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Creating Emotions via B2C Websites

Abstract
Relative to offline media communications, business-to-consumer websites possess unique characteristics that affect the likelihood of generating emotional reactions to the web experience itself, with the brand, and/or with fellow customers and employees of the firm. The emotion causing antecedents elucidated within this manuscript are the website’s vividness, interactivity, challenge, interaction speed, machine memory and allowable social interactions. Depending on how a website performs on these dimensions, positive or negative emotions may result. Thus, for example, using machine memory to automatically generate purchase recommendations based on prior consumption patterns may be perceived as pleasantly surprising, whereas a firm sending unsolicited emails based on a user’s cookie trail may be annoying. Regardless of the valence of the resultant emotion(s), the feelings generated may attach to the brand. Because a goal of brand managers is to get consumers to associate positive emotions with a brand, a pre-condition to developing and managing a website is to understand these emotion evoking antecedents and their ramifications.

Keywords: B2C websites, emotions, affect transfer, telepresence
Features that online media possess but generally not offline media are that users are afforded the opportunity to interact with the website, effect the challenge involved during the user-website interaction, control content and connect with other people. In addition, the web host can learn about the user and capitalize on this knowledge via ‘machine memory’. We start with the supposition that all media can be emotive (and not always in a positive way), but that the features unique to the internet confer emotion-evoking advantages that offline media lack. Prompting and attaching positive emotions to a brand increases customer loyalty, trust and market share (Fournier, 1998; Steenkamp & Dekimpe, 1997).

Consumers are increasingly turning to the Internet to search for, evaluate, purchase and in some cases virtually consume products. On-line consumer decision processes can be cognitively demanding and highly emotive. Websites must therefore carefully managed and offer an engaging customer experience. But how is this done? Research pertaining to web use in general has unearthed antecedents leading to “flow” (Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000), which Hoffman and Novak (1996, p. 57) define as “a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity ...[that is] intrinsically enjoyable ... accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness, and ... self-reinforcing.” However, these authors caution that their research “has not considered the specific elements of commercial Web site design that facilitate a compelling experience, nor how this experience is likely to vary across the wide range of commercial sites found on the Web today” (Novak et al., 2000, p. 33). The overarching objective of this research effort is to fill this void.
More specifically, the contribution of this paper is threefold. First, based on an extant review of the literature we present a conceptual model of six characteristics unique to B2C websites that affect the likelihood of generating emotional reactions to the web experience itself, the brand, fellow customers and/or with employees of the firm. These feelings subsequently attach to the brand, thereby affecting consumer behavior. In addition to highlighting the antecedents causing emotions, we note which are (are not) under the control of the webmaster. Second, while the intent of the model is to show how to create positive emotions, we share examples of how underperforming on these characteristics can cause negative emotions. Indeed, because users are exposed to multiple content elements within a website (e.g., FAQs, email enquiries, payment systems), various brand/product announcements (video clips, brand descriptions) and/or interface with variety of actors (customer representatives, fellow chat room guests), it is reasonable to assume that web environments are particularly prone to evoking multiple feelings, some good and some not. Insights on mixed emotions are shared. Third, we present managerial implications. Collectively, these insights are directed toward brand managers, promotion coordinators, and IT staff responsible for website design and maintenance.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF EMOTIONS

Studies on emotions within marketing usually begin by distinguishing emotions from closely related concepts such as affect, mood and attitude. Briefly, affect is in reference to a valenced feeling state. Both moods and emotions have valence (as well as arousal), and can therefore be thought of as specific examples of affect. Cohen and Areni
(1991, p. 191) note: "The distinction most commonly made between moods and emotions is that emotions are more intense and stimulus specific than moods". Thus, downloading a stimulating video may make one feel excited or playful, a positively valenced affective state with high levels of arousal. For our purposes, emotions are of short duration and object specific, in contrast to moods which are of milder intensity, longer-lived, and "may be elicited and maintained without conscious awareness of the feeling state, its cause, or its influence on current activities" (Cohen & Areni, 1991, p. 191) – for example, one might get out of bed in a bad mood. Emotions are characterized by the presence of action tendencies, such as flight, bodily symptoms due to arousal, such as accelerated heart rate, and facial expressions, such as smiling (Plutchik, 1994). Importantly, emotions can create affective traces which are attached to the object that prompted the emotion, thereby affecting one's attitude toward that object. This affective trace, unlike the emotion that prompted it, can be long-lived. Readers may be familiar with the adage: I forgot what you said, but I remember how you made me feel.

