How Web Aesthetics Impact Online Shopping

Raja Sarkar

Ph.D. Scholar/ UGC Junior Research Fellow, Department of Business Administration, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India

ABSTRACT

The business world is changing rapidly and it is getting restructured at an astonishing pace. Internet penetration has resulted in the commencement of a new era and has brought a completely new and important source of income for small, medium and big companies by servicing their customers through internet whether they are in their work place or at home. It is getting used as an easy and affordable means to transact business without any limitation of time, place or situation. Online shopping has created a new platform for the expansion and growth of business. This study examines the role and impact of aesthetic design in online shopping stores. Designing online shopping sites involves the application of knowledge from diverse fields such as marketing and human-computer interaction. This article is a collation of research findings from different areas to investigate the role of web aesthetics in shaping the mood and perception of consumers in favour of online shopping companies.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Consumer Behavior, Online Shopping, Human-Computer Interaction, Marketing, Web-Store Design.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the growing popularity and penetration of online shopping, businesses all over the globe are now trying to enhance their competitive advantages by focusing their resources on the virtual business environment. Armed with the power of telecommunications and information technologies, consumers can now access information and data of innumerable vendors more easily than ever before. Moreover, new software tools make it easy for consumers to compare and assess the quality, image, and price of products. In the academic literatures, website aesthetics and quality have generally been recognized as critical factors to drive business online. As such, numerous studies have been carried out to determine the impact of website quality and aesthetics on consumer perceptions about different online shopping sites. The crowded field of competitors in the online shopping industry indicates that achieving long-term success in Web retailing requires e-vendors to adhere to traditional economic and marketing principles and apply traditional marketing strategies. These trends increase the importance of how potential consumers view Web-stores. Previous studies have indicated that design decisions made by a retailer influence consumer perceptions of the retailer and their intentions to shop at those sites (**Jarvenpaa and Tractinsky 1999; Zhang and von Dran 2000**). Consumers weigh various store attributes differently when shopping for low or high-risk products (**Jarvenpaa et al. 2000; Lowengart and Tractinsky 2001**). According to **Zhang et al. (2001),** consumers also weigh design attributes of online shopping sites differently, depending on the type of products or services offered by those sites. While there is now a growing body of research on the impact of consumer behavior in electronic retail settings, little research has been done to date on the specific question of why consumers prefer and adopt one specific Web-based retailer over a competing retailer. According to **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,** aesthetics is "an artistically beautiful or pleasing appearance". The design of online shopping sites should take aesthetic considerations into account. The Internet has emerged as a potent shopping channel in recent years. Besides, Internet shopping sites are also becoming entertainment and stimulation centers. The importance of beauty has been recognized since time immemorial. Modern social science has established the

importance of aesthetics in everyday life. **Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972**demonstrated that a person's physical appearance influences other aspects of the social interaction.

II. METHODS AND MATERIAL

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this article regarding online shopping are mentioned below:

a) To investigate if the aesthetic qualities of an online shopping site matter in terms of consumer behavior in Web shopping;

b) To find out how different aesthetic aspects of online shopping sites interact with different characteristics of products, stores and consumers.

Literature Review:

Previous studies have pointed out that some of the most used key dimensions of online service quality research were navigability, playfulness, information quality, trust, personalization and responsiveness **(Nusair & Kandampully, 2008).**

E-retail aesthetics is conveyed mainly through the web-site's interface, which serves as the "facade" **(Hooper 1986**of the e-store. Users experience the aesthetics of this interface immediately **(Lindgaard et al. 2006).**
Research in website design suggests that providing richer media with more real environment has more positive influence with user's involvement **(Hausman & Siekpe, 2009).**
Study of the design aspects of online retail sites have emphasised aspects of information content and its impact on consumer cognition and decision processes, as well as usability issues, such as ease of navigation and interface consistency (**Bellman, Loshe and Johnson 1999; Lohse, Bellmand and Johnson 2000; Lohse and Spiller 1998; Nielsen 2000; Spiller and Lohse 1998; Spool et al. 1998).**

McKnight, Choudhury, and Kacmar (2002found that perceptions of the site design and quality were strong predictors of trusting beliefs in the retailer and in consumer intentions to buy from the site.

