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Perceived irritation in online shopping: The impact of website design characteristics



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ABSTRACT

Perceived irritation has shown negative effects on various aspects of consumer shopping behavior. Despite the enormous proliferation of online shopping in recent years, very little research has explored perceived consumer irritation or its determinants in online shopping environments. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the effects of visual, navigational, and informational website design characteristics on consumers' perceived irritation in online shopping activities. The results of data collected from online shoppers showed that the three website design characteristics had significant negative effects on perceived irritation in online shopping context. These findings offer valuable implications for website designers and online retailers who wish to design and maintain attractive websites that can minimize perceptions of irritation among current and potential customers.

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1. Introduction

Perceived irritation has demonstrated negative effects on various aspects of consumer purchasing behavior such as satisfaction, trust, attitude, purchasing intention, and eventual buying behavior (Azeem, 2012; d'Astous, 2000; Gao & Wu, 2010). In traditional and face-to-face shopping, feelings of irritation among consumers develop from unfriendly interactions with the shopping environment elements such as the store attributes, store personnel, or other customers (Thota, 2012). As such, the role of the shopping environment in provoking feelings of irritation among consumers has been widely recognized and investigated in the literature especially in traditional shopping (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985; d'Astous, 2000; Ducoffe, 1996; Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001; Thota, 2012). A comprehensive literature review by Turley and Milliman (2000) corroborate the importance of stores' attributes in influencing consumers' shopping beliefs and behaviors. Consequently, businesses frequently arrange and reorganize the physical layout and attributes of their stores in a careful manner to induce positive effects on their customers and to mitigate any potential consumer irritation (Ergolu et al., 2001). However, while online shopping has become a dominant commercial medium for consumers and retailers alike (Bao, Bao, & Sheng, 2011), perceived

irritation in online shopping environments has not been sufficiently investigated in the literature (Gao & Koufaris, 2006). Thus, perceived irritation deserves further investigation and better understanding in online shopping contexts.

The concept of consumer irritation can be extended to online shopping contexts and, like in traditional shopping environments; it provokes negative effects on a wide range of perceptions and feelings among online customers (Gao & Koufaris, 2006; Huang, 2008; Lim, 2013; Luo, 2002). When a customer encounters an unpleasant situation and feels irritated (whether at a conventional or virtual store), the customer abandons the shopping cart and leaves the store without making a purchase. In addition to abandoning the current purchase, such irritative and annoying experiences can have a lingering and adverse effect on consumers' beliefs about retailers' trust, benevolence, competence, dependability, and integrity (Gao & Wu, 2010; Thota, 2012). Given the easiness and speed at which consumers can leave a commercial website and defect to a competitor's site (O'Brien & Toms, 2008; Wu, Chen, Chen, & Cheng, 2014), the issue of irritation becomes even more relevant and detrimental to online shopping.

In the virtual business world, a website interface serves as a window through which consumers encounter their initial experiences with an online retailer (Zhang & van Darn, 2002). All subsequent interactions between the consumer and the online retailer are accomplished through the website's interface (Karimov, Brengman, Van Hove, & Van, 2011; Shih, 2004; Wells, Valacich, &

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Hess, 2011). Accordingly, the design elements of online virtual store have similar, even more important, effects on consumers' beliefs and attitudes as the design elements and arrangements in a conventional store (Liang & Lai, 2002). It has been shown that poorly-designed websites irritate their users and impede navigation of the site, finding products, and purchase behavior (Gao & Koufaris, 2006; Gao & Wu, 2010; Huang, 2008; Wells et al., 2011). Although website design characteristics represent the basic atmospheric building blocks that can be carefully manipulated to communicate positive signals to enhance shoppers' perceptions and attitudes (Koo & Ju, 2010; Manganari, Siomkos, & Vrechopoulos, 2009), investigations of the effects of website design factors on perceived irritation in online shopping are exceptionally scarce in the literature.

To enhance consumers' online shopping behavior, it is crucial for businesses to have a better understanding of not only factors that stimulate positive and pleasing feelings among consumers but also factors that arouse negative emotions and reactions among customers which could ultimately impede online shopping behavior (Azeem, 2012). Accordingly, the present study aims to address the research void described above and provide a better understanding of the impact of website design elements on perceived irritation in online shopping environments. More precisely, the intent of this study is not to examine all website design elements which is extremely difficult to do in a single study, but rather it aims to focus on key website design characteristics that are most apparent to and used by consumers; namely visual, navigation, and information website designs. Undoubtedly, understanding how website design characteristics affect feelings of irritation in online shopping will provide valuable implications for designing better websites that can be more effective in reducing perceptions of irritation among online consumers and can subsequently increase acceptance of online shopping.

