WEBSITE DESIGN CUES AND ONLINE PURCHASE INTENTION: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND AGENDA SETTING

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Abstract

This paper provides insight into the concept, theories and empirical findings on the influence of website design on online purchase intention. The study draws from existing studies to establish the connection between website design cues and online purchase intention. The review shows that consumers' evaluation and interpretation of layout and functionality of the website in addition to the security and aesthetic appeal of the website create and influence their trust, value co-creation and the intention to purchase the offering of the website of the online service provider or online stores. The paper therefore recommends that online service providers or online shops should ensure that their websites have very good layout, and the layout is functioning. The paper concludes that evaluation and interpretation of website design along with its attributes (layout and functionality of a website, security of the website and aesthetic appeal of the website) create and influence trust, value co-creation, and intention to purchase the offering of the website (online services).

Keywords: Aesthetic appeal, Navigational aids, Online purchase intention, Online service provider, Website design.

Introduction

Many service firms in Nigeria have developed a website to deliver services to a wider range of consumers in respective of their distance. This includes online stores, which has made a sporadic growth in the last decade from only 4 online stores in 2010 to 478 online stores in 2019 (Philip Consulting, 2019). The growth of online stores has been attributed to the low cost of developing a website coupled with the benefits website offers firms to attract and reach large segments of consumers irrespective of their locations. The growth of online stores has also been fueled by the downward trend in the cost of accessing the internet; the proliferation of affordable smartphones, as well as the perceived advantage most websites, offer users to speedily compared prices of a product against offline and other online stores.

Unfortunately, it has been reported that one of the challenges consumers encounter when purchasing a product on the website of local online shops in Nigeria when compared to foreign online stores is poor website design (Philips Consulting, 2019) occasion by low quality website layout, website security,

website freshness, website aesthetic appearance and other surroundings of the websites, which tell a lot about the offerings of the website. A website that is designed to be visually appealing with a clear image, good navigation aids and with relevant information about technical details of product offering is considered a key variable influencing customer perceptions and behavior, and one of the strongest drivers of online service value (Tran, 2016).

The website is a digital environment where service performance occurs or buyers and sellers interact (Mudiantono, 2017). It is also referred to as online servicescape, a virtual space that is aided by internet facilities where service encounter occurs between the service providers and a customer (Hariss & Goode, 2010). It is an online environment that is built on the internet by designing a digital environment with key features that facilitate the performance of service delivery (Abarbanel, 2013). Like the brick and mortar service environments, the website also has a layout, security, display of information, color, appearance, and functionality (Mudiantono, 2017). These attributes of a website are important to establish a reputable online store as they engender the feeling of trust, which is a cogent reason to buy a focal brand (Kim & Siong, 2015). This suggests that improvement in the website of most online stores in Nigeria can trigger trust to engage the website and purchase a product from them among Nigerians though only few empirical studies in Nigeria that have examined this issue mainly focused on the influence of e-service quality experience (Wali & Oparab, 2012), online shopping risk and trust in online shopping (Olusoji, Ogunkoya, Lasisi & Elumah, 2015) and online marketing (Jenyo & Soyoye, 2015; Ayo, Adewoye, & Oni, 2015) on consumer purchase behavior. In an attempt to bridge these gaps, the objective of this paper is to draw from extant studies done across the globe to provide insight into the concept, theories and empirical findings on the influence of website design on online purchase intention.

