AM: In the main, probably. I think the most I have spent buying something over the Net is around £100 and that was a present I bought my other half. Otherwise most of my regular Internet shopping is for food. So I suppose if you take the products individually, they are very cheap, and my weekly shop is around £50. I'm not very extravagant am I?

MC: No more than me. So would you characterise your online shopping as mainly consisting of routine purchases?

AM: Yes.

MC: OK, the other thing I noticed from analysing your response is that you have moved a lot of routine jobs online, like grocery shopping. Would you agree?

AM: Yes, anything that can free me from daily chores is welcomed. It lets me have free time.

- MC: OK. But you did mention that you shop online for groceries and also go to the supermarket as well. So would it be far to say that you use the Web to make purchases that reduce the time on chores?
- AM: Yes, that's fair.
- MC: OK, I noted that you also used the Web for searching for information about products that you were unfamiliar with. What about products that you have seen in-store?
- AM: I'll buy them on the Web if I have changed my mind, or I can get a discount online. But yes, I use the Web and the high street together – they work well together because I can buy stuff out-of-hours but see stuff in the shop, and you can't do that online with some products.
- MC: So would you see the Internet as a complementary shopping channel?
- AM: Definitely, it lets me do things that I couldn't do before – and I'm not just talking about greater choice. It just fits my chaotic life.
- MC: It's flexible to your changing needs?
- AM: Absolutely. And that's invaluable. I don't know how I managed before the Internet, I really don't. It's my first port of call if I want to find out something when I'm thinking about buying something.
- MC: Does the amount of time you spend on a task vary.
- AM: Oh yes. Sometimes I can spend ages looking for information, especially if I think that I can find something special only on the Internet.
- MC: And how would you characterise your ability with the Web.
- AM: Getting better – though I still have problems with some sites if I haven't visited them before. It would be really nice if they would all use the same layout. But otherwise I'm better than I was, you know. You get a feel for different sites and whether they will be any good, whether they will give you the information you want, or linking you to a site that will.
- MC: OK, would you say that the Internet is your most favourable mode of shopping?
- AM: Depends what I am trying to do. Probably not – it's great yes, but it could never replace the pleasure of 'going shopping'. That's such a physical sensation that I don't think the Internet could ever replace. No, I think the Internet is a good support for traditional forms of shopping.
- MC: One last question – do you still look up information online for others?
- AM: Well my husband still asks me, does that count? He can't be bothered learning out to use so leaves the computer to me. And my boss pretty much asks me to look up something on a daily basis.
- MC: Thanks very much Alison.

Appendix D

2nd Round Transcript: Linda W, 22nd May 2001

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Thanks for agreeing to talk to me over phone. I've analysed your responses and I'd like to get your responses to them, if that's OK.

LW: OK. I don't look an idiot do I?

MC: Not at all, why would you think that?

LW: Well, because I can't use it very well.

MC: What makes you say that?

LW: because I just keep getting swamped with information and couldn't find anything.

MC: So is your son still looking up information for you?

LW: Oh yes. It takes me ages to find stuff on the Web and then it's not really what I want. David is much better at finding things than me. But then, he knows what he's doing with a computer and I don't really.

MC: OK, before we get onto the findings, I just need to explain that the purpose of this chat today is to make sure that my findings reflect your perceptions of your Internet behaviour. Don't be afraid to disagree with me, if you think I've got it wrong. That's the whole purpose of this conversation. OK?

LW: OK.

MC: Right, would you agree that you use the Internet mainly to find out about products?

LW: Well I don't use it that much anymore. But when I do use it, it's normally a to look up information about things I'm not familiar with. Take a couple of weeks ago I went on to find out about dress corsages for a wedding were going to. I wanted to know what I should wear. It was a really posh do and I didn't want to be wearing ours upside down.

MC: So when you are on the Internet, most of your time is spent browsing for information?

LW: Yes, probably. I can't think of anything that I've bought on there since we last spoke.

MC: Would you characterise your browsing as a time-consuming activity?

LW: A particularly time-consuming activity. With the corsage's I had to work through them systematically like. Eventually I forgot exactly what I was looking for, or what I'd looked at, because I'd seen that many sites.

MC: That doesn't sound very pleasant.

LW: More frustrating, really.

MC: Why?

LW: Well I've seen David use the Web and he manages to find things really quickly. He must know a few short-cuts. I should really get him to teach me them. I just click links and see what happens. Sometimes you find yourself at a site that's really interesting and other times you've jumped to a site that has got nothing to do with what I want. It would be nice to be able to surf the Internet properly, like others.

MC: So you find it quite hard work then?

LW: I've definitely got to be in the mood. It's not something I would choose to do.

MC: So you don't browse for pleasure?

LW: Well I've got to have a reason to use it, but once I'm on there I don't mind it. I check out a few regular sites I like and maybe do a couple of keyword searches for stuff. It still amazes me what you can find on it. There's all sorts – some of it is drivel but there some really good educational sites and I was telling Peter about the interactive garden thing they've got on the BBC web-site. It looked great fun, so I had a little play with that.

MC: That sounds like quite advanced technology.

LW: Is it? I don't know, I just clicked on the picture and then dragged flower symbols across. And it's got instructions so I was all right.

MC: So given what you've said today, would you say that the Internet is your least favourite mode of shopping.

LW: Well I definitely use it the least, but I don't think that qualifies it as my worse shopping experience – that would be going to Trafford Centre at the weekend with the grand kids. Shear hell. Least favourite... I really could say to be honest, because I don't really use it to buy stuff.

MC: OK, thanks for talking with me Linda.

