

Influences of online store perception, shopping enjoyment, and shopping involvement on consumer patronage behavior towards an online retailer[☆]

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Abstract

Online apparel retailers have adopted various types of image interactivity technology (IIT), such as close-up pictures or zoom-in functions, mix-and-match functions, and 3D virtual models to enhance consumers' online shopping experience. The purpose of the present study was to examine the influence of level of IIT on consumer perception of online retail environment, shopping enjoyment, shopping involvement, a desire to stay, and patronage intention. Significant structural relationships between these research variables were found, supporting a pleasure-oriented conceptual model of consumer patronage behavior in the online retailing environment. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Even though online sales still represent a small segment of overall retail sales, online sales are growing rapidly (DesMarteau, 2004). US Department of Commerce reported that the e-commerce sales estimate in the third quarter of 2005 increased 26.7% from the third quarter of 2004 and 2.7% from the second quarter of 2005 (Quarterly retail e-commerce sales, 2005). Apparel became the second largest online product category with \$6 billion in sales in 2003, which is doubled from the sales in 2001 (United States Department of Commerce, 2003, 2005). Online sales of apparel grew by 54% in 2003, eclipsing the growth rates of online stalwarts such as books, music, videos, software, and hardware (Marlin, 2004). Hence, with apparel sales burgeoning, understanding the impact of image interactiv-

ity technology (IIT) on an apparel firm takes on more significance.

Steuer (1992) defined interactivity as the “extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time (p. 84).” Interactivity of a Web site may offer a wide range of benefits to customers and marketers including facilitated communications, customization of presented information, image manipulation, and entertainment (Fiore et al., 2005a). Moreover, the interactive nature of Web sites has been credited with positively affecting consumer responses, including increasing the desire to browse and purchase online (Fiore and Jin, 2003; Fiore et al., 2005a,b; Gehrke and Turban, 1999; Lee et al., in press; Mathwick, 2002). In the present study we focus on one aspect of IIT employed by Internet apparel retailers, the 3D virtual model, which provides the ability to manipulate presentation of an apparel product or combinations of products on a virtually created body on a Web site. This IIT method allows the viewer/shopper to view the garments from various angles or distances (Fiore and Jin, 2003).

IIT offers an innovative way to present the product, articulate product attributes, and simulate product

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experience in a virtual world. The level of interactivity offered by IIT varies by technology used. A single 2D pictorial image of the product that is clicked to enlarge the image provides the user with a low level of interactivity, whereas a mix-and-match feature or zoom-in function, which allows the user more control over the manipulation of the product image, offers a higher level of interactivity. A relatively new form of IIT, 3D virtual model technology, offers an even higher level of interactivity. This form of IIT allows the customer to view a combination of products on the body and from different angles and distances.

Research shows that 3D virtual product presentations provide a stimulating experience due to vivid sensory information and the psychological sensation of being present in the online environment (Li et al., 2001). The ability to simulate trying the product on one’s body using a 3D virtual model may also be an important interactive feature for apparel Web sites because consumers frequently state the inability to try on the product leads to hesitation to purchase apparel online (Abend, 2001). According to Sam Taylor, vice president of e-commerce for Lands’ End, virtual model technology used on Landsend.com contributed to a 34% increase in conversion rate of shoppers to buyers and more apparel purchases (DesMarteau, 2004). Various apparel retailers have adopted this virtual model technology to enhance the online shopping experience. Currently, Lands’ End, Sears, L.L. Bean, Adidas, Speedo, H&M, and iVillage utilize My Virtual Model™ technology on their Web sites (Go shopping, 2005). For example, one of the largest online apparel retailers, Lands’ End, claimed that the updated version of My Virtual Model™ that allows customers to use their specific body measurements when creating the virtual model makes shopping for

