

Effects of Emotions on Consumer Behaviour during Online Service Purchasing

Yoshimi Kunieda

Department of Tourism
Osaka Seikei College, Osaka, Japan
kunieda@osaka-seikei.ac.jp

Abstract

Positive emotions about consumption are known to improve consumer satisfaction, whereas negative emotions decrease it. Furthermore, feelings evoked by consumer experiences are important as they determine satisfaction. Previous retail studies have pointed out the significance of shopping environment, which influence consumer emotions. How do these emotions affect consumer behaviour during online service purchasing? This study examined psychological processes of cognition and emotions before and after the purchase of services on the Internet. The results show that both positive and negative emotions significantly affect not only consumer judgment but also satisfaction.

Keywords: consumer behaviour; emotions; feelings; involvement; online service

1 Introduction

Research has made considerable progress in our understanding of affect, showing that moods, feelings and emotions are related to nearly all aspects of consumption behaviour (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009). This is particularly evident in retail settings and has also been shown to influence strategic variables such as spending, word of mouth and repeat purchase intentions (e.g. Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). The Internet has had great impact on the tourism industry, with online booking now being commonplace. Law & Hsu (2006) reported that hotel website users viewed most of the features included in the website as important. High functionality is needed in core website components such as hotel information and reservations (Musante, Bojanic, & Zhang, 2009). In the website environment, hotel and retail buying behavior may have much in common. Recently, the need to examine the psychological process that a consumer goes through during pre-experience and post-experience stages is acknowledged within the psychology and tourism framework (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001). Variables such as attitudes, decision-making processes, emotions, experience and satisfaction or loyalty are necessary to understand the consumer psychology of tourism, hospitality and leisure (Crouch, Perdue, Timmermans, & Uysal, 2004). At the evaluation stage, feelings may affect consumer behaviour in regard to online service products as well as to material retail products. The purpose of this research is to study the psychological process and consumers' cognition and affect at post-consumption and to clarify how feelings affect decision making.

2 Hypothesis

If a consumer is motivated, it is called involvement (Shimizu, 1999). In this experiment, some hotel users have high involvement, whereas others would have low involvement (indicating a less motivating experience). The consumer's attitude is

determined by whether he or she has motivation to process the information. Until the consumer takes action, the inference process is constructed when the consumer evaluates the quality. If there are insufficient internal cues or if it is too costly to collect these cues, the consumer tends to rely on external cues (Yamamoto, 1992). In this research, external cues considered are building façade, hotel brands, price and word of mouth, whereas internal cues are site location, contents of meals, past experience and employee service. On this basis, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Post-purchase, total website viewing time influences high- and low-involvement consumers' feelings.

H2: Post-purchase, positive feelings are evoked in the high-involvement consumers, and negative emotion in the low-involvement consumers.

H3: Positive feelings evoked after purchasing service products online elicit higher satisfaction.

3 Methodology

In March 2012, a virtual hotel reservation website was constructed in the 'SEN' experimental site developed by Professor S. Yamamoto and Associate Professor Y. Hamuro, Kwansai Gakuin University Graduate School, Japan. The participants were divided into two groups (TR1, n = 763; TR2, n = 760) comprising working men (TR1: 30s, 159; 40s, 171; 50s, 218; TR2: 30s, 160; 40s, 192; 50s, 230) and women (TR1: 30s, 83; 40s, 81; 50s, 51; TR2: 30s, 67; 40s, 59; 50s, 52). First, a structured questionnaire, with a 5-point Likert scale, concerning cognition of travel and hotel was provided to the participants. Second, eight resort hotels in Okinawa were presented on the SEN website. Participants were asked to select four desirable hotels on the basis of the brand and photographs of the building and then were asked to choose the best among the four after comparing each hotel's page on the websites. Third, after a making a reservation, participants were asked to rate how they felt on the following scales: (a) 'Uneasy' to 'Safe'; (b) 'Annoyed' to 'Pleased'; (c) 'Unpleasant' to 'Pleasant'; (d) 'Disappointed' to 'Content'; (e) 'Unhappy' to 'Happy'; (f) 'Bored' to 'Excited'; (g) 'Humiliated' to 'Dignified'; (h) 'Dissatisfied' to 'Satisfied'. For measuring the subjective emotional experience, the Likert method was adopted from psychological scales. Next, the participants made a reservation in a city hotel and then rated their feelings in the same way.

