



Website usability, consumer satisfaction and the intention to use a website: The moderating effect of perceived risk

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the influence of website usability on both consumers' satisfaction and intention to use a website, as well as the impact of satisfaction on usage intentions. Additionally, we study the moderating effect that consumer risk perceptions may have on the influence of website usability. Results show that website usability affects satisfaction which in turn affects intention to use. Contrary to expected, usability does not directly affect intention to use but has an indirect effect through consumer satisfaction. Finally, the usability effect on consumer satisfaction is moderated by perceived risk.

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1. Introduction

According to [Oneupweb \(2010\)](#), in the context of online transactions, online users' mainly expect websites that facilitate their purchases. In this line, 95.5% of users expect pricing and shipping information to be clearly presented, so usability must be an essential component of e-retail strategy.

Website usability can be defined considering the following aspects ([Flavián et al., 2006](#)): (a) the ease of understanding the structure of a website, its functions, interface and the contents that can be observed by the user; (b) simplicity of use of the website in its initial stages; (c) the speed with which the users can find what they are looking for; (d) the perceived ease of site navigation in terms of time required and action necessary in order to obtain the desired results; and (e) the ability of the user to control what they are doing, and where they are, at any given moment.

Analogously to merchandising in offline stores, when a customer accesses to an online store, usability issues may affect customer's perceptions and behaviors. Thus, more usable websites tend to create more positive attitudes toward online stores and increase conversion rates, whereas less usable websites have the opposite effect ([Becker and Mottay, 2001](#)).

Considering the influence of usability on website performance, online retailers require a full understanding of this variable. Previous

literature in the field of retailing has studied the concept of usability, especially as a component of quality of service ([Ladhari, 2010](#)). However, the integration of usability management in the e-business strategy and the role of perceived risk are outstanding issues. This research allows us to understand the relevance of usability on strategic indicators of companies' success analyzing the influence of perceived usability on the levels of consumer satisfaction and intention to use a website. Moreover, although the Internet shopping has been proposed to involve more risk than traditional shopping ([Lee and Turban, 2001](#)), different consumers may perceive different levels of risk in the same online environment. Thus, this research contributes to the literature analyzing whether risk moderates the influence of perceived usability on consumer satisfaction and intention to use a website.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we structure the remainder of this article as follows. In the following section we formalize the working hypotheses. Next, data collection and measure validation processes are explained, followed by the results of the analyses. Finally, we discuss the main conclusions, managerial implications, and limitations of the study, as well as some possibilities for future research.

2. Hypotheses formulation

Traditionally, several authors have stated that satisfaction – defined as an affective condition that results from a global evaluation of all the aspects that make up a relationship – is a crucial antecedent of re-purchase and re-usage intentions of a product or service (e.g. [Oliver, 1980](#); [Anderson and Sullivan, 1993](#)). Focusing on the new technologies context, satisfaction

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with prior use is also found to be the strongest predictor of users' continuance intentions (Bhattacharjee, 2001). In the same line, Devaraj et al. (2002) measured customer satisfaction in the e-commerce context and supported empirically that satisfaction is a key determinant of customer channel preference. More recently, researchers have found that satisfaction positively affects loyalty intentions toward online shopping (Chiu et al., 2009) and boosts the use of Internet portals (Lin et al., 2005), e-services (Liao et al., 2007) and online communities as well (Liu et al., 2010).

Broadly speaking, literature supports that satisfied consumers exhibit a greater intention to use firm's products, have a greater re-purchase intention, favor positive word-of-mouth and have a lower to look for alternative providers (Oliver, 1999; Kim et al., 2009). Consequently, it is expected that once users achieve certain levels of satisfaction with prior use of a website, the perceptions of satisfaction will influence their re-usage intentions. Thus, we propose our first hypothesis:

H1. *Consumer satisfaction has a positive effect on consumer intention to use a website.*

In one of the first works focusing on the determinants of satisfaction in online exchanges, Szymanski and Hise (2000) noted the ability of website design to promote satisfactory purchase experiences. This result has been supported by several authors afterwards. For example, Kim and Eom (2002) concluded that usability is of critical importance in achieving user satisfaction. More recently, Maditinos and Theodoridis (2010) pointed out that both quality of the interface and of the information provided to consumers (two key aspects of website usability) have a significant effect on the levels of users' satisfaction.

