

Moderating Effect of Accompaniment on the Relationship Between Online Perceived Quality and Perceived Value

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to highlight the impact of the mediating effect of the perceived value on the influence of perceived quality of the purchase-site on the buying intention, Moreover; our goal is to study the moderating effect of accompaniment on the relationship between the perceived quality on perceived value web site. The data-gathering was carried out through an experimentation conducted an online-trading site for a laptop purchase. The findings reveal that the perceived quality partially influence the perceived value. The latter exerts a positive effect upon the buying intention. Accompaniment moderates the relationship between the perceived quality and the perceived value.

Keywords: Accompaniment, moderating effect, online perceived quality, perceived value, purchase intention

INTRODUCTION

The quality of store retailing is determinant for the purchasing-act and is not a random factor. The designers and researchers have to emphasise the quality to be perceived by the consumer. This perception is very subjective since the consumer does not directly assess the underlying qualities of the product or the store retailing. His choice is based upon a good impression. Therefore, providing a high-quality online-service is to be considered as a paramount strategy for the success of the firm's goals (Bressolles, 2006). Besides, this potential is accounted for by the ability of the store to yield consumer value generating benefits so as to establish a steady and sustainable relationship with him as a differentiating-medium and thereby create a competitive advantage key. Indeed, while frequenting an outlet, the consumer is not only limited to the item-acquisition task, but also seeks to go through a gratifying-experience. The value concept defined by Holbrook (1999) as an experience relationship with a product is the most suitable for our context since it enables to enjoy a benefit from a pleasant experience provided by an outlet frequentation.

The main objective of this research was:

- To evaluate factors of perceived quality affecting perceived value during online shopping in Tunisia
- To study the moderating effect of accompaniment on the relationship between online perceived quality and perceived value
- To test the robustness of the proposed model in Tunisia context

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Online perceived quality: According to Bressolles (2006), providing an upmarket service always constitutes a basic strategy for the success of a business organisation whether it be in the real world or in the virtual world. Referring to the research conducted on the traditional service, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) define the quality service as a comprehensive judgement or an attitude towards the superiority of a service, i.e. the perceived quality is attributed to the evaluation of excellence or the superiority of a product (Tsotsou, 2006). In the electronic service, perceived quality is determined by the degree according to which a website makes shopping easier or provides efficacy and efficiency in product-purchase or delivery (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2002). Upon examination of the literature, we can assert that the trading-website-efficacy is not only confined to the strictly-utilitarian tools apprehended through information research on the features of products, but other studies took other dimensions into account. Indeed Napoli and Ewing (1998), Ghose and Dou, (1998) and Chen and Well (1999) refer the website-quality to the informative, entertainment, aesthetic, interactive (personalization), efficacy and securing dimensions.

The quality of information is essential for determining the consumer's purchasing decision. Furthermore, this set of information are connected to the product-features, the firm, and the sale transaction (Jeong and Lambert, 2001) attribute the information-quality to three facets: on the one hand, semantic (easy comprehension), syntactic (a logical information order)

and graphical (delightful reading provided by a friendly user-interface); whereas the design is linked to respecting a graphical chart so as to display a visually-attractive unit (Eighmey, 1997). The website design aesthetic aspects are based upon the information-content-layout and their usability by the cognitive capabilities and the consumers' decision-making process such as the easy to use and browsing, as well as the interface coherence (Noam and Oded, 2007). However, the provision of diverse information is achieved by interactive applications through a customised service. Nysveen and Pedersen (2004) point out that the customised service helps the consumers surf through myriads of content and shopping options that offer responses adjusted to the consumers' predilections. Eventually, security & privacy is a negative index for the trading sites (Santos, 2003), since it implies the consumer's protection from hacking and financial losses when using his credit card on the website.

