The Impact of Online Product Presentation on Consumers’ Perceptions: An Experimental Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The website design and specifically the visual aspects have been revealed as key factors for achieving a successfully e-service website. This research examines the effects of the visual product presentation on online users’ perceptions. We carried out an experiment to analyze the impact of the size, the quality and the movement of the product picture on the perceived usability, satisfaction and purchase intention of users. We also analyzed the moderating role of user experience and product familiarity. The results suggest the importance of visual aspects, emphasizing the quality of the picture as the most salient factor. This study also indicates that users’ satisfaction is influenced to a great extent by these attributes. [Article copies are available for purchase from InfoSci-on-Demand.com]

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Online Shopping; Product Presentation; Web Atmospherics; Web Navigation; Web Site Design

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, the diffusion of the Internet as a new retail and distribution channel has undergone a great growth. The possibilities of exchange are almost infinite if we take into account that there are 1,400 million people (Internet World Stats, 2008) and more than 70,000 million of dotcom (Domain Tools, 2008). Sales through the web are up to 65 billion US$ in United States in the first half of 2007, which means an increase of 20% (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008). It is thought that in Europe sales
outcomes will reach 197 billion US$ by 2008, which supposes an increase of 37% related to 2006 (Emarketer, 2008).

In this context, a special interest has arisen focused on the analysis of the factors that affect the success of e-commerce and e-services websites. In this line, the specialized literature has identified the website design as one of the main factors for the development of a good interface for satisfying the consumer needs. A good design is relevant for companies to survive in the extremely competitive World Wide Web (Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Tan & Wei, 2006). Thus, the web design is important for getting higher levels of satisfaction with the website (Kim & Eom, 2002) or for increasing the online purchase intention of the consumer.

More specifically, visual aspects, such as images, graphics or icons, are being considered as one of the main components of the website design (Kim & Stoel, 2004; Park, Lennon & Stoel, 2005; Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002). In this line, the appearance of a store influence the consumer’s perceptions and behaviours, which has been demonstrated in the traditional context (Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn & Nesdale, 1994), as well as in the online context (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis, 2001; Kim & Eom, 2002; Vrechopoulos & Siomkos, 2002). However, very little research has been focused on studying how the specific features of visual elements could influence online consumers.

The aim of this study is therefore, to examine the effect of the online product presentation on user’s perceptions and behaviours. In particular, this research analyzes the effects of three of the features most exploited by e-firms: the size, the quality and the movement of the product picture. We analyze three dependent variables related to consumer behaviour, basing on the model of Consumer Response System proposed by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982): one cognitive variable –perceived usability–, one affective variable –satisfaction with the website– and one behavioural variable –online purchase intention–. In this way, this research offers an integrated global overview about the users’ perceptions in order to better examine their inner states. This approach integrates the information processing perspective and the experiential view, which is very useful for our study to acquire a more complete knowledge of the real online behaviour under this display of visual aspects of the product presentation.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the literature regarding the relevance of website design for the success of the electronic commerce and e-services. After that, we formulate hypotheses about the effects of different visual product presentations on online consumers’ inner states, and the role played by users’ experience with the Internet and familiarity with the type of product. We then discuss the methodology and present our findings. Lastly, we introduce the main conclusions and managerial implications, as well as the research limitations and future research lines.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WEBSITE DESIGN

With the development of the Internet, electronic commerce and e-services, most of the research carried out in the field of web design has been focused on identifying the key factors that could have an influence on website degree of acceptation and success
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