We must also note that making the purchase easier is one of the main motivations of consumers' online purchasing (Bridges and Florsheim, 2008). Therefore, when visiting a website, consumers expect to find a channel whose features facilitate search, selection, payment and post-purchase actions. Consequently, it is reasonable to say that satisfaction with the purchase experience depend on website ease of use (Shankar et al., 2003). Complex and not intuitive interfaces, long purchasing processes, non-updated information or non-relevant information create an interaction atmosphere that negatively affects consumer satisfaction. According to all these ideas, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. *Perceived website usability has a positive effect on consumer satisfaction.*

However, literature on online consumer behavior found that usability impact is even more relevant since it not only affects satisfaction but also favor future purchase intentions. In this respect, Flavián et al. (2006) found that usability positively affects consumer loyalty to a website. As well, Abdeldayem (2010) noted that attitudes toward online shopping and the intention to shop online are affected by ease of use. Therefore, we propose in our third hypothesis that:

H3. *Perceived website usability has a positive effect on consumer intention to use the website.*

2.1. Moderating effect of perceived risk

Focusing on the online context, the importance of risk perceptions is evident when conducting an e-purchase. Compared to traditional shopping, online commercial establishments are less known to consumers (Lee and Turban, 2001), and the absence of face-to-face interaction has introduced more uncertainty and risk (Wu and Chen, 2005). Apart from risk associated with intangibility and time lag, customers have to release personal and

financial data to not always well known providers (De Ruyter et al., 2001). Moreover, the outcome of this process depends on the behavior of the e-marketer and this is not within the consumer's control (Lee and Turban, 2001). Therefore, perceived risk is a relevant parameter, especially in the early stages of a process of customer adoption of online purchase of products and services (De Ruyter et al., 2001; Hsu and Chiu, 2004).

As a result of numerous online frauds and piracy crimes in the network, users need more and more signs to make sure that financial and personal information is under their control and that privacy and security are guaranteed. In doing so, usability could be understood as a sign of competence, ability and honesty by the organization hosting the website. Firms often use signals to communicate the level of some unobservable quality, especially to reduce the information asymmetry between buyers and sellers (Schlosser et al., 2006). Since an online transaction is usually unobservable by consumers before purchase (Schlosser et al., 2006), website usability might serve to demonstrate that the company is able to provide high-quality services and understands and is sensitive to online consumers' fears. Besides, consumer perceptions about their own control of the online transaction process could be increased by perceived usability (Casaló et al., 2007), since greater usability is associated to low levels of difficulty to manage a system (Davis, 1989). That is, users perceptions of their own skills depend not only on their experience but also on the usability of the website (Flavián et al., 2006).

In those cases in which consumers perceive high risk in an online transaction, website usability may help reduce this uncertainty and thus its effect in forming consumer satisfaction and intentions to use a website may be reinforced. To be precise, consumers perceiving high risk would more likely try to eliminate any suspicion when interacting with the website. Usability communicates information about performance, thus consumers might infer that a company that has invested in usability and website design can successfully handle online transactions (Schlosser et al., 2006). Thus, in a high-risk situation consumers will be more prone to carefully analyze all the information about the website and, as a result, website usability may help overcome these fears and form a more favorable opinion of using a website. In turn, when perceived risk is low, consumers will be less influenced by usability perceptions since they do not need these reinforcements to overcome worry about the possibility of non-desired outcomes.

Taking into account the previous considerations we propose in the following hypothesis a moderating role of risk in the effect of usability on both satisfaction and intention to use.

H4. *If perceived risk increases, the relationship between perceived website usability and: (a) consumer satisfaction and (b) consumer intention to use the website will be strengthened.*

To sum up, the research model can be seen in Fig. 1.

3. Data collection

Data were obtained through a web survey targeted to the users of a Spanish online retailer, which helped us to recruit participants. This practice is consistent with common online market research (e.g. Steenkamp and Geyskens, 2006). To be precise, data was collected among the users of a bus ticket e-selling service offered by one of the most important transport companies in Spain. It is important to note that only few companies operate online in this sector in Spain.

In order to measure the variables, a structured questionnaire containing closed questions was developed. This questionnaire was designed to gather information about the studied constructs

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