Perceived value: In the marketing area the pioneering research dealing with the value-concept is set within a transactional perspective. The value concept is formulated by Zeithaml (1988) as the comprehensive assessment of the utility of perceived benefits, and perceived sacrifices, or as the difference between perceived benefits and paid costs; it is also the ratio of perceived benefits in relation to the perceived sacrifices. Sacrifices encompass all the costs (purchasing price, acquisition costs, installation), while perceived benefits are the combinations of physical attributes of the available service in a given relationship of the product use Ravald and Grönroos (1996). Comparing between the benefits and the sacrifices is a strictly cognitive and rational aspect (Sánchez *et al.*, 2006). Unlike the Zeithaml (1988) pattern, Woodruff (1997) defines value as the estimation of preference and assessment of attributes related to the product in its use-situations. This definition can be implemented on the expected value and on the received value.

The experiential and situational side of the value were the main focus of the conception put forward by Holbrook (1999, 2005) who traces it back to the traditional experiential model (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) which assumes that the experience gone through by the consumer provides for him a joy-and-gratification hedonic feeling. The "cognition-Affect-behaviour" paradigm provides a conceptual underpinning for this experiential approach (Sanchez *et al.*, 2006), whereby, the value is defined as interactive, relativistic, preference and experience (Holbrook, 2005). According to the Holbrook (2005, 1999), the consumption value reflects three underlying dimensions: the extrinsic value versus the intrinsic value; the self-oriented value versus the value oriented to others, active value versus reactive value. Eight value-sources emanate from the dimensions' combination which were defined as follows: efficiency,

excellence, status, esteem, play, aesthetic, ethics and spirituality.

Purchase intention: In the context of online selling, we shall use the same behaviour aspects of approach used in a traditional retailing environment (Eroglu *et al.*, 2001). Indeed, according to the theory reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), intention is defined as an intermediary cognitive component between attitude and behaviour. This theory states that intention is predicted by two variables, either a personal factor, which refers to the attitude towards the behaviour or to the social norm. According to Cao and Zhang (2004), the main limit of this theory is to consider that behaviour is monitored by the individual and that intention is the only behaviour determinant. This limit raised an argument for setting out further comprehensive theories. Ajzen (1991) bolstered the theory reasoned action by devising the theory of planned Behavior. He incorporates the concept of perceived behavioral control as the perception of whether one possesses necessary resources and opportunities to perform a behavior as a direct predictor of behavioral intention. Thus, intentions represent motivational components of a behavior, that is, the degree of conscious effort that a person will exert in order to perform a behavior (Shim *et al.*, 2001).

Accompaniment: Accompaniment was defined by the presence of one or several close (individuals, marriage partner, friend or family member) (Debenedetti, 2003) during movement to a point of sale. The companions (Debenedetti, 2003) were called primary small group of close individuals (Brée, 2004). Friends, colleagues, parents or neighbours make up a tremendous source of influence exerted by a continuous temporal relationship (Dandouau, 1999). In marketing, Debenedetti (2003) proposed a research synthesis devoted for the study of the crucial role played by companions in the leisure sites, by asserting that this individual variable comprises three components: The presence, the identity, the number of companions (Debenedetti, 2003) and accomplishes three functions: the first bears a leisure aspect linked to the friendly characteristic of the relationship between the companions. The second function is cognitive, and it accounted for by the exchange of ideas and discussion as well as the intrusion of others in the decision-process by respecting the listening-cognitive effort (Dandouau, 1999). The works carried out on the relational field are based upon the inter actionist approach and reveal the importance of the exchange-social dimension (Dandouau, 1999). The third function has an affective aspect and refers to the number of companions (Debenedetti, 2003).

