



Website environmental cues: how do they work in online apparel shopping?

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Introduction In spite of the remarkable growth in online apparel sales, the absence of physical examination before purchasing can be a perceived risk in online apparel shopping. To reduce the risks and enhance online consumers' shopping experiences, it is valuable to study the significance of website environment on consumer response behaviors. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to examine the effects of website environmental cues on the consumer's two dimensions of attitudes (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) that, in turn, influence their response behaviors (i.e., satisfaction and purchase intention).

Literature Review and Hypotheses Eroglu, Machleit, and Davis (2003) found that various online environmental cues, through the mediation of affective and cognitive states, have an impact on approach or avoidance behaviors. The study also identified individual's organismic states in relation to two components of attitude: emotion and cognition. Batra and Ahtola (1990) mentioned that consumers purchase products for hedonic and utilitarian reasons. Hedonic shopping experiences could be derived from a product's uniqueness, symbolic meaning, or emotional arousal. In contrast, the utilitarian dimension is related to more functional and goal-oriented aspects of shopping. Paralleling these issues, it could be noted that emotion reflects hedonic attitude and cognition reveals the utilitarian attitude. Therefore, the present study defines hedonic attitude as an emotional reaction exhibited in response to environmental stimuli. The utilitarian attitude refers to an individual's cognitive response, elicited by website environmental cues. The present study identifies four online website environmental cues as stimuli: website design, image interactivity technology (IIT), e-trust and customization. Previous studies have shown that website design influences consumers' emotional responses (Ha & Lennon, 2010) and 'user-friendly' website design assists consumers to understand information effectively (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). IIT plays an important role in stimulating the online apparel consumers' moods and perceptions of information (Park, Stoel, & Lennon, 2008). Several studies provided evidence for significance of consumer attitudes toward e-trust and customized cues. Congruent with this, the present study hypothesizes that website design (H1a), IIT (H2a), e-trust (H3a), and customization (H4a) will be positively related to consumers' hedonic attitudes. Also, it is predicted that website design (H1b), IIT (H2b), e-trust (H3b), and customization (H4b) will be positively related to consumers' utilitarian attitudes. In an online shopping context, consumers' attitudes (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) formed based on the website stimuli influence satisfaction and purchase intention (Park et al., 2008). Therefore, the effect of hedonic and utilitarian attitudes on satisfaction (H5a & H6a) and purchase intention (H5b & H6b) will be positive.

Methodology A total of 243 college students completed the questionnaire. Participants were asked demographic information as well as their experiences and satisfaction with purchasing

apparel online. Respondents' perceptions toward the four website environmental cues were measured in addition to their attitudes (hedonic and utilitarian), and purchase intention.

Cronbach's alpha for all survey items was greater than .70.

Results and Discussion To test hypotheses, this study employed path analysis techniques using the *Mplus* 6.11. Results showed that proposed hypotheses were partially supported. Website design was positively related to consumers' hedonic attitudes (H1a: $\beta = .420$, $p < .001$) and utilitarian attitudes (H1b: $\beta = .278$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H1a and H1b were supported. For H2a and H2b, IIT had a positive relation to consumers' hedonic attitudes (H2a: $\beta = .253$, $p < .001$) and utilitarian attitudes (H2b: $\beta = .174$, $p < .01$). Thus, H2a and H2b were statistically supported. Consumer perception of e-trust exhibited a positive impact on hedonic attitudes (H3a: $\beta = .159$, $p < .01$) and utilitarian attitudes (H3b: $\beta = .355$, $p < .001$), and therefore, H3a and H3b were also supported. However, customization was not positively related to their both hedonic attitudes (H4a: $\beta = .100$, $p < .079$) and utilitarian attitudes (H4b: $\beta = .090$, $p < .134$). For this reason, H4a and H4b were not supported. The highest β value indicates that website design was the strongest determinant of consumers' hedonic attitudes and e-trust was the strongest determinant of utilitarian shopping attitudes. In addition, consumers' hedonic attitudes had a significant effect on satisfaction (H5a: $\beta = .249$, $p < .001$) and purchase intention (H5b: $\beta = .138$, $p < .05$), supporting H5a and H5b. In addition, utilitarian attitudes had a positive effect on satisfaction (H6a: $\beta = .601$, $p < .001$) and purchase intention (H6b: $\beta = .595$, $p < .001$). Therefore, H6a and H6b were also supported. The results demonstrated that consumers who have higher levels of utilitarian shopping attitudes may feel more satisfaction and purchase intention, as they reached their shopping goals. Consumers may still regard physical examination as an important factor in their apparel shopping process. Findings of this study suggest that online retailers and website developers should provide enhanced image interactivity technology, trustworthy website features, as well as visually appealing website designs. Customization might be seriously undermined if consumers have a negative perception due to privacy or trust issues. Accordingly, online retailers should balance between providing consumers customized features and assuring e-trust.

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