Impact of Electronic Servicescape of Online Gaming on Customer Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Customer engagement today has become crucial in creating stickiness for a brand. The elements of servicescape influences the user of a website to return to the website and get involved. This study examines the servicescape which impacts an online gamer’s cognitive and emotional experience through electronic media. The article highlights the important factors such as aesthetics, ambience, spatial layout and functionality, symbols, and artefacts in the online game, and also the engagement of the customer through cognitive and emotional responses. Social interaction and psychological engagement were also found to be important aspect of the electronic servicescape for online gamers. Several implications for marketing strategies is presented in the article for designers like managing colour, design, and image placement so that the website/app is less crowded, easy to navigate, and faster. In an online gaming experience, gamers tend to evaluate cognitive factors in the website and form their behaviours towards investing time and money in the game.

KEYWORDS

Customer Engagement, Electronic Media, Electronic Servicescape, E-Scape, E-Servicescape, Online Customer Engagement, Online Gaming, Social Interaction On Online Games

INTRODUCTION

The internet has transformed the way customers make purchases since more and more customers are opting for online purchases rather than purchasing products or services physically. The internet-based purchase activity reduces the time spent on purchases and also the customers are not restricted to any geographical area (Sharma & Sheth, 2004). In today’s digital age, the service providers are not only delivering service through physical stores but, largely through online portals like online retailers, online game providers, online cab service provider and many more. Since purchases which are made online do not have direct personal contact, the shopping environment is very different from that of a physical store. Hence, for a customer to evaluate product or services online require cues which would help them to evaluate the online websites. It has been found that in-store environmental factors influence the evaluation of in-store attributes, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention (Dawson et al., 1990). The servicescape is defined as the physical environment of encounters between consumers and employees of the service provider, which should be able to generate a positive relationship between consumers and their shopping environment (Josien, 2010). Bitner (1992) suggested that companies where the interaction between the customer and the service provider is minuscule or less, the need of servicescape for such companies would be larger. Hence, the concept of servicescape is equally or in some scenarios more important for online websites.

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The online gaming has increased stupendously in the past few years due to the availability of faster internet and advancement in the quality of hardware with lower prices. Indian online gaming industry alone will be adding 190 million gamers and would become a USD one billion opportunity by 2021, which presently is at USD 290 million (KPMG, 2017). Whereas, the world’s largest online game market, China generated revenue of USD34.4 billion in 2018 surpassing U.S.A (Newzoo, 2019). Unlike, online retail stores like iTunes where consumers pay to download music and consumption of music happens only after the download of the music file has taken place, hence, involving a brief time gap between payment and consumption of the service, in online gaming the games are self-immersive and payments for different features of the game are instantaneous which heightens the gaming experience. The longer the consumers stick to the platform, higher are the chances of them involving in purchasing paid features resulting in higher profitability. Thus, it would be interesting to find whether servicescape can be extended to online gaming, where the requirement of servicescape seems to be extremely critical to engage customers longer.

BACKGROUND

This study investigates the relationship among stimuli from the environment, organisms’ internal responses, and behavioural responses in online gaming. The stimulus-organism-response theory (S-O-R theory) brings in the relationship amongst a stimulus, an organism, and a response. A stimulus is an environment like in case of online gaming the environment could be primarily one of the three types: Browser-based, App based or Offline (KPMG, 2017). An organism here would be a gamer in the environment (browser/ app or offline) and a response is a behaviour which results from the environment. Stimulus on which prior research has taken place in the field of marketing consists of music, lighting, smell, design, cleanliness, spatial arrangement, colour and congestion. An organism responds internally to such a stimulus and these responses include the experience of varied human emotions resulting in evaluations of product quality, price, etc. Bitner (1992), based on S-O-R theory, measured the impact of servicescape on internal responses like cognition and emotion which further results in approach or avoidance behaviour. The impact of online servicescape using the S-O-R theory has been researched by Kim and Koh (2007) which provided the groundwork for further empirical investigation. The components of online servicescape directly affect the cognitive and emotive responses of a human who may either purchase, revisit or demonstrate an intention to stay.

Online Gaming

The term ‘Online Gaming’ has multiple interpretations today, due to the penetration of the internet and other network platforms which facilitate the accessibility of games. Online gaming today can be defined based on the following:

1. Channels used to procure or access the game;
2. Device used to play and
3. Mode of game-play.

An online game is accessed through online channels and requires internet to experience the game or to make purchases within the game or procure the game through the internet. This research concentrates upon the online gaming from the perspective of its procurement or access channel i.e. the internet. Online games include all genres and can be played across single-player, multiplayer and massively multiplayer formats. The three primary forms of online gaming are Browser-based, App based or Offline. Nielsen (2017) suggests that with more gaming experience the gamers preference changes from smaller screens to larger ones which provides ease of use to complex gaming activities and even today the maximum amount of time spent by a gamer in the U.S is on mobile phones and then on personal computers.
Evaluating the Usability and Content Usefulness of Web Sites: A Benchmarking Approach
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