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Online perceived quality and perceived value: The diversity of research related to the causal chain between

quality and value varies with the interest context of study. In the healthcare service Choi *et al.* (2004) asserted the hypothesis stating that the health service quality has a positive impact on the perception of the service value. In the tourist industry, Gallarza and Saura (2006) empirically confirmed a significant relationship between the perceived quality and the perceived value. They concluded that the travel-service quality is an antecedent to the perceived value. In the marketing field, Sweeney and Soutar (2001), deduced the idea that perceived value is generated from the goods exhibited or the provided services at the same interesting levels of the price, the emotion felt during the movement to the sale point (browsing/travel) or the consumer's social image-enhancement. Thus, our first hypothesis is presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Online perceived quality has a significantly positive impact on the value

Sub-hypothesis H1:

- H.1.a:** Easy to use has a significantly positive impact on the value
- H.1.b:** Design and information quality have a significantly positive impact on the value
- H.1.c:** Personalization and Interactivity have a significantly positive impact on the value
- H.1.d:** Security is positively has a significantly positive impact on the value

Perceived value and purchase intention: In the specific field of traditional retailing marketing, Babin and Attaway (2000) showed that the store mood raises emotions which help determine the perceived value which motivate the customer to go through other shopping experiences. Besides, Roy and Tai (2003), assert that a pleasant experience encourages the client to establish a sustainable relationship with the store and to show up again. From an empirical viewpoint, Choi *et al.* (2004) validated the value-ability to positively influence the satisfaction, hence the behavioural intention. Similarly, Babin and Babin (2001) ascertained the existence of a positive relationship between the perceived value and the purchase intention. The Kim *et al.* (2007) research was added to the empirical study by proving a positive effect between the high level of interactive use on the website and the approach behaviour. As a matter of fact, what is generated by the pleasure of visiting an entertaining store and the aesthetic components contributes significantly in the provision of value and to plunge the visitor in an immersion state by making the navigation more delightful and intuitive and finally enabling the boost of sales' chances and the recommendation of the store to other customers. As a result, the perceived value positively influences the purchasing intention.

Hypothesis 2: The perceived value has a significantly positive impact on the purchasing intention of the site.

Sub-hypothesis H2:

- H.2.a:** Efficiency has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.b:** Escapism has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.c:** Intrinsic enjoyment has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.d:** Entertainment value has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.e:** Excellence value has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.f:** Visual appeal has positively related to purchase intention
- H.2.g:** Economic Value has positively related to purchase intention

Accompaniment (moderating effect): Indeed, the presence of companions provides to the consumer benefits which contribute to moulding the lived experience both on the affective and cognitive side. Furthermore, accompaniment allows the consumer to relax his attention, to entertain himself and to talk about the range of offer, and thereby will be more careful to visual stimuli and to the aesthetic quality-components likely to attract customers into a store. On the other hand, Moore and Lehmann (1980) revealed that the companions' presence is expressed by a higher propensity to seek information. Also, it is plausible to find a relation between accompaniment and value, in an experiential perspective derived from the interaction between the situation-subject-object triad. No research focused on the analysis of this relationship. We shall study this relationship by assuming that the indirect effect of this variable is interpreted by a moderating effect on the relationship between perceived quality and perceived value. Our hypothesis is laid down as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Accompaniment multiplies the impact of perceived quality of the site on the perceived value.

Sub-hypothesis H3:

- H.3.a:** Accompaniment multiplies the impact of easy to use of the site on the perceived value.
- H.3.b:** Accompaniment multiplies the impact of design and information of the site on the perceived value.
- H.3.c:** Accompaniment multiplies the impact of Personalization and Interactivity of the site on the perceived value.
- H.3.d:** Accompaniment multiplies the impact of Security the site on the perceived value

DATA AND EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY

Experimentation: For the data gathering, we had recourse to experimentation among a 360 individual sample and among whom 55.7% were females, 140 are

civil servants among whom 11.4% have incomes ranging from 700 and 900 Tunisian dinars. The sampling method used is randomised. No criterion was used for the respondents' selection except the will and the time-availability to cordially take part in the enquiry. We advise the individual that he can make his choice according to his preference, his need and his budget. We request him to move to the chosen point of sale (virtual site) so as to assess the various possibilities offered by this outlet by surveying the quality of this site (movement/browsing, department access/hypertext links, ergonomics, layout, etc.). We ask the respondent(s) that he has to show a real shopping behaviour and that he has a true purchasing intention.

