

Using online service-scape to appeal to customers: A focus on hedonic shoppers

M Mpinganjira

*Department of Marketing Management
University of Johannesburg*

mmpinganjira@uj.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The website is the main place of interface between online retailers and their customers. As a place of interface it can be an important source of environmental stimuli on customers. This paper empirically examines the influence that factors associated with the online service-scape have on customers' hedonic shopping experience. Data used was collected using a structured questionnaire. Responses from 149 online customers who were found to be hedonic in their shopping orientation were used in the analysis. Version 21 of SPSS/AMOS statistical package was used to analyse the data. The findings show that web site usability, mass customisation and web aesthetic appeal play a significant positive role in influencing online customers' level of hedonic shopping experience. Website informativeness was however not found to have significant influence on customers' level of hedonic shopping experience. The findings also show that customers' level of hedonic shopping experience significantly influences commitment to online stores. The findings in the paper have wider implications on management of online stores. In general the study identifies factors that managers of online stores can focus on in order to appeal hedonic shoppers by bringing enhanced pleasure to the online shopping experience.

Keywords: Online retailing, hedonic shopping experience, web usability, mass customisation, website aesthetic appeal, commitment to an online store.

Online retailing has become a common phenomenon in many parts of the world including South Africa. Many customers these days make online and/or offline purchase decisions based on product information obtained online. For this reason online shopping sites have become important platforms on which relationships between retailers and consumers are being established (Demangeot & Broderick, 2010:118). This is underscored by the fast pace at which online sales are growing globally and at individual country levels. According to a report by E-

marketer (2014:Online) global business-to-consumer e-commerce sales growth was at an average rate of 19 percent in 2013 with total sales standing at US \$1.23 trillion. According to the report total sales in 2014 are expected to reach US\$1.471 trillion in 2014, representing an increase of nearly 20 percent over 2013 sales figures. In a study that examined sales elasticity differences between e-retailers and traditional retailers using longitudinal quarterly data covering the period between 1999 to 2010 Ramcharran (2013:54) found evidence of more stability for e-commerce

sales than for traditional sales. The findings attest to the high positive growth prospects of the e-commerce sector over the traditional sector.

Luo, Ba & Zhang (2012:1131) observed that while online shopping is growing at a fast pace, surveys continue to show that many customers are not highly satisfied with their shopping experiences. They noted that more research is required to help better understand factors that influence customers' evaluations of their online experiences. Growing online retail competition is also making it necessary for retailers to look for ways in which they can enhance their customers' online experience. Studies in online retailing, including Chang, Chih, Liou & Hwang (2014:168), O'Cass & Carlson (2012:28) as well as Gregg & Walczak, (2010:1), point out the prominent role that websites play in influencing customer shopping behaviour in general. This is mainly due to the fact that online shopping is characterised by physical absence of sales assistants as well as products. As a self-service, online retail customers have to rely on the website for cues that help in making buying related decisions. Rose, Hair & Clark (2011:24) remarked that customer engagement with an organisation's website also creates an opportunity for positive experience that can result in building of long term relationships. Pine & Gilmore (2011:3) in their book entitled the 'Experience Economy' observed that experience presents a new source of value that is distinct from services. They described it as 'an existing but previously unarticulated genre of economic output' p. xxiv. The experience economy calls for businesses to look at themselves not only as sources of goods and/or service providers but as sources of memories and as experience stagers. Studies focusing on shopping value theory, including Anderson Knight, Pookulangara & Josiam (2014:774) as well as Büttner, Arnd & Göritz (2014:1027), note that experience as a shopping value is highly associated with customers who are hedonic in their shopping orientation. Hedonic

shoppers are defined as shoppers that focus on and seek to maximise emotional pleasure that takes place while shopping for products (Anderson et al. (2014:774; Dirsehan & Yalçin, 2011:80). They are unlike utilitarian shoppers who focus on the functional side of shopping namely making the actual purchase without spending too much time as they are efficiency oriented (Anderson et al. 2014:774; Haas & Kenning, 2014:430).

Rose et al (2011:24) observed that while the field of customer experience is well researched in the traditional face to face context, not much research has been done to explore the concept in online context. Scarpi, Pizzi & Visentin (2014:266) also noted the need for studies focused on understanding customer experience in online contexts. This paper aims at contributing to this understanding by investigating the influence of service-scape related factors on hedonic customers' shopping experience. Online service-scape refers to the online service environment or website related factors to be specific (Harris & Goode, 2010:231; Tran, Strutton & Taylor 2012:823). The specific objectives of the study are to (i) determine website related precursors of online customers' hedonic experience; (ii) examine the relative influence of different website related factors on customers' hedonic experience; and (iii) examine the influence of hedonic experience on customer commitment to online stores.

