

GAINING SATISFACTION AND TRUST IN A BRAND WEBSITE

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INTRODUCTION

Gaining satisfaction and trust online remains a challenging task for marketers, due to increased levels of uncertainty that exist in the interactive environment. Many studies have been conducted in order to investigate how the online media influences satisfaction and trust (eg. Martin et al., 2011; Shankar et al. 2003). However, the present study makes an attempt to understand the factors that increase satisfaction and trust in an interactive brand website. In particular, the present study addresses the following two questions: Are the levels of consumer trust and satisfaction for a brand website different according to the level of website interactivity? Are the levels of consumer trust and satisfaction affected by the four facets (aesthetics, playfulness, service excellence and customer return on investment) of Experiential Value [EV].

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Interactivity, Trust and Satisfaction

Website interactivity refers to the interactive mechanisms available online consisting of consumer to consumer interaction and business to consumer interaction (Lin and Lee, 2012). The three dimensions of perceived interactivity are “active control”, “responsiveness” and “synchronicity” (Song and Zinkhan 2008).

Web-site success was identified as a multidimensional construct, with trust and satisfaction as key factors. Internet consumer trust is defined as *a consumer's subjective belief that a selling party or entity will fulfil its transactional obligations as the consumer understands them* (Kim 2012, p.225). Trust is important especially in uncertain environments that consumers feel vulnerable and exposed to high risk situations (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Trust, is a pre-requisite for long-term relationship with the brand and online transactions (Moorman et al., 1993). The frequency of interaction and the extent of consumer trust are positive related (Martin et al. 2011). The greater the frequency of interaction, the easier it is to build trust (Wu and Chang, 2005). In addition, increased levels of interactivity in a brand website, which means increased responsiveness, two-way communication and user control may eliminate the conditions of uncertainty and risky. It is expected that:

H1: As the level of website interactivity increases, the trust increases.

Online satisfaction is defined as *“the psychological reaction of the customer with respect to his or her prior experience with comparison between expected and perceived performance”* (Chang and Wang, 2008 p.11). Attribution processes have been recognized as antecedent of customer satisfaction (eg. Folkes, 1988). The interactive literature proposes the “active control” as one important dimension of interactivity in a brand website (eg. Voorveld et. al. 2011). Product and information customization as well as dropdown menus are recognized as three interactive functions within the active control dimension (Voorveld et. al. 2011). An interactive website could generate greater satisfaction by providing greater control to consumers to personalise the information and to customise the product or the service (Shankar et al. 2003). These arguments suggest that the degree of website interaction is positive correlated to e-satisfaction. It is expected that

H2: As the website interactivity increases, the satisfaction increases.

Experiential Value and Satisfaction and Trust

Experiential Value [EV] is a scale that measures the consumer experience in four dimensions such as aesthetics, service excellence, customer return on investment and playfulness (Mathwick et al., 2001). Visual appeal and entertainment value reflects the aesthetic element of the online retailing store.

Enjoyment and escapism is reflected by the perception of playfulness. Service excellence is reflected by the service provided by the website. Efficiency and economic value reflects the customer return on investment (Mathwick et al., 2001). The literature correlates the four dimensions of [EV] with the satisfaction. In particular, Oliver (1999) claims that satisfaction will occur if value such as aesthetics, excellence and efficiency are accomplished. Economic value is positive related with satisfaction in the web environment (Verhagen et al. 2011). Also, elements of play and playfulness are drivers of online satisfaction (Lin et al. 2011). It is expected that the four dimensions of EV will influence the consumer satisfaction for the brand website. It is therefore proposed that:

H3: The four dimensions of (EV) [aesthetics, playfulness, service excellence and customer return on investment (croi)] influence satisfaction of brand website positively

Aesthetics design, in a website, is considered as an important tool in order to develop feelings of trust (Weinstock et al. 2012). Service quality as well as playfulness appears to be factors that contribute to customer trust (Velmurugan, 2009; Hess et al. 2009). Pricing plays important role in mitigating the negative impact of high product uncertainty (Luo et al. 2012). Therefore it is expected that:

H4: The four dimensions of (EV) [aesthetics, playfulness, service excellence and customer return on investment (croi)] influence trust for a brand website positively.