Appendix E

Interview Journal: Carl & Jane H, December 2002

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

1. High opinion of his technical ability which appears supported by others attitude towards him.
2. Adopts role of expert advisor – though insists that does not offer advice – a contradiction here or my misunderstanding?
3. Trust borne from competence rather than family ties?
4. Gives impression of highly competent – is this routine behaviours masking as competence? How good when faced with unusual requests – what actions will he take, will he accept the request.
5. Requests made to free time on other pressing domestic chores – form of multi-tasking?
6. Suspect he has clear idea of surrogate role he plays (though this may be unreflective). How is it displayed? Scope of surrogate role?
7. Acts as a surrogate for esteem purposes and self-interest (?)

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. Some altruism in actions, though dominant motives appear self-serving: maintain technical prowess/standing amongst friends, family even colleagues.
2. Very clear role played – questions the consumer for clues as to what find, and educates them re: what willing (not able!) to offer them. The action is all determined by him.
3. Attitude – they've asked so I can set out my terms. Product of negotiating character or experience with surrogate role?
4. Limits advice on products to those that are pc-related. Straightforward disinterest in other requests – doesn't appear interested in the lives of others.
5. Adopts superior attitude on pc-items. Got the feeling would be upset if consumer ignored advice, maybe even refuse to help them in the future.
6. Activity is mainly gatekeeper/broker
7. Doesn't really engage in unsolicited information provision – unless prior knowledge through casual conversation.

Appendix E

Interview Journal: Alison M & John T,

December 2002

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

1. Appears to have a wide circle of friends and large extended family. Lots of scope for playing a surrogate role.
2. Job as a secretary offers potential – interesting to see how surrogate role in the work-place differs from that in a domestic environment.
3. Trust borne of diligence and ties rather than competence?
4. But downplays her Internet ability – why? Character-based or reduce demands made of her?
5. If latter, what Internet related demands are being made of her, and what are her reactions to them? Suspect is a people-pleaser; place others needs first.
6. Suspect that boss and worker have differing views of surrogate role; difficult to anticipate what those will be: simple request v involved request.
7. What form of requests would be made to a secretary; extension of clerical duties or merely making existing duties electronic.

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. Different set of interaction rules for surrogate in workplace compared with domestic environment: contractual obligation v moral obligation
2. Unknown requests create greater levels of frustration and require greater levels of communication – lack of tacit knowledge?
3. FAQ strategies devised to combat the unknown, though can't set parameters of work as clearly as Carl.
4. Varied surrogate roles with attendant levels of input.
 - a. Acts predominately as an information professional at work combining different sources. Opinion not asked for and not given.
 - b. Acts predominately as a broker in domestic environments; finding sites others would find useful but can't locate themselves. Advice offered, taken occasionally.

Appendix E

Interview Journal: Linda & David W, December 2002

Thoughts and feelings pre-interview

1. Very proud of her son, unsure as to the actual technical ability of him.
2. Extremely efficient at managing her time for maximum personal contact and fulfilment. Interesting to see whether she has discontinued her web use, and associated reasons, or whether concerns for her business will have spurred her on.
3. Trust borne of family ties.
4. Surrogacy product of family ties – out of love rather than personal interest? Interesting to see how this affects the dynamic of surrogate: scope, role and advice.
5. Unlikely that she will withdrawal from the decision-making process totally, but suspect strongly considers David's advice and recommendations – e.g. adopting the Internet initially.

Thoughts and feelings post-interview

1. Interesting surrogate dynamic – more unsolicited information conveyed when relationship based on close family ties.
2. More significant role for the determination of product offerings and domain familiarity.
3. Equally, the requester actively seeks the advice and recommendations made by the surrogate – this may be because the requester is a novice? Definitely looks to surrogate to protect them from Internet fraud.
4. Surrogacy challenges Rogers theory of adoption – discontinued use no longer so clear cut.
5. Surrogate willing and able to carry any and all requests made by family and friends – irrespective of the time demands made of self. Form of moral obligation and curry favour?
6. Communication levels vary with task but surrogate draws extensively on tacit knowledge and accumulated experience of both person making request and suitable web-sites. Tacit knowledge significant value-adding factor – possibly main reason for continued use.

Appendix F

3rd Round Transcript: Carl & Jane H, 5th December 2002

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Hi, before we get started can you answer a few standard demographic questions for me please? Carl gave me his in the last interview.

JH: OK.

MC: What age range are you: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 60+

JH: 36-45.

MC: OK, and what is your occupation?

JH: Shop assistant and PT student

MC: What your highest qualification?

CH: A level – so far.

MC: What are you studying for?

JH: Professional certificate in Childcare

MC: And I'll put you down as female, obviously. And how long have you been using the Internet?

JH: Not as long as Carl, about 2 years.

CH: But she hardly uses it.

JH: That's because you are on it all the time. As soon as you have finished your tea in the evening you pop up stairs saying "I'll just check my e-mail" and he's gone half the night.

- MC: So how would you characterise your familiarity with the Web then Jane: expert, intermediate or novice.
- JH: Not as good as Carl, but I can generally find my way around when I need to.
- CH: Yeah, but you normally ask me.
- JH: True. I do, but then you can find things that I can't. So it's better for me if you do it.
- MC: What kind of things have you asked Carl to do on the Internet for you?
- JH: Just recently it's been stuff related to my course.
- CH: Yeah, last night it was for somebody called Friobles.
- MC: Who?
- CH: A child psychologist or something. Apparently he invented the kindergarten. I didn't know that at the time but Jane asked me to check him out.
- MC: Wouldn't it have been easier for Jane to do it?
- CH: I was already logged on.
- MC: So how does it work? How do you sift through all the information on this guy you know nothing about for Jane who is looking for something quite specific and presumably detailed.
- JH: I ask him to find me decent web-sites about Froibles.
- MC: Decent?
- JH: Sites that I will help me to do my coursework.
- CH: When I find them I shout down "Oi, which one do you want?" because I don't know which Frederick Froibles she's after or what she wants with him. And I don't particularly want to know either.
- MC: Why?
- CH: I'm not interested in child-minding theorists. Why on earth would I want to know more. I'd just be clicking on links at random which is boring. It would just waste my time.
- MC: And then?
- CH: I either save the URL for her so that she can do whatever she wants to, look for whatever information and stuff that she needs for her coursework. Last night because we were both around, you pointed to a couple of links you wanted and I printed them off for you.
- MC: So you don't really get involved in her request then?
- CH: Not really. Jane's looking for very specific information on Friobles and a couple of graphics for a presentation. It's easier if I find what looks to be a useful site and let

