

Tone in Text and the Effect on Trust and Choice Confidence in Online Fashion Shopping

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Abstract

Consumers' psychological demands for e-tail shopping have increased as websites have become one of the most dominant retail outlets for various fashion products. The lack of realistic social stimuli in virtual contexts (websites) has been a major limitation for many online shoppers. Prior research has focused on the viable role of technology to improve positive social factors in e-tailing; however, this study tests the role of tone in text in fashion e-tail sites on consumers' trust and choice confidence. We conducted a self-administered online survey with 309 individuals from the U.S.. The results indicated positive effects of casual tone in text-based content of a fashion e-tail site on trust and confidence. Trust also has a significant positive effect on confidence. Both trust and confidence improved purchase intention. Given the high price of employing an avatar or simulated salesperson online, using tone in text to increase positive social effect on shoppers can be a positive alternative when managers plan e-tail strategies contributing to consumers' positive shopping experience online. Discussions and study limitations are provided.

Key words: Tone in text, Trust, Choice confidence, Purchase intention

I. Introduction

『Online Shopping Trends 2013』 report showed that more than half (62%) of U.S. consumers shop online at least once a month, and only 1% say that they never shop online (Nanji, 2013). With increased number of consumers shopping online, online retailers face a vital challenge in enhancing consumers' shopping experience, as it tends to be more impersonal, anonymous and automated (Riegelsberger et al., 2003; van der Heijden, 2003; Wang & Emurian, 2005) compared to offline shopping. In a brick-and-mortar retail setting, a shopping experience involving positive emotion has been correlated with increased time spent and purchases at the store (Babin et al., 1994; Jones, 1999).

Furthermore, social aspects of shopping experiences have been a major contributor to positive emotions (Jones, 1999; McGrath & Otnes, 1995). However, an online store lacking human warmth and sociability (Gefen & Straub, 2003) is difficult to persuade consumers with most social cues for the customer-company communications being filtered out. It is also theorized that the casual tone in e-tail website will serve as social cues (Wang et al., 2007) to positively impact the consumers' levels of trust and confidence which in turn would enhance their attitudes towards online shopping.

Trust has been a strong influential factor affecting consumers purchase decisions both in offline and online environments (Winch & Joyce, 2006); however, in the online environment, building trust between consumers and the website rather than consumers and sales person has been a key issue. Research has

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explored ways to improve the levels of trust and confidence through virtual simulations, yet little research tested the viable social role of text-based web contents. Accordingly, the study tested the effect of tone in text on choice confidence and trust. Virtual communications have incorporated language in the form of written text, and writing style has become crucial features affecting individual attitudes. As the number of online users has increased, writing style has become a crucial feature affecting users' attitudes in virtual environments (Deacon, 2012; Wise et al., 2009). Although several articles have explained text-based communication between consumers and companies (Lipinski-Harten & Tafarodi, 2012), few academic studies have explored the social effect of text on e-tail websites, and no study has explored the casual tone effect on consumer behavior in e-tail contexts. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use the casual tone in text to increase positive consumer psychology such as trust and confidence which in turn will improve positive attitudes towards the featured items on the website.

II. Literature Review

1. Tone of Writing Increasing Trust

1) *Tone of Writing*

Tone impacts how individuals perceive and evaluate others in a communication context. Casual tone in text will increase positive social dynamics online, and this will enhance the shoppers' perception of trust towards the website itself. The rationale comes from the Computers As Social Actors (CASA) paradigm (Reeves & Nass, 1996; Wang et al., 2007). Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) researchers have employed the paradigm to explain individuals' psychological connection in mediated environments; that is, within a medium of no actual human being existing, it may give the user a sense of human warmth and sociality with proper provision of appropriate social cues (Steinfeld, 1986; Yoo & Alavi, 2001).

