

## Impact of Website Features on Online on Relationship Marketing (Case Study: Online Booking of Travel Tickets)

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to determine the effect of website features on relationship marketing among Hamsafar Travel Agency in Ahvaz City. The research method was descriptive, correlational of development-applied type. The statistical population consisted of all passengers of Hamsafar Travel Agency in Ahvaz who booked tickets online. Since, the size of statistical population of this research was unlimited, the sample size of 345 subjects was selected using randomized sampling. To analyze the data, to test reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficient method was used and value of this statistic for all variables was higher than 0.7, so questionnaire had desired reliability. To analyze the hypothesis, Pearson and Spearman correlation and regression models were applied using with SPSS Software and for structural equation modeling, AMOS Software was used. According to the results, order of dimensions from the the highest to the lowest mean value included affective commitment, calculative commitment, website features and relationship marketing. The results show that the website features had a significant positive impact on affective commitment and calculative commitment and that relationship marketing has a significant positive impact on affective commitment and calculative commitment has a positive and significant impact on relationship marketing. According to regression equations, website features accounted for 53% of the variations of affective commitment and 42% of calculative commitment while affective commitment accounted for 1% of variations of relationship marketing and calculative commitment accounted for 6% of variations of relationship marketing. In conclusion, it can be said that website features has a higher impact on affective commitment and calculative commitment has a higher impact on relationship marketing and calculative commitment and affective commitment have a weak mediating role between the website features and relationship marketing.

**Key words:** Website features, relationship marketing, affective commitment, calculative commitment, Iran

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, marketing and business have undergone many changes. According to information released by International Relations Center, the number of Internet users is increasing every day. Internet has an increasingly important impact on the everyday lives of people in aspects such as communication, entertainment, social activities and shopping. Businesses also have shifted their business model from physical sale to virtual market because of the opportunities created by an online business model (Shiva *et al.*, 2012). Internet not only has a key role in the improvement of mass information processing and executive functions but also plays a role in the delivery of services in a more consumer-based mode. Internet can have a direct effect on production capability, compression of time and reduction of cost which leads to an important saving through shifting the

processes from offline to online (Ashley *et al.*, 2011). Social and physical network theory provide a reasonable expectation to strengthen our understanding of online marketing in a couple of dimensions; first, the internet is a medium by which consumers interact, communicate and react to each other. So physical and social network theory provide an important framework for internet connection and decision-making processes. Secondly, as a multi-channel platform, the internet is complicated and requires understanding consumer sentiment, social interaction and interests. Third, because a lot of shopping experiences are based on impression, the internet provides a combination of virtual simulation and interpersonal simulation. Finally, the internet is a social media that is increasingly searched by consumers and by which they share with others (Card *et al.*, 2003). Today, web site provide companies with an important platform for communicating with users and facilitate business

transactions. Growth of websites is tantamount to the growth of information technology in many organizations. Some companies integrate their websites for their business processes. The ability to conduct transactions is an important factor affecting the use of the websites (Card *et al.*, 2003). Web sites can be classified into two categories: transactional and information. Information websites provide business information but do not allow customers to purchase goods online but the transactional website does this. Most academic researches have focused on the impact of websites on transactional websites. In reality, many companies keep their websites without transactional operations. When an online search for information leads to a purchase decision, customers can purchase in a variety of ways. First, they may receive the product from the website from which they have received the information assuming such site allows them so. Second, the customer may decide to leave the site and buy the product from a competitor's website. Third, online search may be preferred over offline shopping especially for seeing the product customers go to physical shops are doing and they use the Internet for gaining more information about product (Lings, 2000).