This experimentation was carried out on commercial web site (www.kelkoo.fr). As for the experimentation was conducted in laboratory of the University Agency of Francophony in Tunisia. So, our experimental estimate comprises the factor of accompaniment (alone and accompanied) yielded equally-distributed two groups.

Measurement: The gauging scales were selected from the literature according to their psycho-graphic quality (length, validity and loyalty). Perceived quality was gauged by 19 items taken from the Guertin and Nantel (2005) scale. Perceived quality was measured by means of the Mathwic *et al.* (2001) scale. The scale is subdivided in seven dimensions. The approach behaviour was operated by the purchasing intention. Items taken from Boonghee and Donthu (2001).

Findings analysis: Throughout this part, we shall present the gauging-scales' reliability and validity and the hypothesis benchmarking.

Scale validity: We realized a factor analysis (ANOVA) for each variable of our model. The Table 1 show these results for both factor analysis and reliability.

The factorial analysis shows that the purchasing-intention scale has a single factor with a proper value

greater than one, which is 2.008. This factor holds 50.195% of the cumulative information. Besides, these items display a 0.6637 Cronbach alpha, hence an acceptable reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results showed that H.1 according to which perceived quality positively influence on the perceived value is partially validated. So, the regression analyses point out a significant and positive relationship between the easy to use of the quality perceived of the site web and the efficiency ($\beta = 0.171$, $t = 3.325$), the intrinsic enjoyment (entertainment value, the visual appeal, and the economic value. Moreover, the easy to use impact has the highest score on entertainment value, followed by the efficiency, the visual appeal, the intrinsic enjoyment, and eventually by the economic value. On the contrary, the easy of use has no significant impact upon the other perceived-value dimensions which are escapism and excellence.

The regression analysis reveals that the global model is significant ($F = 8.269$; $p = 0.000$). Indeed, the perceived site value positively influence was an important predictor of the purchasing intention. The purchase intention is reinforced by an aesthetically-attracting aspect linked to beauty and hedonistic advantages related to the capability of web site to yield enjoyment, entertainment, escapism, and making this site beneficial for the visitor. Therefore, what affectively stitches a visitor to a purchasing site and urges him to buy and hang out to the same purchasing site is accounted for by the feelings, the positive emotions aroused in this visitor during his visit. As a result, H.2 according to which perceived value web site, positively influence the purchase intention is partially validated.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Purchase Intention} &= 0.219 \text{ Visual appeal} \\ & \quad (t = 4.451, p = 0.000) \\ & + 0.195 \text{ efficiency} \\ & \quad (t = 3.955, p = 0.000) \\ & + 0.141 \text{ Escapism} \end{aligned}$$

Table 1: Reliability dimension

Concept	KMO	Test of bartlett	Dimensions	Cumulative % of information	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived quality	0.834	$\chi^2 = 2278,91$ $p = 0.000$	Easy to use	30,458	0.8552
			Design and information quality	14,325	0.7649
			Personnalization and interactivity	10,122	0.7039
			Security & privacy	8,059	0.7752
Perceived value	0.830	$\chi^2 = 4759,029$ $p = 0.000$	Visual appeal	4,850	0.7484
			Entertainment value	6,775	0.7973
			Intrinsic enjoyment	7,211	0.8312
			Espasim	9,477	0.8584
			Economic value	4,404	0.7344
			Excellence	6,114	0.7745
			Efficiency	27,346	0.8040

