

Exploring the Motivations of Consumer Resale Behavior In C2C E-commerce

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Abstract

Consumer participating in online Customer to Customer auction (C2C) has been a prevailing and flourishing phenomenon. However, there are little studies explain why do consumer resell online. From literature review and consumer in-depth interviews, we identified the primary motivations for consumers to resell online with four: profit-driven monetary motives, utilitarian trade-up motives, emotional/social motives, and house grooming motives. We then discovered that consumer resale behavior is performed differently than that of retailers. Moreover, consumer resale foresight appears to prelude consumer purchase behavior.

Keywords: Consumer Online Resale, Disposition, Secondary Market, C2C E-commerce

1. Background

Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) e-commerce is a revolutionary and popular model of e-commerce, where consumers form a market to sell and buy products online. The largest and most popular C2C company running online auctions, eBay, has 233 million registered users worldwide, with 114 million users in the U.S. and 118 million users in international markets (eBay news release, 2007). If eBay were a country, it would be the fifth most populous country in the world following China, India, the United States, and Indonesia. In the first quarter of 2007, the gross merchandise volume, or total value of all successfully closed items on eBay's trading platform, was US\$14.3 billion internationally (eBay news release, 2007). Approximately 1.3 million online sellers have utilized eBay as a primary or secondary source of personal income, according to A.C. Nielsen's 2006 International Research. In the U.S., consumer online auction sales will reach \$65 billion by 2010, accounting for nearly one-fifth of all online retail sales (Forrester Research, 2005).

Consumers as resellers of used products have been around for a long time in physical markets. However, electronic exchanges alter the scale and scope of what is possible with regard to the sale of used products, and information technology has increased efficiency for buyers and sellers in locating and trading products (Bajari and Hortacsu, 2004; Ghose et al., 2005). Consumer resellers can sell goods quickly and easily, with low transaction costs and sometimes higher prices (Halstead and Becherer, 2003). The impact of consumer online resale on traditional secondary market is evident. In the United States, the US\$9 million in annual sales resulting from traditional garage sales is dwarfed by the \$19 billion in sales through annual C2C online auctions (Dykema, 1999; Herrmann, 1997).

It is inferable from the large number of online sellers and the sales figures that a great deal of current consumer behavior differs from traditional consumer behavior, which involves purchasing and consuming only. The Internet not only changes business models but also dramatically changes consumer purchase and consumption behavior. Durable goods are no longer considered unrecoverable costs, but rather can be consid-

ered liquid assets or acceptable accounts for consumers who have mastered reselling on C2C online auction sites. The product's value or benefits may be perceived differently when consumers contemplate reselling their possession. With the intention to resell, consumers will compare the value brought by continuously using the product, the value of holding cash earned by reselling the product, and the value of new products the cash can buy. When the latter two values are higher than the former, consumers may resell the product online.

While many prior C2C studies have concentrated on online buying behavior or auction mechanisms such as bidding strategies and web assurance (e.g., Ariely and Simonson, 2003; Brown and Morgan, 2006; Jap, 2003; Liu et al., 2002), we aim to investigate another pivotal function of the C2C secondary market, as a channel to sell unwanted goods, and the underlying resale behavior. Past studies related to consumer resale behavior can mainly be found in three streams of research: (1) consumer disposition behavior (Hanson, 1980; Harrelland and McConocha, 1992; Jacoby et al., 1977; Paden and Stell, 2005; Young and Wallendorf, 1989);(2) informal markets: farmers' market (Heisley et al., 1991; Pyle, 1971; Sommer et al., 1980), garage sales (Herrmann, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2006; Herrmann and Soffer, 1984), and flea markets (Belk et al., 1988; Bruin, 2000; Sherry, 1990); and (3) consumers' extended self related to physical belongings (Belk, 1988; Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005, 2006; Price et al., 2000). Although scholars have studied market phenomena related to consumers acting as resellers, none have focused on consumers' online resale behavior, and knowledge about the specificity and meaning of various types of consumer online resale remains primitive. Research on the formation of consumer online resale motivations and their backward influence on offline purchase plans and decision-making when consumers intend to resell at the time of purchase is particularly scant. For instance, consumers may feel more affordable and be more willing to purchase high-priced products if they have skills in using online auctions to recover part of the product costs. In view of the prosperity of C2C e-commerce, it is crucial to scrutinize the behavior of C2C resellers, especially the motivations to resell, in order to more completely explain the consumer resale phenomenon.