- her spend the time looking within that site for the information she wants. I don't know anything about child psychology and probably wouldn't understand the information in the site anyway. So there would be no point in me doing the detailed searching, especially when she is just downstairs and can do it for herself. I'm just here to find the sites of most use.
- MC: That must take a degree of trust – in him to find the right sites.
- JH: I wouldn't ask him if I thought he hadn't done the search properly. But I trust him, and he hasn't let me down yet. He's very reliable at finding stuff for me, sometimes he finds things that I wouldn't have thought possible. .
- MC So would you characterise yourself as a filtering mechanism then, sorting through the amount of information available on the Web to produce a narrow range of 'relevant sites?
- JH: That's a good way of describing it. Yeah, you do tend to eliminate the most irrelevant sites.
- CH: Hadn't thought of it that way.
- MC: What way would you say?
- CH: I find information on the Web that people can, and do, use effectively.
- MC: Effectively?
- CH: That fits what they asked for and helps them do what they want to do.
- JH: The other week he helped mum out – and she didn't ask either, but was glad that he could fix the problem with her sewing machine.
- CH: Yeah, but all I did then was look up technical instructions for repairing her make of knitting machine. My mother-in-law spent half an hour talking about the problems she was having with her knitting machine when she visited last weekend.
- MC: But why do it if she didn't ask you to?
- CH: Well she was obviously concerned.
- JH: Knitting is mum's passion, she makes loads of stuff. She's very good.
- CH: I didn't know whether I would find anything so I didn't tell her in case she was disappointed.
- MC: How would you characterise your search for Jane's mum, or Jane herself, compared with those you do for yourself.
- CH: The same. Normally I need some idea how, or why, it's going to be used. Just to give me an idea what to look for. Jane's mum was different because I didn't know the type of machine she has.
- JH: And I couldn't help him there.
- CH: So I kept looking until I'd got a fairly clear idea what information's available and then picked something I thought would help.

MC: How do you know if it is?

CH: Well she didn't moan. They normally tell me pretty quick if its not. Then I have to go off and look again. But I don't bother with long drawn out searches. Normally people just want me to find a web-site and then they do the fine searching.

JH: That's not true. You were moaning about having to spend ages sorting out online travel for this stag do you are arranging for Gary.

CH: I'm going on a stage do to Edinburgh and Jane saw an advert on TV for £5 and £10 rail fares from anywhere to anywhere. So I rang them up and found out it was up the East Coast. So I was checking the Web to find train fares for the guy who is getting married, and he doesn't have a PC.

MC: Does he have any access to the Web?

CH: He doesn't own a PC, but he could probably use the one at the office.

MC: Did he ask you to do this for him?

CH: I'm arranging the stag do. He's never actually asked, I've just assumed being the best man, that that is what I did. I was surfing the web for him because I'm sorted out my transport up to Edinburgh - I've managed to wangle it so that work is paying for my trip up there, so I don't actually need to know train times or prices.

MC: So what were you looking for?

CH: Well I'm not bothered about the fare price because the firm is paying for me, but I know that Mick...

JH: He's the groom

CH: ...would want them as cheap as possible. That way we have more money for booze. I mean you can't expect everyone to pay top whack, they probably wouldn't turn up knowing that lot.

JH: Keith probably wouldn't for one.

CH: Anyway, there's seven on us going I went on to find the best times and prices available on the East Coast lines. It's easier to compare them on the Web than over the phone. And then once I'd found the best combination I was going to use it to book them there and then.

MC: How did you know what was the best combination?

CH: Well they wanted to know the prices first and then the times.

MC: So did you have to contact the other 6 to decide this?

CH: Not really. Most of the other lads are postmen like Mick, so he had a pretty good idea of their price range and what shifts people were doing for the train times.

MC: So you just talked with Mick?

- CH: He was on the mobile at the same time that I was on the Web so we were really deciding the stuff together. I'd ask "when do you want to set off" and he'd reply "10am" and I'd say well at that time the price would be £40 a piece but if you went at 11.30am it would cost £20 a piece. And he said "Oh great, that's cheap. We will have them." So I booked them.
- MC: Would you buy products if other people asked you?
- CH: Only if I knew them really well, and knew that I could get my money back.
- JH: Yeah, he wouldn't even buy me a coursework book. Mean bugger.
- CH: That was £60 and you get an allowance for textbooks, let them pay for it. £60 for one textbook. I could buy loads of things for that price.
- MC: Don't you trust her?
- CH: Of course, but that wasn't the point.
- MC: So have either of you used the Internet for any other people?
- JH: No – I tend to do my own surfing or, if I'm busy or can't find something then I ask Carl do find it.
- MC: Have you asked anybody else?
- JH: No – Carl is pretty good at using the Internet, plus I don't know who else I would ask. Especially as he is on tap. It's really convenient just to shout up the stairs if I'm working on something else.
- MC: Like multi-tasking.
- JH: That's right. Getting somebody else to do the boring stuff, like finding good websites is great because then I can spend time doing what I have to do. Two for the price of one.
- MC: How do you feel about that Carl.
- CH: Doesn't bother me really. Doing a key word search doesn't take long, and it keeps her happy, so why should I complain?
- MC: People seem to come to you because of a good reputation. What do you think about that?
- CH: Well I'm probably better than most people I know.
- JH: It's true, he can find things other can't. Your mate Darren is always asking you find stuff or download things for him.
- CH: True.
- MC: Can't he use the Web?
- CH: Well he can surf for normal stuff like TV pages, the weather and clothes etc but the stuff he asks me to find is more specific, technical information.