2. Research model and hypotheses

Fig. 1 presents the research model guiding this study. The research model was developed based on conceptual and empirical studies in related disciplines. As Fig. 1 shows, the model posits that visual, navigation, and information website design characteristics will have negative effects on perceived irritation in online shopping settings. The research variables and hypotheses are described below.

2.1. Perceived irritation

Consumer irritation refers to the feelings of displeasure, discomfort and infuriation that are caused by provoking or annoying stimuli such as incidents, messages, or interactions that may go against what a consumer expects or anticipates in a

particular situation (Ducoffe, 1996). Thus, perceived irritation in online shopping environments refers to the degree to which an online shopping site appears messy and frustrating to its users (Lim & Ting, 2012). Although very few studies have examined consumer irritation with respect to online shopping (Gao & Koufaris, 2006), almost all studies used perceived irritation as a determinant to other factors and, thereby, focused on the consequences of perceived irritation (Lim, 2013; Lim & Ting, 2012; Luo, 2002; Xu, Oh, & Teo, 2009). Such studies have shown that perceived irritation had negative effects on online consumers' attitude, satisfaction, word of mouth, intention to return, perceived ease of use, and purchasing behavior (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009; Huang, 2008; Jere & Davis, 2011; Thota, 2012). Moreover, perceived irritation had negative effects on vendor-related factors such as credibility, competence, dependability, and integrity (Gao & Wu, 2010). Despite the numerous negative outcomes attributed to perceived irritation in online shopping, there has been little or no research effort aimed at examining determinants of perceptions of irritation among online shoppers.

As posited earlier, consumers develop feelings of irritation primarily from their unfavorable interactions and experiences with the shopping environment (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1985). In comparison, perceptions of irritation in online shopping arise from unpleasant interactions with the shopping website. Because the website's interface operates as the 'online storefront' with which users interact and upon which they develop their first impressions about the virtual store or vendor (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002), the site's interface design has substantial effects on perceptions of irritation (Wells et al., 2011). For instance, websites that are informative, visually appealing, easy to navigate and use seem to enhance users' involvement with the site and are less likely to instigate feelings of irritation among users (Gao & Wu, 2010). In contrast, a messy and poorly-designed website drains users' attention, requires more effort and cognition to use, and evokes negative feelings that may cause irritation among users because they are unable to navigate the website, find products, or complete a purchase task (Azeem, 2012; Chen & Wells, 1999; Gao & Wu, 2010).

2.2. Website design

The ability of a traditional store to fulfill consumers' expectations through careful design of physical, social, and aesthetic elements is analogues to a website's ability to attract and retain online consumers through carefully-designed website screens and interfaces (Eroglu et al., 2001; Rosen & Purinton, 2004). Previous studies suggest that the impact of website design on online shopping is as important to consumers as the effects of good service and low prices in traditional retailing (Koufaris, 2002). Website design plays even a greater role in online purchasing than the service provided to customers in traditional stores. In online shopping, consumers experience and evaluate the quality of service, as it is manifested by the site's interface design, before they make purchases (Zhang & von Dran, 2002). Moreover, past work shows that consumers are more likely to visit and buy from better-designed websites (Mithas, Ramasubbu, Krishnan, & Fornell, 2007). Accordingly, website design characteristics play a key role in developing consumers' initial beliefs and subsequent purchasing behavior (Cheung, Chan, & Limayen, 2005; Karimov et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2011) and communicating product and vendor qualities to consumers (Wells et al., 2011). Thus, developing pleasing and organized shopping websites is crucial for enhancing consumers' beliefs and attracting online customers (Ahn, Ryu, & Han, 2007; Chang & Chen, 2009).

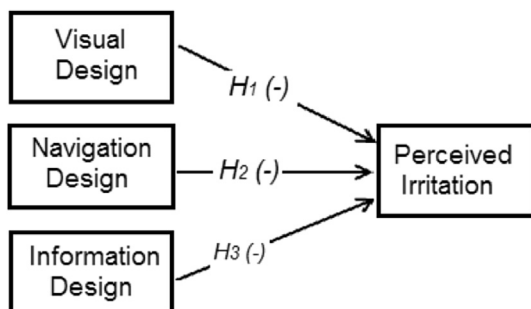


Fig. 1. Research model.

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