2.Consumer Disposition and Resale

Much of the research on consumer behavior has focused on the acquisition phase; hence the disposition process has received relatively less attention (Mowen, 1995; Lastovicka and Fernandez, 2005; Rassuli and Harrell, 1990). Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst (1977), in the first study on consumer disposition, developed a conceptual taxonomy to describe consumer disposition behavior, classifying resale as one of the disposition choices. Following Jacoby's research, Hanson (1980) developed an explanatory model of several salient factors involved in the disposition decision process. Harrell and McConocha (1992) conducted a field study to discover how consumer characteristics are related to the selection of disposition options. These studies indicate that, rather than giving or throwing away unwanted goods, consumers can resell them in venues such as flea markets, garage sales, or consignment stores. Jacoby et al. (1977) suggested a promising direction for future research on studying consumer disposition patterns, which they believed would vary over time. The "disposition phase" refers to what consumers do with a product once they have completed using it (Mowen, 1995). However, consumers may resell unused goods or goods which are not used completely in order to recover part of the acquisition cost. One of the most important emerging disposition channel is the Internet via online auctions. In addition to C2C websites, consumers have traditionally resold their unwanted goods through the following venues.

(1) Consignment stores: Consignment stores are designated to sell goods for consigners who have the desire to sell unwanted goods and are charged a service fee. Consignment stores only receive the service fee after the sale is complete. eBay "drop-off stores" often use the consignment model of selling in order to assist consumers in reselling products. These online drop-off store owners use eBay as a platform to sell goods for consigners who lack the time or expertise to sell on eBay.

(2) Flea markets: A flea market or swap meet is a place where vendors come to sell or trade their goods. The vast majority of flea markets in rural areas involve the sale of second-hand goods. The semi-spontaneous nature and vendor-oriented open-market layout of flea markets sometimes includes concerts and carnival-type events to attract shoppers. Several studies have focused on the social embeddedness of consumption, the marketplace ambience, and comparisons of flea markets to traditional retail stores (Belk et al., 1988; Sherry, 1990; Wallendorf and Amould, 1988).

(3) Garage sales : “A garage sale is usually a community-based special sale that can be found in virtually all American communities, and which is the temporary public sale of used goods, primarily household items and clothing from in and around a private residence” (Herrmann, 2006, p. 182). Sellers at garage sales have a wide range of styles and motivations, from periodic housecleaning and socializing to making a profit and generating cash (Herrmann and Soiffer, 1984). In contrast to retailers’ profit-making motivation, several studies on consumer sellers at garage sales have shown that the social relations of the garage sale experience may be a major reason for sellers’ and buyers’ participation in such sales events. Herrmann (1997) argued that the U.S. garage sale is a complex site that provides the potential for specific exchanges to be constructed as gifts or commodities, or both. Herrmann (1997) has explained that participants of different races and classes can transmit something of themselves with their possessions, transform their own lives in the process, and contribute to a broader spirit of community through these reciprocal transactions.

(4) Pawn shops: A pawnbroker offers monetary loans in exchange for an item of value to be held by the pawn broker. These stores sometimes carry a negative impression due to the fact that they often offer a low price for used goods. People who pawn goods usually need money urgently and value the privacy of the transaction.

Buyers may need more information when buying used products because the preservation condition, quality, price, and after-sale service of used goods vary dramatically in every transaction. The information search and opportunity costs restrict the development of the physical secondary markets due to the lack of an efficient solution to solve such problems. Belk et al. (1988) commented that informal markets, such as farmers markets, garage sales, and flea markets, may be seen as modern anachronisms in which smaller scale, more direct, and often less efficient exchange mechanisms have partly supplanted newer, less costly, larger scale exchange institutions. However, the inefficiency has somewhat been redressed by the information revolution in C2C online auctions, which can greatly decrease costs in searching of buyers, sellers, and products, and allow goods to be sold in a timely manner at more reasonable prices.

