Influence of Website Design on Consumer Emotion and Purchase Intention in Travel Websites

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ABSTRACT

This work presents the results of three studies that investigated the influence of website design on consumer emotion and purchase intention in travel websites with the use of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. The first two studies addressed how the website’s background color and picture layout can influence consumer emotion and purchase intention, whereas the third study investigated the influence of the size and quantity of pictures on consumer emotion and purchase intention. The results demonstrated that consumer emotion is more positive toward buying online from travel websites that are designed with warm colors and with layouts having such feature as left-hand side images and right-hand side text, along with a few large pictures. Additionally, the results also showed that consumer emotion has a positive influence on purchase intention in a travel website. These results suggested that sellers and managers should improve the design of travel websites to stimulate consumer emotion and purchase intention.

KEYWORDS

Emotion, Purchase Intention, Stimulus-Organism-Response, Travel Website, Website Design

INTRODUCTION

As online travel services continue to gain market share, tourism has become one of the world’s most vibrant industries. Because of the popularity of the Internet, website design has also become increasingly diversified (Chen and Lu, 2015), and with the online travel market continuing to boom, consumers are increasingly using online travel websites to make their own travel arrangements. Huang et al. (2010) reported that online experience has become very important in the global tourism industry in recent years. In the travel website environment, providing consumers with a compelling experience has emerged as an important issue (Nusair and Parsa, 2011). The literature on online travel marketing issues or purchase behavior mostly focused on the Internet or e-commerce (Frias et al., 2008; Brey et al., 2007; Choi et al., 2007). Vision stimuli in a travel website, which is a developing and essential marketing channel in the tourism industry, remains rarely studied.

Various environmental stimuli can induce consumers’ behavioral responses (Goodwin, 1987; Benbunan-Fich, 2001). Donovan and Rossiter (1982) conducted the first empirical investigate of the retail atmosphere. They found that environmental stimuli affect emotional states characterized by pleasure and arousal. Previous studies considerably focused on environmental store effects on purchasing behavior in traditional retail shops (Turley and Milliman, 2000). However, only a limited number of studies focused on the effect of these atmospheric factors in the context of online travel services.
websites. Based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model from environmental psychology, Eroglu et al. (2001) proposed a model that considers how online atmospheric cues influence affective and cognitive states, thereby leading to approach/avoidance behaviors. The model posits that the environment (S) leads to approach/avoidance behaviors (R) and that the emotional states (O) induced by the environmental stimuli mediate this relation. Sherman et al. (1997) utilized the S-O-R model to explore how store environment and emotional states influence various dimensions of purchase behavior. The results revealed that consumer emotions could mediate the purchase process. The store environment and consumer emotional states may be important determinants of purchase behavior. Accordingly, the S-O-R model was used to investigate the effects of website design elements on purchase intention in this study. This study depicts the relations of environmental stimuli (S), which are operationalized as the background color of a website, the size and quantity of pictures, and the picture layout, with organism (O), which is the reflection of emotional responses, and purchase intention (R).

Human cognitive systems for reading text and viewing pictures are not organized in the same manner. Nielsen (2006) demonstrated that a picture could be more attractive than text and that significantly more attention is paid to a left-hand side image than to a right-hand side one. Additionally, the color of the background is also another ubiquitous feature in the online environment (Gorn et al., 2004). The style of a web page can attract consumers and encourage them to visit the website, thus evoking their preferences and promoting their purchase intentions. Mazaheri et al. (2013) indicated that with increased competition, online retailers tend to differentiate themselves from competitors by relying on web atmospherics to create an environment that could evoke a positive emotional state in online consumers, which will further entice such behavior as willingness to spend more time and money on their website. Because online browsing is mainly a visual task, it is necessary to understand how visual design of a website affects browsers’ online behaviors. However, few studies have specifically investigated and focused on consumer emotion in travel websites in recent years. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the influence of visual stimuli on consumer emotion and purchase intention in travel websites with the use of S–O–R model.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

S–O–R Model

This study is based on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). This theory indicates the environment as having stimulating factors (S) that affect individuals directly, which result in cognitive or emotional reactions (O) that affect consumer behavior (R) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Moreover, this theory also indicates that the external physical environment can influence an individual’s emotional state and behavior. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) were the first to employ the S–O–R model to study the impact of store atmosphere on customers’ perceptions and decisions. Donovan and Rossiter (1982) utilized the S–O–R model and used retail stores as investigating responders to examine the relationship between environmental stimuli and behavioral intention by using two emotions, namely pleasure and arousal.

Eroglu et al. (2001, 2003) extended the S–O–R model in online retailing and provided empirical support for significant effects of situation atmospherics on consumer attitudes. The S–O–R model has been extensively investigated in previous online store studies and proved to be valid in predicting online consumer cognitive decisions and subsequent behaviors (Chang and Chen, 2008; Jai et al., 2013; Kawaf and Tagg, 2012; Kim and Lennon, 2013; Liu et al., 2013; Manganari et al., 2011; Richard, 2005; Rose et al., 2012). Following the above literatures, this work proposes that color of background, picture layout, and the size and quantity of pictures will have impacts on emotion and purchase intention in travel websites.
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