

Important e-tail aspects influencing consumer decision-making process: A conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

India has witnessed a change in the way consumers shop with the advent of Internet enabled service providers. Even though the share of online retail is a minuscule percentage of the total retail sales in the present moment in India, India is set to become the world's second largest online shopping market by 2034. The market is already witnessing a lot of consolidation with big domestic and foreign players merging with or taking over small Indian e-tailers. Given the current cluttered nature of the Indian e-commerce landscape Indian etailers to pay a lot of attention into ensuring consumer loyalty and retention. In a scenario where the Products dealt in by most of the etailers are similar in nature or belong to the same brand retailers have to innovate in order to win over consumers. This paper attempts to understand the important and crucial aspects on the side of the e-tailer that plays a major influencing role in the consumer decision making. The author attempts to present a conceptual model showcasing the influence of certain website elements on consumer decision making.

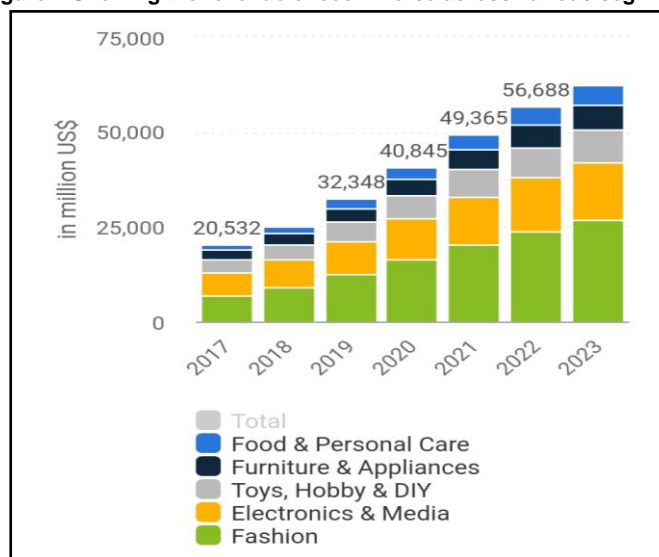
1. Introduction

The advancement in technology along with the growth in the internet has given a boost to the retail sector across the world. The factors that chiefly influenced the growth of internet in India are: Increased availability of bandwidth, availability of smart phones at cheaper cost, cheaper data plan and various government initiatives such as digital India. The growth in internet usage is not only restricted to the urban region, in fact it's much higher in rural area which accounts for 35% when compare to 7% in urban regions. According to world atlas

(2019) India has second higher number of internet user after China with 699 million users connected.

According to a report by Statista (2019), India's revenue in ecommerce market amounts to US\$32348 million with growth of 27.8% in 2019. The revenue is expected to grow at the rate of 17.8%, amounting to US\$62284 by the year 2023. Further the report also states that currently (2019) the user penetration in India is 37.5%, which is anticipated to reach 46.2% by the year 2023.

Figure1- Showing the revenue of ecommerce across various segments



Given the positive sign both on the demand and supply side, India is set to become the world's second largest e-commerce market and the fastest growing e-commerce market in the world. The growing Indian market has attracted a lot of foreign giants and also he secured huge amounts of

investments in the Indian e-commerce landscape. The market even though dominated by giants like Flipkart and Amazon has been witnessing to the emergence of new retailers in in the categories of products as well as service delivery. Service providers like UrbanClap and rent to Mojo have been attracting

investments looking at the growing consumer preference to procure services online. Zomato and Swiggy has gone on an offensive to capture the food delivery segment. As there is a clear difference in the consumer shopping environment between online and off-line the website plays a critical role in ensuring not only trial and purchase but also consumer retention and loyalty. The website characteristics can ensure an environment of trust and security which plays a prime role in Indian consumer mind-sets.

2. Objectives

This present study has the following objectives:

- To understand the characteristics of attributes of the e-tailer that play a critical role in consumer decision-making
- To look at in what aspects the e-tailer attributes impact the consumer mind
- To provide a conceptual model highlighting the relationship between the consumer decision-making process and e-tailer attributes

3. Methodology

The paper is developed through exploration of relevant existing literature on online brands and e-marketing mix. Focus group studies and personal interviews conducted with academicians and experts in the field of branding have helped to identify the factors in an Indian context.

4. Important E-Tail aspects related to Website

The following paragraphs deal with the important attributes of e-tailer that play a critical role in ensuring consumer loyalty and retention and helps the consumer in the decision making process. These attributes may often play a major role in differentiating one e-tailer from another which becomes an important measure in a crowded market place with all e-tailers offering similar product and sales offers.