3. Consumer Interviews

We conducted consumer interviews to collect information of possible consumer purchase decisions and online resale behavior. Through a snowball process, a purposeful sample of 25 participants who had successful experience in selling a number of products online took part in this study. To enhance the generalizability of our findings, we gathered data in Taiwan and China and compared the interview findings with existing studies conducted in Western countries. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 42, with an average age of 28. Novice users with only one resale experience and veteran users with 17,637 resale experiences were both included in the interviews (see

Table 1). All names in the table were altered for participants’ privacy.

Patton (2002) identified three basic types of qualitative interviews for research or evaluation: informal conversational interview, interview guide approach, and standardized open-ended interview. We employed the interview guide approach considering the main purposes of the study are clear, and we already had enough information to develop guidelines for interviews. Intensive interviews were conducted using a conversational, unstructured, exploratory interview style guided by an outline in order to explore resellers’ resale motivations, product supply source, product condition, pricing strategy, resale goals, and resale satisfaction. Resellers can sell different products with different reasons, so we asked each participant to give several examples of successful online resale transactions. Each consumer interview lasted about one hour. We collected 131 resale transaction cases from the 25 participants, with each participant providing 5 resale examples, on average. One advantage of investigating online resale is that all transaction records within two years are kept in the auction system, including the messages between sellers and buyers. Interview participants were encouraged to log on to their account to view the records of their resale if they do not remember the details of the transaction during the interviews, which helped to improve the accuracy of information.

All interviews were recorded for further analysis and interpretation (Spiggle, 1994). During the qualitative research process, data collection and analyses were processed simultaneously, and results of any data analysis led to further data collection (Siggle, 1994, Strauss and Cobin, 1990; Glaster, 1992). We continued the interviews until we no longer distinguished significant resale patterns from newer interviewees. Patton (2002) noted that the sampling size of a qualitative study depends on the research questions of interest, how

to use the research results, and the resources of the researchers. In our study, one hundred and thirty-one resale cases from the 25 interview participants have provided sufficient information to achieve the current research goals, that is, to identify critical dimensions for identify motivations of consumer online resale and distill implications for managers and further research.

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Information

Name	Place	Gender	Age	Occupation	Resale Frequency
Kevin	Taiwan	M	32	Marketing Planner	62
Ivy	Taiwan	F	25	Realtor	148
Ann	Taiwan	F	23	Teacher	51
Alex	Taiwan	M	40	Driver	12
Chen	Taiwan	M	35	MIS Engineer	3
Wang	Taiwan	M	26	Telemarketing Sales	213
Vicky	Taiwan	F	32	Nurse	55
Lisa	Taiwan	F	23	Graduate Student	62
Tony	Taiwan	M	22	College Student	5
Yang	Taiwan	M	22	College Student	34
Ying	Taiwan	F	22	College Student	4
Howard	Taiwan	M	22	College Student	24
Annie	Taiwan	F	29	Secretary	52
Sherry	Taiwan	F	32	Housewife	34
Kelly	Taiwan	F	42	Housewife	43
Mary	China	F	21	College Student	138
Poly	China	F	27	Housewife	125
Linda	China	F	31	Sales	249
Wu	China	F	35	Public Officer	22
Candy	China	F	26	Unemployment	414
Tom	China	M	19	College Student	1
Mandy	China	F	24	Factory Worker	35
Susan	China	F	23	Graduate Student	17,637
Eric	China	M	36	Engineer	57
April	China	F	25	Housewife	354

4. Defining consumer online resale

Like flea markets and garage sales, a variety of sellers participate in C2C online resale. An important task in the current study is to distinguish “consumer online resale” from “professional online resale”. As noted before, a reseller can conduct different types of transactions. One can repetitively sell the same products in bulk as a retailer and post used DVDs on the same webpage as a consumer disposing of unwanted items. Under this situation, selling the specific products constantly can be seen as “professional resale”, while the sale of second-hand DVDs of self use is a “consumer resale”. Belk et al. (1988) compared full-time professional sellers in flea markets to those of amateurs, and found that the personal inventories of used goods held by amateurs were the primary supply source. Some of these amateur resellers may be frequent sellers at a flea market or garage sale, but lack the time, money, or commitment to develop better sources of sup-

ply and display facilities (Belk et al., 1988). Thus, we define consumer online resale as an online resale that products been resold that is purchased “mainly” for self-use, not for resale.