MC: Technical information?

CH: Yes, information related to certain software. He had me check out the spec's for streaming video's. I don't know why because his PC doesn't have a firewire port for downloading digital video's. I told him this before I looked for the information but he still wanted me to check it out. I don't know whether he's thinking of buying a new PC.

MC: Can you describe how you collected your information?

CH: I'm always monitoring the comments posted by 'techie's' on specialist mail-groups so I tend to check them first to see what they have to say. Then I'll double check the spec's for new software downloads on the manufacturers web-sites, just to make sure that its suitable for the PC that Darren has.

MC: Was it?

CH: Yes, because I knew what spec his PC was, I knew that he didn't have the memory for the software he wanted, so I suggested a different software that would do the whiz-bang stuff he was after but on his current PC.

MC: Did he appreciate your advice?

CH: Well he hasn't wasted money on a new computer so I take it that he listened.

MC: Would you say that people listen to you a lot?

JH: Probably, especially if it's something technical or Web-based. You have a lot of experience that I think others are relying on.

CH: I'd agree. I think people think if they ask me to do something then they are guaranteed to get something useful. There's expectation of ready-made success really.

MC: Have you an example where this happened?

JH: Mum trying to buy that piece of furniture.

CH: Oh yes, I had to spend time explaining why some products are better bought online – faster delivery, cheaper or they have a better selection. But some products you just need to touch and smell. And these are better bought offline. Brenda really wanted this chest of drawers she'd seen until I explained that the cost of delivery would be astronomical and the quality of the digital picture wasn't that great.

JH: yeah, there was no guarantee that what she would get is what is thought was the picture.

MC: So you stopped her from possibly being a victim of Internet fraud?

CH: I wouldn't go that far, but its just not something you buy over the Net, especially when Courts down the road will probably have the same item in for £10 less.

MC: Any other examples of stuff Darren asked you to look for.

- CH: Well I've downloaded a couple of software drivers for him, and passed across a couple of CD's. The last one was to do with unblocking mobile phones.
- MC: Couldn't he do that himself?
- CH: Obviously not. Most software he can, the mobile phones stuff you had to know how to find the information because it's not well publicised, and my Internet connection is free whereas he has to pay for his.
- MC: Don't you mind?
- CH: Not really. It keeps my hand in and I learn about the latest software developments in areas that are not directly related to work but nice to know about.
- MC: So you normally surf for Darren for technically-based information that is hidden on the Web?
- CH: No I just find any sort of information. He'll ring and say "I can't find anything on this or that or the other can you have a look". I'll have a look, find it for him and then either download it or tell him where to go and find it.
- MC: What makes you able to find this information when others seemingly can't?
- CH: I don't know. I'm comfortable with computers whereas others tend to find them threatening and get frustrated when they can't get things to work, or it takes too long to find something. They'd prefer to ask somebody that knows – whether it's a shop assistant or a geek like me.
- MC: Why a geek?
- CH: Well I'm a systems programmer and part of my job involves being familiar with the Web and how it works. I know about gophers and what they are good for, which search engines work better than others and I manage a RFC bulletin board because it covers information that is useful for work.
- MC: So you know how to find reliable information?
- CH: Exactly. There's a lot of information on the Web that is complete junk of no use to anybody. Information that people can use is more difficult to find and I think that is where I come in. I have more of a feel for what is likely to be trustworthy information, say information on a manufacturer's site or a dedicated website on a particular topic, than some hairbrained personal homepage. How do you know whether what you are reading is true or not? Take mobile phones for example. There's a South American retailer selling the latest Nokia phone for a fraction of the cost it's on sale here in Britain. Now I didn't know if this was a come on or what. However I checked out the Nokia manufacturer's site and they have a link to this South American retailer so you have more confidence in that retailer.
- MC: Have you ever surfed for anybody you didn't know?
- CH: Not really, but then why would I?
- MC: I was thinking of a colleague at work where you're asked to surf for something work-related?

- CH: Not really at work since they all have access to the Web via their PC's but Jane asked me to surf for one of her college friends that I didn't know. They'd been out shopping and one of the stores – Dorothy Perkins I think – didn't have her size in something, so Jane rang me up and asked if I could check out the stores site and check if it was in stock and book it.
- MC: Did you mind?
- CH: Not really. I only took a couple of minutes, it didn't interrupt what I was doing at work and I was helping Jane out with a mate.
- MC: So how do you view using the Web for others like the friend you just mentioned?
- CH: Basically I'm doing somebody else a favour.
- MC: Don't you get any benefit?
- CH: It depends on what I'm asked to do. Take the stag trip, because I had access to the Internet I got to plan events that I wanted. So yeah there was a bit of self-interest there, but others benefited to. Then if you take my helping out Jane or her mum, well that's because it's less hassle to do it than the constant nagging.
- JH: Oi – I don't nag.
- CH: See.
- MC: OK – Jane, what do you think are the benefits of using Carl to surf for you?
- JH: He know's his way around the Internet and I don't so its easier and quicker for him to find stuff. And I can get on with doing other things like making the tea and looking after the kids.
- MC: So it's his experience and familiarity...?
- CH: It's a large reason why I ask him to look for stuff on the Web for me.
- MC: Any drawbacks of this approach?
- JH: Can't think of any – he always manages to find something useful and if I'm not available then he save it for me so that I can have a look at it later.
- CH: Not really. I make sure I have a pretty good idea of what they want first so I'm not wasting my time. And they either take or leave my advice – I'm not particularly bothered either way. If it goes wrong, it's their problem.
- MC: OK, thanks to you both for talking to me. You've made some interesting comments.