In an e-tail environment, interface features of websites have been strategically utilized to improve perceived social presence. Initially, introducing a sense

of human warmth has been incorporated mostly through website features such as e-mails (Gefen & Straub, 2003), virtual communities (Kumar & Benbasat, 2002), chats (Kumar & Benbasat, 2002), message boards (Cyr et al., 2007), and human web assistants (Yoon et al., 2008). However, these website features require actual human response. Meanwhile, website features that may instill a sense of social presence through imaginary interactions without another human presence include socially-rich picture content (Cyr et al., 2007; Gefen & Straub, 2003), socially-rich text content (Gefen & Straub, 2003), personalized greetings (Gefen & Straub, 2003; Kumar & Benbasat, 2002), human audio (Lombard & Ditton, 1997), human video (Kumar & Benbasat, 2002), talking-face displays (Sproull et al., 1996), and intelligent agents (Papadopoulou et al., 2001).

Yet still, text-based content has been most dominant in providing key product/service information on websites selling fashion items. Tone, a literary technique of composition, includes the attitudes toward the subject and audience implied in a literary work (Booth & Kelly, 2010). Conveyed by both the choice of words and the story's narrator, along with every adjective and adverb used, sentence structure, and the imagery in the writing (Booth & Kelly, 2010), research has illustrated a dichotomy of tone: casual versus formal (Allyn et al., 2012). Casual in text attempts to give the impression of a dialogue and uses informal expressions and contractions ("I'm" rather than "I am"), mostly relying on first or second person (I, we, you). Formal tone in text relies on effective organization, structure, and phrasing, rarely uses contractions, and relies on the third person (he, she, and they). Casual writing in e-tail setting is similar to an informal writing style in an email to a friend about new product that he/she would like to buy. Following example shows a casual tone in text: "Your child will be the greatest biking warrior on the block when he or she rides around the neighborhood wearing this awesome Mohawk helmet by Raskulls" ("Formal and informal", 2012). In contrast, the example of formal writing will be as follows: "A child can ride on a bicycle and have a helmet on. The child can use a helmet, such as this one by Raskulls" ("Formal and informal", 2012). The effect of casual tone of writing has been studied in ad-

vertising research that socially rich text can enhance liking and purchasing intention toward the product (Oliver et al., 1993). Positive effects of casual tone of writing have been demonstrated in the text-based content of various virtual surroundings such as digital learning or online gaming (Deacon, 2012; Wise et al., 2009).

Although the impact of tone of writing has not been studied in the context of e-tail environment, it is likely that a casual tone of writing in retail websites may improve website trust. Trust has been an important factor in marketing and retail environment involving social and economical transactions involving uncertainty and dependency. Trust in business research has demonstrated that it reduces perceived risk (Hoffman et al., 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000), reduces the need for extensive negotiations (Jarvenpaa et al., 2000), and increases commitment as well as long-term orientation (Hoffman et al., 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; Tan, 1999). Trust in business setting has been a prime motivator of behavior determining the effectiveness of business transactions (Zand, 1972). Lack of trust can be resulted in an overall discouragement of the willingness to take risks (Bell & Emory, 1971; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Trust is especially an important element that impacts one's willingness to engage in activities in e-tail environments where a person is exposed to risk. Research on trust in offline business setting has focused on building trust based on ongoing two-way interactions (Gefen, 2000). Trust in an e-tail environment is somewhat different since it is missing two-way interactions, as another type of trust building mechanism that doesn't require two-way interactions is applicable to the unique e-tail environment (Gefen, 2000).