Online shopping, based on the growth of the Internet, is emerging fast. Many opportunities for vendors have been created to create and maintain interaction with customers. However, all customers are not same for a company and those who spend more money and buy more are the most important ones. Therefore, customer retention is a major concern for companies wishing to gain a competitive advantage. Previous studies show that increasing customer retention will lead to higher profits for companies. As a result, it is very important to identify important factors affecting customer repurchase intention. Among the factors that have been identified from previous studies are trust and loyalty. A loyal customer is very likely to repurchase and trust building is not only a key factor affecting customer online shopping behavior but also a key factor affecting customer loyalty. In the meantime, commitment is very important. Commitment refers to the concept of a sustainable tendency of each of the partners to maintain valuable relationships, commitment to a relationship is established when one of the parties believes in the importance of the relationship and makes maximum attempts to ensure the preservation or promotion of the relationship (Gary and Byun, 2001). The main objective of this study was to determine impact of website bookings on online booking (relationship marketing) and the role of affective and calculative commitment on website features and relationship marketing.

## **Literature review**

**Domestic literature:** Doaei (2015) conducted "Feasibility study of implementing online marketing in Fars Province's carpet market". This descriptive-survey study was done using the tools of observation and questionnaire, to evaluate the feasibility of using the Internet in marketing and the results show that it is possible to implement the use of the Internet in activities related to customers, sales channels and distribution and market research in the carpet market of Fars Province.

Ronaghi (2015) studied "Providing of a comprehensive framework for implementing online marketing using meta-synthesis method". Using meta-synthesis method, this study evaluated over 450 papers on Internet marketing, using content analysis to extract dimensions and related codes and the importance and priority of each was determined using quantitative method of Shannon entropy.

According to the findings, it became clear that codes of marketing strategies, internet and e-Business strategies and business strategies and online consumer behavior had the largest important factors. Finally, after having taken the final steps of the research, the framework of implementation of internet marketing was provided. Based on the finding of this research, to set up and deploy internet marketing in an organization, attention should be given to various in and out-organizational dimensions and using the experiences and previous studies, we can say that the final framework of this research is a good road map for the establishment of internet marketing. Of the 22 codes studied in this research, marketing strategy, the Internet and e-commerce, business strategies and online consumer behavior were of the highest significance level. Colgate and Alexander (1998) studied "The Effect of fascination and web features on satisfaction of users of social networks (case study: Facebook)". Due to the rise of use of social networks, especially Facebook among Iranian users, this study aimed to investigate the effect of fascination on the continuation of the user.

The 406 questionnaires were used. Iranian Facebook study and analysis were collected and to evaluate data, the PLS analysis software was used. The data suggest that the fascination affects satisfaction, ease of use and perceived usefulness and user satisfaction results in their intention to use Facebook. However, although user intention and satisfaction affects continued use of Facebook, the usefulness and perceived ease of use had no an impact on the continued use by the users.

Hadadian (2014) studied "Behavioral factors affecting the acceptance of Internet shopping (in the aviation industry)". This study is an applied research and used a survey method. The population consists of foreign

passengers on domestic flights of August of Mashhad International Airport. The sample has been done using Cochran formula and the sample size of 215 has been used. So after preparing the conceptual model, based on the criteria of trust, price, perceived risk, utility and quality of internet website, a questionnaire was prepared, administered and information obtained were analyzed using structural equation and Lisrel Software. The results showed that three criteria: quality of website, utility and trust directly and perceived risk indirectly affected internet shopping tendency. Besides, impact of factor of price on air passengers' online ticket purchases was not confirmed.

**Foreign literature:** Anderson and Gerbing (1988) studied the role of online marketing tools in institution of higher education. This survey study used a questionnaire and was conducted among 400 students. The results showed no significant relationship between students' attitude towards the necessity of using new Internet marketing tools expected perception of the university. In this study, the importance of audience perception and interpretation of users of internet marketing tools have been investigated.

Hogg *et al.* (1998) studied internet-marketing intelligence by web mining. In this study, by using data mining techniques, behavior of customers when buying from online stores was studied to improve the structure of the store website. In this study, 86 Spanish stores were evaluated. The results show that at any level of internet-marketing (strategic or operational), different techniques are needed.

Payne *et al.* (1995) "Effects website features on online relationship marketing (case study: online booking of hotel)". This study concluded that features web design to online marketing relationship is important.