Table 2: Synthesis of results for moderating effect of accompaniment

Perceived-value	Effect sens perceived quality xaccompaniment			
	Easy to use	Design and information quality	Personalization on and interactivity	Security
Visual appeal	F = 3.775; p = 0.024 reducing effect	F = 5.776; p = 0.003 multiplying effect	F = 4.045; p = 0.018 reducing effect	Insignificant
Entertainment value	F = 3.208; p = 0.039 reducing effect	Insignificant	F = 5.505; p = 0.004 multiplying effect	Insignificant
Escapism	Insignificant	F = 3.732; p = 0.025 multiplying effect	Insignificant	Insignificant
Intrinsic enjoyment	F = 3.019; p = 0.05 multiplying effect	Insignificant	F = 9.959; p = 0.000 multiplying effect	Insignificant
Excellence	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant
Efficiency	F = 6.592; p = 0.002 multiplying effect	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant
Economic value	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant	Insignificant
Hypothesis-related decisions	H3.a partially accepted	H3.b partially accepted	H3.c partially accepted	H3.d rejected

(t = 2.866, p = 0.000)
+0.134 Intrinsic enjoyment
(t = 2.717, p = 0.007)

These results confirm the previous research undertaken by (Lee *et al.*, 2007; Gill *et al.*, 2007). In sum, it is therefore likely that the appearance and the degree of originality of on line store brought about by the design determine the site capability to provide to the visitor enjoyment, relax, control, stimulation and escapism that respectively influence the customers' purchasing behaviour, and thereby their purchasing intention. In order to influence the consumer's behaviour, designers and marketers ought to gear their investment more to the aesthetic aspect of the point of sale so as to procure entertaining -and-gratifying-visit experiences (Mathwic *et al.*, 2001).

As shown in Table 2, accompaniment multiplies the impact of the ease-of-use on the efficiency, intrinsic enjoyment and economic value. Besides, the interaction effect shows that accompaniment intensifies the escapism value through the design and information-quality values when the consumer shares his visit with other persons beside visitors. Regarding the interactivity and personalisation dimension, we find that their interaction effect with accompaniment increases the leisure-intrinsic enjoyment value, while it shrinks the visual-appeal value. Thus, H.3 postulating that accompaniment multiplies the perceived quality dimensions on the perceived value is partially-validated.

These findings all the more confirm the argument that accompaniment is not a social "counter-point" (Debenedetti, 2003) of the point of sale frequentation experience, but it constitutes an intrinsic-benefit source (which is leisure, cognitive input, and the affective back up for the lived experience (Debenedetti, 2003).

Furthermore, the presence of companions allows for anxiety-and-stress alleviation, and the visitor's discomfort (Debenedetti, 2002). Hence, the presence of companions

enables the visitor(s) to swap view points and thoughts, discussions and leisure experiences, to report adjusted products/services generating preferential hedonistic dimensions and favouring contact between accompanied group-members; whereas, the accompaniment-interaction effect brings about no significant effect on security. This consolidates the assumption that companions represent a source for transmitting beliefs and values and also a source of information on the outcome of the purchasing decision.

CONCLUSION

The easy to use of web site has a positive and significant impact the perceived value. This accessibility is closely related to the aesthetic components (design) which are connected to the visual aspect and information-quality under the elements linked to information such as completeness, relevance, comprehensibility and the clarity of the offer that act intensively first on the visual appeal, on the economic value, then, on escapism, and ultimately on the excellence. In fact, the individual can participate by transforming and adjusting the aspect and the informative content in an individualised and personalised fashion. This perceived-quality dimension (interactivity and personalization) influences the intrinsic enjoyment, entertainment value and the visual appeal. For instance, we can add that security is one factor of this quality but has no impact on perceived value.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Like any research, the present study bears some limits such as the Internet-connection flow and the means associated to laboratory-experimentation. Indeed, the individual respondent was accompanied during the experimentation and the group of respondents could not actually carry out the laptop purchase. To conclude our research we shall formulate some input. The

implementation of the value-theorisation on the purchasing-experience put forward by Mathwic *et al.* (2001) in the Tunisian context of shopping on line. It is worth recommending to the managers to set experiential-positioning strategies aiming at an intrinsic value stemming from a gratifying experience. Companions are more and more the target for specific-marketing strategies mainly in online-shopping and/or offline shopping.

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