Literature Review

Online Purchase Intentions

Online purchase intention is the last stage in a consumer's decision-making process when engaging offerings display on the website/internet (Wann-Yih, Phan, Adriana, & Amaya, 2016). Given this, it is the extent to which customers place the offering of a particular online service provider topmost in their minds and consider buying the offering when the need arises in the future (Cheng & Yee, 2014). It is an attitudinal disposition to patronize a particular online service provider against others (Ki-Han, Yan, Yu & Jae, 2015). It has been

defined as customers' self-reported likelihood of engaging in the acquisition of a product (Cheng & Yee, 2014). It is the likelihood that an individual will patronize the offering of a specific online service provider (Zhang, Fang, Wei, Ramsey, McCole & Chen, 2011). It is the belief that a customer will buy product(s) from a specific e-retailer (Wen, Prybutok & Xu, 2011) deeply held commitment to patronize the offering of a particular online service provider (Xu& Liu, 2010) and consider using a particular online service provider when a need for its service arises in the future (Harris & Goode, 2010). In the same vein, Kaur and Quareshi (2015) opined that purchase intentions can be gauged through customers believe that they consider a particular shopping site as their first choice to buy similar products in the future, with the likelihood to continue using the shopping site to purchase products and the will to come back to the shopping site to buy similar products in the future. They also opined that customers with high purchase intentions are likely to make recommendations to other consumers and engage in positive word of mouth advert about a particular online retailer after the initial experience. Supporting this, Goyal, Maity, Thamizhvanan, and Xavier (2013) further noted that purchase intentions and loyalty intention are likened as both involving consumer's willingness to buy a product or offering of a particular online shop. Purchase intention, according to Huang, Jiaand and Song (2015) increases with an increase in customers' stickiness to the website. Roy, Lassar, and Butaney (2014) define online stickiness as the frequency of website visits and duration spent on particular websites. It is central to understating customers' intentions to buy, converting visitors to buyers and even repeat buyers in an online service environment. In supporting this, Bogicevic (2014) stated that future patronage of an offering of a particular online service provider increases if customers spent more time on a particular website than other others. Lin (2007) further stressed that purchase intentions increase with an increase in the ability of websites to attract visitors and keep them to stay longer on the website.

Website

The website also referred to as online cape, online environment, escape, e-environment and cyberspace in marketing literature is a digital environment where service performance occurs. It is an atmospheric environment aspect in the virtual space when the service encounter occurs between the service providers with a customer (Hariss & Goode, 2010). It is an online environment that is built on the internet by designing a digital environment with key features that would facilitate the performance of service delivery (Abarbanel, 2013).

IKoernig (2003) defined the online website as cyberspace where buyers and sellers interact. It is a virtual market where the exchange is performed, delivered, and consummated (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002). Zeithaml et al. (2002) further opined that a website is a market place aided by internet facilities which provide the basis for customers to search and experience service delivery of online vendor(s). The website can be tailor to reflect e-stores, e-shops, e-servicescape in marketing literature. It is designed with animate and inanimate stimuli to which a consumer is exposed to during a service encounter. The website designs reflect the color, layout, navigation, and logo which influence the internal responses and external behaviors of consumers. The design of a website can create emotion including excitement, which stimulates the desire to stay within the website to engage in service performance (Ki-Han, Yan, Yu & Jae, 2015).

Website Design Cues

Like that of a physical service environment which has the following cues: ambience factors (lighting and temperature), design (architectural design, interior decor), security (login and exit) and spatial layout and functionality (i.e. arrangement of buildings, equipment, and furniture according to the needs of the service delivery process), the website also has the following design cues: aesthetics, ambience, lighting and service product (Mudiantono, 2017). It has visual color, lighting, space and function, artifacts, layout and auditory cues (music and noise). Specifically, Harris and Goode's (2010) model on website or e-servicescape identified three cues (aesthetic appeal, online layout and functionality, and financial security) of a typical website. They specifically drew on extant conceptualizations of offline service settings (notably the work of Bitner, 1992) but relied on the work of Zeithaml et al. (2002) in their operationalization to equate the Bitner's (1992) two dimensions of offline servicescape (ambience conditions, and layout and functionality) to the dimensions of e-servicescape (aesthetic appeal, and layout and functionality) and whilst Bitner's (1992) third dimension (signs, symbols, and artefacts) was replaced by financial security (an issue widely accepted as more critical during online exchanges). The extant study has specifically theorized that a website is engaging when its layout, functionality, security and aesthetic appeal are impressive (Kim & Siong, 2015). The layout of a website is the arrangement, organization, structure, and adaptability (customization) of a website (Harris & Goode, 2010). The functionality of a website is the extent to which the information, logos, and organization of the website facilitate customers' service goals/performance in the most effective manner (Harris & Goode, 2010). The security of a website is how users