Consumers may be motivated by the desire to maintain a positive mood **(Meloy 2000**or to increase the hedonic value of the shopping experience **(Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994).**So, aesthetic design of online stores may create a positive mood and create pleasant feelings during the shopping process **(Porat and Tractinsky 2006).**

Web page color and background images were found to affect consumer choice **(Mandel and Johnson 2002).** Aesthetics may affect perceptions by inducing affective response, which, in turn, influences evaluations of other attributes of the object and attitudes towards the object in general **(e.g., Norman 2004; Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz 2004; Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli 2006).**

The aesthetic dispositions of consumers are major determinants of their perceptions of the design's aesthetics and can be based on individual sensitivities to aesthetics **(Bloch et al. 2003**or on social or cultural factors (e.g., nationality or age groupthat affect those sensitivities.

For first-time consumers, an aesthetic design can create favorable first impressions **(Norman 2004; Postrel 2002**that may trigger a positive affect **(Pham 2004**and create a favorable bias in the consumer's decision making process **(Loken 2006; Yeung and Wyer 2004).** **Lavie and Tractinsky (2004**showed that online users perceive two high-level, aesthetic subdimensions. The first sub dimension, which they termed "classical" aesthetics, is associated with clean and orderly design and with user perceptions of the Web site's usability (i.e., eases, of use). The second aesthetic subdimension, termed "expressive," represents designs perceived by users to be original and creative. This dimension contributes to the uniqueness of the site's appearance.
To promote hedonic shopping, online stores need to improve sensory stimulation, create the feeling of fantasy and arousal as well as enjoyment and pleasure **(Babin et al. 1994).**

The new age research works suggest that aesthetics is correlated with user satisfaction **(Lindgaard and Dudek 2003; Tractinsky et al. 2000**and pleasure **(Hassenzahl 2003; Lavie and Tractinsky 2004).**

Zhang and von Dran (2000found that certain aesthetic elements of a Web site serve as purchase motivators, while other aesthetic elements serve as hygienic factors (i.e., necessitiesin purchase decisions from e-retailers.

Porat and Tractinsky (2006and Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli (2006found that aesthetics influenced consumers' emotional states and attitudes towards Web stores.

Aesthetics may elicit moods that stimulate consumers to form an affect-based initial impression that is later used as a basis for judgments **(Loken 2006).**

The design characteristics of the store are objective properties of the design (e.g., shape, color, size, etc.and may be used to intentionally affect user perceptions **(Park et al. 2005**or they might be interpreted in ways that were unintended by the designer.

According to **Lavie and Tractinsky (2004)**, the expressive aesthetics of Web sites convey a sense of creativity and uniqueness. This type of aesthetics is likely to serve an important role when shopping for specialty goods, an activity during which consumers engage in a relatively intense process of information gathering.

The dimension of classical aesthetics represents order, clarity, and clean design **(Lavie and Tractinsky 2004).** These characteristics are considered valuable in most shopping environments, perhaps somewhat more so in upscale shopping, where attention to detail is likely to be higher.

Expressive aesthetics can facilitate the marketing of fashion items as it can contribute in conveying the special image and identity desired by consumers of this type of apparel **(Schroeder 2002).**

In **Creusen and Schoormans' (2005**words, "aesthetic value often will be important to consumers for durable products, as these products are often used for many years and are visible in consumer's homes or to other people".

Visual design is one of the most important factors that can influence feelings in the virtual world. Thus, aesthetic design can be instrumental in creating such environments which generate these feelings **(Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Lavie and Tractinsky 2004; Zhang and von Dran 2000).**

The store's visual design may serve to increase trustworthiness by serving as an indicator of site credibility **(Fogg et al. 2002).**

If aesthetics is perceived as relevant (e.g., shopping for products that stress aesthetic designor is indicative of the store's professionalism (e.g., attention to detail), it should be consequential to the decision process **(Petty and Wegener 1999).**

During the search stage, well-organized website structure and the attractive design are important things to persuade consumers to be interested in buying product and service **(Koo et al.).**

Shergill and Chen (2005identified website design characteristics as the dominant factor which influences consumer perceptions of online purchasing.

Turban et al. (2002argue that elegant design of website will serve better to its intended audiences.

According to **Kin and Lee (2002**the website design describes the appeal of the user interface design presented to customers so that they are willing to visit more often and stay longer with attractive websites **(Shaw et al., 2000).** Following them, **Than and Grandon's (2002**study found that quality website design is crucial for online shopping.

III. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Incorporating aesthetics into online shopping sites does come with a cost, which may not be justified by each and everybody. Hence, to help e-retailers negotiate the benefits and costs of designing aesthetic sites, the suggestion will be for the e-retailers to adopt a focused approach to this aspect of the Web store. Depending on the type of products and services they sell and the type of customers they target, some stores may require heavy investment in aesthetic design. Similarly, some other stores may have to invest in the more innovative aspect

of aesthetic design, while other stores' investment should be concentrated more towards more conservative aesthetics. Correctly understanding the time and process to emphasize upon proper aesthetic design would result in luring new customers and retaining existing consumers, improving consumer attitudes and increasing potential purchases, as well as in reducing attrition rate. The literature review suggests that e-retailers should configure their Web-store design according to combinations of consumer and product characteristics. This can be achieved by customizing shopping sites that would offer similar products for different consumer groups. Such customization would help e-retailers adapting better to the various parameters of the shopping context. This potential rapid growth of online stores for the same retailer might seem as a case of spreading resources instead of consolidation. However, this strategy incorporates better segmentation schemes that not only increase the parity between consumer shopping needs and e-retailer offerings, but also serves as a means for better pricing schemes for different consumer groups.

Clearly, this paper does not exhaust the role of aesthetics in online shopping. Future research can improve our knowledge about additional areas in the online shopping environment that can be affected by the aesthetics of online sites, and additional analyses can shed some more light on this phenomenon.

IV. REFERENCES

[1]. Barwise, Patrick, Anita Elberse, and Kathy Hammond 2002. "Marketing and the Internet." *In Handbook of Marketing*. Eds. Weitz, B. and R. Wensley. London: Sage Publishing.

[2]. Bellizzi Joseph A. and Robert E. Hite. 1992. "Environmental Color, Consumer Feelings and Purchase Likelihood." *Psychology and Marketing 9*: 347-363.

[3]. Bellman, Steven, Gerald L. Lohse, and Eric. J. Johnson. 1999. "Predictors of Online Buying Behavior," *Communications of the ACM 42* (December): 32-38.

[4]. Berthon, Pierre, Morris B. Holbrook, and James M. Hulbert. 2000. "Beyond Market Orientation: A Conceptualization of Market Evolution." *Journal of Interactive Marketing 14*: 50-66.

[5]. Butler, Keith.A. 1996. "Usability Engineering Turns 19." *Interactions 3*: 59-75.

[6]. Card, Stuart K., Thomas .P. Moran, and Allen Newell. 1983. *The Psychology of Human-Computer Interaction*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.

[7]. Chang, Younhwa, Leslie D. Burns, and Charles J. Noel. 1996. "Attitudinal Versus Normative Influence in the Purchase of Brand-Name Casual Apparel." *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 25(1): 79-109.

[8]. Childers Terry L., Christopher L. Carr, Joann Peck, and Stephen Carson, 2001. "Hedonic and utilitarian motivations for online retail shopping behavior." *Journal of Retailing* 77(4): 511-535.

[9]. Coates, Dale. 2003. *Watches Tell More than Time*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

[10]. Cox, Dena and Anthony D. Cox. 2002. "Beyond First Impressions: The Effects of Repeated Exposure on Consumer Liking of Visually Complex and Simple Product Designs". *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science 30*: 119-130.

[11]. Creusen, Mariëlle E. H and Jan P. L. Schoormans. 2005. "The Different Roles of Product Appearance in Consumer Choice" *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 22(1): 63-81

[12]. Darden, William R. and Barry J. Babin. 1994. "Exploring the Concept of Affective Quality: Expanding the Concept of Retail Personality." *Journal of Business Research 29*: 101-109.

[13]. Dion, Karen, Ellen Berscheid, and Elaine Walster. 1972. "What is Beautiful is Good." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 24*: 285-290.

[14]. Donovan, Robert J. and John R. Rossiter. 1982. "Store Atmosphere: An Experimental Psychology Approach," *Journal of Retailing 58* (Spring): 34-57.

[15]. Donovan, Robert J., John R. Rossister, Gilian Marcoolyn, and Andrew Nesdale. 1994. "Store Atmosphere and Purchasing Behavior." *Journal of Retailing 70*: 283-294.