Appendix F

3rd Round Transcript: Alison M & John T, 8th December 2002

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Hi, before we get started can you answer a few standard demographic questions for me please? I need to add them to basic stats Alison gave me in her first interview.

JT: OK. It's nothing embarrassing is it?

MC: No – only possibly your age, but your identity will be completely anonymous.

JT: OK. Go ahead.

MC: What age range are you: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 60+

JT: 45-55.

MC: And what is your occupation?

JT: Finance Director

MC: And your highest qualification.

CH: Degree in Civil Engineering and ACCA accredited.

MC: Gender?

JT: Male.

MC: And how long have you been using the Internet?

JT: In its current form since 95

MC: And how would you characterise your Web experience: novice, intermediate or expert.

JT: Expert.

- MC: Why do you think that?
- JT: Because I've been using it for a long time; I use it everyday to reply and send e-mails and can find what I want when I want to.
- MC: OK, that's interesting because when I was talking with Alison before she mentioned that you ask her to search for information on your behalf.
- JT: Probably – I don't know whether it's everyday, but yes I definitely ask her to look things up for me, it's part of her job description.
- MC: Can you give me an example of the sorts of requests you would make?
- JT: Well most of my information search/product purchases tend to be travel-related. The one I can remember is asking Alison, last week, to sort out flights for 5 executives to fly to the States.
- AM: Yes you wanted me to arrange flights and accommodation for you and four others - . the sales team from Enesco and the assistant FD at Weatherall. It's for a meeting with HQ next week?
- JT: Yes, how are you getting on with it?
- AM: All the arrangements are in place, they just need your signature for the flight approval.
- JT: BA.
- AM: Of course, I always try and get a BA flight now that I know you are collecting air miles with them.
- JT: What about the accommodation?
- AM: I've got some lined up, but I'm waiting for Chicago to get back to me, because they reckon they know the local hotels and are trying to get a good deal.
- MC: Is this how it normally goes, you make a request and Alison brings back a completed solution?
- JT: Yes.
- AM: Not always. Sometimes members of the senior management team just want me to find a collection of sites that they can investigate further, on their own.
- MC: Why would they want that?
- AM: So that they can have control over the process really. I don't think some of them trust me to make the right decisions, or explore all the options.
- JT: I think that trust is an over-rated issue, especially when looking for information is a contractual obligation. Do it consistently poor and you will be fired. I mean Alison can hardly refuse my requests to search for work-related information.
- MC: So you don't trust Alison?

- JT: I have every confidence in Alison's ability. My point however is that trust is less important when it is a contractual obligation.
- MC: Earlier on you when you said you had booked with BA, you said 'of course'. Why?
- AM: Because I booked a flight to the States with United because I didn't realise that he was collecting BA air miles.
- JT: My fault I hadn't mentioned it.
- MC: Does this type of miscommunication happen a lot.
- JT: No.
- AM: Not really, not once you get to know what they ask for and have built up an understanding of what they want
- MC: Based on experience.
- AM: Definitely. It's a bit trial-and-error at the beginning, because they assume that you know what they want, or how much they want to pay for hotel. For example some senior executives won't go for any hotel less than a 5-star whilst others want their accommodation as close to their meeting as possible. Some want other night stays, whilst others want to catch the red eye so they can be there and back in one working day. That's normally so they are not away from their family for too long.
- MC: Do these executives tell you up front about their different needs.
- AM: No, I just know them because they are based on experience.
- JT: Why would they? When you consider it, it's not idiosyncratic to the person making the travel request. They know why they want a particular flight or accommodation.
- MC: True, but I'm interested in the impact this lack of communication has on Alison's role and ability to use the Web on behalf of others?
- AM: Well sometimes, in the beginning especially, it's a very tedious process with lots of frustration.
- MC: Tedious? Can you give me an example?
- AM: Well a couple of months ago, one of the sales team asked me to book two different flights, one from Manchester and the other from Edinburgh to go to Chicago for a normal meeting. So I booked a direct flight for both thinking that would help them. Turned out he wanted both flights routed via Schiphol, because he was having a quick meeting with the sales team there prior to the big pow-wow in Chicago. If he had told me this originally then I wouldn't have wasted so much time.
- MC: Is this an isolated case?
- AM: Not really, there is a fair amount of information that I need that people just don't give me. But I've learnt to ask them questions to make sure that I won't be wasting my time.

MC: Like a mental FAQ?

AM: I hadn't thought that actually, but yes. I have a mental checklist that I run through when somebody asks me to make travel arrangements for them.

MC: So, with all this experience, I take it that you are the resident expert for travel arrangements?

JT: I would say so. She is the natural choice to root out the bargains and avoid the white elephants.

MC: White elephants?

JT: Vendors that promise you the earth but don't follow through or are telling lies in the first place.

MC: So do you take on board the recommendations she makes?

JT: On some things, it depends what I am doing. But yes if it is a run of the mill travel request and I'm not particularly worried about flight times or such, then I'm more than happy to follow the selections and recommendations made by Alison. She has a lot of personal integrity.

MC: And for non-routine requests.

JT: Well then it's only naturally to pay more attention and have more of an input in the details and, if it's really important, then I will want to double check the accuracy and reliability of vendors selected.

MC: Do you find that people tend to accept your recommendations?

AM: Well I don't really recommend anything really. What I tend to do is provide extra information so that the person making the request can see and judge the details for themselves. I try to give them as comprehensive picture of the different options available as possible.

MC: And this is all Net based?

AM: Mostly, though sometimes I'll call a tour agent to see if they know the answers and can fill some of the information gaps that occur from time-to-time on the Internet.

MC: Can you give me an example of an information gap?