Due to the limited interaction with actual social entities (e.g., salespeople) online, online shoppers feel a greater uncertainty in making purchases online. If the shoppers are exposed to website features reflecting rich social cues, they likely perceive a sense of personal connection and feel confident about a website. It is because a friendly tone in text is believed to reduce risk that the reader may perceive from the text's content (Gefen, 2000). According to Rice and Love (1987), communication using media of limited social

presence is perceived less trustful due to the inherent psychological distance which in turn negatively affects consumer trust towards the media content. Contrastingly, communication through media with rich social cues can lead to a more positive evaluation of the communication (Kehrwald, 2008). Website features reflecting rich social cues contribute to shoppers' increased trust and positive attitudes towards the site itself (Lee & Hahn, 2015). Vai and Sosulski (2011) suggested that, in online learning environment, the casual tone of writing creates a social text a friendly vibe and accordingly helped the readers build trust. Based on the literature, it can be suggested that using a casual tone in text of a retail website likely encourages favorable expectation and creates favorable environment where consumers can trust the vendor. Furthermore, trust is created within the context of a social environment and Gefen and Straub (2003) confirmed that social presence is an essential condition for developing trust. In line with this, 98 documented that consumers are likely to trust a virtual mall when they perceive a positive social presence at the mall. More trust can be developed in an environment that displays greater perceived socialness through a casual tone in text. Therefore, we posit the following:

H₁: The level of conversationality of tone in e-tail text increases website trust.

2) Tone of Writing to Choice Confidence

Casual tone of writing in text content will increase customers' confidence in their choices on the website. Choice confidence refers to a consumer's certainty regarding which brand/product to choose (Laroche et al., 1996). Choice confidence is one of the most important motivations through which a shopper is engaged in an effort-requiring purchase (Heitmann et al., 2007), and it is highly relevant to social atmospherics of the context (Park & Lessig, 1981). According to Festinger (1954), people have a natural tendency to voluntarily get engaged in social activities, for the purpose of ensuring their judgment and decisions. Individuals form their opinions based on others', and they were more influenced by the opinion of an incidental individual, such as a stranger or acquaintance, when

an object was psychologically close rather than distant (Ledgerwood et al., 2010). Moreover, consumers who are unfamiliar with the context are more likely to exhibit low degree of choice confidence. As a result, shoppers often report low choice confidence within e-tail context due to a lacking social presence. In a recent study by Lee and Hahn (2015), casual tone in text increases customers' perceived informational support, which captures a rational support perception in web-based retailing; in other words, casual tone in text can improve perceived quality of information provided on the site, and this increases consumers' rational judgment on the site such as confidence. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H₂: The level of conversationality of tone in e-tail text increases choice confidence.

2. Trust, Choice Confidence, and Purchase Intention

1) Trust to Choice Confidence

Increased trust on the website should lead to choice confidence. Scholars have shown that trust leads to rational online buying behavior (Chang & Chen, 2008). Confidence is generally described as a state of being certain either that a hypothesis or prediction is correct or that a chosen course of action is the best or most effective. In contexts of consumer behavior, choice confidence can be viewed as a cognitively satisfying situation, and refers to the extent to which a customer is certain about the choice in product or services that the choice will result in a good outcome (Fazio & Zanna, 1977). Confidence has been documented to be one of the most crucial attributes in marketing that can directly affect consumer satisfaction (Heitmann et al., 2007). Particularly in online shopping where cues to reduce risk perceptions are critically lacking, shopping at a website that he/she can trust makes him/her have confidence. Making purchases online is often associated with a greater risk perception compared to making transactions in a traditional store setting. It is because that online shopping provides limited product information and this may increase shoppers' concerns about potential financial loss or privacy/security is-

ues. Website trust can reduce the decision risk and increase confidence in shoppers (Papadopoulou, 2007; Shin & Shin, 2011). Research explored contextual factors increasing/decreasing choice confidence. The results found that factors increasing perceived risk negatively affect choice confidence. Based on the literature, we expect that consumers are likely to be confident in their purchase decisions when they trust the website. Positive relationships among trust, confidence, and credibility were found in previous studies (Ampofo et al., 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Website trust increases choice confidence.

