

## Consumer Response to Different Types of Website Interactivity

Faiza Rehman<sup>1</sup>, Mertcan Taşçioğlu<sup>2</sup>, Funda Bayrakdaroğlu<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Faculty Of Business Administration/ Institute Of Management Sciences, Pakistan)

<sup>2</sup>(Department Of Business Administration/ Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey)

<sup>3</sup>(Department Of Business Administration/ Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper aims to explore the impact of different types of interactivity on consumer perception. A quantitative research methodology using scenario-based experiment was employed. An experiment was conducted using research participants from Turkey. The findings of this study suggest that person interactivity leads to higher levels of attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty than machine interactivity. The results also reveal that person interactivity combined with high contact interactivity is the optimal strategy for e-retailers.*

**Keywords:** *Consumer behavior, person interactivity, machine interactivity, contact interactivity, scenario-based experiment*

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### I. Introduction

When the Internet was first introduced, it was used to exchange information, to write emails and to stay in touch with the outside world. It was not used for advertisement, but the marketers soon realized its worth that how such useful tools can help them to promote their businesses. Since then a new concept has emerged in the business world: Internet based marketing, in other words E-Marketing. Internet based marketing is considered to be one of the most effective mediums used for carrying out all business processes. Use of a website is important not only for businesses, but also for buyers. With the use of traditional media, consumers were only informed about the availability of products. They did not have the opportunity to satisfy their queries regarding the product. It has given the opportunity to both sellers and buyers to communicate with each other and satisfy their queries. Due to the interactive nature of the Internet, the consumer now has the ability to communicate with sellers, which was not possible with the use of traditional media (Liu, 2003).

Efforts have been made by several researchers to study what makes the Internet different from the rest of the media. Researchers agreed on a point that the interactive nature of the Internet makes it distinctive among different mediums. In this regard interactivity plays an important role to make a company's website successful. To understand how interactivity can be used more effectively, researchers tried to study different aspects of the interactivity. Some researchers have studied the two dimensions of interactivity which is machine and person interactivity to forecast the intentions of the consumers for online purchasing (Suntornpithug and Khamalah, 2010; Jiang et al., 2009). Other researchers have studied the important role played by interactivity in building up customer relationship (Yoon et al., 2008). A lot of work has been done by researchers to study the impact of machine and person interactivity on consumer willingness to purchase online and revisits to the website. However, a little importance has been given to understand what kind of impact is brought by different types of interactivity on consumer's perception.

The main objective of this research is to study the impact of different types of interactivity (i.e. machine and person interactivity) and different levels of contact interactivity on consumer perception (attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty). The research question of this study is: What is consumers' response to different types of interactivity? A scenario-based behavioral experiment using 2x2 factorial design was conducted to test the hypotheses.

The paper begins with a literature review of interactivity concept. Followed by the design of the experiment to test the hypotheses. Finally, the findings of the study are discussed, future research directions and implications are given at the end.

### II. Literature Review

For hundreds of years mass media was the only medium which was used by the communicators to share information with the audience. The audience was only able to receive the information, they did not have the opportunity to give feedback to the sender of the message, creating only one-way communication. Technologies through which the information was shared included television, radio, recorded films, newspapers and magazines.

With the passage of time and advancement in technology, the Internet is now considered one of the mass medium used for addressing a large number of people (Thorson and Rodger, 2006). The researcher made several attempts to find out what makes Internet unique among the mass media. The researchers agreed on a

point that “interactivity” is the unique feature of the Internet which differentiate it from the rest of the mass media (e.g., Hoffman and Novak 1996; Sundar and Kim 2005; Song and Zinkhan 2008). The audience is now able to give immediate feedback to the sender of the information creating two-way communication.

Interactivity has been defined in several ways by different researchers. Early definitions of interactivity focuses on person-to-person or person to organization interactions. Williams et al., (p.10,1988) defines interactivity as “the degree to which participants in a communication process have control over, and can exchange roles in, their mutual discourse”. The direct communication setting between person and organization irrespective of time and distance is called interactivity (Blattberg and Deighton, 1991) . The later definitions focused on responsiveness and two-way communication. Ha and James (p.461,1998) defined interactivity as “the extent to which the communicator and the audience respond to each other’s communication need”. Interactivity is a two-way communication setting which consist of navigation and responsiveness (Wu,1999). In this study the definition of Chang and Chen (p.2930,2008) will be used, they defined interactivity as “the degree of interaction or dialogue between the website and the customer”.