Payne *et al.* (1995) studied "Effect of website features online relationship marketing (Case Study Online book hotel)", the survey concluded that features of web design are important to online relationship marketing. Both identified dimensions of commitment prepare ground for trust while affective commitment prepare ground for e-Loyalty. Results showed that affective commitment was rather affected by hedonistic features.

Conway and Swift (2000) in his research studied mixtures of marketing in new generation marketing. He converted mixtures of traditional marketing to devaluation dimensions in virtual and modern space and in addition to marketer and purchaser, he discussed third dimension, namely, society and its impact on modern marketing process and provided a model for it.

### **Conceptual definitions of key terms**

**Relationship marketing:** Relationship marketing is a marketing practice based on relationships, interactions and networks that cause, maintain and strengthen relationship with the customers and beneficiaries (Gummesson, 1998).

**Affective commitment:** This type of organizational commitment is a kind of affective dependence upon which the employee takes his identity from organization and has a feeling of belonging and dependence of and enjoys continuing membership in it and will not leave the organization due to such strong affective commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

**Calculative commitment:** People with high skills are valuable to organization which increases organization's bonuses for them, thus creating a commitment called calculative commitment (Bansal *et al.*, 2004).

**Website features:** Web sites must have hedonistic and utilitarian features that are effective for organization; hedonistic features are pleasure-seeking, mental and intangible features and create a pleasurable reaction in consumer; hedonistic consumption seeks entertainment, imagination and illusion, arousal, sensory stimulation and pleasure (Butz and Goodstein, 1996) and utilitarian features which are characterized by real and tangible nature are utilitarian in choices and purchase decisions of consumers and aim to maximize use and performance and utilitarian judgment is based on cognitive activities, goal-oriented and tends to perform a necessary task; further, consumers focus on the immediate consequences of the use and utilitarian consumption is aimed at an increase in benefits (Sin *et al.*, 2005).

### **Hypothesis:**

#### **The main hypothesis:**

- Website features have a significant positive impact on relationship marketing

#### **Secondary hypotheses:**

- Website features have a significant positive impact on affective commitment
- Website features have a significant positive impact on calculative commitment
- Affective commitment has a positive and significant impact on relationship marketing
- Calculative commitment has a positive and significant impact on relationship marketing
- Affective commitment has a significant and positive impact on relationship between website features and relationship marketing

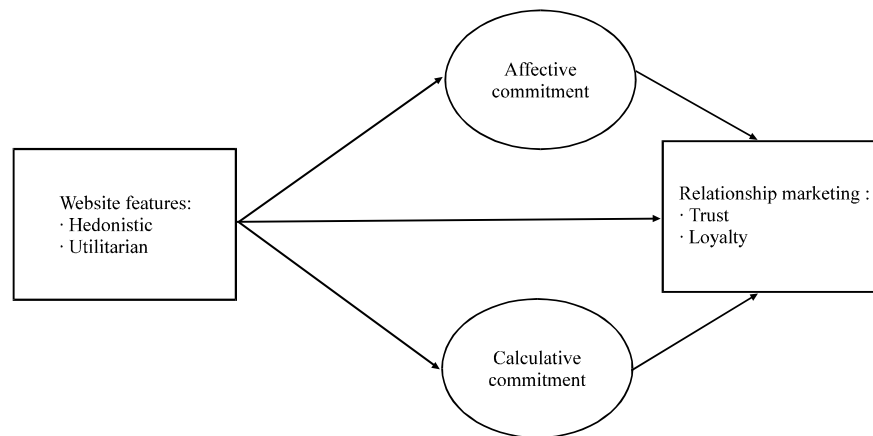


Fig. 1: Online purchase commitment model based on Payne *et al.* (1995)

- Calculative commitment has a significant and positive impact on relationship between website features and relationship marketing

**The conceptual model based on research hypotheses:** Conceptual model of this research is online purchase commitment model of Payne *et al.* (1995) which aims to study hedonistic and utilitarian features of website's customers and study of electronic trust and loyalty in terms of online booking, as shown in Fig. 1.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was an applied and development research in terms of objective and in terms of method, it was a descriptive research of correlational type. This research is applied because of its capabilities to help companies and organizations in solving problems and activities related to relationship marketing and because of this research helping develop the knowledge, it is a development research and because it studies the relationship between variables based on objective of research, it is correlational. In other words, this type of research will review the existing situation and to describe the current status of the system on a regular basis and studies features of it and if necessary studies the relationships between variables.

