Beyond Trust: Web Site Design Preferences Across Cultures

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ABSTRACT

The growth of Internet shopping motivates a better understanding of how e-loyalty is built online between businesses and consumers. In this study, Web site design and culture are advanced as important to Web site trust, Web site satisfaction, and e-loyalty in online business relationships. Based on data collected in Canada, the U.S., Germany, and Japan, the research considers (1) examining within culture preferences for design elements of a local vs. a foreign Web site and subsequent participant perceptions of trust, satisfaction, and e-loyalty; and (2) comparisons between cultures for design preferences of local and foreign Web sites and subsequent participant perceptions of trust, satisfaction, and e-loyalty. As predicted, similarities were greatest among Americans, Canadians, and Germans, with the Japanese representing a different and unique case. The results are discussed against hypothesized expectations. Implications for future research are outlined.

Keywords: culture; e-business; e-loyalty; Internet; satisfaction; trust; Web site design

INTRODUCTION

The origin of online shoppers is progressively more global and represents a multicultural community. In 2004, there were 736.6 million people with Internet access (Global Reach, 2004) and, hence, access to online consumer products. Of those Internet users, the primary language is English (35.6%), followed by Chinese (12.2%), Japanese (9.5%), Spanish (8%), and German (7%). Understanding how to build trust, satisfaction, and ultimately loyalty for diverse consumers in electronic
markets is a central imperative (Gommans et al., 2001; Grewal et al., 2003; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Jones et al., 2000; McKnight et al., 2002; Urban et al., 2000; Yoon, 2002).

Despite an anticipated large number of consumers from multiple cultures, few studies have systematically examined Web preferences of users related to design characteristics across cultures. This appears an omission in the literature, considering Chen and Dhillon (2003, pp. 310-311) who note:

In the case of an Internet vendor, the Web site is perhaps the only way a firm communicates with its customers. Therefore its appearance and structure encourage or discourage a consumer’s purchase intentions. In the marketing literature Web site features such as layout, appeal, graphics, readability, and ease-of-use have been considered to affect consumers’ clicking frequency.

Some researchers have done work in the area of culture and design (Barber and Badre, 2001; Del Galdo and Nielsen, 1996; Marcus and Gould, 2000), but results have been either inconclusive or unrelated to developing loyal online customers. Issues of interest extend beyond consideration of language to also include color, product information and use of images.

With increased prevalence of the Internet for shopping, research has been focused on how to develop trust online. As with the literature on trust prior to the Internet, the elements contributing to online trust are diverse and include quality, customer support, on-time delivery, compelling product presentations, convenient and reasonably priced shipping and handling, clear and trustworthy privacy policies (Reichheld and Schechter, 2000), company reputation (Egger, 2000; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Lohse and Spiller, 1998; Quelch and Klein, 1996; Resnick and Zeckhauser, 2002; Yoon, 2002), online transaction security (Palmer et al., 2000), or information privacy (Hoffman and Novak, 1996) among other considerations. Overall shopping satisfaction has been used to predict subsequent purchases and loyalty to Internet shopping sites, (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003; Devaraj et al., 2002; Szymanski and Hise, 2000; Yoon, 2002). In particular, Yoon tested both trust and satisfaction related to Web site design and security, and found trust related to security, while ease of navigation (generally accepted as a design characteristic of Web sites) tied to satisfaction. This is an interesting distinction, and suggests satisfaction merits further investigation related to various design features of Web sites.

Although trust and satisfaction are expected to be predictive of e-loyalty, few studies have systematically examined these elements linked to design preferences. More specifically, design preferences contributing to the development of trust, satisfaction and e-loyalty have not been examined across cultures. This investigation addresses this gap by examining within culture preferences for design features of a local vs. a foreign Web site and participants’ consequent perceptions of trust, satisfaction and e-loyalty. The research also examines comparisons between cultures for design preferences of the local Web site and subsequent par-
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