2) Trust and Choice Confidence Increasing Purchase Intention

Trust to purchase intention. According to Hassainein and Head (2007), trust helps reduce ambiguity and vulnerability a consumer feels while engaging in online shopping. The relationships between trust and purchase intention have been examined frequently in previous online shopping research. Lui et al. (2005) examined that trust was an important factor to predict consumers' intention for online shopping. Kuan and Bock (2007) also confirmed the positive relationship between online trust and online purchase intention in a grocery shopping context. Therefore, based on previous studies, we propose that when consumers have a website trust, they are willing to purchase the products online. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

H₄: Website trust increases purchase intention.

Choice confidence to purchase intention. The importance of building confidence in online shopping has been much emphasized in literatures (Constantinides, 2004; Koufaris & Hampton-Sosa, 2002). Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2002) proved that if consumers have a stronger confidence in a company's web site, they may be more likely to make more purchases from that web site. If consumers have positive online viewing experience and feel confident about online transactions and shopping at online retailers, they more likely

have higher purchase intention for the online retailer web site (Constantinides, 2004). Therefore, we propose:

H₅: Choice confidence increases purchase intention.

III. Methods

1. Sample and Study Design

We conducted an online survey to test the hypotheses. For this, a fictitious website selling low-priced female accessories (average price per unit of \$10 to \$30). The fashion accessories were chosen for the site, because it had been chosen as the fashion category that can be most commonly shopped online in the group interviews with 12 undergraduates (50% female; aged 19 to 34). In developing the fictitious website for survey, we referred to site layouts and content design of extant websites for fashion accessories.

We intended to set an experimental context where participants were able to get exposed to various levels of perceived conversationality in text-based content. For this, we developed two websites as experimental conditions reflecting a distinct level of conversationality: low or high level conversationality in tone. We measured perceived conversationality at each of the conditions using three 7-point Likert items from extant studies (Allyn et al., 2012; Lee & Hahn, 2015) and used the measures in testing our hypotheses. The level of conversationality in tone was manipulated through product attributes and company information of the site: The website for low conversationality tone condition employed first person narratives and informal expressions in the website's product details, while the website for high conversationality tone condition used third person narratives and formal expressions. In specific, we followed the prior literatures on tone (Allyn et al., 2012; Lee & Hahn, 2015) and employed casual expressions and multiple contradictions for the company information and product attributes for the low conversationality in tone condition. In addition, those text information in the casual tone condition primarily relied on first- or second-person perspectives (e.g., "Thanks for checking our awesome website-the

official website of Fashion Accessories. For our awesome customers, we offer over 1,000 uniquely designed accessories, jewelry, bags, and wallets..."). Relatively, those text content (i.e., company information and product attributes) for the low conversationality in tone condition used minimum contradictions or casual expressions and mostly used a third-person perspective (e.g., "Thank you for visiting the official website of Fashion Accessories. The collection of Fashion Accessories includes more than 1,000 uniquely designed accessories, jewelry, bags, and wallets..."). Perceived level of conversationality was significantly different across two experimental conditions tone ($X_{low}=4.78 > X_{high}=2.44$, $p < .05$). The results yielded a satisfactory level of perceived realism, with no significant difference emerging between the two conditions ($X_{low}=5.63$, $X_{high}=5.98$, $p > .05$). In addition, no significant difference was indicated on the information conveyed by the text-based content across the two conditions ($p > .05$).

The sample for main study was acquired through a national market research company specializing in the U.S. marketplace. The company sent an invitation e-mail to 5,000 randomly chosen female consumers and asked them to participate in the study. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two different tone conditions. The participants were asked to browse the website to choose accessories for themselves. After making their selection, participants were guided to our online survey. In the span of two weeks, 321 completed responses were collected. We excluded 12 incomplete responses. The remaining 309 responses were used for the analysis ($n_{low}=152$ and $n_{high}=157$).