perceived the website to be secure, safe and promote privacy when performing financial services (Kim & Siong, 2015). The aesthetic appeal of a website is the extent to which users evaluate the graphics, fonts, and photographs in a website to be enticing, alluring, fascinating and entertaining (Harris & Goode, 2010).

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored on the theory of exit, voice, and loyalty developed by Hirschman (1970). A few decades later, the theory has been widely adopted to study the response-behavior of consumers (Bitner, 1992) in terms of how to exit, voice, and be loyal to a particular environment such as an online service environment or website. Hirschman (1970) defined exit as an active and destructive response to dissatisfaction, unveiled by a break of relationship with the object (brand, product, retailer, and supplier). Voice is a verbal response to disaffections of service received which may take the form of complaining to friends, relatives and engaging negative word of mouth as indicated by the model consisting of private response (e.g., negative word-of-mouth), voice response (e.g., seeking redress from the seller), and third-party response (e.g., taking legal action or complain to an external third party) with an expectation of change in the organization's practices, policies, and responses. Loyalty is an intention to stay in the environment despite their level of satisfaction and marketing efforts which have the potential to trigger their switching behavior. Xu and Liu (2010) opined that though dissatisfactions with physical servicescape cues may not cause some customers of offline stores to exit but in online servicescape (website) it assumes additional significant switching intention given the low cost of switching, comparing prices and deals on the internet. In alignment with this, several studies of e-satisfaction have also demonstrated a strong impact of satisfaction with the physical environment on customer emotional responses (Wen et al., 2011). They noted that layout and functional environmental cues provide the fulfillment of utilitarian needs. However, poor evaluation of the utilitarian environment triggers anxiety, low level of trust and emotional dissonance which are central to exit from an online service environment. Adding to this, Bitner (1992) developed and tested three primary dimensions of the servicescape that influence customers' holistic perceptions of the servicescape(i.e. perceived quality) and their subsequent internal (i.e. satisfaction with the servicescape) and external responses (i.e. approach/avoidance, staying, patronage). Tran (2016) further suggested that customers respond to disaffection with online service environments through negative word-of-mouth (WOM) by communicating their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction among

acquaintances that may severely damage the firm's reputations and image. He observed that servicescapes stimulate pleasure or emotions that make customers to be attracted and willing to spend money over and over again in purchasing offerings of particular service environments.

Empirical Review

In this section, previous empirical studies were examined to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between website cues and online purchase intentions.

Mudiantono (2017) examined the influence of website design quality, service quality and enjoyment on purchase intention using data from 160 customers who have made a minimum of two purchases on the Zalora website in 2016. They used Structural Equation Modeling to test the data and found that website design quality, service quality and enjoyment have a positive effect on purchase intentions.

Wann-Yih et al. (2016) investigated the nature of e-servicescapes and investigate the relationships among website trustworthiness, website attitude, brand attitude, e-WOM intention, and purchase intention among sampled 290 consumers in Taiwan. Their study showed that e-servicescape dimensions (aesthetic appeal, customization, usability, and financial security) have significant impacts on consumer attitudes and trust toward a website. Their study also found that women are more likely to experience more positive effects of e-servicescape on internal responses, such as website trustworthiness and attitude.

