

The impact of usability of a website on recommendations by its visitors

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Abstract: The main objective of this research is to carry out an impact analysis of the selected usability elements of the monitored website on recommendations by its visitors. The analysis was carried out through a survey, which is intended to test the impact of the different elements of online marketing campaigns on their perception by customers of the given company. The selected company belongs to the category of SME, and actively implements marketing campaigns on the Internet. Therefore, it will be possible to monitor and assess the impact of these activities on the perception of the organization by its customers. From the achieved results we assume that the selected usability elements of the monitored website are directly impact recommendations by its visitors.

Keywords: user experience, UX, usability, website recommendation

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1. Introduction

The appearance and design of a website is closely linked to the behavior of its visitors. A website of a business entity or a project should be created with a clearly specified goal in mind, while taking into account behavior of a target group of visitors. This behavior is often describes as MDA - Most Desired Action, eg. filling out a contact or order form, making a purchase, etc.). The whole website can be arranged so as to make a visitor donate money to some cause (Janouch, 2010).

“A website can be seen as a direct marketing tool because it allows for direct sales, it’s interactive, it can adapt its content and format to the needs of visitors. On top of that it is also possible to measure its effectiveness. Websites can be also seen as a public relations tool because they allow communication with groups key for the proper functioning of any business unit or organization, such as employees, potential employees, journalists, partners and customers. Websites are also an advertising tool because some websites are used to strengthen the brand’s image. Websites are also tools of sales support (online coupons or marketing campaigns)” (Karlíček 2011, p. 172).

We agree with Janouch (2010), who states that usability means adapting a website to its users’ preferences and the purpose for which it are created at the first place. A website should be easily understood by its users, allows for easy and effective orientation like the search menu in the case of big websites, and many other rules and recommendations.

A / B testing tests and compares the changes to the elements present on the website – mainly landing pages but it can be other pages as well which include some user-initiated action, and their impact on the performance of websites in terms of a conversion rate. For the sake of the test we need to create two different versions of websites (Weller 2012):

- Control website – up-to-date version of the landing page.
- Alternative website - modified version of the landing page being tested. Modifications may include any element defined in the HTML code which affects the user experience (User Experience - UX), and thus influences the user behavior.

In most cases, the goal is to increase the conversion rate for the landing page. However, there are several other metrics which are being tested by A / B testing. Changes to the alternative website may involve the following (Weller 2012):

- different (if the website contains such an element) or a new element for carrying out actions,
- different or new product,
- different or new banner,
- different or new sign of credibility (credibility can be enhanced by sending a message or by any other element that informs about security and privacy, especially in cases when the website processes credit cards or email addresses),
- different fonts, headlines, images or forms.

In addition to the control and alternate landing page we need to redirect the user after his/her successful payment to the completion page. The completion page usually thanks users for their purchase or filling out some contact form. It is the last element of the whole process and the arrival of the user at this site indicates the actual conversion operation (Weller 2012).

Through a website a business entity or an organization presents its face to the whole world (Downes 2011). Websites are often the first point of contact between a business entity and its customers. The actual understanding of how corporate websites influence unknown buyers and ultimately influence their purchasing behavior is essential for eBusiness (Gregg 2010).

2. Data and Methodology

The main objective of this research is to carry out an impact analysis of the selected usability elements of the monitored website on recommendations by its visitors. The analysis will be carried out through a survey, which is intended to test the impact of the different elements of online marketing campaigns on their perception by customers of the given company. The selected company belongs to the category of SME, and actively implements marketing campaigns on the Internet, and therefore it is possible to monitor and assess the impact of these activities on the perception of the company by its customers.

The research focuses on the selected company based in the Slovak Republic and Internet marketing tools used by this company to carry out its marketing strategies online. Based on our objectives, we have outlined the following research problems:

- There is a significant relationship between recommending a website and its clarity of navigation and usability.

Based on the stated objectives of the doctoral thesis and subsequently identified research problems, we have come up with the following research hypotheses:

- **H1.** We assume the existence of a linear relationship between recommending a website and its clarity of navigation.
- **H2.** We assume the existence of a linear relationship between recommending a website and its usability.

Data was obtained using the exploratory method, which collect data from subjective responses of participants, in this case visitors of the website of the selected company, its premises and its Facebook page. The questionnaire consisted of 18 chronologically arranged questions (according to the research questions), bearing in mind the subject of the research - the impact of the Internet marketing on the perception of the organization by its customers. The very beginning of the questionnaire contains questions identifying demographic and social features of individual respondents. The questionnaire consists of open questions and closed questions using Licker's scale where respondents could express rate of their agreement or disagreement with the presented statements/ questions. The survey results are presented in the form of tables and graphs generated by the computer program Numbers v. 5.2.2, under the office package iWork from Apple Inc. Mathematical and statistical verification of the set hypotheses will be implemented through the statistical program IBM SPSS 22 for Mac OS X.

