

The BAT model acknowledges that business interaction consists **NOT ONLY OF COMMUNICATION**, but also of an **EXCHANGE OF VALUE**.

This also means, however, that actions are restricted and constrained. There are usually some predefined communicative actions that can be performed through a particular IT application. Something can be said through a piece of software, but not everything. IT applications enable and constrain communicative actions or to say it in another way: IT is a mediator of coordinative actions.

It is not only a matter of what actions can be performed through an IT application. The intended types of communicative actions must also be identifiable by the user. A customer interacting through a Web site must understand what actions are possible to perform. This is a matter of IT affordances—what the IT application affords to its users. The concept of affordance, originally developed in perception psychology [2], has been brought into computing [5, 10]. An affordance is an action possibility that is observable by its potential users. Affordances must include both executable and informative properties.

This is an action view on IT applications and it fits well into LAP. IT applications should not only be usable. They should be actable. IT applications should support the performance of communicative and informative actions [4]. The IT application, as a designed artifact, involves communication to its users. The user interface communicates action possibilities to the users. These action possibilities (affordances) of the user interface should be seen as metacommunicative actions from designers to users [5]. They are metacommunicative actions since they inform about possible communicative actions. The buttons on a Web site (such as “search,” “order,” “confirm”) are, as such, communicative actions from IT designers to users. These buttons communicate what business actions a potential user can perform. When the user clicks a button, a particular communicative

business action is performed.

IT AS MEDIA IN BUSINESS INTERACTION

In what ways is IT a mediator in business interaction? What kinds of actions may be afforded and

mediated through IT? The BAT model can help us discuss and analyze this. Different business actions (according to the different exchange phases) can be mediated through some IT application. Software applications are media through which business actions are performed.

One key LAP issue concerns who is responsible for the mediation of business actions. Consider the following trivial example: A commercial Web site makes it possible for customers to place their orders independent of time and place. The Web

site is an enabler of order actions. However, the certain features of the Web site may also restrict the customer in expressing orders. The customer may desire ordered products to be delivered to different addresses and this may not be possible according to the Web site. It is important to acknowledge that IT both enables and constrains communicative actions. The one in power of the IT application will also have power over communication and the coordination process.

We can use the BAT model to investigate the IT mediation of the business interaction. It is important to raise questions like: Who is in charge of the mediating instrument? What purposes are inherent in the instruments? What actions are enabled? What constraints are put on actions?

In Figure 3, four different cases of IT-mediated business interaction have been depicted. We use the

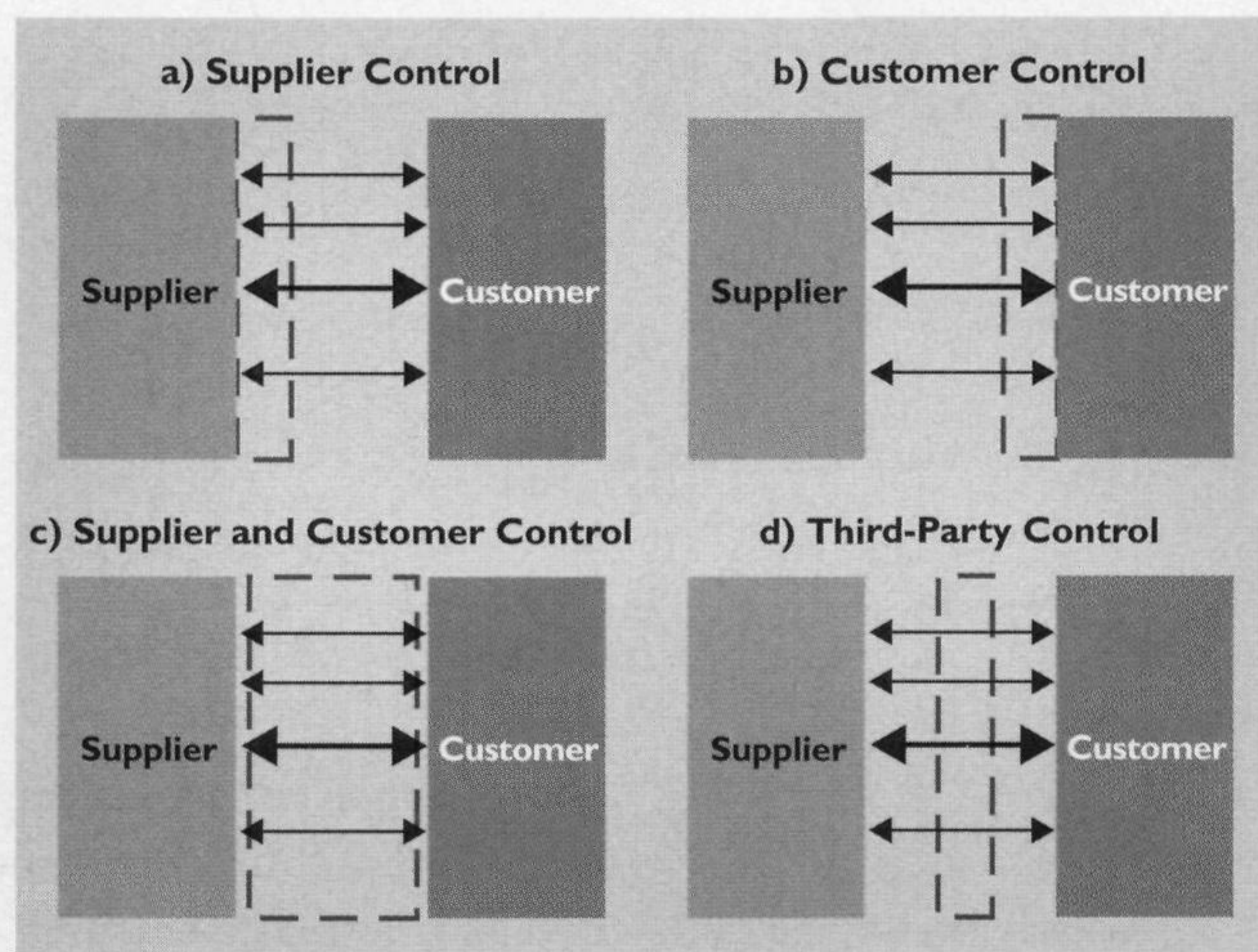


Figure 3. The role of media in business interaction—four cases: a) supplier control; b) customer control; c) combined supplier and customer control; d) third-party control.