Tran (2016) investigated e-servicescape, trust, e-WOM, and customer loyalty using a survey method to collect data from 613 samples through emails and Facebook postings over three months. The study empirically provided an understanding of E-WOM and how e-servicescape may lead to E-WOM and customer loyalty. It adopted the stimulus-organism-response theory and the network co-production model to investigate the relationships between e-servicescape, trust, E-WOM intentions, customer loyalty, and purchase intentions. Cross-sectional customer data from a single e-tailer and structural equation modeling were used to analyze the responses. Tran (2016) included customer reviews to the sub-dimension of e-servicescape which include: entertainment value, originality of design, visual appeal, customization, interactivity, the relevance of information, usability, ease of payment and perceived security of the e-tailer. The findings of the Tran (2016) showed that

e-servicescape positively impacts trust, which in turn positively influences E-WOM and customer loyalty. Moreover, the study also revealed that two groups of customers were compared using multi-group analysis, where one group of users received emails and the other group received social network postings from the same e-tailer. Overall, the results indicated emails had a stronger impact on e-servicescape, E-WOM, and customer loyalty. Social networking site postings had a slightly greater influence on trust, and two sub-dimensions of e-servicescape, that is, interactivity and ease of payment.

Hakima and Deswindi (2015) assessed the effects of e-servicescape(website) on customer intention using hospital websites in South Jakarta. The study collected data from 285 respondents using electronic media such as e-mail and social media. The Spearman correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between the variables considered. Based on the statistical analysis, the study found that the ambiance conditions of the website influence the perceived quality of hospital websites. The study also found that the perceived quality of the hospital website was significantly and positively related to the design aspects variable of the website, search aids and slogans of the website and functional aspects of the website. It was also found by the study that there is a relationship between perceived quality and customer intention to use a hospital service.

Kwabena and Amponsah-Tawiah (2015) examined the impact of servicescape on customer patronage of three-star hotels in Accra, Ghana. Using multiple regression to analyze the data collected from 104 respondents conveniently drawn from six hotels in the city of Accra. The study found that ambiance conditions, spatial layout, symbols and artifacts of the hotels have a positive and significant impact on hotel patronage by customers.

Kim and Siong (2015) investigated the effect of salient e-servicescape attributes on online brand image in Malaysia. They specifically identified and measured the salient e-servicescape attributes of shopping websites based on the preferences of buyers, and examined if these attributes predict the formation of online brand image (OBI). In achieving this objective, Kim and Siong (2015) first of all interviewed 50 online shoppers which made up of 60% executives, 13% students and 27% others segment of customers to identify five distinct salient e-servicescape attributes – quality photograph, navigation bar, company logo, price information, and the confirmation mail. They conducted an interview by asking the participants to name three frequently visited shopping websites and indicate the most favored website out of the three and point out the reasons they preferred or favored one of the three

websites. The study also found that quality photographs are a strongly perceived attribute under the ambiance dimension. While Navigation bar, product, and simple arrangement are the most mentioned attributes in the design dimension. The company logo represents the most frequently perceived attribute in the signs, symbols and artifact dimensions. Pricing information and the confirmation mail are the strongly perceived attributes in the interaction dimension. The study also sampled 316 individuals from different market segment they met at shopping malls located in Kuala Lumpur, Melaka, and Kuching; urban areas in Malaysia and found that five salient e-servicescape constructs (quality photograph, navigation bar, company logo, price information, and the confirmation mail) explained or predicted brand image which was measured with three-point associations (strong, favorable and unique) of e-shopping malls in Malaysia.

