Chapter 2
Online Branding and Marketing:
A User Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Multimodal is quite established as communication metaphor in user interfaces and there is at least some limited prima facie case that can be used to influence positively consumer behaviour. This paper explores the perceptions of users to interactive multimodal e-branding and its effect on the consumer purchase decision. A sample of 200 respondents, was used as a basis to explore marketing techniques on social media and multimodal influence on consumer purchase decisions. The results and their analysis indicated that advertisements or messages to users with audio, video and text on in combination are the most effective forms of compiling multimodal messages that aim to advertise, persuade and eventually lead to a purchase on the e-commerce and social media platforms. The data also pointed to the use of multimodal Virtual Shopping Assistants. These findings provide an overall viewpoint on user perception that can be used as a basis for a series of empirical experiments in simulations to identify the specific user influence under particular user context and multimodal messages.

INTRODUCTION

Multimodal processing is the main means that people generally interact with the world. The role of multimodality in HCI is broadly to enhance the communication using audio (speech, music, earcons, auditory icons or special sound effects) and visual (still and moving images, graphics). Although multimodality is quite extensively used in HCI, there is very limited use in e-commerce in the form of user communication in e-branding or social media platforms. On the other hand, the use of social media platforms is

increasing and has led to a change in the consumer behaviour. This change necessitated businesses to re-plan their marketing strategies on the digital domain. This change and the identification of the user perception and predisposition has led to this research programme that aims to first identify and obtain an overall user point of view in this context and to empirically investigate and compare different forms of multimodal output in different contexts in vivo. This paper describes the results of the user perception.

According to the Office of the National Statistics (UK), the average weekly spend online in June 2016 was £944.3 million (ONS, 2016). This demonstrates an increase of 14.1% compared with June 2015. This figure is a significant rise and shows the continued strength which online shopping has gained. Given this on-going increase in online shopping, e-commerce organisations seek to improve product presentations. For example, visual presentation of product (360 degree rotation), live two-way communication (interactive and live chat).

As social media marketing is widely regarded to influence the behaviour of consumers, interactive multimodal metaphors are prime building blocks to be embedded on social media messages and platforms. This could lead to reduced complexity of the messages as they could aid user understanding and lead to an online transaction. Given this context, a gap has been identified in the literature specifically on the effect and impact of specific or combined multimodal metaphors (text, illustrations, video, graphics and audio) in e-branding, advertising or social media influencing context on consumers purchase decisions.

E-COMMERCE EXPERIENCE THROUGH E-BRANDING AND MULTIMODALITY

Branding aims to create additional value of a product or service. This is often achieved by using innovative approaches and techniques that will eventually lead to repeat purchase (Yen, 2016; Aaker,1991; Chernatony and McDOnald, 1992; Kapferer, 1992; Hankinson and Cowking, 1993; Rowley, 2009). The growth and competition of e-commerce makes branding significant activity for any organisation or business. E-Presence and a strong e-brand identity are fundamental components to succeed. In this context, branding is the process through which continuous experience and value to customers is provided leading to customer satisfaction (Akhtar et al., 2106; Ries and Ries, 2000; Bergstorm, 2000; Berry, 2000; Mitchell, 2000).

This customer satisfaction, experience and value leads to the creation of a trust in the brand. The effective growth of a consumer-organisation relationship is often the key to long-term and sustained business growth. In a highly segmented market with brand leadership and brand-loyal and satisfied consumers, competitors find it extremely difficult to obtain a sustainable market share. Branding enables the growth of image and reputation with the expectation to lead to new or repeat purchases through reputation or user brand loyalty.

Brand leaders with an established reputation experience greater control on price, consumption and influence over the user choice compared to their counterparts with lower brand image, reputation or leaders of unbranded products (Simmons, 2007; Ibeh et al., 2005). The negotiating capacity of brand leaders can often result into stronger negotiations and control with their suppliers that leads to economies of scale (Chen and Sen, 2016; Steven, 1999).

Branding and e-branding have been topics of significant interest however their contribution to business performance has remained questionable (Rigas and Hussain, 2016). Given that organisations often invest multiples of their annual sales revenue in e-branding to enhance the online reputation and presence, the return is not directly measurable.

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