AM: Like the time it would take to get from the airport to the meeting place, or when you know that there are particular flights or accommodations available but they are showing online as fully booked.

JT: So that's why I sometimes get a pack that contains an e-ticket bought online and a hotel and car reservation bought through the local travel agent

AM: Yes, by talking with a travel agent I can get round the information gaps sometimes found on the Web.

MC: So what happens after you've given them all this information?

AM: They either come back saying 'Yes that's fine, book it or put a deposit down or something'. On the odd occasion they might say, 'can you find something a bit cheaper or I've heard that hotel's no good can you find me another one'.

MC: Why do you think you have to do this re-work?

AM: It's normally due to a lack of a clearly stated request.

JT: And you haven't asked them the right questions.

MC: Can you describe what you do then?

AM: I have to waste time doing the search again. Senior management assume I know what they want when they ask me to make travel arrangements for them. But then its difficult to know people that are distant colleagues and unknown members of staff

MC: Then what happens?

AM: I print out the new information and take it back to them. They will either say Yes, which is usually what happens at that stage, or sometimes No. Often I've got to the case where I've booked something, and they've changed their minds. They want to go for more days, or they want to go for less days or they want to go somewhere in-between.

MC: Even when you have told them all the information and they have been making the decision at every stage?

AM: Even after I have booked it for them.

MC: If a friend did that to you, ask you to do something and then change their mind what would be your reaction?

AM: I'd get really annoyed and wouldn't do it for them again. But I don't think my friends would treat me like that, whereas at work, its sort of part of my duties as a secretary so they think they can treat me differently.

MC: Differently?

AM: I'm expected to provide travel information, and its not personal, its just business, and business tends to change its mind. But if my friends were asking then it would be as a favour.

MC: How would you characterise the level of communication needed to make a travel arrangement?

JT: Minimal – that way it frees me up to get on with more important things.

AM: It depends on whether I know the person well or if there circumstances change suddenly. Then a lot of communication is needed to refine ever changing demands. Sometimes it's incredibly frustrating and I don't seem to get anything done all day.

JT: I'm afraid I have a meeting that I need to get to. So if you don't mind I'll leave at this point.

MC: That's fine. Thanks very much for giving up your time to participant in this study. Your comments are most helpful. I will send you a copy of the analysis once I have completed it.

MC: O.K. We've pretty much covered your surfing for others at work. Taking a different perspective, do you do any surfing for people that are not work related, say at home?

AM: Well I was looking up information for my daughter, for her homework.

MC: Can you tell me a bit more about it?

AM: The teacher had set an exercise about the Stuarts so I looked on the Web for her. I looked on the Encyclopaedia site. Britannica?

MC: Did she ask you to help her?

AM: Not really. She mentioned her homework to me when I was picking her up from school. Because I enjoy helping my daughter with her homework, I thought this would be the easiest way of doing it, by having a look at the internet. And not only that I thought maybe she might grasp the hint of doing it herself next time.

MC: So it was a way of trying to encourage your daughter to use the Net?

AM: Yes, but she hasn't got the hint. She still asks me to help her with her homework.

MC: Has she asked you to look for information since?

AM: No she hasn't. But then she hasn't had that kind of homework since. The rest of the homework she's had has been textbook stuff. But when she asked me she wanted a tapestry thing from William the Conqueror reign. I think it was to do with the Vikings not the Stuarts. Anyway she had to print out the Bayeux tapestry and a map and details of when the war started and finished and stuff like that. Quite interesting really.

MC: Sounds like a lot of information. How did you know what to collect?

AM: She had questions like describe the build up to the war of William the Conqueror so it was easy to remember and easier still to look on the Internet. And you had to describe in your own words the build up of the war and such.

MC: So you started with Britannica?

AM: Not at first. I just typed in keywords into a search engine but that produced hundreds of hits. Which is pointless. I scrolled through a few of them but found it wasn't relevant. I tried to bring up kids sites because some of the information came up very, very complicated and a lot of writing. I tried to find something that was short and to the point. So I had to go round and find more kid-type sites.

MC: Why kids sites?

AM: Because it needed to be at a level my 9yr old could understand and the sites she would have looked at.

MC: Sort of putting yourself in her shoes.

AM: Exactly. It was be pointless writing it as an adult because the teacher would have seen it straight away. I was looking for simple writing, easy to understand and that had pictures.

MC: Would your daughter have known the difference?

AM: Yes I think so. She wouldn't have understood the heavy writing of some of the sites. And she wouldn't have got access to those sites. We've done her so that she can only go to the kids sites anyway. We narrowed down her access with a parent block.

MC: Did your daughter give you any guidance at all?

AM: No, I was looking for the information on my own. Basically I did the whole assignment on my own.

MC: Can you explain?

AM: Well used the questions to look for information. Then I printed off what I thought was appropriate and got deleted the stuff that wasn't. I gave these print out to her and said 'you can either cut them up and paste it in or re-write it yourself'. But she just paste the whole page I had printed out for her.

MC: And how would you characterise the communication between you whilst you where doing this task.

AM: There wasn't any.

MC: Pardon?

AM: I know. She mentioned she could do with some help and I just went away and did it. But it was interesting really. I learnt a lot – unlike my daughter.

MC: And you were making all the choices, all the decisions?

AM: Yes. I was deciding on her behalf that this was right and this is what you need. I did ask her to read it but whether or not she did I don't know. I don't think she even altered what I'd printed off.

MC: Got any ideas why she didn't help you or change what you had done.

AM: Lazy. Definitely laziness. She was probably hoping that I could give her a better grade than if she did it herself.

MC: OK, have you ever surfed for anybody else in a social setting?

AM: One of our friends did ask us once to find where to stay in Florida so we had to look up hotels out there for them.

MC: Why did they come to you?