4 Results

For resort hotels, 'Happy' (3.75) and 'Pleasant' (3.65) feelings had a higher score of mean value. 'Content' (3.69) was highest for city hotels, with 'Safety' (3.64) second. There were positive feelings evoked for both resort and city hotels. As indicated in Table 1, in the correlation with satisfaction, 'Happy' for resort and 'Content' for city were strongly related with satisfaction.

Table 1. Correlation between feelings and satisfaction

feelings	Uneasy –Safe	Annoyed –Pleased	Unpleasant –Pleasant	Disappointed –Content	Unhappy –Happy	Bored– Excited	Humiliated –Dignified
TR1 resort hotel	.754**	.742**	.739**	.786**	.791**	.645**	.692**
city hotel	.801**	.790**	.768**	.849**	.792**	.676**	.745**
TR2 resort hotel	.744**	.790**	.769**	.817**	.808**	.744**	.711**
city hotel	.750**	.746**	.745**	.821**	.756**	.695**	.709**

** $p < .001$

Second, the participants were classified into the three stages of high-, moderate- and low-involvement groups. ANOVA (analysis of variance) was conducted for the effects of involvement variables ‘preference’, ‘usage of hotels’ and ‘brand’ and ‘Internet usage’ on feelings variables. The results showed that the high-involvement group of each category was more positive than other groups for all variables (e.g., $F=16.8097$, $df=2/737$, $p<.05$ for Uneasy-Safe feelings of ‘preference’). Thirdly, a multiple regression was conducted predicting internal cues with above four involvement groups. The results indicated that ‘usage of hotels’, the high-involvement rely on mainly internal cues ($\beta=.252$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.828$). Next, feelings were analysed in relation to the total website viewing time. There were significant differences between the means of time and feelings such as ‘Dissatisfied’ to ‘Satisfied’ ($F=2.624$, $df=4/735$, $p<.034$), ‘Humiliated’ to ‘Dignified’ ($F=3.348$, $df=4/735$, $p<.010$) for city hotels and others for resort hotels. Results showed that consumers who spent a shorter time on the site showed positive feelings, but those who stayed longer searching for information showed negative feelings. Finally, a factorial analysis using the principal factor method and promax rotation (thus explaining the 44.6% variance) extracted four factors, which were labelled ‘External cues’, ‘Hotel user’, ‘Travel seeker’ and ‘Internal cues’. The ‘Hotel user’ and the ‘Travel seeker’ were classified into high- and low-involvement groups. ANOVA was conducted whether there is a statistically significant difference between ‘Hotel user’ and external cues. The result showed significance level is 0.001 ($p=.000$), which is statistically significant ($F=36.933$, $df=1/738$). Thus, the high-involvement group used such external cues as hotel brand and building façade comparing to low-involvement, though they were expected to use internal cues.

5 Conclusion

At the evaluation stage, internal and external cues influence consumer decision-making and evaluation. High-involvement consumers using both external and internal cues searched for more information in a shorter period of time than the low-involvement participants. Thus, H1 was supported. However, future study could add greater clarity to these results. Furthermore, positive emotions evoked after

purchasing were highly related to satisfaction. In this study, the high-involvement group also showed more positive feelings than the low-involvement group. Thus, H2 was supported. Finally, after participants selected the hotel, positive feelings were evoked in high-involvement consumers for both resort and city hotels. Thus, H3 was supported. In conclusion, marketers must learn to which segment customers belong and how the website environment causes positive and satisfied feelings. Especially for online service products, the cues on which consumers rely for evaluation are identified as crucial.

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