A Study of Emotional and Rational Purchasing Behavior for Online Shopping

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Abstract. Emotion has gained much attention in product design over recent years. It is not surprising that the aesthetic appeal may determine the fate of a product, namely its success or failure in the market. Unlike the traditional marketing channel, websites provide a different opportunity for promoting the products to the potential customers who may know the products via a computer mediated website and its user interface. Previous studies have shown that website design features and usability can influence the willingness of the purchase. However, whether the product characteristics on the websites and the customers’ attitudes (emotional thinking vs rational thinking) will affect the purchasing behavior is still unknown. In this study, the influence of the emotional appearances of the websites and the product characteristics as well as the user characteristics to the purchase behavior was examined. The findings suggest the emotional web appeal may not be able to affect the thinking style which may further enhance the purchasing intention of specific products. Further study on web appeal and web design strategies may be needed to identify and attract online customers.

Keywords: E-commerce, Emotional decision, Web appeal, Purchase behavior.

1 Introduction

According to Forrest Research, the US Internet commerce was 16.5 billion dollars in 2001, and expects to reach 35.1 billion dollars in 2011. As this growth continues, there is increasing interest and needs in understanding issues regarding online consumer behavior. Indeed, the online sales environment is different from the traditional market in which the face-to-face contact and the direct experience of the transaction are required in making purchase decisions. In the electronic commerce, or e-commerce, the buying and selling of products and services is computer mediated. Medium characteristics, consumer characteristics and product characteristics are important group factors to online consumer behaviors [2]. Among others, design elements are one of the major attributes of the medium characteristics. The purpose of this study is to identify what design strategies should have to enhance consumer’s purchasing intention by examining the interaction of emotional on web design and product and consumer characteristics.
2 Background and Research Proposition

Emotional and rational paradigms can apply in many different aspects of consumer decision-making process. From determining of the product characteristics to evaluation of the advertisement effectiveness and to understanding the styles the consumer process product information, some models were used for developing the strategies to attract consumers.

2.1 Rational and Emotional Paradigm on Product Type and Advertisement Appeal

The consumer’s purchasing decision making process can vary widely among products. Vaughn [14] reviewed Foot, Cone, and Belding’s FCB model, by which products were categorized with two different dimensions: involvement (high/low) and rationality/emotionality (think/feel). From these dimensions of FCB model, any product purchasing decision can be classified into one of the following four types, i.e., think/high, think/low, feel/high and feel/low. Typically, think/high products include large appliances, home appliances etc. Feel/high products include fashion, jewelry and apparel, etc. Products such as foods, drugs and house cleaning belong to think/low categories, and those which can help to create little personal pleasure, such as beers and desserts, are of feel/low group. Reliable measurement of FCB dimension was developed [11] and the scales were used to test candidate products in order for insuring the proper choice of product type.

On the other hand, appeals are used to enhance the attractiveness of products. Appeals in product advertisement can be considered as either emotional or rational [13]. Rational appeals can be seen as informative in nature and may be exemplified with information such as product components, availability, nutrition content, package details, price/value position, etc. Emotional appeals can be seen as psychological in nature and may stimulate either negative or positive emotion that changes purchasing desire [4]. It was hypothesized that the type of appeals works better when matching the type of products. The result of the study did show that the rational appeals work best for the thinking products and emotional appeals are more appropriate for feeling products.

2.2 User Characteristics

User characteristic will lead to variations of which people respond to an advertisement appeal. It was argued that when exposed to the same amount of emotional stimuli, people who are more emotional oriented will respond with a higher level of emotionality [7], and people who enjoy thinking more will process and evaluate the advertisement more deeply [10]. Based on the above findings, it is expected that the similar effects of the advertisement appeal will also be found for the web appeal. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H₁: People who process information by feeling (the feelers) are affected by the emotional web appeal and people who process information by thinking (thinkers) are not affected by the emotional web appeal.