Website Content

Marketing mix variable in context of online business related to information has been explored by many authors who have emphasized upon the availability, relevance and transparency of information (Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011; Gao & Koufaris, 2006; Leelakulthani & Hongcharu, 2010). Authentic and current form of information has been presented as an essential element for online service quality, online satisfaction (Chung & Shin, 2010a; Kabadayi & Gupta, 2011; Khare, 2010; Liu, He, Gao, & Xie, 2008; Rod, Ashill, Shao, & Carruthers, 2009; Wigand, 2012) and e-loyalty (Hyun et al., 2006). Also, the presence of a current, relevant and accurate product and brand related information available on the website helps in product comparisons thereby leading to trust. (Croome et al., 2010). Many authors have reported that high-quality information has a positive effect on online purchase intention (Bigné-Alcañiz, Ruiz-Mafé, Aldás-Manzano, & Sanz-Blas, 2008) as well. E-marketing mix variables related to information available on the website can be measured in terms of accuracy, searchability, wholeness and appropriateness, being update and being understandable.

Website characteristics

Technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1985) propounds that the design features of a website influence the attitude of a customer towards website usage, which is a function of its perceived usefulness and perceived ease-of-use. The 'ease of use' attribute as suggested by Davis (1985) finds repeated mention in the e-marketing mix variables literature (Bansal, McDougall, Dikolli, & Sedatole, 2004; Chiou & Pan, 2009; Christodoulides, De Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, & Abimbola, 2006; Ganguly, Dash, & Cyr, 2009; Liu et al., 2008; Ribbink, Riel, Liljander, & Streukens, 2004; Rod et al., 2009; Silva & Alwi, 2008a). Website characteristics can be divided into three features namely website format, website speed and website navigation. Website format deals with the layout and color scheme of a website. 'website speed' refers to the uploading and loading speed of a website. Website navigation has to do with the overall browsing ordeal of a consumer while navigating a product catalog or transaction process. User-friendly websites are easy to search and is endowed with logical structures (Fan & Su, 2011; Szymanski & Hise, 2000). These above-discussed characteristics help in making a website efficient and reliable.

Website's security & Website privacy

To enhance the level of trust, website variables related to security and privacy play a significant role (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003). Security in terms of financial details of credit cards/debit cards/bank account etc. and privacy in terms of personal details are of crucial concern for customers when they initiate a transaction. As these two equalities of an e-tailer can impact the purchase intention (Salisbury, Pearson, Pearson, & Miller, 2003) therefore their effect with respect to online satisfaction, e-loyalty, online trust, online service quality, online brand image and online Brand Equity has also been researched. While a few researchers have called it as financial risk (J. Sinha, 2010), others have preferred measuring both security risk of credit card information as well as privacy of personal information (Carlson & O'Cass, 2010; Christodoulides et al., 2006; Chung & Shin, 2010a; Ganguly et al., 2009; H.-Y. Ha, 2004a; Julie, 2002; Liu et al., 2008; Rod et al., 2009; Sheng & Liu, 2010; Silva & Alwi, 2008a; Szymanski & Hise, 2000; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003). The more one is familiar with the website, the more risk-free his/her attitude while making a transaction online (J.-H. Kim, Kim, & Kandampully, 2009).

Customization

This e-tailer attribute refers to the customization of the data obtainable on the web site also as for the product (Christodoulides, 2009). Customization is completed in terms of any purchase recommendation, customized product and personalization of promotional material as per feelings and desires of a singular client (S. S. Srinivasan et al., 2002). Besides serving or catering to the needs (Kabadayi & Gupta, 2011), if individual attention is provided, it may result in the perception of excellent service quality (Wigand, 2012). Customization may be carried on at the extent of planning customized web site (Rose, Clark, Samouel, & Hair, 2012). A general understanding of the website variable "customization or personalization" is that of availability of customized product that cater to specific desires of consumers. There is the presence of some experimental proof that the extent of

satisfaction will increase if customers are allowed to offer their selection of attributes of the merchandise while choosing a product (Huffman & Kahn, 1998).

Responsiveness

According to the SERVQUAL model "Responsiveness" is defined as the disposition to assist customers and supply prompt services (A. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). E-tailer attribute associated with responsiveness has been used as an element for developing a multi-item scale for measurement of service quality of on-line companies. Within the E-S-Qual scale, 'responsiveness' is defined as the fast response and also the ability to obtain assistance if there's a problem or question (A. Parasuraman, 2005). Yoo and Donthu outlined 'responsiveness' as the speed at which the the backend website processes manifest itself and interactive responsiveness to the client request by the client relationship officers (BoongheeYoo&Donthu, 2001a). Commitment towards addressing consumers' issues, concerns and complaints is vital for client satisfaction (Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011; Bansal et al., 2004; Khare, 2010; Liu et al., 2008; Ribbink et al., 2004) as well as loyalty (Anderson & Swaminathan, 2011; Otim& Grover, 2006). A number of authors have studied responsiveness in terms of assistance and care provided by the websites to their customers in terms of pre-and-post purchase activities (S. S. Srinivasan et al., 2002). Responsiveness has additionally been featured as a very important variable whereas assessing on-line brand image (Christodoulides&Chernatony, 2004; timberland & Alwi, 2008a).