This research is organized as follows: an exploratory study to illustrate various aspects of the topic, preparing a questionnaire to collect information, determining the validity and reliability, data collection, data analysis, modeling and model testing and conclusions and suggestion. In addition to questionnaire, relevant books and articles on the subject were used. For information regarding test and approval or rejection of hypotheses, mainly questionnaires were used. For information regarding the research literature, library method was used.

**Statistical population:** Population included all people who bought a ticket online from Hamsafar Travel Agency in Ahvaz.

**Sample size:** Give population was unlimited, the formula for the calculation of the sample size is as described below and test was calculated at 95% confidence level and the amount of accuracy in this sample was 0.05 and because there is no estimate of the value of success is not, success ratio of 0.5 was considered. Given the values in the formula of the sample, sample size of 380 was calculated and used and 380 questionnaires were administered and 345 questionnaires were collected.

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{\epsilon^2} = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} \cong 380$$

$Z_{\alpha/2}$  denotes test statistic,  $\epsilon$  accuracy of sample and  $p$  ratio of subjects included.

**The data collection tool:** In order to collect the information needed to test the existing hypotheses and drawing conclusions, library and field methods were used for test study of variables and significance of variables. Variables were analyzed by the preparation of the questionnaire and administering of it to Hamsafar Travel Agency; for such purpose, a questionnaire on Likert scale was used. The following methods were applied for data collection:

**Library studies:** The written information from libraries and books on the subject and related specialized articles and journals as well as relevant statistics and figures were gathered and adapted.

**Field studies:** To collect data to draw conclusions about the questions, the questionnaire was administered. Each

Table 1: Number of items

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Website features	7	0.74
Affective commitment	3	0.76
Calculative commitment	3	0.72
Relationship marketing	9	0.94

Table 2: Results of the first sub-hypothesis

Type of test	Variable	Affective commitment	
Correlation	Website features	Pearson coefficient	0/73
		Sig.	0/00
		Spearman coefficient	0/64
		Sig.	0/00
Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>			
Fixed	0.28	3.14	0.002
Website Features	0.89	19.87	0.000

questionnaire was developed given main objective and questions and each item was in line with main objective of research. Research questions were provided in form of questionnaire items. The questionnaire consisted of 22 items which discussed in Table 1.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To test the hypotheses, first significant relationship between the variables is measured by Pearson and Spearman correlation test and then through regression models, the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable is examined.

- First hypothesis: website features have a significant positive impact on affective commitment (Table 2)

Estimated values in Table 2 indicate that the variable of website features and affective commitment has a significant relationship because Sig. = 0.05, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.75) shows a direct relationship between these two variables, in the sense that as website features increase, affective commitment increases, therefore, hypothesis that there is a relation between website features and affective commitment is confirmed. As for relation of variable of website features and affective commitment, according to estimates of Spearman correlation coefficient calculated in the above table, it should be noted that relationship of website features and affective commitment is significant because Sig. = 0.05, according to the Spearman coefficient (0.64), the relationship is direct.

According to Table 2, the significance level of website features that is 0.00 confirms the relationship; in fact, a positive linear relationship between website features and affective commitment is confirmed.

