

Review Article

The Impact of User' Learning Style on Online Customer Service Effectiveness

Hafid Agourram¹ and Hasna Agourram²

¹Full Professor, Bishop's University, Sherbrooke, Canada

²Master in Marketing, HEC Montreal, Montreal, Canada

Abstract

National culture determines the shared learning style of its people. In a particular culture, people may learn best when content is made of videos, graphs, pictures, charts. In another culture they learn better by talking, discussing and chatting. In another culture, by reading and writing, and in other cultures by experimenting. At the same time all online businesses assume a static customer learning style. The design of the sites usually reflects the designer learning style and cognitive styles which in turn reflect the learning style type if people in particular culture. However, the sharp increase number in online businesses shifted the attention and the focus of management to the quality and effectiveness of online customer service sites. We argue that the fit between the designs of the content with the customer's learning style may increase online service effectiveness. We proposed a three step approach to implement the model. The service site is designed in such a way that it offers contents that fits each of VARK learning styles. As soon as the customer uploads the site, he or she responds to VARK learning style questionnaires. The questionnaire may complete within five minutes. The system analyses the questionnaire and automatically uploads the content that would fit the user preferred learning style.

Keywords: Learning styles; Online customer service; Culture

Introduction

National culture determines the shared learning style of its people. In a particular culture, people may learn best when content is made of videos, graphs, pictures, charts. In another culture they learn better by talking, discussing and chatting. In another culture, by reading and writing, and in other cultures by experimenting. At the same time all online businesses assume a static customer learning style. The design of the sites usually reflects the designer learning style and cognitive styles which in turn reflect the learning style type if people in particular culture. However, the sharp increase number in online businesses shifted the attention and the focus of management to the quality and effectiveness of online customer service sites. We argue that the fit between the designs of the content with the customer's learning style may increase online service effectiveness. We proposed a three step approach to implement the model. The service site is designed in such a way that it offers contents that fits each of VARK learning styles. As soon as the customer uploads the site, he or she responds to VARK learning style questionnaires. The questionnaire may complete within five minutes. The system analyses the questionnaire and automatically uploads the content that would fit the user preferred learning style. The article is structured as follows. First, an overview of the theoretical; background of the major concepts that make up the research model is presented, followed by a detailed discussion about the research model. Finally the article concludes with implications for practice and future research.

Literature Review

Learning styles

Information processing, cognitive processing styles and learning styles have been used interchangeably in the literature. Leonard et al [1] argues that Information processing styles often termed cognitive styles has gained prominence in the organizational behavior literature, as researchers use it to study decision making behavior, conflict, strategy development, and group processes. He defined cognitive styles as "the way in which people process and organize information and arrive at

judgments or conclusion based on their observation". The concept is so vague that it has been conceptualized from different point of view. From decision making perspective, Soane [2] claims that Information processing style can be defined as how decisions are made. The author added that Information processing styles typically characterized as tendencies to use analytical or intuitive approaches to influence decision processes and outcomes.

It becomes clear that information processing and cognitive processing is processes that help an individual receive the information, process it, memorize it and ultimately take action accordingly. On the other hand, the concept of learning styles can be better referred to as the mechanism by which an individual builds intrinsic knowledge not necessarily for decision making. Messick [3] combine all of these concepts and argues "different learners have different cognitive styles and information processing strategies that determine a learner typical mode of perceiving remembering thinking and problem solving".

In this article we use the concept of learning style to explain our theory. We believe that after an individual receives information, he or she interprets the information in such a way that fits his/her cognitive style and produces specific meaning to his interpretation.

Learning style is defined as the preference or the predisposition of an individual to perceive and process information in a particular way or a combination of ways.

Fleming and mills [4] have developed an inventory of learning styles known as VARK. Visual (V) aural (A) read write (R) and kinesthetic (K). The authors argue that people have different learning styles. Some people may learn by watching, others listening, others by reading and writing and, others by experimenting.

People with visual preference learn best from presentation of materiel using graphs charts, diagrams, and videos. Aural learners refer to receive information through listening. Read write learners prefer to take in information through writing and reading from printed words. Kinesthetic learners gain better understanding of materiel through concrete examples and applications.

National culture

Culture is a term that was originally developed in the field of anthropology and has recently become a prevalent research area in

*Corresponding author: Dr. Hafid Agourram, Williams school of Business, Bishop's University, Canada. E-mail id: hagourra@ubishops.ca

Received: Oct 11, 2018; **Accepted:** Oct 23, 2018; **Published:** Oct 25, 2018

Citation: Agourram H and Agourram H. Enyioke. The Impact of User' Learning Style on Online Customer Service Effectiveness. *GSL J Busin Manag Admin Affair*. 2018; 2:114.

organizational studies. Unfortunately, a consistent definition of this ambiguous concept is extremely difficult to isolate [5]. The complexity of the concept of culture derives then from the multiplicity of the perspectives that investigate it. One thing that all researchers agree upon is the fact that culture is related to people. In 1952, the anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn [6] claimed that there were more than 150 definitions of the concept of culture. Baligh [7] also argues that there are many ways to describe and define culture and that one may conceive of culture in terms of its parts and its components, and the two are related. Culture concerns a group of people who share a common understanding and meaning of things around them. It is a shared system of meaning [8] or, the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes members of one group from another [9]. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner [8] propose the following model to understand culture.