METHOD

In order to test the proposed hypotheses an online experiment was conducted and three different treatment conditions were developed (high, medium and low interactivity). A retailer's website that presents a fictitious brand for a laptop was designed with three different versions of interactivity levels, high, medium and low.

Based on the interactivity –related literature there were designed the three experimental websites (Table A). The three dimensions of website interactivity, as well as, the six elements that enhance the level of perceived interactivity were taken under consideration. As stated earlier, the three dimensions of interactivity are the two-way communication, synchronicity and control. Two-way communication refers to the communication between the company and the users. Synchronicity regards with websites response which should be immediate and without delay. Control refers to users' ability to control their navigation, the content and the pace of interaction (e.g. Liu and Shrum 2002; McMillan and Hwang 2002; Johnson et al. 2006; Song and Zinkhan 2008; Voolverd et al 2011). The six elements that make websites truly interactive are “*feedback forms, the capability to register the product online, the option to recommend the site to a friend, dropdown menus, the option to customize products and the capability to customize information on the Web site*” (Voolverd et al. 2011, p. 89). Following Sohn et al. (2007) the low-interactivity site was a one-page document containing nothing but the text information and photo images of the product. The three variations of the website featuring the laptop provided the same amount of information (Sicilia, et al. 2005).

Table A: Interactivity elements employed in high, medium and low interactivity version of the website

Interactivity elements		Interactivity level		
		High	Medium	Low
Two way communication Liu and Shrum 2002; McMillan and Hwang 2002; Voolverd et al 2011	option to recommend the site to a friend	✓	✓	
	capability to register the product online	✓		
	feedback form	✓	✓	
	telephone number, e-mail	✓	✓	✓
	online service	✓		
	e-shop	✓	✓	
Time or synchronicity Johnson et al. 2006; Song and Zinkhan 2008; Voolverd et al 2011	click to call – we call you back now	✓		
	online service	✓		
	number of clicks required to reach certain information	✓	✓	

	response time	✓		
Control and Zinkhan 2008; Voolverd et al 2011	an option to customize products	✓		
	capability to customize information	✓		
	dropdown menu	✓	✓	

Three experienced web-designers served as judges to verify the actual level of interactivity on each website. To measure the three dimensions of perceived interactivity the 21-item scale developed by [Song and Zinkhan \(2008\)](#) was used. A pre-test was conducted with 60 students. The results confirmed that each web page provides the appropriate level of interactivity according to the treatment conditions of the experiment.

Satisfaction is measured on an eight-item scale employed by Montoya- Weiss, Voss, and Grewal (2003) to online environment. *Trust* is measured on an eight-item scale based on the [Ganesan \(1994\)](#) and [Doney and Cannon \(1977\)](#) scales and was adapted to an online context following the proposals of [Martin et al., \(2011\)](#). *Experiential Value* is measured with the scale proposed by [Mathwick et al. \(2001\)](#). Experiential Value Scale (EVS) consists of 19 items measuring experiential value. They examine the consumer shopping experience in terms of four dimensions of experiential value: service excellence, aesthetics, playfulness, customer return on investment.

The sample was a convenience one, consisting of students. 190 individuals participated in the study (180 usable questionnaires). The age mean was 20,9 years old. 48% the sample consisted of women. Their income is between 0-480 euro. They surf in the web almost 3 hours per day.

Experimental Process

The experiment was conducted in a University lab. Each participant first answered the questionnaire regarding demographics, web-usage time per week and web experience. Then he was exposed to one out of three experimental website. Participants were instructed to navigate at the website individually, at their own time and pace. Once the navigation process was completed, the participants filled in the rest questionnaires regarding “trust”, “satisfaction” and “experiential value”.

RESULTS

Data were entered and analysed to SPSS 20. Cronbach’s alpha values for all the variables are higher than .70 indicating high reliability. MANOVA Tukey HSD was selected and the dependent variable is the trust whereas the independent is the level of website interactivity. [Levene Statistic Sig. = .000 < .05. ANOVAs F(2,177)= 8.965 (Sig.=.000 < .05)]. Data analysis indicated that individuals exposed to the low interactive website generated more trust as compared to those exposed to medium [mean difference= .49405, Sig. = .000] and high [md: .18016, Sig. = .297] interactive levels. It should also be underlined that individuals exposed to the high interactivity website indicated higher levels of trust as compared to those exposed to medium [md = .31389, Sig. = .021]. Therefore H1 is rejected.