- The second sub-hypothesis: website features has a significant positive impact on and calculative commitment (Table 3)

Table 3: Results of the second sub-hypothesis

Type of test	Variable	Calculative commitment	
Correlation	Website features	Pearson coefficient	0/65
		Sig.	0/00
		Spearman coefficient	0/52
		Sig.	0/00
Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>			
Fixed	0.37	5.190	0.00
Website features	0.77	16.003	0.00

Table 4: Results of the third sub-hypothesis

Type of test	Variable	Relationship marketing	
Correlation	Affective commitment	Pearson coefficient	0/135
		Sig.	0/01
		Spearman coefficient	0/245
		Sig.	0/00
Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>			
Fixed	1.92	19.07	0.000
Affective commitment	0.12	2.50	0.012

Estimated values in Table 3 indicate that the variable of website features and calculative commitment has a significant relationship because Sig. = 0.05, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.65) shows a direct relationship between these two variables, in the sense that as website features increase, calculative commitment increases, therefore, hypothesis that there is a relation between website features and calculative commitment is confirmed. As for relation of variable of website features and calculative commitment, according to estimates of Spearman correlation coefficient calculated in the above table, it should be noted that relationship of website features and calculative commitment is significant, because Sig. = 0.05, according to the Spearman coefficient (0.52), the relationship is direct.

According to Table 3, the significance level of website features that is 0.00 confirms the relationship; in fact, a positive linear relationship between website features and calculative commitment is confirmed.

- The third sub-hypothesis: affective commitment and relationship marketing has a significant and positive impact

Estimated values in Table 4 indicate that the variable of affective commitment and relationship marketing has a significant relationship because Sig. = 0.05, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.135) shows the direct relationship between these two variables, in the sense that the higher the amount, affective commitment's impact on relationship marketing increases, therefore, hypothesis that there is a relation between affective commitment and relationship marketing is confirmed. As for relation of variable of affective commitment and relationship marketing, according to estimates of Spearman correlation coefficient calculated in the above table, it should be

Table 5: Results of the fourth sub-hypothesis

Type of test	Variable	Relationship marketing	
Correlation	Calculative commitment	Pearson coefficient	245/0
		Sig.	00/0
		Spearman coefficient	208/0
		Sig.	00/0
Variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>			
Fixed	1.75	18.50	0.00
Calculative commitment	0.22	4.66	0.00

noted that relationship of affective commitment and relationship marketing is significant because Sig. = 0.05, according to the Spearman coefficient (0.245), the relationship is direct.

According to Table 4, the significance level of affective commitment that is 0.01 confirms the relationship; in fact, a positive linear relationship between affective commitment and relationship marketing is confirmed.

- The fourth sub-hypothesis: calculative commitment and relationship marketing has a significant and positive relationship

Estimated values in Table 5 indicate that the variable of calculative commitment and relationship marketing has a significant relationship because Sig. = 0.05, the value of Pearson's correlation coefficient (0.245) shows the direct relationship between these two variables, in the sense that the higher the amount, calculative commitment's impact on relationship marketing increases, therefore, hypothesis that there is a relation between calculative commitment and relationship marketing is confirmed. As for relation of variable of calculative commitment and relationship marketing, according to estimates of Spearman correlation coefficient calculated in the above table, it should be said that relation of calculative commitment and relationship marketing is significant, because Sig. = 0.05, according to the Spearman coefficient (0.208), the relationship is direct.

According to Table 5, significance level of calculative commitment (0.00), this relationship is confirmed; in fact, a positive linear relationship between calculative commitment and relationship marketing can be asserted.

- Fifth hypothesis: the affective commitment has a mediator role between the website features and relationship marketing

To test this hypothesis, the following three hypotheses must have a significant relationship:

- The website features have an impact on affective commitment

- Affective commitment impacts on relationship marketing
- The website features in the presence of variable of affective commitment have a weaker influence on relationship marketing

According to Table 6, in the first model, website features has a positive effect on affective commitment, because the significance level of website features variable is (0.00) and significance level is smaller than error level of 0.05. In the second model, affective commitment has a positive effect on relationship marketing because the significance level of affective commitment variable is 0.00, which is smaller than error level of 0.05 and in the third model, the website features has an impact on relationship marketing commitment in the presence of variable of affective commitment, because the significance level of variable of website features in presence of affective commitment has significance level of 0.00 which is smaller than error level of 0.05 and also, value of coefficient of website feature is reduced compared to the first model but the third model, affective commitment is not significant and therefore, mediator role has a weak nature.