Lands’ End apparel online even easier and more accurate by providing size recommendations (Lands’ End, 2004). Researchers found that simple technologies providing interactivity have positive effects on consumer responses (Klein, 2003; Schlosser, 2003). However, the present researchers propose advanced IIT, providing a higher level of image interactivity, will promote more positive consumer responses than does lower level IIT. Hence, the present study will compare the relative effect of level of IIT, with virtual model technology (described above) as a high level of IIT and enlargement of front views of products as a low level of IIT, on approach responses (e.g., desire to stay, patronage intention to an online retailer). In the next section we will discuss relationships among research variables and propose a conceptual model. Fig. 1 displays the proposed conceptual model of online patronage behavior suggesting relationships among research constructs.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Effects of IIT on shopping enjoyment, store environment, shopping involvement, and approach responses

In line with the stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) model, which poses that the environment (S) influences an individual’s affective and cognitive experiences (O) that mediate approach/avoidance responses (R; e.g., desire to stay) towards the environment (Bitner, 1992; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), IIT of a retail Web site may influence cognitions and affect that have an impact on approach responses. In particular, the use of IIT features on a Web site may signal a change from

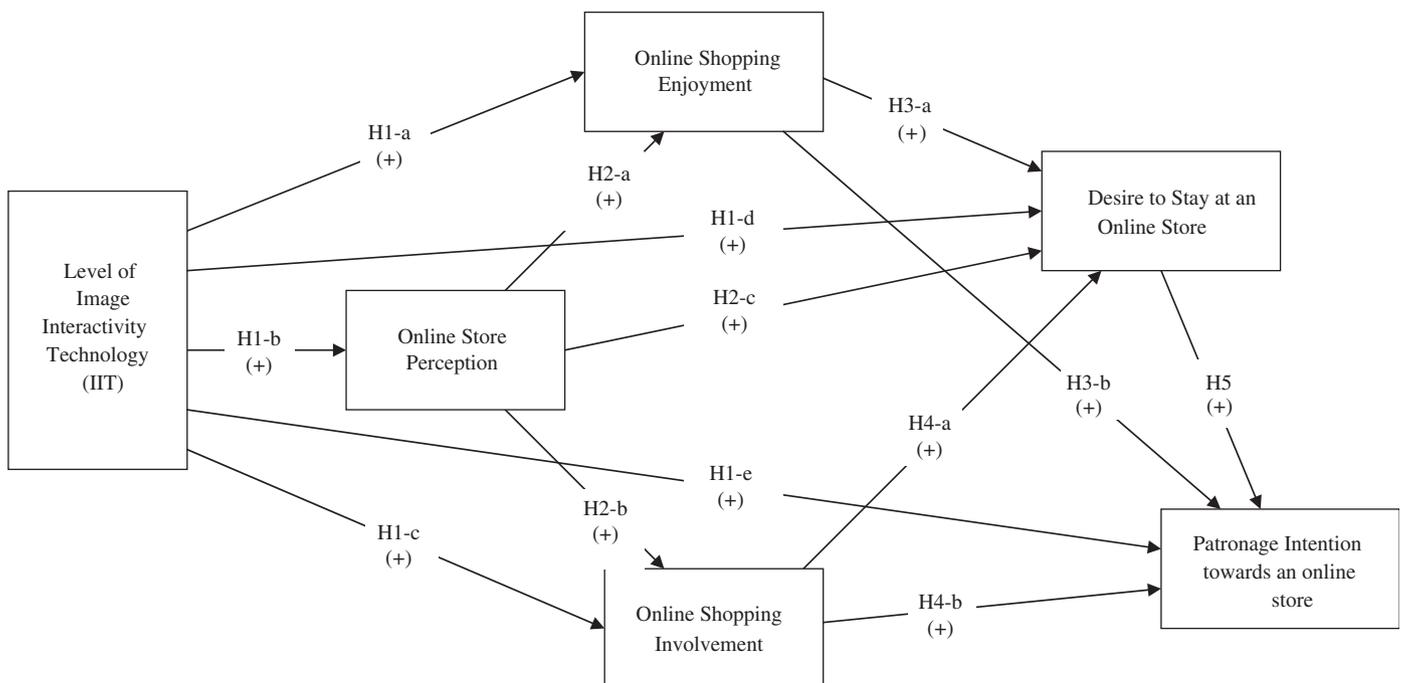


Fig. 1. A theoretical model predicting online retailer patronage behavior.

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