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Online website in brand creation of online store

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Abstract. Online website is one of the basic tools in the process of brand creation. The presence in virtual environment determines the possibility to reach clients. More and more often do they treat Internet as the basic source of information. The aim of this article is to identify the most common elements used on websites in online stores. The study is exploratory. On the basis of empirical study, the authors identified the most important elements and their features in online stores, which can be important for clients.

Introduction

Thanks to the Internet, consumers are able to interact with brands in new ways. Internet technologies and related applications are more and more advanced. Increasingly more organizations are investing heavily in customer-directed online source technologies, which is related to higher costs.

Despite many authors examining different tools used in online stores or online websites, there is a lack of information about what kind of new elements are important for customers, and what kind of features they are looking for. Those elements are important in the context of technology acceptance. They can influence the dimensions of the technology acceptance model (TAM): perceived usefulness,

perceived ease of use, or other dimensions such as perceived risk. This can lead to higher purchase intention (Green, Pearson, 2011, p. 187).

The aim of this article is to identify the elements which are used in online stores and are important for customers, and show the difference between new and old elements. The authors conducted the empirical study: the online focus groups using the FOCUSSON software to examine those elements.

The results show that customers can identify the differences in new and old elements. The most important for them is to feel save during the online shopping, which can be provided by interaction between the store and the client (e.g. by chatting online or gathering opinions from different users). Moreover, they want to have personalized elements, which will make the process easy and quick.

Literature review and research questions

Many researchers try to identify and examine the role of different elements of an online store which can influence the consumers' behavior. According to Al-Qesi (Al-Qeisi, Dennis, Alamanos, Jayawardhena, 2014, p. 2284), those elements are: web design quality such as technical quality, general content quality, special content quality, and appearance quality. Hedonic features and utilitarian features can influence trust, flow, and e-loyalty (Bilgihan, Nusair, Okumus, Cobanoglu, 2015, p. 669). Hedonic features include: social interaction, positive surprises, fun experience, or imaginery, whereas utilitarian features include e.g.: product selection or product information. Chang (2013, p. 312) proved that interaction tools like human to computer and social interaction can enhance satisfaction and intention to use. Green and Pearson (2011, p. 187) suggest that download delay and interactivity have impact on the perceived usefulness and ease of use. Dou and Krishnamurthy (2007, p. 196) examined what kinds of elements are used on websites. They noticed such major categories as: text content (about company, product, store locator, career info, etc.), multimedia content (pictures, videos, and music), loyalist support, design, synergy with other communication vehicles, or interactivity. Singh (2002, pp. 437−439) proposed such website elements as: personalized Web pages, FAQs, chat room, e-mail and automated responses, help desk, and call centers.

On the basis of the previous research, the authors identified the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What is important for consumers while shopping online?
RQ2: What kind of elements do consumers identify in online stores?
RQ3: Which elements do consumers perceive as new and old?
RQ4: Which elements of online stores are important for consumers?

Method

To examine different elements used in online stores and their importance for customers, the online focus group study was conducted. The authors used the FOCUSSON (www.focusson.pl) software, which enables researchers to make research via Internet. 5 groups of customers were examined to identify what kinds of elements used in online stores seem to be new and old for them, and which are the most important.

The groups consisted of customers of different ages. Group 1 – below 25 years of age, Group 2 – from 25 to 34, Group 3 – from 35 to 44, Group 4 – from 45 to 54, Group 5 – above 55. The study was conducted in March and April of 2016. The online focus groups were anonymous under nicknames, so the participants and authors could not identify the specific person.

Results

First, the participants were asked to tell what is the most important for them during online shopping. In all the groups, they focused on three elements. First of all, the ease of use of the website was taken into consideration. Customers want the online store to be simple and clear, so that they do not have to think what the next step in an online shopping path should be. Secondly, the usefulness of the website – customers are annoyed when they do not find the information or product they are looking for. Moreover, customers need to feel save while shopping online. They still have a little trust into online shoppers, so they need to see some elements which can enhance their sense of security. According to the technology development, they also want to receive a personalized offer.

In the second step, the participants were asked to identify what kind of elements are usually used in online stores. The most common answers were: shopping cart, forum, product page, opinions, photos and videos, text description, contact form, newsletter, social media connection, most popular products module, blog, browser, discount tools, log-in and registration, payment forms, delivery forms, ads, sorting, colors, and music.