Plato and Aristotle made reference to the trilogy of the human spirit: thoughts, feelings and desires (attributable to Cohen & Areni, 1991). It is now generally accepted that mental activity involves both cognitions and affect. The former has a stronger effect on attitude formation, but the latter has a pervasive and oftentimes not subtle effect (Lingaard, Fernandes, Dudek & Brown, 2006). For extant reviews of emotions related literature, see Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (1999) and Watson and Spence (2007).

Some scholars are skeptical about the ability of websites to evoke emotions (Leong, Huang & Stanners, 1998); however, web practitioners counter by noting: 1) the multimedia richness of the medium (Philport & Arbittier, 1997; Carton, 2002); 2)
evidence in support of the emotive potential of combining words, pictures and sound (Allen, 2001); and, 3) the ability to form relationships via personalization and interactivity (Charski, 2000). In a series of empirical studies, there was evidence that opinions concerning a website's visual appeal were formed within 50 milliseconds and that the near spontaneous reaction can carry over to assessments of other features on the website (Lingaard, Fernandes, Dudek & Brown, 2006), conceivably causing one to disregard or discount evidence not consistent with one's initial reaction. This finding speaks volumes for the need to carefully manage one's website.

For an example of a website that for many will evoke positive emotions consider the BMW website (www.bmw.com). Prospective owners can configure the car of their dreams, a task that for some is exhilarating. In addition, the website also showcases BMW art cars from the last 30 years, offers a Lifestyle section where current and prospective owners can purchase BMW themed products, and provides access to the acclaimed BMW films. In short, the website presents a convenient opportunity for BMW owners and interested parties to indulge their fascination with the brand.

A goal of brand managers is to get consumers to associate positive emotions with a brand. For example, Pepsi's latest attempt to reinvigorate their flagship brand is to roll-out new themes every few weeks, each with its "own website with video clips and other enticements to engage consumers. The aim is to represent the 'fun, optimistic and youthful' spirit of Pepsi" (the Economist, "Trouble Brewing", March 3rd, 2007, p. 62-63). Interacting with websites like BMW and Pepsi can generate feelings directed at an object (the brand), actors (interactions with a customer representative or with other customers) or the event (interfacing with the website, such as downloading video clips or entering
personal data). These emotion evoking avenues operate independently. Thus, an individual might find watching video clips provided on the website pleasurable, but be annoyed by comments posted in a chat room.

In Figure 1 we provide a flavor for the type of actions that can occur when an individual is interacting with a website. The antecedents in the figure are elucidated shortly. What is important at this juncture is that each action can result in a positive or negative emotion. This figure is for illustrative purposes only; by no means are the actions and emotions shown meant to be exhaustive. The resultant emotions, ephemeral though they are, affect brand evaluations either via a direct affect transfer (the residual affective trace attaches to a brand or organization) or by triggering cognitive elaborations (e.g., a prompt reply to an enquiry results in pleasant surprise, which may generate a lasting cognition regarding the helpfulness of the company).

[ insert Figure 1 about here ]

Individuals appraise aspects of the web experience (i.e., objects, actors and events) much like one reacts to a service encounter where the actor(s), object, and event are all visible. For example, one’s overall evaluation of a particular hotel is likely to be affected by interactions with the reception staff, a critical service encounter, but one tangential to the core product. Just as contact with the hotel receptionist constitutes a moment of truth which provides an opportunity to evaluate an organization and its offerings, a website experience – being a form of two-way communication – is also a moment of truth and must therefore be managed accordingly. Based upon an extant review of the literature, we present Figure 2, a conceptual model of web-enabled emotion causing antecedents. The antecedents elucidated within this manuscript are the website’s
vividness, interactivity, challenge, interaction speed, machine memory and allowable social interactions. Within this section we clarify the components of the diagram, starting from the top left.