Kühn et al. (2015) examined online servicescape dimensions as predictors of website trust in the South African domestic airline industry. The study specifically investigated the extent to which three online servicescape dimensions predicted website trust in the South African domestic airline industry using a target population of all residents of the North West province of South Africa who had bought an airline ticket on the website of a domestic airline (Kulula.com, Mango, British Airways, South African Airways or SA Express) during the past six months (November 2012 to April 2013). Kühn et al. (2015) sampled 300 responses from the domestic airline passengers who had purchased an airline e-ticket from a website. Using multiple regression analysis to conduct test for the hypotheses formulated, that 62.40% of the variance in website trust could be ascribed to the three dimensions of the online servicescape and three predictor variables (aesthetic appeal, layout, and function, as well as online financial security) and an outcome variable (website trust), is significant. The study found that though the three dimensions of online servicescape predict website trust online financial security is the best predictor of website trust, followed by layout, functionality and aesthetic appeal. Consequently, the study recommended that South African domestic airlines that wish to cultivate website trust should focus primarily on enhancing the online financial security of their websites, followed by customizing the layout and functionality of their websites, and lastly improving aesthetic appeal by increasing the entertainment value of their websites.

Adiele, Grend, and Chinedu (2015) examined the relationship between physical evidence and customer patronage in quoted banks in the South-South zone of Nigeria. Having sampled three managers and 7 customers from each

of the 14 quoted banks and used the Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient to test the data collected. Adiele et al. (2015) showed the efficient design of workplace ambiance; physical architecture and signs significantly impact on sales volume, profit margin, and customer retention.

Jenyo and Soyoye (2015) investigated online marketing and consumer purchase behavior in some selected firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. Their main objectives were to examine the impact of the functionality of the infrastructure of the internet and the internet security issues on consumers' decision to eventual purchase. The population of the research includes some selected firms in Lagos, of which a sample of thirty (30) companies was drawn from the metropolis. Using simple regression to test the hypotheses developed for the study, it was shown that online marketing has an impact on consumer purchase decisions in Nigeria firms. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between consumer purchase decisions and infrastructure of the internet and that significant relationship between internet security and consumer purchase behavior exists.

Olusoji, Ogunkoya, Lasisi, and Elumah (2015) examined risk and trust in online shopping in Nigeria with the main focus on consumers trust in online vendors rather than trust in the infrastructure, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of online shopping as well as perceived risk which include financial risk, product performance risk, social, psychological risk and time/convenience loss (risk). Using correlation analysis to test data collected with questionnaires conveniently administered to 100 respondents selected from Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja. The study revealed that the presence of perceived risk negatively affects trust in online shopping and that perceived usefulness of online shopping has a positive effect on the actual usage of online shopping. Ayo, Adewoye, and Oni (2015) conducted a study on business-to-consumer e-commerce in Nigeria with the primary objectives of examining how task-technology fit, perceived usefulness, trust, and risk impact on consumers' acceptance of B2C e-commerce in Nigeria. Using 900 respondents randomly sampled, they found significant relationships between the model variables, that task-technology fit, perceived usefulness, trust, and perceived risk all have significant relationships with behavioral intention.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that evaluation and interpretation of website design along with its attributes (layout and functionality of a website, security of the website and aesthetic appeal of the website) create and influence trust, value

co-creation, and intention to purchase the offering of the website(online services).

Recommendations

The paper, therefore, recommends that

i.   online shops/ online services should ensure that its website has a very good layout, and the layout is functioning, which can be done by ensuring that website pages respond and load quickly (runs) when launched, its navigational aids are clear, logical (links) and user-friendly and the search buttons (tools) including keywords search function are prominently displayed for customers to quickly and easily search and locate desired information, compare products and prices as well as view the merchandise in different ways including the technical details like the price, name and color and other features of their products offering.

ii.   The online shops should also make sure their website is aesthetic appealing by using graphics, logos, images, fonts, and photographs that are attractive, fresh, original, innovative, creative, entertaining and catchy.

iii. Online shops should ensure adequate security of the website by putting a contact telephone number on every web page to enable customers easily and quickly contact the site to discuss any special requirements or ask for additional advice particularly for higher-priced or high level of choice as well as payment for order delivery is straightforward and does not require entering a lot of financial details to diffuse customer perception that their financial information would be exposed to unauthorized persons or fraudsters. The study further suggests the need for future studies to empirically test how website design influences trust and purchase intentions of products in online stores in Nigeria.

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