Besides its definition, attempts have been made to study different dimensions of the interactivity. Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) considered interactivity was one of the main component in the communication settings and related that to the attitudinal aspect of acceptance and satisfaction. Coyle and Thorson (2001) conducted an experiment to study interactivity and richness in commercial websites. Thorson and Rodgers (2006) in their research used E-Word Of Mouth to examine the effects of interactivity and perceived interactivity on attitudes toward the website, attitudes toward the nominee, and voting intents of the people. Jiang et al., (2009) conducted a study to understand that how website involvement can influence purchase intention of the consumer in the form of website interactivity that is active and reciprocal communication and how these influences can be controlled by using different types of products that are available on the website. Suntornpithug and Khamalah (2010) studied and tested two dimensions of interactivity (machine and person interactivity) to forecast consumers' motives to purchase online. In this study, we use interactivity and manipulate it as machine and person interactivity.

Hoffman and Novak (1996) distinguished two dimensions of interactivity as machine interactivity and person interactivity. The interactivity of the person with the machine is known as machine interactivity. When a person sends a request for some piece of information, an automated reply is given by the machine. Human to human interaction using a medium is known as person interactivity. When a person requests some piece of information, the feedback is given by a human. After having a deep understanding of the literature, the first hypotheses of the study are specified below:

H1a: Person interactivity leads to higher levels of attitude towards website than machine interactivity

H1b: Person interactivity leads to higher levels of ease of use than machine interactivity

H1c: Person interactivity leads to higher levels of e-loyalty than machine interactivity

Contact interactivity is the presence of customer service support on the website that enables e-retailers and customers to communicate with each other using that service support available on the website. Srinivasan et al., (p.42, 2002) in their paper defined contact interactivity as “the availability and effectiveness of customer support tools on a website, and the degree to which two-way communication with customers and among customers is facilitated”. According to contact interactivity facilitates customers to make a search process that can speedily trace preferred product or service (Alba et al., 1997). A study conducted by Lii et al.,(2004) showed that interactivity is the main support tool which drives the customer to visit the website repeatedly. Salvati (1999) mentioned that e-retailers will not be able to grab enough of the market share until they “muster the full measure of dedication needed to achieve and capitalize upon electronic interactivity”. Therefore we hypothesized that:

H2a: An increase in contact interactivity leads to higher levels of attitude towards website

H2b: An increase in contact interactivity leads to higher levels of ease of use

H2c: An increase in contact interactivity leads to higher levels of e-loyalty

Ease of use is the central element which plays a key role in the success of the website. Ease of use can be defined as “The degree to which a person believes that using a particular system will be free of effort” (Davis,p.320, 1989) .Ease of use has been studied in various ways by different researchers. Venkatesh and Davis (1996) are of the view that a brief interaction of the user with the application enables them to develop a view about its ease of use. Davis (1989) reported that the consumers’ intention to use the website in the future is dependent on ease of use of the website. Johnson et al., (2003) stated that there will be a higher rate of purchase if the website is easy to use for the customers. Seyal and Pijpers (2004) mentioned that the attitude to use website in the future is determined by the perceived ease of use. Venkatesh and Agarwal (2006) stated that to use the website, ease of use is considered to be a major driver of this decision.

The concept of loyalty has been discussed widely in traditional marketing which is the consistent purchase behavior of the consumer towards a specific product without concerning about the price and convenience. Anderson and Srinivasan (p.125,2003) described e-loyalty as “customer’s favorable attitude

toward an electronic business resulting in repeat buying behavior". Lin and Wang (p.273,2006) defined customer loyalty as "customers, who showed their positive attitude to enhance their repeat buying behavior". In online commerce, the term used for loyalty is e-loyalty. Cyr (p.3,2008) defined e-loyalty as "perceived intention to visit or use a website in the future and to consider purchasing from it in the future".

Srinivasan et al., (2002) identified potential factors which can impact e-loyalty. These factors include customization, contact interactivity, care, community, convenience, cultivation, choice, and character (8 Cs). Beside convenience, all other were considered to have a significant impact on e-loyalty. Ghane et al., (2011) conducted a study to investigate the impacts of e-satisfaction, e-trust and e-service quality on e-loyalty, in e-banking as an aspect of B2C e-commerce context. Results indicated that service quality, e-satisfaction, and e-trust have a strong direct effect on e-loyalty. Winnie (2014) conducted a research to examine the relationship between website quality and customer's e-loyalty. The result indicated that that customer interface quality is positively related to customer e-loyalty and e-satisfaction.