They were also asked to group those elements into new and old. The differences are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The elements of online store grouped into new and old in the perception of participants

Group	New elements	Old elements
below 25	virtual fitting room, video presentation, virtual assistant, product configurator, social media, online chat, newsletter, product propositions, 3D photos	browser, shopping cart, contact form, product description, photos, discounts, log-in, delivery forms, payment forms, registration, sorting, colors, music, forum, opinions, ads, filtration
25–34	opinions, virtual fitting room, video presentation, virtual assistant, product configurator, social media, product propositions, virtual walk, street view, 3d photos, payment forms	browser, chart, contact form, product description, photos, discounts, log-in, delivery forms, registration, sorting, colors, music, forum, most popular module, filtration, online chat
35–44	opinions, virtual fitting room, video presentation, virtual assistant, product configurator, social media, online chat, newsletter, product propositions, 3d photos, blog, payment forms	browser, chart, contact form, product description, photos, discounts, log-in, delivery forms, sorting, colors, music, forum, most popular module, filtration, ads, language selection, registration
above 45	opinions, virtual fitting room, video presentation, virtual assistant, product configurator, online chat, newsletter, product propositions, 3d photos, blog, language selection, payment forms	browser, chart, contact form, product description, photos, discounts, log-in, payment form, sorting, colors, music, forum, opinions, registration, most popular module, filtration, ads, language selection

Source: own elaboration.

Table 1 shows the differences in the perception of new and old elements of an online store. All of the participants agreed that the virtual fitting room is a new element and might be useful when shopping online, however, they rarely use it because not many stores have this element on their websites. Similarly, they perceive the video presentation as the new element which is very important for them. It enhances the sense of security during online shopping. Customers want to have the possibility to see the product in usage, when it moves. It is also possible by showing the product in 3D, which is also considered as a new element. The virtual assistant is not very common in online shopping, but can be useful for customers. They want to find the information quickly and easily. The online chat is also a very important element for customers, but some of them treat it as the old one (the group aged 25–34). Despite this fact, the online chat with the real person is perceived as one of the most important elements on the website. The social media integration is perceived as a new element for 3 groups, except for the group above 45 years

of age. The elements which can enhance personalization on the website, such as the product configurator and products propositions, are also perceived as new elements although the participants noticed that very few stores have this element.

Young consumers, in contrast to other groups, perceive opinions as an old element, as well as payment forms. However, for all the groups mentioned, it is the most important element they take into consideration while shopping online. The newsletter is still perceived as a new element in 3 groups except for the group aged 25–34. The virtual walk and street view were mentioned only in the group aged 25–34. The blog is perceived as new in older groups − above 35.

The browser, shopping cart, contact form, product description, photos, discounts, registration, log-in, sorting, colors, music, forum, delivery forms, and filtration are perceived as old in all groups. They also noticed that they do not pay much attention to the elements such as: colors, log-in, registration, music, or forums. Although the price is an important factor, consumers do not look for discounts tools on the website. The browser is very important while considering the ease of use of the online store, as well as the product description and photos. However, the participants prefer the photos of a product in motion than a static one (e.g. 3D or movie). The groups below the age of 25 and above 35 perceive ads as the old element. For older consumers − above the age of 35 − the most popular module and language selection are the old elements.

Summary

The study showed that although the different groups of the participants notice similar elements on the website, they perceive them in different ways. Therefore, it is important for managers to know about the consumers as well as possible and offer those elements which are significant for them.

The younger groups do not perceive e.g. opinions as the new element. They need the elements, which are more technologically advanced. It is very important for them to find the personalized information about the product and the brand, as well as to have the possibility to share this information through social media. The older consumers perceive more elements as new. It might be caused by the Internet experience they have. For them, the Internet environment is not as natural as for the younger consumers.

Despite the differences, the study showed some elements which are very important for customers in social media. They need to find the information on the product quickly, easily, and safely. That is why they consider such elements as opinions, online chat, or integration with social media as very important. They also want to eliminate the gap between the reality and online environment by receiving product presentation in the 3D or video form.

The knowledge of this perception should be considered by online stores managers or owners during the creation of an online store.

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Wykorzystanie strony internetowej w kreowaniu marki sklepu internetowego

Słowa kluczowe: strona www, kreowanie marki, marka online, sklep online

Streszczenie. Strona www jest obecnie jednym z podstawowych narzędzi kreowania marki oraz komunikacji z klientem. Obecność w internecie warunkuje możliwość dotarcia do klientów, którzy coraz częściej traktują internet jako podstawowe źródło informacji o produktach i przedsiębiorstwach. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja elementów najczęściej wykorzystywanych na stronach www marek produktów oraz usług. Badanie ma charakter jakościowy eksploracyjny. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych online, autorki zidentyfikowały najważniejsze elementy występujące w sklepach online oraz ich cechy ważne dla nabywców.