Order fulfillment and product delivery

E-tailer attribute associated with delivery and responsiveness have an effect on satisfaction and e-loyalty and are a component of the post-purchase behavior of an internet shopper (Croome et al., 2010; Otim& Grover, 2006). E-tailer attribute associated with delivery or order fulfillment are enclosed within the studies related to web site performance (Carlson & O'Cass, 2011). E-tailer attribute 'delivery' has been studied separately in only a few studies. Delivery of merchandise includes timely delivery of the proper product at a convenient time (Julie, 2002). Delivery of product additionally implies that the merchandise ought to reach the client undamaged (Fan & Su, 2011). As timely delivery of a product has become obligatory, the most focus is on delivering the proper product (Z. C. Lee, 2010). Certain authors have additionally incorporated the packaging facet of the merchandise within the delivery method (Liu et al., 2008)

Website Interactivity

In terms of shopper interactivity, the uncertainty concerning the net is inevitable (Hoffman, Novak, & Chatterjee, 2000). Researchers have used interactivity feature as associate antecedent to numerous major marketing variables however with very little uniformity. In the year 2011, Fan & Su thought of interactivity like the way of giving feedback and as a point of contact (Fan & Su, 2011). Lawson-body and Willoughby

associated it with security and safe setting for transactions (Lawson-Body, Assion; Willoughby, Lori; Logossah, 2010). Another study characterised interactive feature of a web site as being dynamic and interesting in nature (S. S. Srinivasan et al., 2002).

5. Consumer Decision Making in Online Context

Online shopper behaviour is completely different from the well-studied established behaviour (Van den Poel and Buckinx, 2005; Bucklin et al., 2002). on-line purchase decision process will be characterised as being to some extent adhoc, involving both formal and informal sub-processes, furthermore as being unstructured and extremely dynamic. on-line purchase deciding is unstructured as shoppers don't follow a predefined set procedure. "Internet selection behavior is dynamic and consists of an evolving series of interconnected selections, where each shopper and trafficker will play a job in shaping the context of sequent selection events relying upon the result.

The nature of on-line purchase activities makes the web purchase method completely different from the normal one. the net affects all stages of the purchase process followed by shoppers (McGaughey and Mason, 1998). for example, finding out alternatives, gathering needed data, concurrent analysis of various retailers, providing personal data and therefore the payment method are all completely different within the on-line setting. In alternative words, the net has modified shopper behaviour by providing shoppers numerous forms of convenience to go looking for data, assess completely different choices, and create an acquisition (Moon, 2004; Constantinides, 2004). "This setting may have a profound result on how customers construct their decision-making processes to adjust suitably to the new decision-making environment" (Xia and Sudharshan, 2002). the net additionally permits for cross-channel purchases. this suggests that completely different stages of the acquisition method would possibly occur via the net channel or physical outlets (Choudhury and Karahanna, 2008). one in all the most underlying problems with on-line purchase selections addressed in previous studies is data overload. the number and kind of knowledge out there on-line is completely different (Bakos, 1997). data overload has been found to be prim ereason for an alteration in behaviour. it's associated with the finite rationality theory. the actual fact that buyers get full by massive amounts of knowledge on merchandise has been well-tried previously (Jacoby, 1984; Malhotra, 1982; 1984). it's been verified that a restricted variety of alternatives and attributes will be processed by people before being full of data overload. Data overload could be a "multiplicative function of the number of product attributes and different data out there for one product" (Mick, Broniarczyk and Haidt, 2004). It ends up in simplification of processes that reciprocally reduce sthe standard of the choice. It additionally will increase confusion and lowers the choice satisfaction (Mick, Broniarczyk and Haidt, 2004). As there's an enormous quantity of knowledge out there on the

net, shoppers are unable to judge all the alternatives comprehensive before creating a selection. Therefore, Häubl and Trifts (2000) have recommended that buyers use a two-stage method. within the initial stage they appear at a large variety of merchandise however not in too much depth, and choose a group of alternatives that appears to be more brilliant. throughout the

second stage, they measure this set in additional depth and perform intensive comparisons based on their criteria to create the acquisition call. This two-staged strategy is that the most common approach (Payne, 1976; Bettman, Luce and Payne, 1998). it's aligned with the studies of countervailing and non-compensatory methods mentioned above.