[16]. Eagly, Alice H., Richard D. Ashmore, Mona G. Makhijani, and Laura C. Longo. 1991. "What is Beautiful is Good, but: A Metaanalytic Review of Research on the Physical Attractiveness

Stereotype." *Psychological Bulletin 110*: 199-128.

[17]. Fazio, Russell H., Roskos-Ewoldsen, David R., and Martha C. Powell. 1994. "Attitudes, perception, and attention." In P.M. Niedenthal and S. Kitayama (eds.*The Heart's Eye*, Academic Press.

[18]. Fiske, John, Bob Hodge, and Graeme Turner. 1987. *Myths of Oz*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

[19]. Fogg, B.J., Cathy Soohoo, David Danielsen, Leslie Marable, Julianne Stanford, and Ellen R. Tauber. 2002. "How Do People Evaluate a Web Site's Credibility?" Persuasive Technology Lab, Stanford University.

[20]. Gilboa, Shaked and Anat Rafaeli (2003), "Store Environment, Emotions and Approach Behavior: Applying Environmental Aesthetics to Retailing," *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research 13* (2): 195-211.

[21]. Gumpert, G. and S.J. Drucker. 1992. "From Agora to the Electronic Shopping Mall." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication 9*: 186-200.

[22]. Hassenzahl, Marc 2003. "The Thing and I: Understanding the Relationship Between User and Product." *In Funology: From Usability to Enjoyment*. Eds. Blythe, M.A., A.F. Monk, K. Overbeeke, and P.C. Wright. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers: 31–42.

[23]. Van der Heijden, Hans. 2003. "Factors Influencing the Usage of Websites: The Case of a Generic Portal in The Netherlands." *Information and Management 40*: 541–549.

[24]. Holbrook, Morris B. 1982. "Mapping the Retail Market for Esthetic Products: The Case of Jazz Records." *Journal of Retailing 58*: 14-129.

[25]. Kotler, Philip. 1997. *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control* th Ed. Prentice Hall.

[26]. Kotler, Philip and Murali K. Mantrla. 1985. "flawed Products: Consumer Responses and Marketer Strategies." *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 2: 27-36.

[27]. Kotler, Philip and G. Alexander Rath. 1984. "Design a Powerful but Neglected Strategic Tool" *Journal of Business Strategy 5*: 16-21.

[28]. Kruft, Hanno-Walter. 1994. *A History of Architectural Theory: From Vitruvius to the Present*. Zwemmer and Princeton Architectural Press.

[29]. Lavie, Talia and Noam Tractinsky. 2004. "Assessing Dimensions of Perceived Visual Aesthetics of Web Sites." *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies 60*: 269-298.

[30]. Levy, Michael and Barton A. Weitz. 1998. *Retailing Management* (3rd Ed.), Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

[31]. Lindgaard, Gitte and Cathy Dudek. 2003. "What is This Evasive Beast We Call User Satisfaction?" *Interacting with Computers 15*: 429-452.

[32]. Lindgaard, Gitte, Gary J. Fernandes, Cathy Dudek, and J. Brown. 2006. "Attention Web Designers: You Have 50 Milliseconds to Make a Good First Impression!" *Behavior and Information Technology 25*: 115 - 126.

[33]. Lindgaard, Gitte and Allan T.W. Whitfield 2004. "Integrating aesthetics within an evolutionary and psychological framework," *Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science*, 5(1): 73 – 90.

[34]. Lohse, Gerald L., Steven Bellman, and Eric. J. Johnson. 2000. "Consumer Buying Behavior on the Internet: Findings from Panel Data." *Journal of Interactive Marketing 14*: 15-29.

[35]. Lohse, Gerald.L. and Peter Spiller. 1998. "Electronic shopping." *Communications of the ACM 41*: 81-85.

[36]. Loken, Barbara 2006. "Consumer Psychology: Categorization, Inferences, Affect, and Persuasion." *Annual Review of Psychology 57*: 453–85.

[37]. McKnight, D. Harrison, Vivek Choudhury, and Charles Kacmar. 2002. "Developing and Validating Trust Measures for e-Commerce: An Integrative Typology." *Information Systems Research 13* (September): 334–359.

[38]. Meloy, Margaret G. 2000. "Mood-Driven Distortion of Product Information." *Journal of Consumer Research 27*: 345-359.