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ABSTRACT

While most research on website has focused on functional tasks, the Internet offers many leisure as well as experiential opportunities. Because of the evolution of the society towards an experience economy, analyzing the role of technologies in experiential contexts makes sense. User experience (UX) refers to research that “goes beyond the purely cognitive and task-oriented perspective” that is generally assumed when studying information systems (Hassenzahl and Tractinsky 2006, p. 92).

This research aims at identifying the variables that play a role and influence online behaviors in a specific experiential environment, namely museum website. In fact, museums are among the most valued cultural institutions in the world and their attendance has been growing since the end of the 80's. Museum attendance generates the highest participation rates, just after cinema, reading and sports (Schuster 2007).

In order to assess website design, we rely on the conceptualization of usability developed by Agarwal and Venkatesh (2002) and adapted from Microsoft Usability Guidelines. However, our conceptualization of website usability for museums takes the position that aesthetics is missing from MUG scales.

Relying on the literature on experience, we propose a research model that was tested by means of a free simulation experiment (Fromkin and Streufert 1976). Two

museum websites were selected for the free simulations: the website of the Quai Branly Museum (France), and the other interface was the Atlanta History Center (USA). The sample of this study consisted of 230 college students from two different countries.

The results of the free simulation experiments indicate that 1) aesthetics is the most important design criteria for experiential interfaces and 2) that website design influences intentions to visit a physical place. Subjective norms and facilitating conditions appear to be two additional predictors of intentions to visit the museum. But national culture plays a minor role in our research model.

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