[ Insert Figure 2 about here ]

Engage the Senses

Studies pertaining to offline media show support for the effects of four factors on the demand for one’s mental resources: its vividness or richness (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999), the amount of competing stimuli (Edell & Keller, 1989), copy style used and ad layout (Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1987). In the web domain a primary driver is telepresence. Telepresence is jointly affected by the combination of vividness (media richness) and machine interactivity (often referred to as user control). Vividness is the focus within this section. Vividness arises from the variety and verisimilitude of sensory modes used (Steuer, 1992; Coyle & Thorson, 2001; Klein, 2003). Sources of media richness include flash animation, video clips, the breadth of sensory elements available or soon to be available (i.e., visual, aural, tactile, olfactory, body balance/orientation), improved computer displays, and the ability to make convincing digital images.

Telepresence is defined as “the compelling sense of being present in a mediated virtual environment” (Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000, p. 9). High levels of telepresence serve to mimic natural shopping environments: consumers can react to products and information much as they do in-store. There is ample offline evidence demonstrating emotional responses to atmospheric, spatial and assortment characteristics within retail stores (e.g., Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn & Nesdale, 1994; Machleit & Eroglu, 2000) and there is growing evidence for similar reactions online (Eroglu, Machleit & Davis,
2003). For example, including avatars as sales agents on a website has been shown to increase satisfaction with the retailer, improve attitudes toward the product, and increase purchase intentions (Holzwarth, Janiszewski & Neuman, 2006). Griffith, Krampf and Palmer (2001) show that the more vivid the online media, the greater the involvement with the web experience.

Creating telepresence is therefore an objective for those seeking to stimulate emotions via a website, however, several issues impede the ability to do so. Most notably is that although vividness is under the control of the webmaster, interacting with a website can be encouraged, but not forced. Machine interactivity is explored next.

**Encourage Interaction with the Website**

The likelihood and ability to interact with a website is influenced by task characteristics and individual differences. Addressing task characteristics first, one's ability to interact with a website comes from the: 1) range of controllable elements (e.g., temporal display, spatial arrangement), 2) speed of response to interactive commands, and 3) mapping, that is, the fit between the action required and the 'natural' way of producing a result (Steuer, 1992). For example, to drag and drop a file into an image of a garbage can has a higher level of mapping than pressing the delete key – the former is therefore more engaging. Some ways viewers exercise control over content and presentation are to enlarge, reduce and rotate images; to choose the order of viewing brand messages; to adjust the sound; and to determine the type and amount of information they desire via linked sources. Consider the last point: providing an abundance of easy to follow product information could be pleasing, whereas providing
long-winded technical descriptions in response to a straightforward enquiry could be annoying.

Interactivity is not unique to the Internet; offline media can permit consumers to exercise some control. For example, there are ways to interact with television programs by voting or purchasing. But overall, TV is considered a “lean back” medium, viewers are passive absorbers of one-way, mass communication, whereas the internet is a “lean forward” interactive medium, where viewers determine what is seen and what actions occur (Dijkstra & van Raaij, 2001). Consumers appreciate the opportunity to influence brand related communications (Levine et al., 2000), something not feasible with print ads and television. The challenge for marketing on the Internet is to offer machine interactivity/user control that produces a satisfying electronic experience while achieving an effective marketing outcome.

To address individual differences we start by noting that just like offline shopping, online shoppers exhibit a variety of orientations. Brown, Pope and Voges (2003) empirically unearthed five orientations, ranging from individuals seeking convenience to those deeply involved with, and who enjoy, the shopping experience. It is reasonable to assume these different orientations would be reflected in time spent online, number of links examined, frequency of visits, etc. For one seeking a high level of engagement, a media rich site that offers, for example, many links and resources would be likely to produce a positive emotion. Conversely, one who wants to quickly confirm brand related information but finds themselves having to negotiate multiple links could become annoyed. Depth of content should therefore be layered on; a good heuristic is to never require a user to go to more than three links to achieve an objective.
The ability to interact with a website provides an opportunity to relate to an organization and, importantly, its brands. Fournier (1998, p. 346) maintains that for a brand relationship to exist, “the partners must collectively affect, define, and redefine the relationship”, a nice quote capturing the utility of user control. Researchers have found support for relationships between elements of user control and positive feelings about the website as well as positive feelings about the online shopping experience (Ariely, 2000; Koufaris, 2002). Using Fournier’s (1998) Brand Relationship Quality scale, Thorbjornsen et al. (2002) demonstrated a link between interacting with a website and the sense of brand relationship, especially among more experienced web users.