In a professional online resale, sellers will repetitively sell the same products with a constant supply, and will manage items and inventory to maximize profit. Self-use is not a sourcing criterion for a professional reseller. On the contrary, in a consumer online resale, sellers do not source for resale and their resale products are limited to personal use items, both in variety and quantity. Even consumer resellers are satisfied with the resale; they will not repurchase the same items for resale in order to pursue more profit. Here, we do not categorize the online resale by the seller’s resale experience or frequency, but by the motivation of selling in each resale. Consumer resellers might have more resale experience than professional sellers, but still act as consumers because their motive is not maximizing profit. Consumer online resellers’ attitude and behavior can be very different from professional online sellers. For example, consumer online resellers have no commitment to take risk of holding inventory and product depreciation; therefore, they only purchase self-use items in small quantities. On the whole, consumer resellers care less about the failure of a resale since they can still make use of the unsold items themselves. One thing we have to specially clarify is that consumer resellers are distributors, not manufacturers. Sellers offering home-made cookies on eBay are actually professional sellers by our definition. According to the aforementioned definitions, all resellers on C2C online auctions can be categorized into three types, namely, professional resellers, mixed-role resellers, and consumer resellers (see Table 2). In our study, we completely exclude “professional resellers” and only focus on consumer online resale performed either by “consumer resellers” or “mixed-role resellers”.

Table 2. Definitions of C2C Online Resellers

C2C Online Reseller Type	Definition
Professional Resellers	Resellers only perform “professional resale” in C2C online auctions.
Mixed-Role Resellers	Resellers perform “professional resale” and “consumer resale” simultaneously in C2C online auctions.
Consumer Resellers	Resellers only perform “consumer resale” in C2C online auctions.

5. Findings: Motivations of Consumer Online Resale

Based on literature and interviews, we underline the four major motives that drive consumers to resell products. Compare to professional resellers with the only goal of making profit, consumers have more reasons to resell, including practical and emotional motivations.

Profit-driven monetary motives:

Consumers seek to make a profit by reselling belongings (Herrmann 1997, Herrmann and Soiffer 1984). When making a profit is the main reason, consumers resell online by straight monetary motivations. Example can be found in our interviews:

“When traveling in Italy, I found that a Prada bag is much cheaper there. I purchased one for myself and one for my sister as a gift. But after returning home, my sister told me that she didn’t like the style. I ended up listing the bag on Yahoo and made a surprising windfall of NT\$5,000 (approximately US\$150). After that experience, I pay special attention to products with large price gaps around the world.”(Ivy)

Utilitarian trade-up motives:

When the resale is strongly linked to trade for other purposes of consumption, consumers conduct a “utilitarian trade-up motivation” resale. The resale is just an instrument to amass money for a specific subsequent consumption or in order to compensate for excessive spending before. For example, students may resell durable goods for tuition before semester starts, or consumers may resell because they need to counteract a significant or unexpected financial loss. Examples can be found in our interviews:

“I had experiences before in reselling my used mobile phone, shoes and PC monitors in order to cover a shortage of NT\$10,000 needed for a new laptop computer.” (Ann)

“I love to change my aftermarket car parts by myself and have purchased lots of components to install on my car. Because these replaced components are usually usable and have value, I resell them on auction sites to get money for more purchases.” (Wu)

Emotional/social motives:

Most consumer resale is due to emotional and social motivations, not making a profit. The possible emotional motivations are as follows: avoidance of wasting (Herrmann and Soiffer 1984, Jacoby et al 1977, Okada 2001), environmental protection (Herrmann and Soiffer 1984), socializing (Belk 1988, Cameron and Galloway 2005, Herrmann and Soiffer 1984, Herrmann 2006, Rafaeli and Noy 2002), achievement and entertainment (Herrmann and Soiffer 1984). Understanding these motivations helps to explain why consumer resale needs not to involve sophisticated profit-and-loss calculation. Examples can be found in our interviews:

“I spend lots of money on online games. A few months ago I became tired of playing online games and wanted to quit. I sold these virtual weapons and treasures on auctions for NT\$20,000.” (Chen)

“Reselling on auction site is like playing a game because every time you sell a thing successfully, you receive a positive feedback. Some friendly buyers even leave very sweet and encouraging comments on your pages that always make me feel happy and thankful.” (Susan)

House grooming motives:

To consumers, money and space are both precious resources. Consumers in limited living space have to get rid of some belongings to keep house organized and clean. Notwithstanding these goods are in good conditions; consumers have no choice but to give up in exchange for room. Herrmann and Soiffer (1984) found “house cleaners” are the largest group shown in U.S. garage sale. These consumers become sellers in the wake of growing children accompanying the need to create space, or as a result of relocation having to dump the stuffs stacked in garage. Coulter and Ligas (2003) also reported that “Purgers” type of consumers love to dispose goods in order to keep living space tidy. Examples can be found in our interviews:

“I do not have enough room to keep my children’s clothes, toys and baby care items. Reselling these items can make lots of money and create more space in my house.” (Kelly)

“Books lose their value after reading them. Therefore, I’d like to resell them to create more space.” (Candy)

6. Discussion and Conclusions

Our study discovered that utilitarian trade-up is a prominent and unique motive for consumers to resell online. It is interesting to find that consumers with resale skills treat goods as liquid assets and an alternative cash account which allow them trade up for other products by selling the old ones. Moreover, emotional motives are found outweighed than monetary drivers for consumer resale. This is because online resale has offered consumers the psychological benefits of fun, enjoyment and sense of achievement.

The results of our interviews do not entirely verify our speculation about the less social relationships involved in online consumer resale as compared to the transactions made in the face-to-face secondary markets such as garage sale. As a matter of fact, the participants in our study revealed a strong socializing motive to resell online. In spite of lack of face-to-face contact, the Internet has provided positive features in online resale transaction facilitating interpersonal relationships development across national and cultural boundaries. Consumers worldwide can exchange information instantly at a lower cost by email, MSN messenger, chat rooms, or Internet phone programs. Consumers of the same interests can interact online with each other to share their hobbies without geographic and time constraints. Therefore, socializing is still an important motive for consumers to resell online.

7. Managerial Implications

Marketers should be aware of the changes that the online secondary market has brought for the potential link between the new product and secondary markets (Purohit, 1992; Zhao and Jagpal, 2006). While the speculated cannibalization effect predicts that the C2C online auction market may steal some sales from retailers, online auction sites that resell consumers' unwanted goods may actually carry over and lead to more new product sales from retailers (Paden and Stell, 2005). Those who shop in stores can pass on and sell extra units of products to those who prefer to shop online. The other types of consumer online resale can also bring consumers the cash to recover part of the original purchase payment, which could encourage consumers to buy more new products from retailers, in turn enhancing retail sales (Paden and Stell, 2005). Moreover, online resale might act as useful vehicles by which some buyers reduce their purchase risks, allowing consumers to spend less time evaluating product information and, therefore, to purchase more new goods. Hence, the possible positive or negative impact of the online secondary market on consumers and retailers deserves further examination in future research.

With continuous growth of the Internet user population and the development of the Internet infrastructure, there is little doubt that the phenomenon of consumers serving as online resellers will proliferate. Given the potential impact on changing consumer purchases and consumption patterns, online consumer resale behavior should be extensively researched and addressed. Although a large portion of consumers have not sold or purchased via the Internet, the impact of C2C e-commerce is intensifying, with more selling agents and online resale consignment stores emerging daily (Paden and Stell, 2005). In sum, the more efficient the information flow on the Internet and the lower the costs of reselling products online, the faster consumer behavior will transpire. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to these evolving consumers.

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