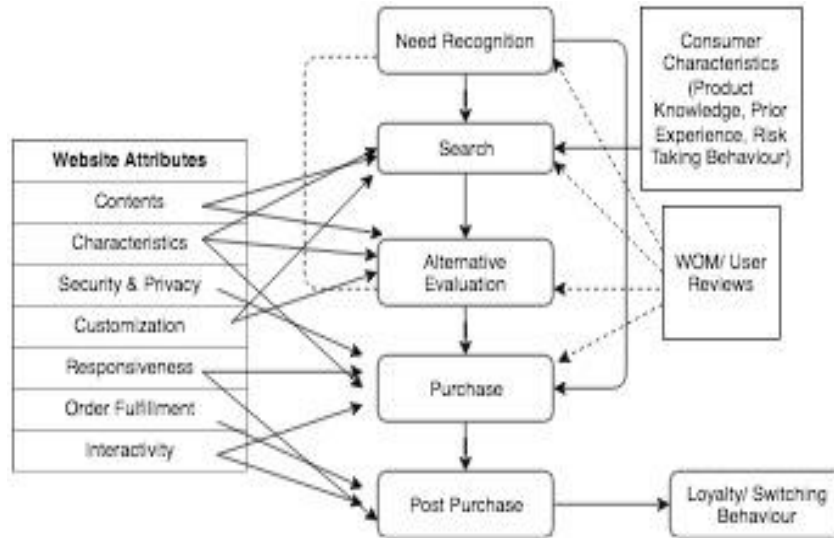


Figure 2: The Conceptual Model

Even though the consumer decision-making process in the context of online purchase may not be sequential step by step process this model uses the traditional decision-making model. The search process and the steps taken up by individual consumers are influenced by the consumers own characteristics in terms of experience with the website or the product category knowledge about the product and he's risk-taking capacity. In case of consumers where some sort of loyalty to words the brand or product exists the consumer directly goes to the purchase stage skipping the search and evolution stage after he recognises the need to purchase the brand or product. User reviews online shopping websites have been seen to influence search decisions and also during the evolution or comparison stage and has a great impact on the final purchase decision. The reviews are also at times trigger a new need thereby starting altogether new decision making process.

The contents displayed on the website in terms of product related and use it related information influence is the search and evolution stage of decision making. websites where relevant and accurate information are displayed has a positive impact on the consumer is mind thereby enticing website loyalty. Consumers prefer websites that are easy to navigate and loads faster compared to others. The website speed greatly impacts the search evolution and purchase stages of decision making. One of the prime different of online shopping is the doubt over security of personal and financial information. Often consumers hesitate to shop online due to their fear of disinformation is leaking to a third party and its miss use. There for a website that ensures safety of personal information and the financial data ends up winning over consumers and their loyalty and retention. one of the problem of Internet is overload of information the same can be said about product

information displayed on the website e-tailers can look to customise advertise men's and productivity information is based on consumers' previous search data which will help consumers have a better shopping experience. Personalisation of information and product related recommendations help consumers both in the search as well as evolution stage thereby ensuring a personalised and unique purchase experience. Responsive websites that handle customer complaints and solve their queries in a fast manner helps consumers make better purchase decisions. Queries can be both during the purchase as well as after product delivery and hence a retailer should pay attention in solving the queries or addressing the consumer issues otherwise the consumer may switch to a competing website. Timely and accurate delivery of the product but by the consumer is of prime importance in today's cluttered market place. Often it has been seen consumers not being happy with delay in project delivery or inaccurate product being delivered. Proper packaging of products to ensure damage free delivery is also a crucial factor in winning consumers loyalty. An interactive engaging website that makes the shopping experience fun and games timely and proper feedback and the sense of security plays a crucial role in consumer satisfaction and retention.

6. Conclusion

The growth of Internet has greatly influenced the way consumers purchase. Today's consumers are willing to take the risk of shopping in an environment which is distinctly different from the traditional physical shopping environment they are used to. India has witnessed the emergence of both national and international brands making the e-commerce landscape a cluttered market place with everyone offering almost similar products and brands. In this scenario it becomes even more difficult to have a loyal base of customers

as brands lack a distinct identity. Proper attention needs to be paid to the website which can be regarded as the environment in which consumers make their purchase decisions. Every element of the website plays a critical or crucial role in ensuring consumer satisfaction. Brands that fail to understand

the influence and the importance of these elements will end up losing customer trust and faith and see their customer base move onto similar competitive offerings that ensure a fun safe interactive shopping environment.

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