For good examples of vividness and particularly machine interactivity, visit www.pepsi.com. Homepage options include abundance of brand related material as well as entertainment and fashion sections, and with one additional click a link to ‘youth empowerment and diversity issues’. In www.nike.com users can tailor-design shoes, if they so desire.

**Be Reasonable in Your Expectations**

Assuming an individual wants to interact in a media rich environment other antecedents come into play which affect the resulting emotions. Vividness and machine interactivity (collectively, telepresence) along with challenge and interaction speed are empirically supported drivers of “flow” (Novak et al., 2000; see also Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this section we address challenge. We take the position that in B2C websites it is unlikely one would experience extreme feelings of “flow [where] time may seem to
stand still and nothing else seems to matter" (Novak et al., 2000, p. 23). But websites can be engaging, and challenge affects the likelihood of them being so.

Challenge is with respect to one's computer literacy and desire to engage mental resources. The relationship between the valence of emotion(s) and challenge is an inverted-U: a level of challenge that is too low or too high is likely to result in a negative emotion; positively valenced emotions emerge when the challenge is consistent with one's skill and desire to engage. But desire to engage is an individual characteristic, hence - consistent with the aforementioned comment on the variety of online shopping orientations - it should be assumed there are grades of engagement. Furthermore, even within an individual it is reasonable to assume their willingness to engage varies with activity. Thus, within B2C websites levels of challenge can, and probably should, be varied. FAQs and payment systems should be simple, whereas offering the opportunity to create, for example, a brand by attribute matrix, will necessarily be more demanding. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that even despite the popularity of electronic games, an increasing number of college aged students are finding computer games to be frustrating, rather than entertaining, due to the effort involved to learn the rules: the challenge involved is too high. Emotional rewards and frustrations from interacting with computers are well-established (Cockton, 2002).

**Whatever You Do, Don't Be Slow**

User control implies an experience where the speed and display of feedback constitutes an exchange that can be either pleasing (e.g., quickly accessing information sought) or annoying (data intensive links that require a long time to download).
Evidence thus far suggests that there is a threshold effect: slow interaction speed has a negative effect on the evaluation of a website, whereas fast speed has a null effect (Dellaert & Kahn, 1999). We can probably all relate to rebuking ourselves for naively clicking on a data intensive – and therefore time intensive – download. To mitigate negative affect due to slow download speed the BMW website allows users to select whether they are connected via broadband or modem, in which case the content displayed adjusts accordingly. Users are forewarned that the modem version has less rich content, but the benefit is faster download. In some instances, file size is noted as well so that users can decide if they wish to proceed with the download.

Machines Have Memory – Use It

When discussing a brand relationship it is necessary to distinguish between an established relationship and an emerging one. A growing portion of the Internet population uses a limited set of websites on a daily basis (Forsyth, Lavoie & McGuire, 2000). An opportunity available to webmasters where recurring visits are common is to offer processing shortcuts, thereby reducing the cognitive resources required to choose or use the website. Machine interactivity, discussed previously, is therefore enhanced by the capacity of electronic media to remember something about the customer and make use of that knowledge in future transactions. This requires machine memory.

Machine memory stems from two sources: 1) what is stored on website databases and linked to an individual user by a cookie or activated via a log-in process, and 2) by what a user is willing to share. At the most basic level the website database should be able to retrieve the user's browsing patterns and transaction outcomes (e.g., recency and
frequency of visits, and monetary value of transactions). With more self-explication from
the user the database may contain personal and financial details as well as preference
information. Amazon.com has been a trendsetter in harnessing the customer relationship
building potential afforded by intelligent machine memory: by tracking and categorizing
past book purchases the website can provide 'like minded' purchase recommendations.
But utilitarian websites like Turbotax.com have also capitalized-on the ability to retrieve,
for a fee, personal information from previous years' tax returns, thereby expediting tax
form preparation.