2. Measures

The research used self-reported surveys to gather the data for this study. The survey measures included perceived level of conversationality, website trust, choice confidence, and purchase intention (Table 1). The level of conversationality in tone was measured with the use of aforementioned three 7-point Likert-type items. Three items for choice confidence (Bruner II et al., 2001) and four items for trust were adopted

Table 1. Validity and reliability of measures

Construct/Indicators	Standardized Factor Loadings (λ)	t-value	Cronbach's α
Level of conversationality of tone in text			
The tone of writing on this website is casual.	.74	-	.81
The tone of writing on this website is conversational.	.93	16.07	
The tone of writing on this website is formal. (reverse coded)	.78	13.71	
Choice confidence			
It is impossible to be certain which product fits my preferences best. (reverse coded)	.95	-	.79
I felt confident when identifying one product that best matches my preferences.	.93	29.78	
I am convinced to find a product that best fulfils my needs.	.85	23.08	
Trust			
The website seems interested in more than just selling me goods and making a profit.	.83	-	.80
The website seems genuinely committed to my satisfaction.	.93	18.45	
I think some of the website's claims about its products and services are exaggerated. (reverse coded)	.73	14.26	
In my experience, the website is reliable. ^a	n/a	n/a	
Purchase intention			
I would be willing to buy products from this website for myself or my family.	.84	-	.91
I would recommend products from this website to other people.	.91	20.41	
I would be willing to buy products from this website for friends. ^a	n/a	n/a	
I would be willing to defend products from this website when others speak poorly about it.	.82	17.60	

a: The items were excluded during the data analysis due to low factor loadings.

from the previous research (Harris & Goode, 2004; Hess, 1995). Purchase intention was measured in using four items developed by Park et al. (2010).

IV. Results and Analysis

1. Preliminary Analysis

1) Sample Profile

Out of participants, 61.1% were female and 38.9% were male. The average age of the participants was 28.13 years (S.D.=12.12) with a range of 18-45 years. Out of the participants, 39.1% were high school graduate, 32.3% were college graduates, and 28.6% held a graduate degree or higher. Those who earned less than \$30,000 per year accounted for 19.1% of the sample, while those who earned between \$30,000 and \$49,999, between \$50,000 and \$69,999, between \$70,000 and \$99,999, and \$100,000 per year or more constituted 19.5%, 28.1%, 15.6%, and 17.7% of the

sample, respectively. Of the participants, 5.6% were Hispanic, 83.8% were Caucasian, 3.8% were Asian, and 6.8% were African-American.

2) Measurement Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to test measurement model of the data. The results showed the model fits, exceeding all the threshold levels suggested in the literature. The χ^2 value was significant ($\chi^2=104.39$, $df=48$, $\chi^2/df=2.18$, $p<.001$), but this was normal with the large sample size of more than 200 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Besides χ^2/df was smaller than threshold level suggested in the literature (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), indicating that the model is acceptable regardless the significant p value. The Good Fit Index (GFI) was .95 with an Adjusted Good Fit Index (AGFI) of .92, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of .98, Normed Fit Index (NFI) of .97, Relative Fit Index (RFI) of .95, and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) of .98. Overall, the fit statistics are all greater than or

equal to .90 for GFI, CFI, NFI, RFI, and IFI, thereby indicating a good model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Also, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value was .06, which was an acceptable number, given the range from .05 to .08 suggested by Browne and Cudeck (1993). These results revealed that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for the four model constructs (i.e., social presence, choice confidence, trust, and decision satisfaction) ranged from .60 to .72. These values all exceeded the threshold value of .50 recommended in the literature (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), establishing the convergent validities of the constructs. Overall, the CFA results indicate that the measurement model is valid and reliable and reveal a strong confirmation of the validities of the suggested constructs (Stewart, 1981). To verify the reliability of the measures, Cronbach's α coefficients are measured. The Cronbach's α of the three constructs (i.e., social presence, choice confidence, trust) ranged from .79 to .91, revealing acceptable levels of reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