AM: Well, we'd been chatting about the problems of finding decent holiday villas at the weekend. I'd mentioned that I'd found a great place on the Net, and because they

didn't have access to the Internet at the time and we did, they asked if they could come round.

MC: So how do you feel when friends make these cans of requests?

AM: I find it very difficult to say no hen friends ask me to search the Web for them. Sometimes I say yes without thinking and then wish I hadn't, like with Nancy and Florida, but unless you want to lose a friend, you have to do what you said you would.

MC: Why did you regret it?

AM: I didn't regret helping them to look for villas, just saying that I could help them that weekend when I had got loads to do.

MC: So what happened?

AM: Well they came round and stayed for most of the afternoon, but we were only looking for about an hour.

MC: Can you describe what you did?

AM: I clicked through and pointed at sites that looked good and sounded nice and I printed off the information for her. But it was easier because they were there sitting with me as I was surfing for them.

MC: Can you talk me through it.

AM: I think they had seen a website in a magazine, so she actually had it written down where to go. So we put that in and it took us off to accommodation in Florida. And it went through the prices and they picked the price range they want there and then with me, and then it showed you pictures of what type of accommodation it was.

MC: So you were basically acting as a Web operator for them.

AM: Yes and NO. Admittedly she was pointing was pointing and saying go into that page, lets have a look at that one and print that off. So in that respect I was a bit of robot. But I did recommend a couple of sites that I had found useful.

MC: And was it?

AM: Yes. My friend thought the information I'd given her was great and she told that she had actually contacted one of the holiday companies I'd given to her.

MC: Did she go with them in the end?

AM: I don't think so, I think it fell through or something. I'm not absolutely sure.

MC: Has she asked you to do it again?

AM: No. Because she's on the Internet now, so I suppose she's surfing for herself.

MC: Thanks for agreeing to take part in this study Alison. It's much appreciated.

Appendix F

3rd Round Transcript: Linda & David W, 12th December 2002

All your comments will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will remain anonymous. During the interview you are not obliged to answer any questions or discuss topics that make you feel uncomfortable.

The purpose of this interview is to get a better understanding about your attitudes and behaviour towards the Internet in the context of your daily life.

MC: Hi, before we get started can you answer a few standard demographic questions for me please? Your mum gave me hers in the last interview.

DW: Right.

MC: What age range or you: 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 60+

JH: 26-35.

MC: OK, and your occupation is?

DW: Hairdresser, with mum.

MC: What your highest qualification?

DW: O level – and my hairdressing certificates.

MC: Gender is male.

DW: Yes.

MC: And how long have you been using the Internet?

DW: Just over two years, but I only got connected last year. I was using the computers at college before then.

MC: OK, and how would you rate your ability using the Internet: expert, intermediate or novice.

DW: Intermediate to expert. I'm getting really good now that I can use the connection we had put in the salon.

MC: You use it a lot at the salon then?

LW: He's never off it.

DW: Yeah, but I have found loads of stuff that could help us. That site that told us about the hair competition was good. I didn't know about it before and because of that site I've entered and it could do loads for the salon.

MC: So you use the Internet regularly then?

DW: I go on when I am bored just to look at what other people are doing, and to check to see whether my web site is up to date and see whether he has put on all the stuff on, basically. When mum decides she wants to come on Holiday then I go and check something.

MC: Can you give me an example Linda?

LW: I think the last time I asked you was to check out hotels in London for me and your Dad. It was about what they were offering - prices, star rating, where it was located.

MC: Aren't looking up holidays a bit of a hobby for you?

LW: Well yes, but David can find things, and he goes right round the subject. My I would have just looked up the web address I'd seen, but he downloaded a load of extra stuff.

DW: Yeah, I remember. The web site gave you the usual blurb but didn't tell you where it was in London and I knew that you wanted to be close to Kensington for the Albert Hall – some tennis tournament or something. So I double checked the location on multi-map.

LW: But you also told me about bus routes and things that were going on the week we wanted to visit.

DW: Oh yes, I went on a couple of the London tourist sites to see what they had got. The official London tourist guide was pretty good – had a lot of information on it and let you decide way to go.

MC: And did you tell David what to look for.

LW: Not really, I just asked him to check out the web site and see if they had any reasonably priced rooms.

MC: Reasonable?

LW: Value for money. That is value based on what I want to pay for certain things like decent service and general amenities and ambience and the actual location of the hotel. Naturally hotel's in big cities are going to be more expensive than B&B's in 'non-touristy' places. I just didn't want to get 'ripped-off', even though friends who have been to London lots of time have told me that I should treat my money as monopoly money when I visit him as everything is so much more expensive than up North.

MC: Did you know what Linda meant by reasonable?

- DW: Yeah I had a fair idea. Normally they go for a good 3-star, which equates to around £35-50 per night in London, with lifts because Dad is getting old.
- MC: So how much communication was happening between you?
- DW: Quite a lot. A one stage I was surfing the Web while I had mum on the phone, telling her what I had found and asking her what she wanted to do next.
- LW: Definitely. I remember there was a lot of phone calls and e-mails flying between us as we were sorting this out. Some of them were to check various things with and others were just to keep me up-to-date with what you had found. It's nice when he does that, it makes me feel involved in the process, but without all the hassle.
- MC: So you took all the decisions then?
- LW: Sort of. I mean, David told me that the hotel he'd found and was suggesting was a townhouse. I've never heard of them or been to one before but I was willing to give it a go.
- MC: Why?
- LW: Because David seemed to think that they were a good bet. He knew somebody that had been to one and had a great time. And from what he had told me about them, they seemed to fit what I wanted.
- MC: Do you take David's suggestions often?
- DW: No.
- LW: Yes I do. If it's something I don't know a lot about but he seems confident about it then yes. He's never let me down in the past and we have the same tastes in a lot of things, so I don't see a problem really.
- MC: So how would you characterise your decision making roles here?
- DW: I was the one looking for information and passing across to mum and she made the decisions.
- LW: True, but a lot of the decisions were made in the light of your comments. I'd say we worked together, though the final decision whether to book or not was mine.
- MC: It sounds like you have a lot of trust in David's judgement.
- LW: I trust him to tell me if the site was O.K.
- MC: What do you mean?
- DW: Mum doesn't have a lot of experience with the Web so she's a bit concerned about Internet fraud and such, especially with all the nonsense on the telly. But, because I use the Web a lot, I know what to look out for, you know the security symbols and such, and if they alternative ways of making a booking. One site I considered didn't have them, so I just forgot about them. No point chancing it really.
- LW: I look to David to protect me from the fraud scams that are everywhere on the Web.

