Bordeaux 2016 Abstract Submission

Title
Investigation of perceived emotions on wine selling websites

I want to submit an abstract for:
Conference Presentation

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Keywords
wine, emotions, e-commerce, web design, self-assessment manikin

Research Question
This preliminary study evaluates to what extent the emotional perception differs between online wine stores.

Methods
A computer assisted study based on the “Self Assessment Manikin” scales in the context of wine and e-commerce.

Results
Websites differ significantly on the rating of felt “dominance”. Additional, there were significant differences on felt "valence" and "arousal" between different website sections.

Abstract
Purpose
In the last years, wine selling websites experienced a vibrant development and will become an increasingly important distribution channel. Therefore, the requirements of web design of online shops will rise as the online market gets more challenging. In this context, the link between the visual perception and users’ experienced emotion of online wine shops offers a great potential, which has been a neglected field in research so far. Psychological research offers a variety of valid opportunities to measure emotions. This preliminary study uses an explicit method to identify emotional websites for the following main study, which will analyse emotions with implicit methods (EMG, EDA, etc.) as well. To gain a better understanding of the effects of emotional web design,
the extent to which the emotional perception between twelve web shops differs was evaluated.

In marketing research the prejudice exists of a non-emotional consumer whose buying decisions are largely based on pure rational information processes. For products that are based upon fulfilling more emotional needs, this traditional view seems to be inappropriate. In general, consumers do not judge products and online stores only on their consciously noticed advantages, but also on an unconscious level which has a strong impact on our decision making process, too.

The basis for the evaluation are 12 out of about 300 German wine selling websites, which were selected based on their unique web design, integrated web shop functionality, and their self-presentation of their company. Therefore, those twelve websites were rated by using the “self-assessment manikin” (SAM) scales. The SAM scale is used as a well-approved explicit method for measuring emotional responses, because self-reports serve as a primary method for ascertaining emotion and mood. The strongest benefit of SAM is its picture-oriented design. A set of graphical and nonverbal manikins helps the study subjects to assess the three dimensions valence, arousal, and dominance on every screenshot. Because of its easy implementation this scale is applied in numerous psychological studies in the past and present.

Study design

For this study, we apply the SAM scale in the context of wine and e-commerce. As a first hypothesis, we assume that the rated emotionality of the selected domains differs significantly on valence (H1.1) arousal (H1.2), and dominance (H1.3). As a second hypothesis, we assume that four selected website sections differ significantly regarding valence (H2.1), arousal (H2.2), and dominance (H2.3). In our approach, the hypotheses will be tested through the use of two analyses of variances (ANOVA).

H1.1 The rated emotionality of the domains, each represented by a set of four screenshots, differs significantly on valence.

H1.2 The rated emotionality of the domains, each represented by a set of four screenshots, differs significantly on arousal.

H1.3 The rated emotionality of the domains, each represented by a set of four screenshots, differs significantly on dominance.

H2.1 The four website sections differ significantly on valence.

H2.2 The four website sections differ significantly on arousal.

H2.3 The four website sections differ significantly on dominance.

More than 130 students and faculty staff from various courses of study at four universities in Germany took part in a ca. 45 min. computer assisted study between April and June 2015. As a criterion for exclusion, participants had to be wine consumers. Overall, twelve domains of German wineries were tested. An entire website was represented by four screenshots. The screenshots were assigned to specific website sections: “landing page”, “who we are”, “product list”, and “product detail”. The first two sections represent the non-shop-area. They practically give a first overview about the winery, the owner, and the range of products. The other two website sections belong to the shop-area, where products can be purchased. All screenshots were rated successively on the three self-assessment manikin scales valence, arousal, and dominance.

Findings
The results show that the subjects differ on felt dominance between the websites. This means that users experienced different levels of “being dominant” whilst judging the wineries´ websites. In addition, there were significant differences on felt valence and arousal between the website sections “landing page”, “product list”, and “product detail”. Interestingly, the non-commercial areas of websites were given higher emotional ratings than the web shops itself.

As already mentioned, a comparison among the twelve different domains of the wineries shows a significant difference on the SAM dimension dominance. The highest ranked website had a clear, powerful design with striking colourful elements. A large proportion of the visible screenshot area is covered with images showing celebrating people with food and small text elements. Products in the shop area presented extensively, without frills and with high quality. In contrast, the lowest rated winemaker website in this dimension is prosaic and pale coloured. The images tended to be very small and are spread randomly on the display, showing serious looking employees in front of a dark and empty room. Another low on dominance rated website shows dark colours, small pictures and plenty of text. The main navigation bar is overloaded and divided the visible range horizontally in the middle. While the web design of the “landing page” is rated “average”, the web shop looks outdated. The subjects read a lot of text and see tiny, unpretentious product images and a tabular list of wines with many screen splitting frames. These statements are confirmed by the average ratio between text and picture elements on the screenshot. The highest rated website on dominance has only 14.4% written content, 35.6% image elements and 50% other website elements on average, whereas the website with the lowest dominance level hast 25.9% text, 15.9% images, and 58.2% other virtual elements. Areas covered with emotional pictures instead of words could therefore be an indicator for emotional web design too. The comparison of the high versus the low rated websites shows which elements of web design can cause feelings of domination, so users experience a feeling of personal strength or superiority.

However, it seems that online shops are less capable of having the same emotional impact than non-shop-areas. Only three of twelve websites did not decline in emotionality between the “landing page” and the online store of the observed screenshots. Contrary, to the non-commercial web areas, the online store has a more technical understanding of the purchase process because its main purpose is basically selling products. It makes sense to build the display area as organised as possible, in terms of navigation, filtering, comparing and product listing. Those familiar “must-have-features” ensure simplified handling, efficient navigation and a better shopping experience, but simultaneously limit the emotional design of a web shop.

In general, shop area screenshots use less space for pictures and focus more on text boxes and listings in tabular form to create a lower feeling of joy and excitement. However, in some cases the web design is inconsistent between the general website and its shop, so users might have assumed to look at websites from different winemakers. Overall, “landing page” screenshots have larger images, more striking headlines, less text elements and minor empty space. Some wineries try to sell their wines by telling their personal story. Personal facts could add emotional value and generate user attraction. Users are therefore able to identify themselves better with the winemakers as they were able to sympathise with the people around the winery and to share similar values.

Practical implications

This evaluation emphasizes that web stores with a purely functional focus and without an emotional perspective, can misguide. Especially for emotional products like wine, sterile web pages can lower the positive customer’s perception. According to our psychological evaluation, online stores should not only be reduced on technical aspects, but should also be carefully designed to create an exciting or pleasant atmosphere. Large, high quality images showing happy people or inspiring moments like a panoramic view of the vineyard have the potential to create an emotional impact on consumers. Colourless or text-heavy web design causes the opposite effect. The structure should be clear and easy to pick up, without using prosaic tables. The entire website should have a homogeneous and consistent appearance – from the landing page until the end of the shopping experience.