The paper is structured such that the next section discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Literature relating to the key constructs of interest in the study is reviewed and proposed hypothesis stated. This is followed by the methodology section which provides details relating to population and sampling, operationalisation of constructs as well as data collection and analysis. Following the methodology are results and discussion as well as implications sections. Thereafter is the last section which highlights conclusions drawn from the findings, limitations of the

study and provides suggestions for future study.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Customer Shopping Experience

Carbone & Haeckel (1994:9) observed that when customers go shopping they always get more than what they bargain for. They attributed this to the fact that shopping always comes with an experience. They defined experience as takeaway impression – a perception produced following consolidation of sensory information. Getting of more than what one bargains for can apply to both online and offline shopping. The only difference is that with offline shopping customers go to a physical store while with online shopping they visit online retailers' websites. According to Dong & Siu (2013:542) customer service experience is about level of enjoyment or otherwise and is based on one's interactions with substantive and communicative elements of the service-scape. Lashley (2008:8) pointed out that customer experiences engage emotions and that this is essential for creating memory. Sources of shopping stimuli that influence customers' emotions can be varied. Of concern in this study is stimuli emanating from the online shopping service-scape.

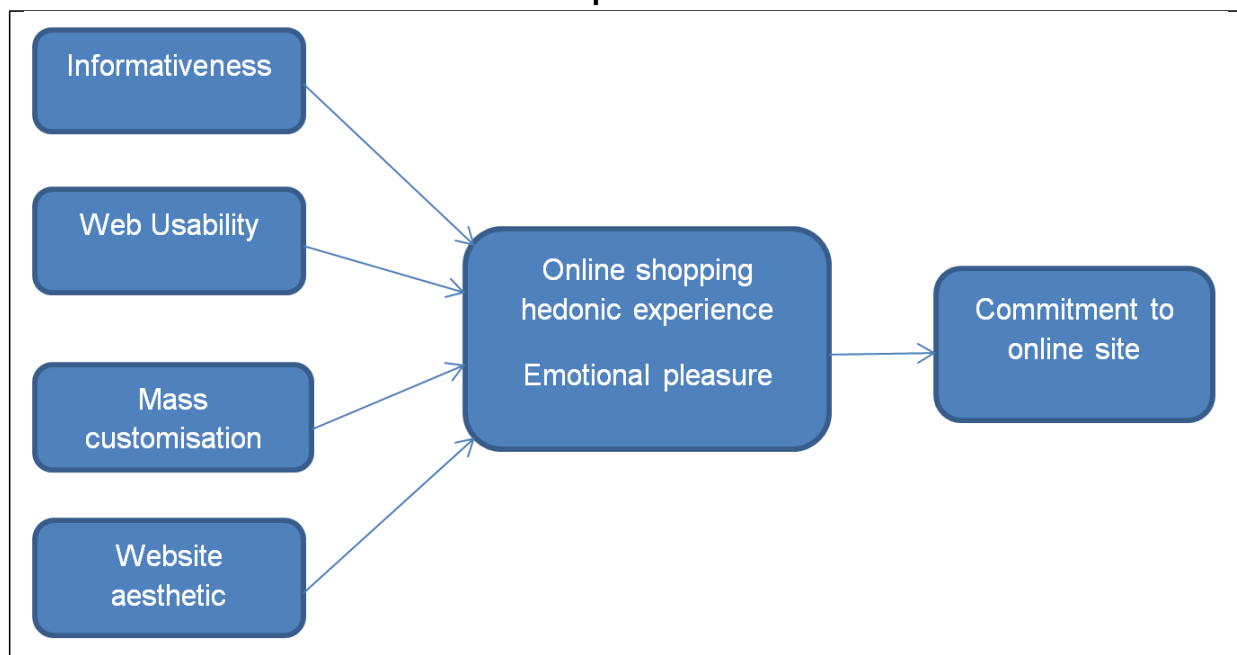
According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework developed by environmental psychologists Mehrabian & Russell (1974), the environment is an important source of stimuli that can exert significant influence on an individual's affective state as well as their behaviour. The developers of the framework remarked that an individual's response to any environment can be categorised as either 'approach' or 'avoidance' behaviour. They noted that approach behaviours include the desire to physically remain in an environment as well as the desire to explore the environment while avoidance behaviours include the desire to leave an

environment and the tendency to be inanimate in the environment.