The Figure 1 indicates that the products of a culture (observable artefacts) are symbols of the norms and values of the people, which in turn are based on fundamental basic assumptions about human existence and life. National culture is a major type of culture.

National culture is a concept that helps determine similarities and differences between the cultures of the countries.

The literature provides some models which try to capture the concept of national culture. Hall [10] uses a single dimension; high context versus low context to differentiate between national cultures. High-context cultures (including much of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America) are relational, and collectivist. People in these cultures emphasize interpersonal relationships. According to Hall, these cultures are collectivist, preferring group harmony and consensus to individual achievement. Explicit information is not as important as context, which might include the speaker's tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, and posture. Low-context cultures (including North America and much of Western Europe) are logical, linear, individualistic, and action-oriented. People from low-context cultures value logic, facts, and directness. Decisions are based on fact rather than intuition.

Hofstede [9] proposes a multidimensional model and suggests that national culture and values, as they affect the work environment and its management, could be categorized on the basis of four dimensions, namely: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity.

The values of people in a particular culture are the most widely used concept or variable in cross-cultural studies [9,11]. The reason for the popularity of values as cross-cultural research variables is the deeper layer of culture; basic assumptions are preconscious (taken for granted) and are powerful because they are less debatable than espoused values.

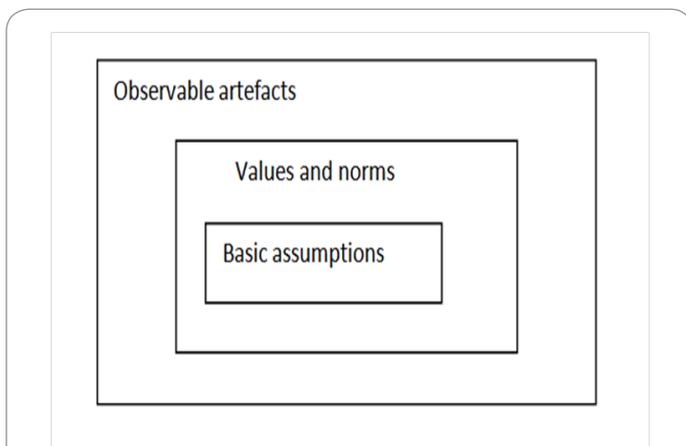


Figure 1: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) cultural model [8].

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner [8] suggest differentiating between norms and values in claiming that values direct our feelings of good and evil, and that norms are the basis by which a group of people judge something as right or wrong.

Online customer service

The internet has established itself as a tool that impacted people's lifestyles, organizational models, and the society in general. The Internet became a vital tool that changed the world. It provides large amount of information in a very short amount of time. It pushes people to change the way they normally purchase goods and services. In the last five years Internet user numbers doubled worldwide, and for over 2 billion people the internet is now a part of their lifestyle [12]. Recent research reports that 89% of American adults use the Internet and 72% of now own a smart phone [13].

Electronic commerce of all types is expanding exponentially as technology becomes more sophisticated with the rapid development in artificial intelligence and the severe competitiveness in the markets. This growth in Electronic commerce automatically puts emphasis in online Customer service. Customer service includes pre-transaction service, transaction service and post-transaction service. Many organizations understood that their survivor depends mainly on how they treat their customers. They understand that quality customer service is a key factor for a company to succeed. Online customer service processes differ substantially from the traditional face to face customer service. IT offers the ability to attract, maintain and search for customers. Virtually all brock and mortar and online businesses use IT to service their customers. Industry watchers note that customer preference for phone support is dropping, while email and chat are becoming more popular options [14]. Online customer service system has become an important tool of online marketing. However many organizations fail to offer satisfactory service online.