Attitude is defined as a favorable and an unfavorable expression towards something. Attitude towards website has been covered widely by different researchers. Mitchell and Olson (p.318,1981) described attitudes as "a person's internal evaluation of an object such as branded product". The positive attitude of the user towards a particular information will determine his/her intention to use the information system in future (Davis 1989). The website is considered to be one of information system, if a user is satisfied with a particular website, it will positively influence his/her attitude towards a website. Lin and Lu (2000) confirmed that positive attitude towards the website leads to revisits of the user to a website. Shobeiri et al. (2015) conducted a research to study the relationship between the web personality and two important variables of e-retailing which are site involvement and site attitudes. The findings of the study suggest that dimensions of website personality positively impacts website attitudes both directly and indirectly through website involvement. Saat and Selamat (2014) made a study to investigate the effect of media richness on attitude towards website in communicating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The result showed that rich presentation positively influence the consumer attitude towards website in displaying CSR. Martin and Camarero (2008) in their research proved that attitude towards website is related to the web design.

Song and Zinkhan (2008) conducted a research to determine those factors which increase the user opinion of interactivity in a situation where the customer was chatting with the e-shopping website. They used two types of theories to find the antecedents of the interactivity: Telepresence theory and interactivity theory. Telepresence theory states that speed is the most important determinant of the perceived interaction, whereas interactivity theory indicates that message quality is the important factor of the interactivity of the website. Besides that they used cognitive control theory and expected that different tasks, such as search and complaint, would change the formation of the interactivity.

Kim and Niehm (2009) conducted a to study the relationship between website quality, loyalty intentions, perceived value and perceived information quality in the perspective of wardrobe shopping website. The result of the study showed that different factors of the website quality positively influenced the perceived information quality. The availability of the interactive features available on the website, which helped customers to complete their task efficiently, evaluated this feature of the website as high quality of the information. The high quality of information provided by the website to customers influenced the perceived value and perceived value positively effected the loyalty of the customers. They believed that high level of information quality provided by the website means that buying product available from that particular website was a good value of money. Based on prior literature review, we hypothesize that:

H3a: An increase in contact interactivity positively moderates the relationship between interactivity and attitude towards website

H3b: An increase in contact interactivity positively moderates the relationship between interactivity and ease of use

H3c: An increase in contact interactivity positively moderates the relationship between interactivity and e-loyalty

### **III. Methodology**

A scenario-based experiment using 2x2 factorial design (interactivity: person vs. machine, contact interactivity: high vs. low) was conducted to test the hypotheses. The purpose of the experiment was to address the research question: What is consumers' response to different types of interactivity?

Participants for this research were undergraduate students at a major university in Turkey. The standard "back-translation" method (Green and White 1976, Deshpande et al. 1986) was applied to translate the questionnaire from English into Turkish. For the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four treatment conditions. Participants read a scenario describing an exchange relationship between a website and consumers. The scenario included manipulations of interactivity types and contact interactivity levels. Interactivity type was manipulated as person and machine, such that in the person type, website was described

as when a consumer needs information about a product, the reply is given by a human, whereas in the machine type website was described as when a consumer needs information about a product, an automated reply is given by the machine. High contact interactivity was manipulated by describing website as enabling consumers to view the product from different angles and having a tool that makes product comparisons easy while in low contact interactivity condition, website was described as not enabling consumers to view the product from different angles and not having a tool that makes product comparisons easy. After reading the scenario, participants were instructed to respond as a typical consumer within the scenario. This projective method helps researchers to construct indirect questions that are not significantly affected by social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993).

All the measures for the dependent variables were adapted from established scales. The attitude toward website measure was adapted from Chen and Wells (2002). The ease of use measure was adapted from Van der Heijden (2003). The e-loyalty measure was adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996). To ensure participants perceived the scenario as believable, two realism measures were included that asked participants if the situation described in the scenario was realistic and if they could imagine themselves in the described situation (Dabholkar, 1994).

