Cross-Cultural Factors in Experiencing Online Video Contents in Product Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Although online shops represent convenient tools to buy and sell products, they do not offer as rich multisensory experiences than physical retailing offers. Audio-visual contents could provide dynamic multisensory information and offer more engaging experiences. However, to be successful, audio-visual contents need to be adjusted to the cultural characteristics of the users. This manuscript presents a study in which Spanish and Finnish participants interacted with audiovisual products depicting videos of the brand design. Through content analysis of participants’ verbalizations, the authors identified categories and subcategories that defined the representation of the video elements and their relative weight depending on the cultural background of the viewer. Although results indicate common elements affecting viewers of the two countries, they differ in the relative weight to global aesthetics features. The results of this study can be utilized in designing audio-visual representations of products for online shops taking into account the cultural factors affecting the design practice.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetics, Advertisement, Audiovisual Experience, Cross-Cultural, Online Video

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, internet has become an important tool for companies since it allows them to provide product information to their customers at a lower cost and reaching more distant and diverse geographical locations than traditional means of shopping and advertising. The reduction of the product cost and the possibility of buying from home make this type of shopping an excellent tool for companies and customers. However, online shops display products in ways that differ from traditional physical shops and many times they do not offer as rich multimodal experiences than real world retailing offers. Due to the absence of these richer sensory and communication experiences, designers need to take special care of the visual design and the format of presentation. Usually the elements of the web sites and the products in display are presented in two-dimensional surfaces. Often, products are displayed by depicting pictures of the object and a description of its features. Through the distribution of the elements in websites such as, colour, sound, and images, designers seek to influence the behaviour of the users and to elicit impressions and experiences of the product in the users (Childers et al., 2002). But these static presentations miss many aspects of the sensory information present in real context, and this could represent a communication barrier between companies and customers. Online shops sometimes add video contents to provide the customers with more dynamic information, but in order to make the audio-visual representations of products more experiential, informational, and acceptable, research results are needed to enhance this kind of visual communication for users with varying cultural backgrounds. According to Childers, et al., (2002),

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online-shoppers use the web not only to purchase products in a fast and efficient manner but also as a potential tool for entertainment and enjoyment. Adding audiovisual contents to websites may provide this additional hedonic dimension by providing attractive contexts to show the products, their aesthetic elements or the quality of their manufactured elements. An attractive video might induce consumer to buy the product, to visit the website in the future, and to share it with others (Reinecke & Gajos, 2014). Recently, Ecklers and Rogers (2014) also suggested that audio-visual contents form part of the viral phenomena, highlighting the influences that videos might have as strategies for marketing (Purcell, 2010). Although companies are aware and have made used of this tool (Lindstrom, 2009), they have sometimes applied emotional sensationalism to their audio-visual contents and have tried to catch the audience attention and interest by developing unconventional ideas that pose the risk of triggering a negative reaction on the audience (Ecklers & Rogers, 2014) instead of aligning with positive users’ experiences. Interest is an important emotion for online shopping. According to Silvia (2005) interest involves first evaluation of the degree to which an idea or event is complicated, unexpected, and hard to process, and second an assessment of whether they will be able to cope with the difficulty of the task and the gain coming from spending resources in understanding. Thus, people find interesting complex or unusual events that can be understood after some effort (Silvia, 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2006). In this sense, and besides functionality and possibilities for outreach, the use of videos poses interesting psychological problems because they integrate visual elements with music, sounds and narrative structure to convey meaning and emotions (Gross & Levenson, 1995) and this combination can be used to raise interest in the presented products. Different aspects of the video design such as the shot composition, the movements of the camera, the music and sounds, the script for particular scenes interact to produce emotional reaction toward the product, and to influence the consumers’ behaviour. Similarly, all these very different aspects of the video interact to conforming the users’ experience of the product and capture their interest.

Identifying the elements of videos that capture interest, and induce positive emotions, and understanding the way in which the audience experience them, is critical for the companies using videos with commercial goals (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). Research should, therefore, provide answer to the question of how video contents can be used to enhance customers’ experiences. For audio-visual elements to be successful, they need to be adjusted to the type of product and to the cultural characteristics of the users. Audio-visual elements of products displayed in online shopping web sites convey culturally differing perceptions, which influence users’ experiences of the products, and thus affect the adoption of e-commerce (Pavlou & Chai, 2002). In the present study, the focus is on examining users’ experiences of audio-visual contents in online shopping websites from cross-cultural perspective to provide insights into culturally adjusted audio-visual online shopping website design. The results of the study are explicated with cognitive appraisal theory of emotion (Norman, 2004; Scherer, 2009; Eckler, 2011), and discussed in terms of design implications of online shopping websites from cross-cultural perspective.

**Experiencing Audio-Visual Content from Cross Cultural Perspective**

Experiencing a product involves creating a mental representation of the cognitive and emotional contents associated to the product. One of the key concepts of modern psychology is mental representation (Newell & Simon, 1972). It means that people have a representation of their actions and environment or their own internal states and their emotions. Experience can be seen as the conscious part of mental representations (Saariluoma & Jokinen, 2014). These emotional contents are represented through appraisal processes derived from different information sources (Scherer, 2009; Saariluoma & Jokinen, 2014; Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Appraisal starts with the perceptual stimuli that include
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