The Good and the Bad of Web-Hosted Discourse

Traditionally, potential and current customers interact with a company via the
telephone, by mail, at a service counter or by using the product and, in this way,
developed a relationship to the brand and the company. Similarly, customers interact
with other customers in informal settings away from the company. Websites offer
excellent opportunities for relationship building, whether with the company and/or with
other customers. Chat rooms, instant messaging and bulletin boards are the most
common ways for users to interact with one another, although there may be live human
assistance and interactive decision aids.

Social interaction about brands ranges from simple word of mouth
recommendations to physical participation in brand communities. One study of offline
brand community interaction (Jeep Camp was studied) showed the ability of active social
participation to move customers from negative or weakly held emotions to strong positive
emotions (e.g., happiness, love) about a brand (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002).
In addition to stimulating emotional responses, social interactions serve to integrate participants (Kemper, 1978), thereby creating a sense of community or belongingness.

There are numerous ways to interact socially with other customers on a website, ranging from reading the ratings provided by persons either known or unknown to the user, to chat rooms that include video as well as audio streaming. Most online social groups take the form of message boards or typed chat rooms. Online communities show “we intention”, which is a sense of group involvement (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002) and virtual social interactions give rise to a sense of ‘us’ versus ‘others’ (Holland & Menzel Baker, 2001). Popular online communities such as Bayer’s support groups for users of their pharmaceutical products testify to the value of connecting people.

Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) show that participation in online groups is motivated at least partly by anticipated emotional experiences. Consciously or otherwise, social interactions prompt evaluations of others’ behaviors and attributions about their intentions. Depending on the outcome of this appraisal process, emotions such as pride, shame, and admiration may occur (Watson & Spence, 2007). For example, after reading comments from satisfied customers, an individual may be proud because they too have chosen to use the brand.

There is considerable variability in the realism of the interactions, ranging from direct, real-time interaction to more distant exchanges such as reading other users’ online ratings. In the case of Lands’ End’s Live help feature there is temporal synchronicity (Hoffman & Novak, 1996), meaning that feedback and results from either the company or other customers occurs immediately. An individual anticipating temporal synchronicity in an environment that does not support it is likely to be annoyed.
Overall, the area of social interaction is an area of great opportunity, but also one of great vulnerability. If interactions are with fellow website users the webmaster has little control over content – it should therefore come as no surprise that employees may provide blogs and participate in chat rooms, oftentimes unbeknownst to other users. Firms should carefully monitor postings by customers on their websites for both positive and negative comments. In the event that an electronic version of negative word-of-mouth appears on the site, although the webmaster cannot stop it, they can endeavor to initiate a dialogue to mitigate the customer’s frustration, or at least identify the cause of the frustration so that corrective actions can be taken to prevent a reoccurrence. When interactions are with an employee of the firm this constitutes a moment of truth, a contact point that affords the customer/user the opportunity to gauge the goodness of the provider. An unsatisfactory (or slow) response will be directly attributed to the organization sponsoring the website, and likely result in feelings of annoyance to outright anger.

ATTACHING EMOTIONS TO A BRAND

Experienced emotions are short lived, but the residue of emotion – its affective trace – can be stored in long-term memory as can brand specific cognitions prompted by the emotion. Studies on the effect of advertisements on brand evaluations support this position. Appraisals of a stimulus (in prior studies, an advertisement) produced an attitude toward the stimulus, which transferred to the brand. This ‘peripheral route’ to persuasion has been widely supported, but is generally thought to have a weaker affect on attitudes toward the brand than does the ‘central route’, where brand specific cognitions affect attitudes towards the brand directly, not indirectly via the stimulus (Petty &
Cacioppo, 1981). MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) expanded our understanding of these routes to persuasion by empirically showing that should there be high levels of involvement with the stimulus – entirely feasible if a user is engaged with a website for a non-trivial period of time – the attitude toward the stimulus prompts deeper cognitions about the brand itself. For example, feeling happy about quickly locating important product information on a website might result in long lasting cognitions about the company being good and helpful, clearly a desirable cognition to attach to a brand. Generating positive emotions during the website interaction experience therefore confers benefits to a brand, either directly, via affect transfer, or indirectly, via heightened brand specific cognitions.