Taking cognisance of arguments in the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework this study examines the influence of online retail service-scape related factors on customer feelings of emotional pleasure (hedonic experience). As per Anderson et al. (2014:774) as well as Kim, Galliers, Shin, & Ryoo (2012:376) hedonic experience relates to affective elements of shopping particularly the level of emotional pleasure experienced while shopping regardless of whether purchase is made or not. Hedonic experience represents a shopping value that customers can derive from a shopping experience (Kim et al. 2012:376). The notion of hedonic value is consistent with Pine & Gilmore (2011:5) view that customer experience needs to be seen as a distinct economic offering from products. While it can be argued that all shoppers in general need to have a good shopping experience, studies on shopping value and motivations note that customers differ in the level of importance that they attach to sensory and affective dimensions of shopping. Customers who accord greater importance to affective and sensory elements of shopping are called hedonic shoppers (Dirsehan & Yalçın, 2011:80).

In looking at the service-scape and customer shopping experience, this study's focus is on customers who are hedonic in their shopping orientation. The study argues that the best way for online retailers to assess their stores' ability to affectively appeal to customers is by testing their performance using customers who are hedonic in their shopping orientation other than on all customers. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model used in this paper to examine online store service-scape stimuli that affects customers' hedonic experience. The model also shows the expected outcome of hedonic experience in terms of commitment to a retail site.

FIGURE 1
Conceptual model



Source: Author's construction based on literature

Informativeness and customer shopping experience

One major advantage associated with online shopping, unlike shopping at physical stores, is the fact that online shopping makes it easy for customers to access a lot of information on a retailer's offer necessary for shopping decision making. Research shows that the more informative a retail site is the more positively customers evaluate the site in general. According to Hsieh, Hsieh, Chiu & Yang (2014:229) an informative site is the one that contains enough information to help customers make informed decisions. Gao & Bai (2014:656) stated that informativeness encapsulates such attributes as accuracy, usefulness and adequacy. Kim et al. (2012:377) argued that perceived hedonic value may go up when shoppers are able to search for products that they want with ease and get a lot of different information concerning the products. In their study they found that information variety had significant positive influence on perceived hedonic value. Ahn, Ryu & Han (2007:272) established that

having sufficient, accurate and timely information influences online customers sense of excitement, curiosity, and makes them to be deeply engaged. Hsieh et al (2014:229) found that level of informativeness helps online customers to feel more in control of their activities on the website which influences level of pleasure experienced. In line with findings in literature it is hypothesised in this study that:

H1: Perceived level of online retail site informativeness positively influences online hedonic shopping experience.

Web Usability and online customer shopping experience

According to the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 9241-11: (1998), usability refers to "the extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use". Lee & Kozar (2012:450)

pointed out that frequently identified usability problems on commercial websites include difficulty in understanding content, difficulty in navigation, inconsistent formats, inefficient search capabilities as well as ill-defined help functions. Studies in online retailing note that when a customer visits an online store usability issues influence not only their perceptions of the site and the retailer but also their behaviours (Zhang Fang, Wei, Ramsey, McCole & Chen 2011:196; Venkatesh & Agarwal 2006:367). Hertzum & Clemmensen (2012:37) remarked that user experience has become a matter of significant concern among web professionals resulting in many spending considerable time and effort on how to improve usability so as to positively influence users' emotional experience with a website. Éthier, Hadaya, Talbot & Cadieux (2008:2787) found that factors related to web-usability including navigation, structure of information, text appearance and arrangement do exert influence on customers' emotions experienced when shopping online including emotions of frustration and joy. It is thus hypothesised in this study that:

H2: Perceived level of web usability is positively associated with online hedonic shopping experience.

