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The Role of Experiential Value from Product Presentation on Consumer Responses towards an Apparel Website

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Abstract
Offering enhanced visual images of apparel products on a website, such as alternative views, image enlargement, and views of a product on a model, is important because product presentation has been found to facilitate positive consumer responses resulting from both hedonic or utilitarian value.

Keywords
website, presentation, experience, emotion

Disciplines
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Comments
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The Role of Experiential Value from Product Presentation on Consumer Responses towards an Apparel Website

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Background and Purpose

Current consumers increasingly expect engaging experiences and not just a process to purchase goods and services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, Postrel, 2003), which suggests the growing importance of website features that not only facilitate the purchase decision process, but also provide an enjoyable shopping experience. Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed that consumption experiences are enhanced by the 4Es (educational, entertainment, escapist, and esthetic experiences) as part of an emerging “Experience Economy” (EE). Moreover, Pine and Gilmore (1999) posited that a consumer environment should include all of the 4Es to fully engage the consumer and lead to the most desirable consumption experience or what they termed the “sweet spot”. Research supports the influence of retail website features on consumer experiences and their resulting effects on consumer attitude towards a product or online store (Fiore & Jin, 2003; Fiore, Jin, & Kim, 2005a; Fiore, Kim, & Lee, 2005b; Klein, 1998; Liu & Arnett, 2000). Offering enhanced visual images of apparel products on a website, such as alternative views, image enlargements, and views of a product on a model, is important because product presentation has been found to facilitate positive consumer responses resulting from both hedonic (experiential) or utilitarian value (Fiore & Jin, 2003; Fiore et al., 2005a; Fiore et al., 2005b; Park, Lennon, & Stoel, 2005).

However, other than one study of bed and breakfast patrons (Oh, Fiore, & Jeong, 2003) that found aesthetic experience of the location to be the only 4E variable significantly affecting consumers, we were not able to find other studies, including online shopping studies, that have empirically looked at the effect of all 4Es simultaneously. Given the dearth of academic research regarding the influence of all 4Es on consumer responses towards online products and retailers, there is a clear need for research. Therefore, using a 4E scale designed for the present study we have explored whether: (1) the 4Es were affected by website features, (2) the 4Es affected consumer emotional components of pleasure and arousal, and (3) resulting pleasure and arousal led to enhanced website patronage intention. Hence, the present study contributes to research on experiential aspects of online shopping and their effect on consumer behavior.

Theoretical Framework.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, presented by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), has been widely adopted in environmental psychology and has been used extensively to explore the impact of store environment on consumer responses (e.g., Baker,
Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Bitner, 1992; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoelyn, & Nesdale, 1994). Thus, the present study adopted this S-O-R framework to explore the effect of retail website features on experiential aspects of online shopping and their effect on consumer patronage intention. Various forms of product presentation representing environmental cues reflect the S variable. The 4Es and consumer emotion reflect O variables that intervene between the S inputs and R outputs (i.e., website patronage intention). Thus, the present study includes a new set of O variables that may be affected by the online retail environment.

**Method**

One hundred ninety-six usable responses from female students were obtained from 230 questionnaires completed at a large Midwestern university in the United States. The questionnaire contained multi-item measurement scales found to be valid and reliable in previous research. Confirmatory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to determine the items constituting each variable and internal consistency. An eigenvalue of 1.00 or greater was used for determining the number of factors. For construct validity, items were retained in the factor if they load above 0.50 (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003), but less than .30 for the other factors (Kline, 1998). Each factor had an acceptable level of reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient above .70, the recommended minimum proposed by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Means of the summated multiple items were used as research variables for hypothesis testing. To examine the hypothesized relationships, the causal model was tested using the maximum-likelihood estimation procedure of Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 6.0.

The present study employed a two-treatment between-subject design to test the effects of product presentation on consumer patronage intention toward the website. Based on input from pretests, two stimulus websites with different levels of product presentation (low and high experiential value) were developed as the experimental treatments from elements of an actual website. Anthropologie.com, a website selling women’s clothing, accessories, and interior products was manipulated to create the stimuli. For the development of the low experiential value stimulus site, product information, simple product images, and pop-up enlarged images were taken from the actual website. These features provided basic information about sensory aspects of the product, but provided little lifestyle-oriented information. For the development of the high experiential value stimulus site, the zoom feature and view on a model feature were added to the low experiential treatment. The view on a model feature allows the shopper to view the product on a posed model in a setting rich with lifestyle cues, such as a highly accessorized living room or café.

**Results and Discussion**

The theoretical model with the hypothesized paths proposed in the literature review was examined. For the theoretical model, the results of causal model analysis revealed a Chi² of 33.09 with 7 degree-of-freedom (p < .01). The GFI was .96; AGFI was .80; CFI was .96; and RMSEA was .14. The fit indices revealed that the theoretical model did not fit the data well. Therefore, the fully recursive model, an ideal model with a perfect model fit with the data, was compared with the theoretical model. From the comparison, an empirical model that included two
statistically significant paths not identified in the theoretical model was proposed. Direct paths from the entertainment and esthetic variables to website patronage intention were added to the initially proposed theoretical model, creating the final empirical model (Figure 1). For the present study, the hypothesized relationships were tested against the empirical model.

The present study found that level of product presentation features had a direct effect on all of the 4Es. That is, exposure to the high level of experiential product presentation enhanced entertainment, educational, escapist, and esthetic experiences. Whereas the level of pictorial product presentation positively affected each of the 4Es, the amount of variance explained was modest ($R^2 < .12$), which suggests that there are other elements of the website or its use that affect the 4Es. Perhaps textual elements of the site and its navigation affect the 4Es.

The results showed that entertainment, escapist, and esthetic experiences had strong direct effects on pleasure, but educational experience did not. To increase pleasure, an important contributor to approach responses towards products and retail settings (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003; Menon & Kahn, 2002; Sweeney & Wyner, 2002), entertainment, escapist, and esthetic experiences created by the apparel website should be incorporated. Only entertainment and esthetic experiences had direct effects on arousal. Among the 4Es, esthetic experience had the strongest influence on pleasure and arousal, which suggests its salience in apparel website design. Therefore, the present study adds to the growing body of S-O-R literature examining shopping environments by identifying new Organism variables affecting emotion and subsequent consumer response variables.

Consistent with previous research (Fiore et al., 2005a), pleasure and arousal positively influenced website patronage intention (i.e., willingness to purchase from, willingness to recommend, and willingness to revisit the website). Present findings revealed that arousal was more influential than pleasure in enhancing website patronage intention of consumers. Moreover, based on the empirical model, entertainment and esthetic experiences were found to have strong direct effects on website patronage intention without mediating effects of emotion.

Findings of this study suggest that entertainment and esthetic experiences were the most influential among the 4Es for (a) an online distribution channel, (b) the product category of women’s casual apparel, and (c) female consumers between the ages of 18 to 25. This may provide specific information to online retailers selling this product category and targeting this age group. Further studies may explore the moderating effects of differences in distribution channels, product categories, and target markets on the 4Es, emotional response, and patronage.
Notes: Standardized path estimates are reported with t-values in parentheses.
Dotted lines present non-significant relationship between variables.
* p < .05. ** p < .01.

Figure 1. A final empirical model showing the effects of product presentation feature on endogenous variables intention. Other outcome variables, such as consumer loyalty may be included in future studies.

Also, the present study shows that experiential factors and emotional factors were important to website patronage intention. Thus, this study focused on the effect of hedonic factors created by website features; future studies may include a combination of hedonic and utilitarian measures to test their relative effect, produced by website features, on the 4Es and consequent consumer responses.

References


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