2. Hypotheses Testing

1) Overall Model

A structural equation modeling was performed to test the hypotheses using a maximum likelihood estimation procedure with a covariance matrix as input. A latent model with 12 indicators and 4 latent (1 exogenous and 3 endogenous) variables was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships indicated in H₁ through H₅. The results of structural equation modeling obtained for the proposed conceptual model revealed a chi-square value of 102.35 ($df=48$; $p<.001^{***}$), GFI of .95, CFI of .98, NFI of .97, RFI of .96, and IFI

of .98. The fit statistics all exceeded the threshold level of .90 for GFI, NFI, RFI, CFI, and IFI suggested in the literature and revealed a good model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The RMSEA value was .06, which was an acceptable number (Hair et al., 1998). Descriptive statistics and correlations between constructs for the model are presented in <Table 2>.

2) Testing Effect of Tone on Trust and Confidence

In the results of SEM, the proposed positive relationship between the level of conversationality in tone and website trust was statistically significant ($\beta=.62$, $t=10.13$, $p<.001^{***}$), providing support for H₁. Indeed, the suggested positive relationship between the level of conversationality and choice confidence was significant ($\beta=.56$, $t=7.28$, $p<.001^{***}$). This supports H₂.

3) Testing Effect of Trust on Confidence

In H₃, we hypothesized that perceived website trust should increase choice confidence. In results of SEM, we found that trust had a significant positive effect on choice confidence (H₃: $\beta=.25$, $t=3.53$, $p<.001^{***}$). Therefore, our H₃ was supported.

4) Testing Effect of Trust and Confidence on Purchase Intention

With H₄, we expected that website trust will increase purchase intention. In the results, a significant effect of trust on purchase intention was found (H₄: $\beta=.39$, $t=6.33$, $p<.001^{***}$). In addition, we hypothesized a positive effect of choice confidence on purchase intention with H₅. The results showed a significant positive impact of choice confidence on purchase intention (H₅: $\beta=.52$, $t=8.29$, $p<.001^{***}$). In total, both

Table 2. Construct means, standard deviations, and correlations

(n=309)

Model Constructs	Mean	S.D.	Correlations			
			1	2	3	4
1. Level of conversational tone in text	3.45	1.32	.60 ^a			
2. Trust	3.67	1.24	.50 ^b	.67		
3. Confidence	4.14	1.12	.47	.40	.72	
4. Purchase intention	4.15	1.31	.68	.49	.62	.64

a: The diagonal matrix reflects values of average variance extracted (AVE).

b: All is significant at $p<.001$.

H4 and H5 were supported. Squared multiple correlations for trust, choice confidence, and purchase intention are .42, .58, and .46, respectively. Summary of hypotheses testing appears in <Fig. 1>.

V. Discussion and Implications

The analysis confirmed a strong influence of the tone in text in e-tail fashion contexts on the experience of choice confidence and trust - the two key psychological factors in e-tailing. The proven causal relationships amongst the variables are consistent with the extant literature of mediated communication (Tannis & Postmes, 2003) and of the web retail environment (Bélisle & Bodur, 2010; Wakefield et al., 2011), which claimed the significant potential social context cues in alleviating lack of social dynamics in a virtual context. In elaborating the extant studies, our results demonstrate the independent effect of specific type of the tone in text on customers. Moreover, the results expand the extant findings mostly emphasizing the web retail dynamics of visual contents in web retail context, as it shows positive web retail social dynamics is actually available from the subtle communication cues in text-based contents of web retail sites.

As text is the most common type of communication

in fashion e-tailing, our results may provide an initial empirical support for the casual tone of e-tail text effect on customers. Whereas trust is more of an affective reaction to social interactions, choice confidence reflects a rational judgment regarding the communication content (Gefen & Straub, 2003; Harris & Goode, 2004). Our results supports the strong and significant roles of both the trust and choice confidence in the dynamics of tone in text-based content on purchase intentions. Based on this, it can be suggested that tone in text within the context of fashion e-tailing can be effective in evoking positive emotional as well as rational responses from the online shoppers. Furthermore, between trust and choice confidence, choice confidence is found to be a stronger antecedent to purchase intention (compared to trust); this crucial impact of rational (versus emotional) judgments online is somewhat consistent with the suggestion of some prior research, which reported a dominant influence of shoppers' rational evaluations on decision-makings in virtual shopping (Lee & Hahn, 2015; Wang et al., 2007). Meanwhile, this strong rational influence of social dynamics of e-tail contexts would be due to the weak and ephemeral type of social dynamics occurring from conversationality in tone (Taylor et al., 2004).