Mass customisation and online customer shopping experience

The concept of mass customisation has its origins in manufacturing. Fogliatto, da Silveira & Borenstein (2012:15) defined it as a "production strategy focused on the broad provision of personalised products and services". Commenting on the application of the concept of mass customisation in online retailing Thirumalai & Sinha (2011:479) observed that "advances in internet and digital technologies extend the realm of customisation beyond the traditional boundaries of manufacturing". They pointed out that developments in information technology capabilities are enabling a variety of

customisation approaches aimed at making websites to be more appealing to customers. According to Lee & Chang (2011:172) one common variation of mass customisation is the co-design process. They noted that the co-design process is an interactive process that requires users to apply online tool-kits provided by retailers. For example using personalisation technologies, online retailers can enable customers to adapt web content into the format of choice including changing the appearance of products. Lee, Lee & Lee (2012:264) identified consumer participation and company responsiveness as two important attributes of any customisation program. They stated that high levels of customer participation are likely to result in better fit with needs. On company responsiveness, they remarked that the ability to respond to customers' needs plays a role in determining customers' attitudes towards a customisation program. Trentin, Perin & Forza (2014:693) asserted that customers derive hedonic benefits from mass customisation experiences. A study by Sun, Suh & Lee (2012:17) found that there is positive relationship between perceived customisation quality and hedonic shopping value. It is thus hypothesised in this study that:

H3: Mass customisation is positively associated with online hedonic shopping experience.

Web Aesthetic Appeal and online customer shopping experience

Aesthetics is a concept concerned with beauty or the appreciation of beauty. Coursaris, Swierenga & Watrall (2008:105) noted that aesthetics is interlinked with the philosophy of art and the pleasing to the senses. In online retailing, websites can be designed so as to give customers pleasure through beauty. According to Chang et al (2014:169) as well as Wang, Minor & Wei (2011:47) web aesthetics represent how different elements and attributes including colour, graphical illustration of

products, page layout including structure of information are combined so as to yield an impression of beauty and appeal to customers. Linghammar (2007:2) as well as Tractinsky, Katz & Ikar (2000:127) found high correlation between perceived interface beauty and users' perceptions on ease of use. Tractinsky et al (2000:129) attributed this to possible occurrence of 'halo-effect' arguing that the beauty of an interface can have a positive effect on users' mood which in turn can exert positive influence on how users evaluate a system as a whole. In their study Koo & Ju (2010:385) found that graphics and colour can impact customer emotions of pleasure. Cai & Xu (2011:186) contended that web aesthetics has positive influence on customers' shopping enjoyment. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H4: Website aesthetic appeal is positively associated with online hedonic shopping experience.

Online hedonic shopping experience and commitment to online site

Commitment to an online site can be evidenced by a number of behaviours and behavioural intentions including willingness to revisit and willingness to repurchase from a site. Wu & Holsapple (2014:87) mentioned the need to look at one's level of emotional involvement in understanding behaviour. In their study they found that emotional experience of enjoyment and arousal has positive influence on behavioural intentions. Commenting on the relationship between emotions and behaviour Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou & Beatty (2011:730) remarked that "emotions arising from consumption experience deposit affective memory traces" and that ultimately emotions influence many different behaviours including repurchase intentions, loyalty to a store as well as word of mouth communication. Their study's findings were that emotions of pleasure positively influence customer store loyalty. Overby &

Lee (2006:1164) noticed that in online shopping, a customer's level of perceived hedonic value is positively associated with their level of preference of a retail store which in turn exerts positive influence on behavioural intention to revisit as well as to purchase again from a shop. Kabadayi & Alan (2012:70) observed that positive emotions have significant direct positive influence on customers' store revisit intentions. Jones, Reynolds & Arnold (2006:978) found that perceived hedonic value positively influences re-patronage intentions as well as customer loyalty. It is therefore hypothesised in this study that:

H5: Online hedonic shopping experience is positively associated with customers' commitment to online stores.

METHODOLOGY

Data used in this paper was collected as part of a larger study targeted at online shoppers from Gauteng, South Africa. The study involved administration of a self-filling structured questionnaire to online customers who were 18 years or older. Respondents were selected using non-probability sampling, specifically using quota sampling. Non-probability sampling was used due to lack of readily available list that could be used to draw a random sample of online shoppers. Use of quota sampling was aimed at ensuring that male and female online shoppers were relatively balanced with no one group dominating the other. Trained field assistants participated in collecting the data. During data collection, the field assistants personally approached respondents at varied public places and explained to them what the study was all about and asked them to participate by filling in the questionnaire. The data collectors were present during the time of questionnaire filling ready to respond to any questions from the participants.