Traditionally website generated emotions were regarded as potentially valuable, but difficult to produce and manage. However, as we have endeavored to achieve by elucidating unique characteristics of B2C websites – the rich media, the ability to connect with other consumers, the capacity to interact directly with the website, and the user’s control over actions and content – this is no longer the case. Websites can now closely approximate the gamut of real-life consumer experiences, which increases the chances that a consumer will feel emotions. Additionally, websites can perform functions that may not be feasible in-store, as the BMW and Pepsi examples illustrated. We acknowledge that TV and print stimuli also produce measurable emotional reactions, but they lack the immediacy of personal experience with the actions of the company and choosing, buying and using the brand. Thus, TV and print ads may be better at reinforcing emotion than at creating it for the first time; we posit the latter is better achieved via a compelling web experience.
**Extreme Feelings Have a Disproportionate Effect**

Websites are multi-faceted exposures to various events, brands/products and/or actors, and as such it is reasonable to assume the web environment is particularly prone to evoking multiple feelings. Mixed emotions do occur, albeit supporting evidence is not web specific. For example, in one study subjects were asked to rate the extent to which they felt six different emotions that they experienced as a result of reading an intentionally emotion evoking incident. It turned out that the reaction to some, not all, of the scenarios produced pleasant surprise as well as anger, emotions of opposite valence (Watson & Spence, 2007).

An explanation for such outcomes is provided by Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993), who postulate that memories of emotion laden experiences are reconstructed as snapshots in time, not as a continuous flow of events. These snapshots are independent events, each with a unique response. Their work, in conjunction with that of others (e.g., Ross & Simonson, 1991; Varey & Kahneman, 1992; Griffin, Drolet & Aaker, 2003), concludes that specific snapshots in time are disproportionately weighted when forming an overall evaluation of the experience. In other words, one’s perception of the overall experience is not an average of the sum of its parts. There is strong evidence for a "preference for happy endings" effect (Ross & Simonson, 1991), that is, the last emotion felt has the strongest effect on one’s overall evaluation of the experience. There is also evidence that the most extreme experience felt will have a disproportionately strong effect. Collectively, these insights are referred to as the Peak-End rule, in reference to the disproportionately strong effect that the peak emotional experience and the end state have on overall evaluations. This insight has clear practical import: consumer research should
be conducted that tracks moment-to-moment responses to interactions with elements of a website to identify and mitigate actions that cause negative affect as well as to identify strong, positive affect evoking events – ideally one of the latter should be moved to the 'end state', if feasible.

Unfortunately, what is little understood is what happens in the case where there is a series of mild emotions, both positive and negative. For example, a user might be annoyed with the slow download speed, but pleasantly surprised with the information provided about the brand's performance. Neither of these emotions is highly arousing. Would one emotion dominate or would these opposing emotions neutralize each other? There is a paucity of research addressing this situation; but discourse amongst scholars within this research domain leads us to postulate that in the case of series of mild emotions these will blend into a single overall feeling. Thus, on balance, what was the overall feeling? Furthermore, the recalled memory will tend to become more extreme over time. Memories are not veridical (Hubbard, 1994). If this supposition is correct, in the case of a website that lacks extreme emotion laden events or a particularly noteworthy ending, assuming the overall experience is at least mildly pleasant this works to the webmaster's advantage.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The benefits of attaching positive feelings to a brand are well documented: it increases brand loyalty, trust and ultimately market share (Fournier, 1998; Steenkamp & Dekimpe, 1997). There are many ways of encouraging positive feelings, the most meaningful of which is for a customer to have a satisfying experience using the product,
which assumes a firm has gotten that far in the consumer’s decision making process. Within this manuscript we have highlighted a comparatively new approach to generating feelings toward an organization and its brands, namely through an engaging B2C website experience. B2C websites possess characteristics that differentiate them from other forms of media communications. We focused on six: vividness, interactivity, challenge, interaction speed, machine memory, and allowable social interactions. We are not discounting the relevance of findings unearthed in relation to offline media, such as the amount of competing stimuli (in short, too much is bad), copy style (consistency is good) and ad layout (there are consistent patterns of search), that affect one’s processing effort. Rather, in addition to these issues the unique characteristics of websites elucidated herein can in and of themselves be emotive, examples of which were shared in figure 1.

