Extended abstract

THE INFLUENCE OF WEBSITE DESIGN, CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ON PERCEIVED WEB USABILITY, SATISFACTION AND PERCEIVED RISK ONLINE[1]

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The current markets globalization as a result of ICT development in general and the Internet in particular, have enhanced the importance of the websites design, which is a powerful communications medium for companies operating in international markets (Turban and Gehrek, 2000). The website of the company represents its image in the Internet as an intermediary with potential clients (Roy, Dewit and Aubert, 2001). Some researchers have found that much of the success of an e-service depends on website usability (Flavián, Guinalíu and Gurrea, 2006). Usability and appearance are two indicators that represent the utilitarian aspects of a website, together with its appeal. Those websites with a high level of usability in their design enable users to carry out their tasks coherently and achieve the results they expect (Palmer, 2000). In fact, this perception of control during the browsing process is positively related to the sensation of security and satisfaction (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001; Casaló, Flavián and Guinalíu, 2008). In this international context, culture plays an increasingly relevant role in the use of information and communication technology. This is likely to affect how usability is understood, thus adding an additional factor to our understanding of culture´s effect on usability (Wallace, Reid, Clinciu and Kang, 2013).

The importance of cultural factors in communications has been reinforced since the web can now link diverse regions and communities across the globe that were relatively isolated by time and space. The growth of global communications has increased and intensified the need for leaning to communicate successfully with a multitude of cultures. Regarding to these international situation, the crucial role of language in intercultural relations is widely acknowledged, with the words of a language being 'symbols' that acts as the vehicles for cultural transfer (Hofstede, 2001). The literature shows that the way in which a person processes information is conditioned by cultural values (Tavassoli, 2002). Furthermore, recent research has demonstrated that language is associated with cultural frameworks, such that communication in a given language can increase access to the cultural values associated with that language (Wong and Hong, 2005) and how users from the same culture, when processing information in different languages, obtain significantly different results in terms of perceived risk online (Alcántara-Pilar, Del Barrio-García and Porcu, 2013).

Based on these premises, we aim to demonstrate how cultural values, language as a cultural framework and website design can moderate the perceived usability, the perceived risk online and the satisfaction online in tourism sector. The reasoning behind choosing this sector as the focus for the research was that the World Tourism Organization (WTO) has declared that the key to success in this medium as a source of tourism information is to swiftly identify consumers' needs and establish direct contact with tourists. Furthermore, the WTO has asserted that websites should offer tourists information that is comprehensive, personalized and up-to-date (Vich-I-Martorell 2004). The Internet is one of the main sources of information used by tourists when making travel plans (Buhalis and Law 2008; Wu, Wei and Chen 2008). This behavior can be considered habitual and common throughout the great majority of countries and cultures, hence the decision to use this sector for the purposes of the present study.

To achieve the research scope, an experiment was designed with three independent variables, each with two levels: culture (Spanish vs. British), website design type (V1: high usability vs. V2: low usability) and processing language (Spanish vs. English). Hence the experiment used a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design. The Spanish and British cultures in particular were chosen due to the cultural differences between them as measured by means of the Hofstede indices (2001). To control the factor relating to individuals' processing language, subjects were randomly assigned a website on a tourist destination written either in their mother tongue (L1) or in their second language (L2). With regard to the site design, we followed the recommendations and works of Moss (2004) and Nielsen (1993, 1999, 2004, 2009), with two treatments being established: (1) website design with high usability (V1) and (2) website design with low usability (V2).

The experiment required a professional website to be purpose-built, providing information on a fictitious tourist destination called "Buyuada" (www.buyuada.org). Six versions of the site were created; two for

each factor. The subjects were selected by an external company which was commissioned to establish an Internet data panel for the experiment. Internet users from the UK and Spain were invited to participate, on the understanding that they had a suitable level of Spanish or English, respectively. The users were asked to browse through the website and put together their own tourism package based on an outward flight, return flight, hotel accommodation and a restaurant, from the multiple options on offer. Once browsing was completed, subjects were redirected to a questionnaire. The final sample comprised 491 Internet users, of which 47% were Spanish and 53% British. To ensure that users came from Spain and the UK, Google Analytics was used during the data collection.

The results indicated that the website design and the language used for browsing moderate the perceived risk online. Moreover, the website design moderates the perceived usability, regardless of the language used for navigation.

As a limitation, the use of two national cultures and an utilitarian website design could be limiting the obtained results.

In terms of future research, it would be interesting to replicate this study in other countries and compare the results across cultures, taking into account two factors in website design (the utilitarian and the aesthetic).

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