DOES THE USE OF A VIRTUAL SPOKESPERSON INDUCE INITIAL TRUST IN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE WEBSITES?

Robert Cutshall, Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi, Corpus Christi, Texas, USA
Jaesung Sim, Mansfield University, Mansfield, Pennsylvania, USA

ABSTRACT

Online retail sales have grown tremendously over the past decade yet online sales only represent 5.5 percent of total retail sales in the US. Hence, there is room for growth as more companies join the ranks of online vendors. The trust that is important for offline sales is even more important for online sales; therefore, online retailers are constantly trying to determine what motivates website visitors to become buyers. It has been determined that trust is one of the motivating factors. This study examines the use of website social presence in the form of a virtual spokesperson (VSP) as a way to elicit initial trust in an electronic commerce website. The study examines two propositions: 1) the use of a VSP on an electronic commerce website will increase the trusting beliefs of a first time website visitor; and 2) the use of a VSP on an electronic commerce website will increase the trusting intentions of a first time website visitor. Empirical evidence is found that supports the two propositions that the use of a VSP will increase the website visitor's trusting beliefs and trusting intentions toward the website.

Keywords: *Initial Trust, Electronic Commerce, Social Presence*