- Sixth hypothesis: calculative commitment has a mediating role between the website features and relationship marketing

To test this hypothesis, the following three hypotheses must have a significant relationship:

- The website features affects calculative commitment
- The calculative commitment has an impact on relationship marketing
- The website features has a weaker impact on relationship marketing commitment in the presence of variable of calculative commitment

According to Table 7, in the first model, website features has a positive effect on calculative commitment, because the significance level of website features variable is (0.00) and significance level is smaller than error level of 0.05. In the second model, calculative commitment has a positive effect on relationship marketing because the significance level of calculative commitment variable is 0.00, which is smaller than error level of 0.05 and in the third model, the website features has a weaker impact on relationship marketing commitment in the presence of variable of calculative commitment because the significance level of variable of website features in presence of calculative commitment has significance level of 0.008 which is smaller than error level of 0.05. Further,

Table 6: Results of the fifth sub-hypothesis

Models	Dependent variable	Independent variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
First	Affective commitment	Website features	0.890	19.80	0.000
Second	Relationship marketing	Affective commitment	0.120	2.50	0.000
Third	Relationship marketing	Website features	0.380	4.60	0.000
		Affective commitment	-0.112	-1.64	0.101

Table 7: Results of the sixth sub-hypothesis

Model	Dependent variable	Independent variables	Coefficients	t-statistic	Sig.
First	Calculative commitment	Website features	0.770	16.003	0.000
Second	Relationship marketing	Calculative commitment	0.220	4.6000	0.000
Third	Relationship marketing	Website features	0.201	2.6000	0.008
		Calculative commitment	0.113	1.7900	0.073

coefficient of website feature is smaller than that of first model but the third model of calculative commitment is not significant and so mediator role is weak.

## CONCLUSION

The results proved that the website features and affective commitment had a direct significant relationship at level of 95%, i.e., with increasing the website's features, affective commitment increases. Also based on the results, website features and calculative commitment had a direct significant relationship at 95%, that is, by increasing the website's features, calculative commitment increases and also results proved that affective commitment and relationship marketing had a direct significant relationship at the level of 95% which means that with an increase in affective commitment, relationship marketing increases; results also proved that calculative commitment and relationship marketing had a direct significant relationship at the level of 95%, namely with increasing the calculative commitment pragmatic, relationship marketing increases. The results also proved that affective commitment had a weak mediator role between and relationship marketing and website features and calculative commitment had a weak mediator role between the website features and relationship marketing.

## SUGGESTIONS

**Practical suggestions:** Given the results of this research, since all the hypotheses on the relationship between website features and relationship marketing have been confirmed, so the following suggestions are made to directors of the companies:

- Creating club of loyal customers, so that customers can become members of the club and benefit from special service and privileges
- Selection of people with high social, technical and risk taking skills
- Allocation of budget to agencies to deliver gifts and reception of loyal customers

- Receiving customer feedback periodically on how to provide services and receive their suggestions
- Design and provision of special extra services to loyal customers
- Implementing customer complaints management system and rapid feedback to customers about problems that arise
- Since, the formation of positive experience in first purchase of company's products (tickets) is very important, then, customers who purchase the company's products for the first time should receive special attention. Therefore, it is recommended that the company try to provide customers with a positive experience in their mind in the communication with their customer. Introduction of customers to web site can be the first encounter of the customer and in this regard, a website with good features is very important. Taking into account all the priorities in the design of website and crating internet brand is a complex task, so organizations must in addition to the use of the customer's opinion use web site designers experienced in the field of website and scholars' opinions in the field of brand image and its features
- Since, website is an important means of communication and has an increasing value, In the future, it will be one of the most important communication channels with the customers; therefore, use of a favorable environment on the website along with the order and apparent beauty, good brand image with an appropriate advertisement, etc. all can create a positive and enjoyable experience of effective participation in the minds of customers

### Suggestions for future research:

- A research with the same title can be done in other provinces and the results should be used for comparison with the results of this study
- The same research can be done on other companies do research and the results should be used for comparison with the results of this study
- It is suggested that another research with a larger sample be conducted

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