Constructs of interest in this paper and items used to measure them are provided in table 1. A five point Likert scale was used to measure item statements associated with each of the constructs. The scale ranged from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree. In operationalising the constructs, the study drew on measures used in past studies. This helped enhance the content validity of the measures. Specifically, the dependent variable of online hedonic experience was measured using items adapted from Cyr, Head & Ivanov (2009:866) as well as Mouakket & Al-hawari (2012:380) while commitment to online retail site was defined in terms of intentions to re-purchase from an online site and was measured using items adapted from Hausman & Siekpe (2009:12). The independent variable of informativeness was measured using items adapted from Demangeot & Broderick (2007:893) while web usability was measured using items adapted from Gounaris, Dimitriadis & Stathakopoulos (2010:154) and Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Malhotra (2005:18) respectively. Items used to measure mass customisation were adapted from Srinivasan, Anderson & Ponnnavolu (2002:48) while website aesthetic appeal was measured using items as adapted from Harris & Goode (2010:241).

Since the focus on the paper was on customers who are hedonic in their shopping orientation, these shoppers were identified during data analysis using hedonic shopping orientation scale adapted from Arnold & Reynolds (2003:82) and Babin & Attaway (2000:99). A total of 149 respondents were found to fit the profile of being hedonic in their shopping orientation as they had average scores of 3.5 and above on the scale. Score of 3.5 and above meant that the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with hedonic shopping orientation indicator statements. Of these respondents 47 percent were male while 53 percent were female shoppers. In terms of age 28.86 percent of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 29, 63.09 percent were between the

ages of 30 and 49 while 8.05 percent were aged 50 and above.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was the main statistical technique used to analyse the data. The SEM was run using version 21 of SPSS/AMOS program. The analysis followed a two stage process. The first stage involved assessment of the measurement model in terms of reliability, validity and goodness of fit. The second stage involved testing the structural model and examining the hypothesised dependence relationships. A number of fit indices were used to assess the goodness of fit of the measurement model. These included the normed chi-square, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The composite reliability coefficients were used to assess construct reliability. In assessing validity, the study examined statistics relating to convergent validity, nomological validity as well as discriminant validity. Factor loadings as well as average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess convergent validity while nomological validity was assessed by examining correlation coefficients associated with constructs hypothesised in the study to be related. Discriminant validity was assessed by examining the AVE coefficients in relation to the maximum shared variance (MSV).

RESULTS

Assessment of the measurement model: Reliability, goodness of fit and validity

Findings relating to reliability of each of the six constructs in the conceptual model are presented in table 1. Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson (2010:710) observed that composite reliability coefficients of .7 and above are indicative of good construct reliability. The results in table 1 thus show that all the constructs in the measurement model were

TALBE 1
Measurement Scales, Reliability and Factor Loadings

Constructs and items	Composite Reliability Coefficient	Factor Loadings
INFO Informativeness	.827	
INFO 1: I feel that I could learn a lot about the products from this website		.786
INFO 2: The website adequately met my information needs		.894
INFO 3: The website provides enough information for me to make a well informed purchase decision		.887
WU Web Usability	.815	
WU 1: This site is a user friendly site		.877
WU 2: This site has good navigation aids		.793
WU 2: It is easy to find information I want on this website		.879
MCus Mass Customisation	.782	
MCus 1 If I wanted to customise this web site to what I like (e.g. product size), I would easily do so		.850
MCus 2 When surfing this site, I felt that I had a lot of control over what I can personalise on this site		.866
MCus 3 When surfing this site, I felt like I had a lot of control over how I can view product on the site		.773
WAsA Website Aesthetic Appeal	.867	
WAsA 1 The website has visually appealing design		.908
WAsA 2 The website is aesthetically appealing		.899
WAsA 3 The internet site looks good		.889
HedE Hedonic Experience	.774	
HedE 1 The website creates a shopping experience that is enjoyable		.854
HedE 2 While shopping at this site, I felt a sense of excitement		.836
HedE 3 The website creates a shopping experience that is pleasurable		.800
COMT Commitment to online retail site	.814	
COMT 1 I will definitely buy products from this site again in the near future		.841
COMT 2 I intend to purchase through this site in near future		.875
COMT 3 It is likely that I will purchase through this site in the near future		.846

reliable as they had composite reliability coefficients of above .7. Specifically, the composite reliability coefficients of the constructs in the model ranged from .774 to .867 with the lowest being for hedonic experience and the highest being for web aesthetic appeal.

Results of assessment of goodness of fit of the measurement model showed a Chi-square (χ^2) value of 167.418 with 120 degrees of freedom (df) and a p value of .003. Examination of other fit statistics showed good model fit as per Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen (2008).