MANOVA Tukey HSD was selected with satisfaction as the dependent variable and website interactivity the independent. [Levene statistic Sig. = .382 <.05. ANOVAs F(2,173) = 7.964, Sig. = .000]. Data analysis indicated that participants exposed to the low interactivity level were more satisfied with the website as compared to those exposed to high [md: .30308, Sig. = .062] and medium [md: .52308, Sig. = .000]. Therefore, H2 is rejected.

A multiple regression [Enter method] was run to predict “satisfaction” from aesthetics, playfulness, return on investment and service excellence [R= .722, R²= .521]. F(4,171) = 46,561, Sig. = .000 < .05. Based on the Unstandardized Coefficients B column, the following is proposed:

$$Satisfaction = 1.171 + .365 aesthetics - .286 playfulness + .657 customer return on involvement - .030 service excellence$$

Aesthetic and customer return on investment have a significant positive relationship with satisfaction whereas playfulness appears to have negative relationship (table 3). Therefore the H3 is accepted for the two of the four dimensions of (EV).

A multiple regression [Enter method] was run to predict “trust” from aesthetics, playfulness, return on investment and service excellence [R=.680, R²= .462]. F(4,175)= 37.604; Sig.= 0.00 < .05. Based on the Unstandardized Coefficients B column, the following is proposed:

$$\text{Trust} = 1.405 + .346 \text{ aesthetics} - .275 \text{ playfulness} + .567 \text{ customer return on investment} - .027 \text{ service excellence}$$

Aesthetics and customer return on investment have positive whereas playfulness has negative relationship with trust. Therefore the H4 is accepted for the two of the four dimensions of (EV).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The present study examined the factors that contribute to increase trust and satisfaction in an interactive website. Specifically, it tested which level of website interactivity increases trust and satisfaction in a brand website. The findings indicated that the low interactivity level seems to increase both trust and satisfaction. It seems that increased levels of interactivity do not reduce the sense of uncertainty derived from the web environment. Also, web users may feel less vulnerable when they are exposed to the low interactive website. Overall, the results indicate, that the level of satisfaction and trust can drastically change in the web environment implying that increased levels of interactivity may not always yield positive communication outcomes (Sohn, et al. 2007). This further supports Liu and Shrum’s (2002) suggestion that the rush to employ interactive elements into the marketing context should be mediated or tempered by fully understanding both; what interactivity can do well and most importantly what it cannot do.

This study provided insights into the relationships between experiential system value and satisfaction as well as trust. Findings indicate that aesthetics and customer return on investment (croi) have positive relationship with both trust and satisfaction in the brand website. Playfulness appears to have negative whereas excellence do not have significant relationship with trust and satisfaction.

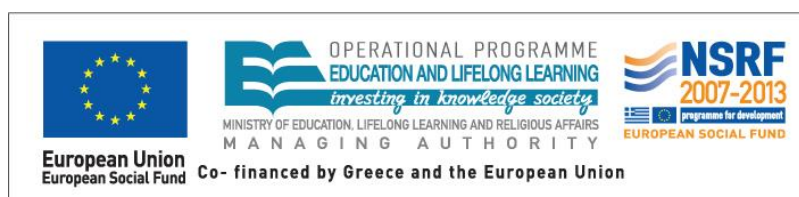
From a practical point of view, the present study offers guidelines for the design and development of brand websites that specifically stimulate satisfaction and trust to their users. Designers, especially for a new brand, should take into account the appropriate level of interactivity employed in their website. The two dimensions of EV, aesthetics and customer return on investment (croi), not only satisfy the users but also gain their trust.

This study has certain limitations that provide directions for future research. First, the experiment was conducted for a fictitious brand. Gaining satisfaction and trust for a new unknown brand is more challenging as compared to an established one. Future studies could investigate the satisfaction and trust for a well-established brand. The sample, consisting of students, has increased familiarity with the internet use. Future studies could examine the factors underling trust and satisfaction with individuals with less web experience and familiarity.

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