



Consumer feelings and behaviours towards well designed websites

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ABSTRACT

We analysed the effect of a well designed website in terms of five indicators: purchase intention, positive attitudes, trust, satisfaction and perceived risk. These effects (measured by 21 items) were successfully combined into a single construct using Rasch's Model. The construct was then tested by building a website designed by experts for a fictitious clothes company. It was compared with four less-well-designed websites created by modifying the well designed website by removing one of the four major constructs [web security; customer service; amount and quality of information provided; and usability]. These websites were surfed by 350 consumers (in five subsamples); the experts were then asked to express their perceptions and attitudes of the sites *a posteriori*. The association between the five websites and the 21 items was displayed visually through a perceptual map built with DYANE software. This showed that a well designed website does not always have the best effect on all 21 items measured.

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1. Introduction

Website and Internet technologies are today well established and dependable, however it is important to know what factors impact website success [5]. Previous research focused on identifying website design factors controllable by the company, which could increase online sales and result in customer satisfaction, trust, and reduce perceived risk. These factors were classified in Fig. 1. Managers, particularly those of SMEs, should be able to develop transactional websites that Internet users will visit; however, not all visits lead to purchases.

We performed a test to determine how simultaneous manipulation of several “key” variables affected purchase intention. As in prior tests, four design variables (web security, customer service, informative content, and usability) were modified to measure their effect on purchase intention and other measures of success. Prior researchers have compared secure and non-secure websites [29], navigable and non-navigable websites [8], etc., but the idea of simultaneously considering the effect of different effects on website results is new. According to statistics from the Spanish

National Statistics Institute and the E-Commerce and Direct Marketing Association, the most important determinant of online shopping is perceived security: nearly half of consumers in a McAfee study terminated an order or abandoned their shopping cart due to security fears. Even to get a good deal, 63% would not purchase from a website that did not display a trust mark or security policy [4]. Together with web security, it seemed likely that the amount of product information and the presence of a wide range of services were really important to the customer when shopping online. As the E-Commerce and Direct Marketing Association concluded, 80% of online buyers purchased online because they could obtain information content and additional services had been offered. Finally, the relevance of usability of the site has been noted in several works. Other indicators are: (i) more than 83% of Internet users leave a website if they feel they have to interact too many times to find a product or service; (ii) 58% of visitors who experience usability problems do not return to the site; (iii) about 60% of the time, people do not find the information they are seeking; (iv) \$25 billion is lost every year due to poor website usability; and (v) the average e-commerce site could increase its sales by 100% if it had improved usability.

Our work was based on constructs from IS, marketing, and psychology in an integrated theoretical framework of online consumer behaviour [13]. Specifically we focused on two major objectives. Firstly, to build a tool capable of measuring the different desired effects of a well designed website in terms of satisfaction, online trust, perceived risk, and purchase intention. Our tool was created to provide a one-dimensional measure of a well designed

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Key factors for building a well designed website and effects

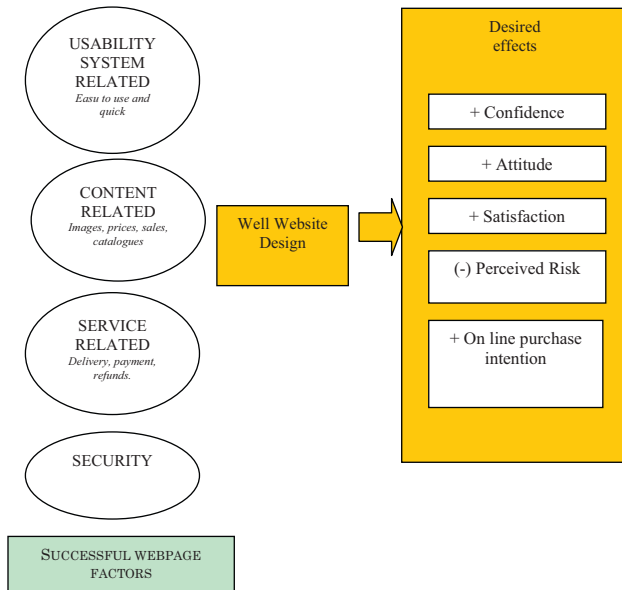


Fig. 1. Key factors for building a well designed website and effects.

website. This construct was created using the Rasch Model to obtain measurements that do not depend on the instrument used and that provided scales that were not linked to the objects being measured, that is, that did not vary from one interviewee to another. The advantage of this method was that a joint measure of different items could be created for the same dimension or construct.

