

Chapter 63

Internet Consumer Behavior: Web Atmospheric

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter develops the major components of web atmospheric (Richard, 2005). In retailing research, retail atmospheric (e.g., scents, color, design) are very important to the success of retailers. Similarly, Richard (2005) demonstrates that web atmospheric are important to the development of positive attitudes toward the website and the products it describes. In Figure 1, these are the shaded areas.

BACKGROUND

Web atmospheric are the conscious development of website environment to induce a positive response by visitors. These are critical to the effectiveness of a site since they determine consumer online brows-

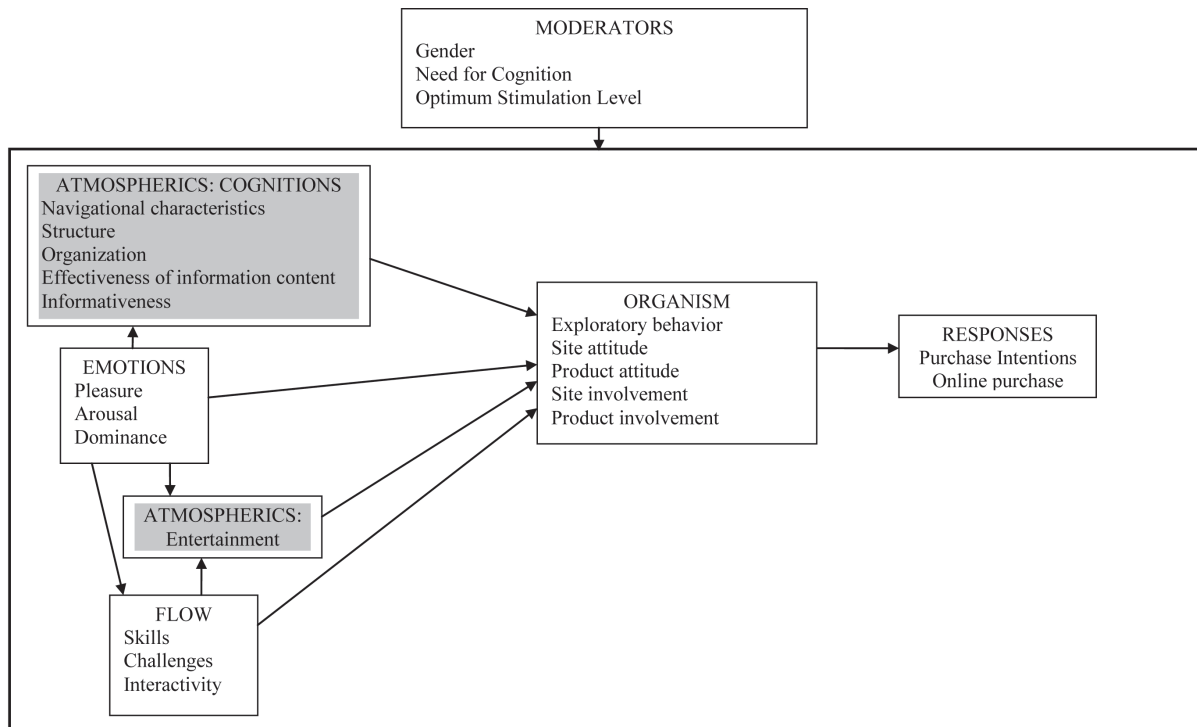
ing and purchase behavior. Six variables are part of web atmospheric: navigational characteristics, website structure, website organization, effectiveness of its content, website informativeness, and website entertainment.

Navigational Characteristics

Characteristics of the products and websites encountered early in online browsing can influence the level of arousal and pleasure (emotions) that consumers experience, and thus can influence their shopping behavior. Two manipulations by Menon and Kahn (2002) show that if the starting experiences encountered by consumers in a simulated internet shopping trip are high in pleasure, then there is a positive influence on approach behavior (attitudes) and shoppers engage in more arousing activities such as more exploration and tendencies

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Figure 1. Model of consumer navigation behavior: web atmospherics (Source: Adapted from Richard, M.O. (2009). Modeling the internet behavior of visitors by the study of cognitive variables and moderators, unpublished doctoral dissertation, HEC-Montreal Business School.)



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to examine new products and stores (Menon & Kahn, 2002).

Lynch, Kent and Srinivasan (2001) identify three characteristics of a website (i.e., site quality, affect and trust) that affect purchase behavior. *Site quality* is represented by ease of use, provision of helpful graphics, usefulness of search engines, and completeness of information (Lynch, Kent, & Srinivasan, 2001). Online sellers believe that site quality influences surfers' probability of buying during the visit and returning to visit the website (Lynch, Kent, & Srinivasan, 2001). The impact of site quality on purchase intentions depends on the selected product category and the world region examined (Lynch, Kent, & Srinivasan, 2001).

Wayfinding

In brick-and-mortar shops, physical maneuvering of a store's environment (i.e., social, visual and design factors) by consumers is called *wayfinding* (Passini, 1984). It is also possible to apply the wayfinding concept to the Internet, but the physical maneuvering process is replaced with maneuvering through scrolling and linking on the Web. Wayfinding on the web is labeled *navigation*. Hoffman and Novak (1996) define navigation as the process of self-directed movement through a computer-mediated environment. Navigational cues are important in brick-and-mortar stores as well as on the web. Text and icon links are cues that help consumers in navigation (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

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