This research has implications for commercial web-

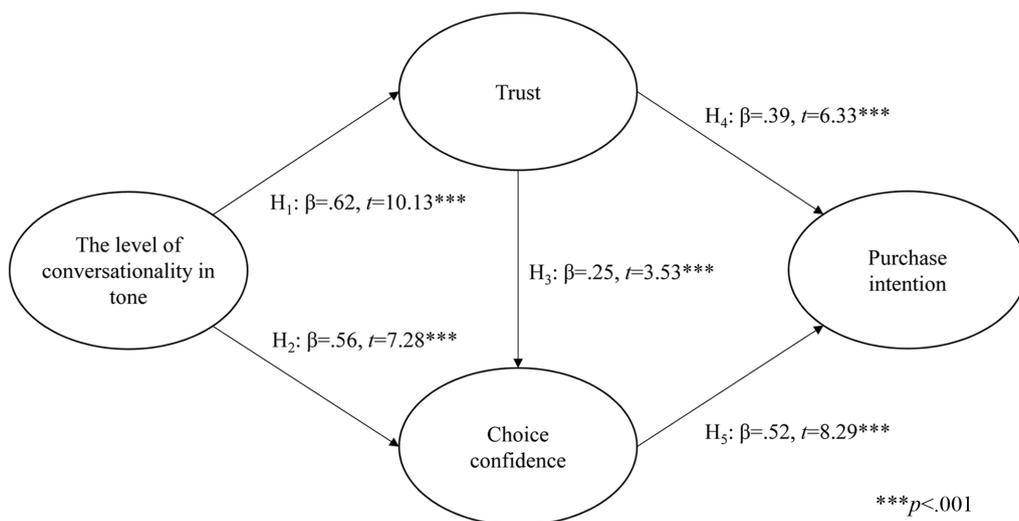


Fig. 1. Research framework and hypotheses.

site design, online advertising, market segmentation, and internet marketing strategies. In applying our results on positive effects of tone to fashion e-tailing, managers should explore a more active way of socially utilizing text content in their websites. So far enhancing social vibe in e-tailing has been most related to various advanced technology or additional contents (often requiring high investments) like avatar or embodied social entity on the site. Company's investment in text-based content is cost effective and a worthwhile effort to retain customers. The results demand that web retailers should pay more attention to small signals in websites, such as time-related information and expressions used in product/company descriptions and/or customer reviews, as they may have a critical impact on the customers' evaluation and shopping value. It is not always the technologies that advance the perceived quality of a web retail site's environment; rather, there exists a wide range of possibilities to improve the e-shopping experience by managing simple, common text-type information at websites. The features for company representatives, warm greetings, portraits of smiling faces, fresh and up-to-date product information, active postings on customer reviews, and quick responses to inquiries should be developed and incorporated into e-commerce websites.

The theoretical and methodological limitations of this study merit discussion to provide direction for future research. First, the model developed in this study can be extended with additional variables related to personal and/or context-based characteristics, such as the individual's category knowledge, the website's design factors in e-commerce (e.g., satisfaction, trust, commitment, word-of-mouth) or with other moderating variables, such as product involvement and company reputation (Hoffman & Novak, 2009). Lastly, future research should test the conceptual framework by considering the varying effect of individual characteristics in the dynamics. Some consumers may think the interference or awareness of someone's social presence during shopping may be annoying or distracting. For instance, the casual tone in text may not be positively effective when consumers do not appreciate social presence in e-tail contexts.

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