Secondly, our work sought an easy way of visually displaying the similarities between the desired effects of a website and the five websites: a perceptual map was employed, using the ANAFACO technique included in DYANE software. Perceptual maps were not used because there was no simultaneous comparison of several websites.

To identify which website came closest to our measured effects, four subsamples of 65 individuals each were exposed to the four manipulated websites. The subsamples were compared with each other and with a control subsample of 110 Internet users who were showed the well designed website. Our intention was to provide managers with some general recommendations on how to distribute their resources when it came to designing a transactional website, so that they did not use unnecessary effort in providing concepts that were less useful in stimulating online sales.

2. Key variables in a well designed website

During the past decade, researchers have applied TAM to examine IT usage and have verified that user perceptions of usefulness and ease-of-use are key determinants of technology adoption [7,17]. This framework was based on the premise that new technologies are complex and potential users are uncertain about their success in adopting innovations.

Researchers have suggested several ways to improve commercial website design; these influence consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards the website, the company and its products. The key factors may be classified in three major blocks: system, contents, and service. We followed the suggestions of one stream of the research [6] which postulated that the perceived quality of a website depended on the user's evaluation of these three parts and, furthermore, that the three factors influence one another; thus that is important that companies commit to them all.

2.1. System usability-related factors for a well designed website: speed and ease of use

A “systematic website structure” [11] must provide good online engineering performance, which involves ease of access, speed, and navigability. Although usability has also been suggested as needing with other factors such as content, interactivity, and responsiveness, we decided to consider only two dimensions: speed and ease of use [25]. We split “speed” into two factors: waiting time, including attitude towards it, and website delay. We measured “ease of use/navigability”, by considering the cognitive effort required to use the website. This concept has been widely studied. In easily navigable websites, users know where they are at all times and where they need to go, because the way to do so is indicated appropriately. See Table 1 for our set of variables.

2.2. Content-related factors for a well designed website: amount and quality of information

Several authors have focused on measuring whether the information provided by the online service is precise, updated, comprehensive, relevant to the user, flexible, and periodically extended or renewed.

2.3. Service-related factors for a well designed website: pre-purchase, during, and post-purchase

Service quality and service value has received particular attention in assessing good designs, but some researchers have also started to examine on-line services and associated concepts [9,14]. We decided to measure online purchase intentions using methods used in prior work [18], considering that customer service-related success factors should include the effects of pre-, during-, and post-purchase service that may enhance the user's perceived quality.

2.4. Web security factors for a well designed website

Of all the “customer services”, perceived security has received most attention in recent years, since a consumer will not be happy to provide personal details on websites that do not provide web security. Consumers may even be satisfied with and trust websites that do not offer any services but they are unlikely to trust and be satisfied with unsecured websites.

3. Determining factors for well website success

Our work focused on websites whose aim was to invite purchase. Obviously, measuring website success in monetary terms is intuitively attractive; however, there are certain limitations and other measures could be more appropriate [10], e.g., subjective performance measures such as; (i) purchase intention [12,24,26]; (ii) attitude towards the website [1,2,22]; (iii) satisfaction; (iv) trust [3,23]; and (v) low risk [21].

Thus, a favourable website in terms of usability, amount and quality of informative content, customer service (before, during and after the transaction), and web security, will be perceived as a quality website. The site will therefore be able to provide superior levels of purchase, trust, satisfaction, and attitudes with a lower level of perceived risk.

3.1. Purchase intention

Many studies have used *purchase intention* as an indicator of website success, considering that purchase intention is also a reflection of customer loyalty. Thus they have analysed the

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