#### IV. Data Analysis and Results

Of the 171 respondents, 16 were deleted due to clear lack of attention paid to the instrument (i.e., blank or identical responses for all measures). The sample size was 155, therefore adhering to the minimum requirement of 20 participants per cell (Hair et al., 2010).

Scale purification was used to assess the convergent validity, reliability, and discriminant validity of the constructs. Convergent validity was determined by using principal component analysis. A minimum Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin score of 0.7 and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity are considered necessary to reliably use factor analysis for data analysis. Both requirements were met with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin score of 0.922 and a Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at the 0.000 level. These results suggested that items and correlations are sufficient for each factor (Leech et al., 2012). Factor analysis was conducted to verify item loadings for the three dependent variables. The items formed into the three factors; however one e-loyalty item cross-loaded with ease of use items. Thus, one e-loyalty item was deleted. As shown in Table 1, the remaining items were not cross-loaded and all values exceeded the normally accepted threshold (i.e., over 0.5) (Hair et al., 2010).

Internal reliability was evaluated using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) suggest that an alpha level of 0.80 is sufficient for good internal consistency. All three scales exceeded the recommended alpha values of 0.80 which suggests that the items appropriately captured the constructs (Churchill, 1979).

**Table 1.** Factor Loadings, And Coefficient A

Measurement Items (Scale Items)	Loadings	Source
<b>Attitude Towards Website (A=0.868)</b>		Chen And Wells (2001)
This Website Makes It Easy For Me To Build A Relationship With This Company.	0.76	
I Would Like To Visit This Website Again In The Future.	0.83	
I'm Satisfied With The Service Provided By This Website.	0.71	
I Feel Comfortable In Surfing This Website.	0.69	
<b>Ease Of Use (A=0.917)</b>		Van Der Heijden (2003)
This Website Easy To Use For Product Assessment.	0.81	
I Can Quickly Find The Information I Need On This Website.	0.80	
This Is A User-Friendly Website.	0.81	
My Interaction With This Website Is Clear And Understandable.	0.72	
<b>E-Loyalty (A=0.932)</b>		Zeithaml Et Al. (1996)
I Say Positive Things About The Website To Other People.	0.79	
I Would Recommend The Website To Someone Who Seeks My Advice.	0.84	
I Encourage Friends And Others To Do Business With The Website.	0.73	
I Consider This Website To Be My First Choice For Future Transactions.	0.77	

Average variance extracted (AVE) was used to evaluate discriminant validity among the constructs. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct compared with the squared phi correlation between each pair of constructs. As suggested, AVE values exceeded 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010), and were greater than the squared phi correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Overall, the results indicates support for discriminant validity. The AVE and squared correlation values can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Average Variance Extracted

	ATW	Ease Of Use	E-Loyalty
ATW	0.634		
Ease Of Use	0.551	0.743	
E-Loyalty	0.598	0.632	0.782

Diagonal: Average Variance Extracted; Lower Matrix: Squared Correlations

Analyzing the manipulation checks revealed support for all manipulations. Mean scores were consistent with the intended manipulation grouping (Mperson interactivity=4.43 > M machine interactivity=1.59; M high contact interactivity=4.48 > M low contact interactivity=1.40). Overall, these results indicate that the manipulations were successful and worked as intended in the experiment.

Realism checks were also performed to determine if the scenarios were perceived by the subjects to be realistic (Louviere et al., 2000). The average responses to the realism measures were 4.00 (on a 5-point scale), demonstrating that participants perceived the scenario as realistic (Dabholkar 1994).

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to evaluate the hypotheses. As hypothesized, statistically significant main effects of interactivity (Wilks' lambda = 0.775; F = 14.46; p < 0.001), and contact interactivity (Wilks' lambda = 0.420; F = 68.64; p < 0.001) were observed. A univariate analysis was performed to determine the sources of the effect. The overall univariate result for the first experiment is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Univariate Results For Main And Interaction Effects

Effects	ATW	Ease Of Use	E-Loyalty
	<i>F</i> -Statistic	<i>F</i> -Statistic	<i>F</i> -Statistic
Interactivity (I)	21.68 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)	35.76 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)	16.55 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)
Contact Interactivity (CI)	140.05 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)	109.76 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)	126.19 ( <i>P</i> <0.001)
I X CI	8.45 ( <i>P</i> =0.004)	10.81 ( <i>P</i> =0.001)	4.74 ( <i>P</i> =0.031)

The dependent variable cell means for the experiment are provided in Table 4. Table shows that attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty levels are higher in person interactivity condition comparing to machine interactivity. Likewise dependent variable levels are higher in high contact interactivity condition. Finally, person interactivity and high contact interactivity condition leads to highest levels of attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty.

