THE EFFECTS OF WEBSITE PERSONALITY AND HUMAN PERSONALITY ON EXPECTATIONS AND PREDICTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

With their potential to develop relationships through dialogue and customized content, websites have become more and more critical in marketing in modern commerce (e.g., Chen, Griffith, & Shen 2005, McMillan 2002, Rodgers & Thorson 2000). Understanding and, subsequently, utilizing the potential of website personality in terms of creating a distinctive image provides firms with a competitive edge in the marketplace (Poddar, Donthu & Wei 2009). The concept of personality (i.e., human, brand, store personalities) has long been paramount in studies of consumer behavior. In general, the goals of these studies include effectively measuring and communicating the important personality dimensions, accurately anticipating the likelihood of various behaviors, and isolating the personality factors that influence future behaviors. (Liebert and Spiegler 1998). Grounded in Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman’s model of customer expectations of service (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman 1993), this study attempts to articulate propositions that relate to how website personality and human personality interact and influence customer expectations and predictions of service quality, and ultimately, customer purchase intent.

Website personality and its influence on consumer expectations and predictions of service quality

Website personality, similar to both brand personality and store personality (Poddar, Donthu & Wei 2009), is defined as “the set of traits encompassing human characteristics and information technology features associated with a website” (Chen & Rodgers 2006, p. 49); it is “based not only on direct or indirect contact that consumer has with the website, but also the interface and system design of the site” (Chen & Rodgers 2006, p. 50). The written content, or messages, of a website declares a website’s personality explicitly, while the layout, colors, themes, and symbols that constitute a website’s personality communicate a website’s personality implicitly (Chen & Rodgers 2006). In service marketing, both “explicit service promises” (e.g., advertising) and “implicit service promises” (e.g., tangibles) were proposed conceptually to directly influence customer expectations and predictions of service quality by Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman (1993). Additionally, brand personality was proposed to directly influence consumer expectation in general (Taichon & Quach 2015). Finally, service-contact-personnel dress, as one of the implicit service promises, was supported empirically to directly influence customer expectations of service quality directly (e.g., Shao, Ramser, & Wilson 2006). Therefore, it is proposed that:

P1: Website personality influences customer expectations of service quality directly.
P2: Website personality influences customer predictions of service quality directly.

Website personality and purchase intent

Purchase intent is the likelihood that a user will make a purchase immediately from a website to make a purchase or return to the website to make a purchase in the future. Poddar, Donthu, & Wei (2009) concluded that understanding website personality gives firms a competitive edge in the marketplace, and that using this personality to become the basis of a firm’s Web site strategy can affect everything from the way a Web site interacts to advertising strategy. More importantly, empirical work shows that brand personality increases purchase intentions directly (Freling, Crosno, & Henard 2010). Thus, it is proposed that:

P3: Website personality influences customer purchase intent directly.

Customer expectations and predictions of service quality and customer purchase intent

Though no conceptual and empirical supports of the relationship between customer predictions of service quality and purchase intent were found, Shao, Baker, and Wagner (2004) demonstrated empirically that there is a positive relationship between customer expectations of service quality and customer purchase intent. Therefore, it is proposed that:

P4: There is a relationship between customer expectations of service quality and customer purchase intent.
P5: There is a relationship between customer predictions of service quality and customer purchase intent.

Customer expectations and predictions of service quality

Conceptually, Baker (1998) and Bitner (1992) proposed that environmental stimuli influences consumes’ cognitions (e.g., beliefs, expectations), which, in turn, influence their behaviors. No research to date has tested whether customer expectations and predictions of service quality mediate the relationship between website personality and customer’s purchase intent. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between website personality and customer’s purchase intent is mediated by customer expectations and predictions of service quality. Therefore, it is proposed that:

P6: Customer expectations of service quality mediate the relationship between website personality and purchase intent.
P7: Customer predictions of service quality mediate the relationship between website personality and customer’s purchase intent.

Consumer personality and the relationship to website personality

Malhotra (1981) suggested that there is a positive relationship between brand preference and the congruity between human characteristics (i.e., human personality) and brand characteristics (i.e., brand personality). Empirically, Xia (2013) supported the hypothesis that brand personality
moderates the effects of companies’ responses to consumer criticism in social media. Thus, it is proposed that:

**P8:** Individual consumer’s personality moderates the relationship between website personality and customer expectations of service quality.

**P9:** Individual consumer’s personality moderates the relationship between website personality and customer predictions of service quality.

**P10:** Individual consumer’s personality moderates the relationship between website personality and customer’s purchase intent.

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**Conceptual Model**

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**REFERENCES**