Research model

The Figure 2 was designed to help organizations fill in this gap and makes online customer service more effective organizations build contents for online customer service based on the designer's cognitive style. These designers assume that people who access the online customer pages have one common cognitive style or learning style. We argue that culture may determine the typical learning style

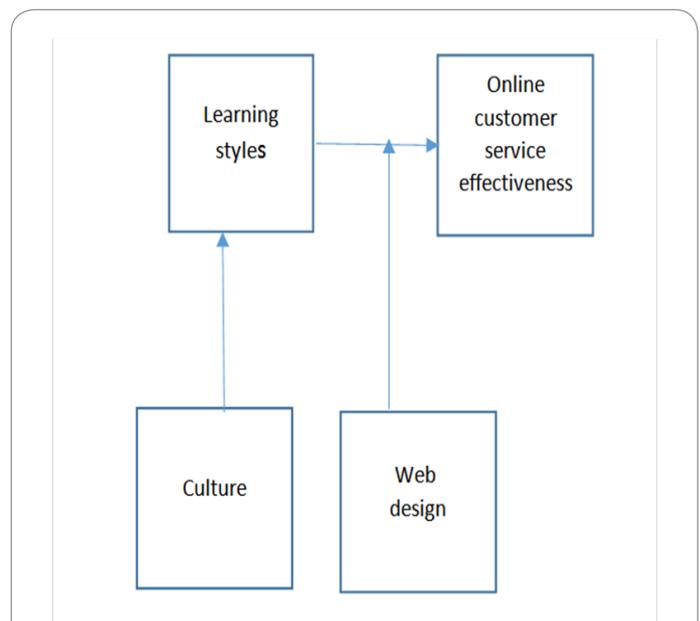


Figure 2: Research model.

of its people. In other words, a typical learning style in some cultures could be visual, in other cultures it could be aural, in others read/ write and in others Kinesthetic. Culture is a shared system of meaning. The definition, meaning and the interpretation of the world given by people in a culture are shared among them. This meaning becomes the norms in that particular culture. The meaning of something is the result of the interpretation given by the individual. We may argue for example that collectivist high context cultures such as China and Arab countries would prefer learn by watching videos and pictures of people whereas in low context and individualistic cultures such as the North American countries people would likely prefer the read and write learning style. These people usually seek objectives and detailed information that would help them understand the context in which they are dealing in before making any move.

We argue that the fit between the design of the online customer service content and the customer learning style would make the service more effective. In other words, when a user with a visual learning styles access an online customer service site that present support and help in such a way that does not match the user style, the user may quickly search for an alternative way to get the request support and he or she would likely switch to the phone.

We recommend that the contents of the customer service site be designed in four different ways where each content matches each of VARK learning styles; Videos, graphs, comments and stories, watching people handling specific problems, audios, text...

Each time a user accesses the customer service site, he will be asked to answer VARK questionnaires made of 16 questions. The system analyses the user's responses and automatically identifies the user learning style. Finally the system uploads content that fits the user's learning style.

Conclusion

People have different learning styles. Some people learn best by watching and listening, others by reading and writing, other by experimenting. At the same time all online customer service sites assume a static customer learning style, usually the assumption would reflect the designer learning style. However, with the drastic increase in online businesses shifted the attention to the quality and effectiveness of online customer service sites. We argued that the fit between the design of the content and the customer learning style may increase service effectiveness. We proposed a three step approach to implement the model. As soon as the customer uploads the site, he or she responds to VARK learning style questionnaires. The questionnaire may be completed within 5 min. the system analyses the questionnaire and automatically uploads the content that would fit the user preferred learning style.

References

1. Leonard NH, Scholl RW, Berube K (1999) Information processing style and decision making. *Journal of organizational behavior* 20: 407-420.
2. Soane E, Schubert I, Lunn R, Pollard S (2015) The relationship between information processing style and information seeking, and its moderation by effect and perceived usefulness: Analysis vs. procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences* 72: 72-78.
3. Messick S (1976) *Individuality in learning*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
4. Fleming GD, Mills C (1992) Not another inventory, rather a catalyst for reflection. *To Improve the academy* 11:137-155.
5. Lammers CJ, Hickson DJ (1979) *Organizations alike and unlike: Toward a comparative sociology of organizations*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
6. Kroeber A, Kluckhohn C (1952) *Culture: a critical review of concepts and definitions*. Cambridge, MA.
7. Baligh HH (1994) Components of Culture: Nature, Interconnections, and Relevance to the Decisions on the Organization Structure. *Management Science* 40: 1: 14-27.
8. Trompenaars FT, Hampden-Turner CH (1998) *Riding the Waves of Culture - Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. McGraw-Hill.
9. Hofstede G (1993). *Cultures and organizations: software of the mind*. London, McGraw-Hill.
10. Hall ET (1976) *Beyond culture*, Anchor press New York NY.
11. Glenn ES, Glenn CG (1981) *Man and Mankind: Conflict and Communication between Cultures*. Ablex, Northwood, NJ.
12. Nielson M (2015) *Digital Natives feel right at home with online Grocery Shopping*.
13. Poucher J (2016) *Smartphone ownership and Internet Usage continues to climb in emerging economies*. Pew Research Center.
14. Klie M (2013) *Should your company abandon phone support?* *CRM Magazine* 17: 4: 24-27.