Primary sources of information were obtained through the quantitative research using the method CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview). Data was collected using an online questionnaire in November 2014. The link to the electronic questionnaire was placed on the website of the company, at www.citygym.sk, on the Facebook page of the company (on the post) at www.facebook.com/city.gym.presov and www.facebook.com/city.gym.kosice. The post published on the social network Facebook was supported by a short-term advertising campaign consisting of the link to the online questionnaire. After the data collection process had been completed we started sorting, coding and evaluating respondents' answers. The basic set of respondents consisted of visitors of the fitness center City Gym, visitors of the monitored website and subscribers of their Facebook page. The research sample consisted of 222 respondents.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1. Representation of respondents by gender

	N	%	Cumulative N	Cumulative %
<i>Gender</i>				
Man	99	44,59	99	44,59
Woman	123	55,41	222	100,00
Overall	222	100,00	222	100,00

The above results show that the research sample was slightly dominated by females (N = 123, 55.41%), compared to the representation of males (N = 99, 44.59%). It can be stated that the composition of the research sample corresponds to the real long-term composition of the fitness center's clients. Gender composition of the survey corresponds to the gender composition of the visitors of the fitness center's Facebook page as well as the website Citygym.sk.

Most of the research sample consisted of respondents aged 19-29 years (N = 144, 64.86%). Respondents who were younger than 18 years amounted to 8.11% (n = 18) of all respondents. The second largest age group were people aged between 30 and 39 years, a total of 42 people, representing a value of 18.92%. Given the nature of the research (the researchers sample consists of people interested in fitness), we assumed lower number of people aged between 40 to 49 years (n = 12, 5.41%) and respondents aged 50 and older (N = 6, 2.70%). Based on data obtained from the web analytics tool Google Analytics, the age structure of survey participants corresponds with the age structure of visitors of the fitness center's Facebook page and website Citygym.sk.

Table 2. Representation of respondents by age

	N	%	Cumulative N	Cumulative %
<i>Age</i>				
to 18 years	18	8,11	18	8,11
19 – 29 years	144	64,86	162	72,97
30 – 39 years	42	18,92	204	91,89
40 – 49 years	12	5,41	216	97,30
50 and more years	6	2,70	222	100
Overall	222	100,00	222	100,00

Table 3. Clarity of navigation on the website

	N	%	Cumulative N	Cumulative %
Definitely yes	93	43,24	96	43,24
Probably yes	90	40,54	186	83,78
Not choose	27	12,16	213	95,94
Probably no	9	4,05	222	100
Definitely no	0	0	222	100
Overall	222	100,00	222	100,00

Q1: Website navigation is an essential element of clarity and usability of web pages. The answers of respondents to this question were highly positive (N = 186, 83.78%). The results show that the structure of the website is perceived very positively. Users do not have a problem finding the necessary information on the website or browsing its pages..

Table 4. Easy use of the website

	N	%	Cumulative N	Cumulative %
Definitely yes	102	45,95	102	45,95
Probably yes	87	39,19	189	85,14
Not choose	27	12,16	216	97,30
Probably no	9	4,05	222	100
Definitely no	0	0	222	100
Overall	222	100,00	222	100,00

Q2: Question relating to the easy use of the website marked a high level of agreement - 45.95% of respondents (N = 102). "Probably yes" was chosen by 87 respondents (39.19%). The responses did not differ from previous questions very much. Only 2.70% of respondents (n = 6) chose the answer "probably no".

Table 5. Recommendation of website

	N	%	Cumulative N	Cumulative %
Definitely yes	117	52,70	117	52,70
Probably yes	72	32,43	189	85,13
Not choose	27	12,16	216	97,29
Probably no	6	2,70	222	100
Definitely no	0	0	222	100
Overall	222	100,00	222	100,00

Q3: 117 respondents, representing 52.70% of the respondents, stated they would definitely recommend the website. The answer "Rather yes" was chosen by 72 respondents (32.43%). 27 respondents (12.16%) chose the answer "not choose". Only 2.7 % of the respondents had a negative attitude toward recommending the websites (2.70%).

The research results on navigation and usability of websites indicate also other aspects concerning the users' perception of the organization. We assume that the user recommendation is directly dependent on clarity of navigation and usability of a website. We argue that the variables (recommendation and clarity of navigation; recommendation and website usability/ ease of use) are interlinked. This statement will be verified using Pearson correlation coefficients.

- H1. We assume the existence of a linear relationship between the users' recommendation and clarity of websites navigation.
- H2. We assume the existence of a linear relationship between the users' recommendation and usability of the website.

Table 6. Pearson correlation (N=222)

	Clarity of navigation	Ease of use	Recommendation of website
Clarity of navigation	117	52,70	117
Ease of use	72	32,43	189
Recommendation of website	27	12,16	216

Positive correlation coefficients indicate a linear relationship between the chosen variables (recommendation and clarity of navigation; recommendation and website usability/ ease of use). We rejected the alternative hypothesis due to lack of a linear relationship between the variables. The significance was calculated at $p = 0.000$. The analysis showed a significant relationship between the variables at the significance level $\alpha < 0.01$. A significant correlation coefficient of the variables usability / ease of use and clarity of navigation ($r = 0.833$) indicates a heavy dependence between the variables. The users recommendation and other variables ($r = 0.501$ and $r = 0.449$) showed a moderate dependency.

The results of our research on the impact of Internet marketing on the perception of organizations by customer show that Internet marketing tools significantly contribute to the positive image of the organizations and subsequent recommendations by customers. The research on the influence of various aspects of websites showed their importance in case of the perception of organizations by customers.

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