

More Research Is Indeed Needed in E-commerce; Where Were Business Academicians When We Needed Them?

Jacques Nantel

Director, RBC Financial Group Chair in e-commerce
HEC Montreal, 3000 Ch. Côte-Ste-Catherine, Montréal, Canada, H3T 2A7
Jacques.Nantel@hec.ca

An exhaustive survey of the literature published between 1995 and 2001 concerning the impact of the Web on business practices suggests that a majority of articles and books, generally published by practitioners but also often by academicians, were too often unfounded, not empirically supported and even misleading. Four areas of business research are explored: Finance, Web usability, advertising on the web, and the distribution of digital products.

In the area of finance and economics, very few articles were published between 1995 and 2002 that suggested that the market evaluation of the .com company was grossly inflated and why it was so. Yet, similar speculative episodes had happened before in history.

In the area of web design and web usability several articles and books have been published. Yet, very few of them are based on sound corroborative methodologies. Everywhere you read that, for a site to be efficient, consumers need to find what they want in 3 clics or that a sample of only five respondents is required in order to test the usability of a site. Although appealing, these results have not received a lot of attention from the academic community. The same holds true for the efficiency of advertising practices on the web for which we have a profusion of anecdotal evidences but very little rigorous analyses.

Finally, another area which suffers from a serious lack of grounded research is the area related to the marketing and distribution of digital products. As it becomes obvious to everyone that the web, even in a “post-Napster” environment, will change forever the way music and other digital products are distributed, very little research have emerged in the business literature suggesting ways in which the economics of this industry could be reshaped.

In this dot-bomb era, the gap between IT and engineering researches on the one hand and business research on the other is widening. The comprehension we have about the ways in which technological advancements change business and especially marketing practices has not evolved at the same pace as technological developments. More business research is indeed needed.