



Chapter II

Website Interactivity and Amusement: Techniques and Effects

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews recent studies in the use of Website presentation techniques for commercial Websites. In particular, it examines theoretical relationships between interactivity features and amusement techniques and their potential effects on enhanced visitor experience — more informative and entertaining Websites. Based on literature spanning research in traditional advertising media, Web advertising, user interface design, and human computer interaction, it proposes several theoretical relationships between the use of direct interactive techniques and perceived informativeness and entertainment, and between the use of amusement and humor features and perceived informativeness and entertainment. It suggests multiple future research directions and advocates further explorations that go beyond observational studies to uncover potential causal effects of certain hypermedia presentation techniques, and the combination thereof, on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Structural features such as text size, font, graphics, color, animation, video, and audio have been widely explored in the studies of the use of traditional media. Similar uses of such features have also been found in the online environment (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000). Factors related to consumer behavior, attitude, and perceptions related to Websites have begun to be examined in the academic literature (Chen & Wells, 1999; Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Ducoffe, 1996; Eighmey, 1997; Koufaris, Kambil & Labarbera, 2001). Recent literature has started exploring the effects of interactive features on Website appeal (Ghose & Dou, 1998), and that of e-store characteristics on e-store sales and traffic (Lohse & Spiller, 1998). Some experimental studies have also examined the effect of animation and image maps on perceived telepresence and consumer attitude (Coyle & Thorson, 2001), and that of the use of pop-up windows on consumer decision-making processes (Xia & Sadharshan, 2000). This chapter reviews the current literature on the use of interactive features for providing a more realistic experience, examines the potential use of humor for enhanced entertainment value of a Website, and proposes several theoretical relationships on the use of interactivity and amusement techniques in commercial Websites. This chapter also discusses the theoretical and practical implications, as well as future research opportunities on the use of related techniques in Websites, Web advertising, and user interface design.

PRESENTATION ATTRIBUTES

Analysis of information content of a communications message is a methodology proposed by Resnik and Stern (1977) in studying the informativeness of an advertisement. Recent literature has adapted this methodology to Websites in various studies examining information content and the presence of design features. These include modified versions of the Resnik and Stern approach (Philport & Arbittier, 1997; Ghose & Dou), and categories of Website content with regard to technology features (Huizingh, 2000; Palmer & Griffith, 1998). In these relatively recent studies, more aspects of a communication's message have been examined through content analysis criteria. In addition to information content, format or presentation attributes that contribute to the delivery of entertaining appeals have also been analyzed.

Philport and Arbittier (1997) studied the content of more than 2,000 commercial communications messages across TV, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet, and found that the number of unique ads for each brand varies by category, and that leading brands command a larger share of each media type than smaller brands. They included such content cues as customer or celebrity endorsement, facts and details, product display, availability of a Web address (for print or TV ads), 1-800 telephone numbers, customer service, and parent company references. They also

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