**Table 4.** Dependent Variable Cell Means For The Experiment

Dependent Variable	Interactivity	Contact Interactivity	Mean
Attitude Towards Website	Person	Low	2.934
		High	3.861
	Machine	Low	2.149
		High	3.679
Ease Of Use	Person	Low	3.250
		High	4.090
	Machine	Low	2.167
		High	3.776
E-Loyalty	Person	Low	2.842
		High	3.917
	Machine	Low	2.101
		High	3.692

In support of H1a, H1b, and H1c the results revealed that person interactivity leads to higher levels of attitude towards website (F=21.68; p<0.001), ease of use (F=35.76; p<0.001), and e-loyalty (F=16.55; p<0.001) than machine interactivity. The results supported H2a, H2b, and H2c showing that an increase in contact interactivity leads to an increase in attitude towards website (F=140.05; p<0.001), ease of use (F=109.76; p<0.001), and e-loyalty (F=126.19; p<0.001).

The MANOVA results also showed that there was a significant two-way interaction between interactivity and contact interactivity (Wilks' lambda = 0.912; F = 4.77; p = 0.003). Univariate results showed a significant interaction between contact interactivity and person interactivity on attitude towards website (F=8.45; p=0.004), ease of use (F=10.81; p=0.001), and e-loyalty (F=4.74; p=0.031). Therefore, the results support H3a, H3b, and H3c.



## **V. General Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to explore consumers' response to different types of interactivity. A scenario based behavioral experiment was employed to test the hypotheses, and the results support the positive effects of person and contact interactivity, as documented in the literature (Rafaeli and Sudweeks 1997, Salvati 1999, Song and Zinkhan 2008, Srinivasan et al., 2002). Enhancing person interactivity in a website leads to increases in attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty. Furthermore, the results reveal that these positive effects increase at high contact interactivity levels, such that contact interactivity positively moderates the relationship between person interactivity and attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty. The experimental results reveal that person interactivity and a high contact interactivity strategy will lead to an increase in attitude towards website, ease of use, and e-loyalty.

## **VI. Implications, Future Research, and Limitations**

Prior studies have examined the concept of interactivity but little efforts have been made to study different types of interactivity and its effect on consumer perception. We contributed to research field by conducting behavioral experiment to understand the consumers' response towards different types of interactivity available on the website. The results of our study confirmed that consumers prefer more interactive and engaging website. Results showed that an increase in person interactivity leads to positive and increase attitude towards website, ease of use and e-loyalty. Results also confirmed that increase in contact interactivity facilitates the relationship between person interactivity and attitude towards of website, ease of use and e-loyalty.

The findings of the study can be used by the practitioners and managers of e-retailer websites. In order to make their website successful, e-retailers should focus more on person to person interactivity. E-retailers should give customers the opportunity to give them feedback using chat rooms, and customer-to-customer interaction through product review. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that a website with person interactivity combined with high level of contact interactivity will lead to ease of use for the customers, and also have positive effect on the attitude towards website and e-loyalty. Increased level of person interactivity and contact interactivity is best and the most effective strategy for increasing customers' positive attitudes to shop online which results in long term relationship and loyalty towards website.

By conducting an experiment we presented the causal effect between independent and dependent variables. Experiments provide precision and control but not generalizability. For future research other methodologies like a survey can be adopted to have more generalizable results. Another limitation is the findings are limited in its application to the general population as the sample is composed of undergraduate students. Future researchers can use adult population to capture a broader respondent base.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In offline environment, consumers engage in a communication with a salesperson which helps them in satisfying their queries regarding the product, but in an online setting, interactivity is an effective element of the website which allows the consumers to talk with representative of the company using some interactive features available on the website. The results of the study highlight the importance of availability of the person and contact interactivity on the e-retailers website. In order to make the website successful, e-retailers must pay careful attention while designing their website. Managers can provide machine or person interactivity or both, but the most desirable is to provide person interactivity and contact interactivity to consumers on the website.

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