MC: So you're like a security guard?

DW: Not really. It's not just dodgy web sites I look out for. I'll also point out the pitfalls of Internet shopping to people.

MC: Can you give me an example?

LW: I can. I always forget to include the cost of the postage and packing when I'm thinking about buying some via the Web. If I mention it to David, he always reminds: "don't forget to add the delivery charges." It was invaluable advice one time because I was looking at buying a decorative planter for Peter and it seemed quite reasonable. But it must have weighed a ton, because when I added on the postage and packing it almost doubled the original price. I couldn't believe it. Without David's reminder I would have had to pay that – and it would have been more than I wanted to. So that was lucky.

MC: Do you mind when people ask you to look up stuff on the Internet?

DW: No, I'm happy to do it. And I'm normally surfing the Web at some point in the day so it's not like it's a burden or anything.

LW: He also knows has to do it, otherwise he knows he's going to get lots of earache.

MC: More of a duty than a favour then?

DW: Probably a bit of both with family. Can't really say no to family, not without them nagging at you. But at the same time, I also want to help out. Can't say it worries me, either way I'm still surfing the Web.

MC: Do you get work-related search requests?

DW: Definitely. Mum will be with a client and they'll be chatting about something and I hear "David can you just look up so-and-so". And it's something that they've been discussing, something the client has usually seen on GMTV or This Morning.

MC: So it's not related to running the salon?

LW: No I ask him to check out different products. It was Tresme's new range last week... remember.

DW: She wanted information about a particular hair product. We went to a hair show and they were demo-ing some new hair extensions. Mum fancied trying them in the shop because a client had asked about them the other day. So when I was back working in the shop she asked me to look them.

MC: What did you do Linda?

LW: Well he showed me the web site, so that I could have a look myself. They'd got some pictures showing how they could be used, which is always useful, but I decided that they wouldn't sell. I told David not to bother.

MC: Couldn't you have done it yourself?

- LW: It would have taken me longer to find the hair competition he mentioned because I don't know how to work the Web really. It takes me far too long to do a normal search.
- MC: Normal?
- LW: Yes, something specific that you want to look up. For some reason I seem to get lost and can't find them when other people, like David here, can. It's just click, click, click and the information he wants is there.
- MC: So what happened after you decided against the hair extensions?
- DW: I had a look round for other suppliers, but Schwarzkopf seemed to be the only one. Shame really.
- MC: Did you tell your mum that you were looking for other suppliers?
- DW: Not really. I just did. I would have told her if I'd found anything similar, or the same product cheaper. But I didn't, half the sites were just PR sites and didn't really tell me anything, and the other half were aimed at top professional hair stylists – a bit too high for our needs.
- LW: But you did mention, remember, that you had looked but couldn't find anything.
- DW: Oh yes. But that was just normal conversation.
- MC: And how did you feel when he told you?
- LW: Not too bad. But then if David can't find stuff on the Internet then it's not there. It was nice that he had tried, and if he could have got them cheaper, then I might have been tempted to buy them. But it wasn't to be and I know that he will have tried his best.
- MC: Would you say that is a standard type of request?
- DW: When I'm at work, probably. Mostly I spend time comparing different hair products to see which ones we could sell or use in the salon.
- MC: Do you suggest them to Linda?
- LW: Oh yes. He'll say "come and have a look at this one mum, it's got tint-highlighters in" or "this leave-in conditioner sounds good. It's getting rave reviews on the mailing lists".
- MC: David can you think of any times when you gave information you'd found off the Internet to somebody other than Linda.
- DW: Sure. I found a great Internet deal on washing machines that I mentioned to my girlfriend. And I told a friend, she doesn't live round here, about the increase in house prices in her area.
- MC: How did they react?
- DW: Well Louise, my girlfriend, did give me a funny look. I think that she thought I was complaining about her washing, but I wasn't. I was just trying to be helpful, and it

- was a really great deal. A triple A Zanussi washing machine for half price! Can you believe it?
- MC: So she didn't react?
- DW: Not really, she basically said something along the lines that she wasn't interested in buying a washing machine at that time.
- MC: Wouldn't you have known that though?
- DW: Yeah, but it would have been nice to have a new washing machine. Ours is ancient. And I could have had a say in what we bought.
- MC: What about your friend, how did she take the information you'd given her?
- DW: She was a bit surprised because we hadn't talked to each other for a while. I think she wanted to know what she was supposed to do with the information I'd given her.
- MC: Why's that do you think?
- DW: Well, I think she thought I had some ulterior motive for telling her about the house prices. But I didn't. I just thought she'd like to know, you know, in case she did want to move. But she wasn't – she made that quite clear.
- LW: David is always looking out for people though. He's always looking out for me, and I appreciate that.
- MC: Do friends ask you to surf the Web for them?
- DW: Only if it's for stuff that I know about, like hairdressing products or if they want to know about different car parts. I double as a mechanic at the weekends. Otherwise, I think they pretty much do their own surfing.
- MC: Well, thanks to both of you for talking with me. It's been very interesting.