Specifically the normed chi-square value was found to be 1.39, the GFI was .904; CFI was .963, the IFI was .964 while the RMSEA was .052.

Results on convergent validity showed high convergent validity for all the six constructs in the model. According to Hair et al (2010:709) AVE coefficients and factor loadings of .5 or higher indicate high convergent validity. The results in table 1 show that all items used to measure each construct had loadings of above .7. Results in table 2, show that all constructs' AVE coefficients were greater than .5. The

TABLE 2
Descriptives and Construct Validity

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	INFO	WU	MCus	WAsA	HedE	COMT
INFO	4.18	.696	.787					
WU	4.42	.589	.678	.773				
MCus	3.77	.796	.232	.137	.739			
WAsA	4.26	.709	.654	.727	.326	.828		
HedE	4.20	.653	.516	.662	.390	.593	.733	
COMT	4.23	.661	.531	.661	.274	.545	.594	.771
AVE			.619	.597	.545	.686	.537	.594
MSV			.460	.529	.152	.529	.523	.523

Note: 1. All correlation were significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

2. Diagonal values in bold are the square root of the AVE. Off diagonal values are construct correlations

TABLE 3:
Hypothesis Testing – Hedonic experience precursors and outcomes

		Standardised Regress on Coefficient	SE	P	Conclusion
Hedonic Experience	← Informativeness	.071	.095	.487	H1 not supported
Hedonic Experience	← Web Usability	.334	.102	.000	H2 Supported
Hedonic Experience	← Mass Customisation	.233	.056	.000	H3 Supported
Hedonic Experience	← Web Aesthetic Appeal	.191	.084	.038	H4 Supported
Commitment to online retail site	← Commitment to online retail site	.623	.080	.000	H5 Supported

results in table 2 also show that the correlation coefficients between constructs hypothesised in the study to be related were all significant thereby providing support for nomological validity. As per Hair et al (2010:710) significant correlation coefficients between constructs hypothesised to be related provide evidence of nomological validity.

Table 2 also provides results on assessment of discriminant validity. As per Gaskins (2013:Online) discriminant validity is evident when the average variance extracted for each construct is greater than maximum shared variance. Discriminant validity is also evident when the square root of the average variance extracted is greater than the absolute inter-construct correlations (Chiu, Chang, Cheng &

Fang 2009:771). The results in table 2 show that the two conditions associated with discriminant validity were both met.

Structural model – Hypotheses testing

Table 3 presents results of the hypotheses testing. The results show that four of the hypothesised five structural paths had p values that were significant. These were paths from web usability, mass customisation and web aesthetic appeal to hedonic experience respectively as well as the path from hedonic experience to commitment to online retail site. Based on the findings hypotheses 2, 3, 4 and 5 are thus accepted. The path from informativeness to hedonic experience was

however found to have an insignificant p value. Hypothesis 1 is thus rejected.

An examination of the standardised regression coefficients shows that web usability had the greatest influence of the three factors that were found to be significant precursors of hedonic experience followed by mass customisation and web aesthetic appeal. This is evidenced by the higher standardised regression coefficient of web usability which was .334 compared to .233 for mass customisation and .191 for web aesthetic appeal.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Developments in information technology are making it easy for retailers to open up stores online. This is resulting in growing stiff competition for online retailers. Researchers in online retailing observe that growing competition is making it increasingly difficult for online retailers to differentiate themselves on the basis of their product or price offerings. This makes it imperative for online retailers to explore additional ways of attracting and retaining customers. Taking cognisance of the fact that there are two main sources of value associated with shopping, namely utilitarian and hedonic value, online retailers need to explore ways in which they can appeal to customers using factors that help enhance shopping value perceptions. Focusing on customers who are hedonic in their orientation, the findings in this study show the important role that hedonic value can play in influencing customers' commitment to an online store. The findings show that perceived levels of hedonic experience has significant influence on customers' commitment to an online retail site. The high regression coefficient associated with the relationship between hedonic shopping experience and commitment to online retail site ($\beta = .623$) is an indication of the significant influence that hedonic shopping experience has on commitment. Central to the enhancement of hedonic shopping value is the ability of retailers to make it pleasurable for

customers to navigate their sites as they search for information.