Consumers are increasingly turning to B2C websites to search for, evaluate, purchase, and in some cases virtually consume products. In doing so, it is increasingly likely that they will engage in multiple actions, e.g., reading brand descriptions, downloading a video clip and/or entering a chat room. Given the multiplicity of actions, websites are prone to evoking a variety of emotions. Evidence to date suggests that the dominant or peak emotion felt, or the last emotion experienced, is likely to be best remembered, and therefore have a disproportionate effect on overall evaluations of the web experience as well as the brand. It is the resultant feeling that attaches to a brand, either directly (via affect transfer) or indirectly (via cognitive elaboration). It therefore behooves a brand manager to be cognizant of these six characteristics and manage them appropriately to mitigate the possibility of a lingering negative feeling. In some cases
this is best achieved by removing functions within a website: better to do a function right or not do it at all.

The array of purposes and functionalities of B2C websites is vast as is the variance in capabilities and interest levels of website users. Nevertheless, because interacting with a website involves multiple activities it should be assumed that a series of independent emotions unfolds. Techniques now exist for tracking these moment-to-moment responses and their influence on overall evaluations. Baumgartner, Sujan and Padgett (1997) used what they called a “feelings monitor”, whereby participants moved a cursor horizontally left or right to reflect “strong negative feelings” to “neutral” to “strong positive feelings”. In their case, this technique was used to track feeling states while watching advertisements. This technique can be modified for use in a website testing lab by using, for example, a galvanic skin test or EEG to provide proxy measures for feeling states (e.g., accelerated heart rate and moist skin indicates heightened arousal). Even without this level of sophistication it should be apparent that, like advertisements, websites should be pre-tested for their efficacy, both in terms of the cognitions generated and emotions evoked. Given the heterogeneity of shopping orientations (Brown et al., 2003), pre-testing should be done on at least two groups: one with low to moderate levels of interest/involvement and another with high-levels interest/involvement. Ideally, what is presented on the website will appeal to both. Low involvement users want quick solutions – a Management Summary, if you will – whereas high involvement individuals want to be engaged longer and therefore desire more content.

We are not so presumptuous to believe we have presented the panacea for website success. Our objective was to integrate and elaborate upon six characteristics relevant to
websites that to date are little understood and/or overlooked. These characteristics can cause emotions – both positive and negative – which affect evaluations of brands. Thus, the insights herein have practical import to brand managers, promotion coordinators, and IT staff responsible for website design and maintenance.
REFERENCES


### Figure 1

**Examples of Website Actions and Resultant Emotions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Emotion Experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vividness</td>
<td>Download stimulating video</td>
<td>(+) Excited, playful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difficult to read; poor color contrast</td>
<td>(-) Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>Virtual consumption of product</td>
<td>(+) Delighted/amused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Required entry of personal data</td>
<td>(-) Angry, critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Designing a brand comparison matrix</td>
<td>(+) Industrious, satisfied, pleased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inability to easily compare brands</td>
<td>(-) Irritated, dubious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction speed</td>
<td>Fast download</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slow download</td>
<td>(-) Annoyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine Memory</td>
<td>Recommendations based on past consumption patterns</td>
<td>(+) Pleasant surprise, inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsolicited email due to memory trace (cookie trail)</td>
<td>(-) Angry, insulted, disgusted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td>A sense of community; membership in virtual group</td>
<td>(+) Pride, warm-hearted, touched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curt, delayed responses to email enquiry</td>
<td>(-) Disgusted, fed-up, offended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2

Factors Affecting the Development and Transfer of Emotions to Brands in an Online Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Emotions with respect to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vividness (media richness)</td>
<td>Website (event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity (user control)</td>
<td>Brand (object)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction Speed</td>
<td>Employees &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Matches Skill</td>
<td>Fellow Customers (actors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine Memory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>