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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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