Apart from pointing the importance of enhanced hedonic shopping experience, the findings in the study show factors that online retailers can focus on their efforts aimed at providing customers with enhanced hedonic shopping experience. Specifically the findings show that web usability, mass customisation and web aesthetic appeal are significant precursors for hedonic shopping experience. On web usability, online retailers need to appreciate that without the web site being user friendly it is difficult for customers to easily explore their site. As the place of interface between an online retailer and its customers, the website plays an important part in facilitating customers' shopping experience. Online retailers thus need to ensure that they develop their retail store websites so as to be highly user friendly. They need to make sure that different pages of the web site represent different store locations within a store and that the website needs to be able to facilitate easy movement from one site location to another. Online retailers ought therefore to confirm that their sites have good navigation aids. Online retailers can also enhance the ease with which customers navigate their sites by making sure that they are operating on adequate bandwidth that can accommodate normal traffic to their stores. This will help ensure that their online retail sites are not unduly slow to access. Butkiewicz, Madhyastha & Sekar (2011:313) observed that one of the main problems associated with unfriendly web sites is low levels of responsiveness.

On mass customisation, it is important for online retailers to be aware of the possibilities of use of information technology to provide their customers with customised web content. As noted by Lee et al. (2012:262) customisation is one of the strategies that can help online retailers serve their customers better. The findings of this study show that there are positive emotional benefits

associated with having retail websites designed so as to allow customers to customise product size and how they view products in general. Unlike having static websites, retail websites that give customers control over the way they view products and other web content offer customers enhanced opportunities to better evaluate products on offer and make better informed purchase decisions. Ultimately, this may also help an online retailer in reducing volumes of product returns. Mass customisation of websites also offer the retailer the opportunity to use their site to serve customers with different needs without the need to come up with other online stores as would be necessary if static websites were the only possibility.

The findings in the study show that online retailers can also positively influence customers' emotions by paying attention to web aesthetic appeal. The findings show that web aesthetic appeal has positive influence on customers' hedonic experience of emotional pleasure while shopping. The findings are in line with those by Koo & Ju (2010:377) that website graphics and colours have positive influence on emotions of pleasure. Online retailers need to realise that web aesthetics can influence customers' first impression about an online retail store as well as in ensuring that customers are kept positively aroused while shopping. Chang et al (2014:169) noted that web aesthetics help provide an overall impression of the online shopping environment. Managers of physical retail stores often work with interior designers in creating desired look and feel for their store. Online retailers can take the same approach and use professional designers to help them come up with the desired the look and feel for their online stores.

According to the findings in the study, informativeness was found not to have significant influence on customer experience of emotional pleasure. This is despite correlation coefficients showing that that there

is significant correlation between the two constructs. Online retailers need to realise that the lack of significant association between informativeness and hedonic shopping experience does not underestimate the importance of ensuring that their online stores provide customers with enough information to help them make informed decisions. The lack of association between the two constructs may be explained by looking at the role of information in shopping decision making. Information carries with it more of cognitive value in that it provides customers with a basis for objective evaluation of objects. Hedonic shopping experience in contrast relates more to affective value.

CONCLUSION

Success in online retailing necessitates firms to be customer oriented in their strategies. The findings in this study show that online stores can effectively make use of their service-scape to provide their hedonic shopping oriented customers a positive emotionally appealing shopping experience. The findings specifically show that online retailers can do this by ensuring that their retail sites are associated with high levels of website usability by providing customers with opportunities for mass customisation and by ensuring that their retail store web site is aesthetically appealing. The importance of ensuring that hedonic customers' need for an emotionally appealing shopping experience is met is evidenced by findings that show the significant positive influence it has on commitment to an online store as measured by future re-purchase intentions.

The findings of this study help advance existing literature on the importance of the online service-scape in creating competitive advantage for online retailers. When effectively designed, the service-scape can be a significant source of environmental stimuli that serve to elicit desirable emotional response on the part of customers. The study

also empirically validates arguments on the importance of customer emotions. The findings show that there is economic value that retail firms stand to gain if they succeed in providing customers with emotionally appealing shopping experience.

While the study contributes to understanding the important role that a well-designed service-scape can have on online retail business success, it has its own limitations. The main limitations relate to the fact that the study is based on a sample drawn using non-probability sampling method and that the study was conducted in Gauteng which is a limited geographical area in South Africa. This limits the extent to which the results can be generalised to a wider population of online shoppers. Future research can take these limitations by replicating the study in other geographical areas and/or testing the model on respondents drawn using probability sampling methods.

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