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EXPLORING ONLINE SATISFACTION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUNG MALE BUYERS OF APPAREL PRODUCTS

Case
Study

Keywords

Online satisfaction,
Products quality,
Price,
Online loyalty

JEL Classification

M30

Abstract

Having loyal customers is an important asset of any company activating in the online environment. An important determinant of online loyalty is customers' satisfaction. The present research has the purpose to investigate the factors influencing online satisfaction of male buyers who purchase apparel products from a specific website. The objectives of this research are: (1) To measure the satisfaction of male buyers, comparing with the satisfaction of women buyers, regarding the experience of apparel products acquisition; (2) To identify the important factors influencing male buyers' online satisfaction; (3) To identify the direct impact of factors influencing satisfaction on buyers' online loyalty. The results suggested that men are less satisfied by the information describing the products and the indications on delivery, payment and ordering, comparing with women. The most important factors that predict male buyers' satisfaction on purchasing apparel products are products quality, interaction and prices. Price and website design are significant important factors for predicting men 'loyalty to a specific website.

INTRODUCTION

The online environment became a space where more and more customers prefer to go shopping for products or services. The volume of sales through online marketing is constantly increasing and the same trend is available for the numbers of online stores. The companies are aware about the importance of being present on the Internet, through their selling or presentation websites.

In the context of a highly competitive market, the companies expand their strategies for attracting and retaining customers on the Internet. Nowadays, understanding the motives the clients have for choosing a preferred website to buy the products they need and the factors affecting their level of satisfaction and loyalty are important conditions for the success of the businesses (Vilares and Coelho, 2003).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer loyalty has a great importance on profitability levels of the companies, specially that studies in customer relationship management field concluded that attracting new clients is more expensive than retaining the existing ones (Dick and Basu, 1994). The researchers highlighted the importance of maintaining loyal clients as a competitive advantage, suggesting the development of a secure, collaborative relationship between the parties involved in the transaction (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Online loyalty means that clients "say nice words about the company, express their preference for the company, buy more, are willing to pay a higher price and their behaviour suggests that they are linked to the company" (Zeithaml et al., 1996, p.34). Also, online loyalty is the engagement to repeat visiting a website with the intention to buy products or services from there (Cyr, 2008; Flavián et al., 2006).

The factors that influence loyalty are dynamics, constantly changing and developing (Johnson et al., 2006) but satisfaction remains one of the most important of them (Sanchez-Garcia et al., 2012; Lin

and Lekhawipat, 2014), although a high level of satisfaction doesn't necessarily mean repeating the purchase (Pavlou, 2003).

Online satisfaction means that the client is content "regarding a previous experience of buying from an online company" (Anderson and Srinivasan, 2003, p. 125).

There is plenty research on the factors affecting online satisfaction. Among the most frequent factors that were identified are the following: *security* (Then and DeLong, 1999; Kwon and Lee, 2003; Yingjiao and Paulins, 2005; Khalifa and Liu, 2007), *convenience* (Then and DeLong, 1999; Khalifa and Liu, 2007), *post-service quality* (Then and DeLong, 1999; Ribbink et al., 2004), *website design* (Ribbink et al., 2004), *personalization* (Ribbink et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2006) and *interaction* (Ribbink et al., 2004).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The present research has the purpose to investigate the factors influencing online satisfaction of male buyers who purchase apparel products from a specific website.

The objectives of this research are:

- (1) To measure the satisfaction of male buyers, comparing with the satisfaction of women buyers, regarding the experience of apparel products acquisition;
- (2) To identify the important factors influencing male buyers' online satisfaction;
- (3) To identify the direct impact of factors influencing satisfaction on male buyers' online loyalty;

METHODOLOGY

As a research methodology, we conducted a quantitative survey based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in a previous research (Bobalca, 2015) in which we identified the factors affecting customers online satisfaction, for apparel products that are bought from a specific website. These factors are:

- a. *Price* – this factor includes buyers' preferences for accessible prices for apparel products, their need to compare the offers available on the Internet for a type of products or the importance that the site they choose to have better prices than competition.
- b. *Information* – this factor reflects the importance of easily accessing clear information on delivery, payment and ordering.
- c. *Interaction* - in this category, the items refers to the importance of the relation between clients and sales representatives: quick answers to buyers'

questions, personalized messages and an effective communication.

d. *Site design* - buyers appreciate a website that attractively presents the products and has an appealing design, with structured information, highlighting the important aspects.

e. *Products quality* – this factor includes the items referring to products, which should be corresponding to the descriptions on the web pages and to clients' expectations.

The scale used for measuring general satisfaction has four items generated from the exploratory previous research: *Generally, I am very satisfied on this website* (Kim et al.,2009); *I am very satisfied on the idea of buying from this website* (Chiu et al., 2012); *I am very satisfied on shopping experience on this website* (Kim et al.,2009; Chiu et al., 2012); *I am very satisfied on the products I have ordered from this website* (Kim et al.,2009; Chung, Shin, 2010; Limbu et al., 2011).

The scale used for measuring online loyalty has five items generated in a previous documentary and qualitative research (Bobalca, 2015): *I intend to buy from this website in the future* (Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006, p. 336), *I intend to recommend this website to my friends* (Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006, p. 336; Söderlund, 2006, p.79), *This website is my first choice when I want to buy* (Bobalca, 2015), *I recommend this site to people who ask for my advice* (Chung and Shin, 2010; Limbu et al, 2011), *I will buy more products in the future, from this website* (Limbu et al, 2011).

The items for measuring factors affecting online satisfaction and the constructs of online loyalty and satisfaction were scaled on a seven point Likert scale, from 1 (Totally Disagree) to 7 (Totally Agree).

The data were analysed with SPSS 20. For comparing the level of satisfaction of male online buyers, comparing to female online buyers, Independent Sample Test was conducted. For identifying the important factors affecting online satisfaction and online loyalty, Regression Analysis was run.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The sample consists in students who usually purchase apparel products from a preferred website, for least two years. The investigated sample is represented by 170 women and 160 men who bought apparel products at least two times in the last six months. They are students at the University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. The data was collected during a previous research (Bobalca, 2015).

We establish the sample size for the present data analysis following Green's rule-of-thumb (1991). According to this rule, in order to conduct a regression analysis, the sample should be with 140 subjects more than the number of the independents variables.

The students are very active online buyers (Cai and Jun, 2003) and represents a subject category often investigated in other studies on the same topic (Then and DeLong,1999; Yingjiao and Paulins, 2005).

RESEARCH RESULTS

Objective 1. Measuring the satisfaction of male buyers, comparing with the satisfaction of women buyers, regarding the experience of apparel products acquisition;

Regarding factors affecting online satisfaction, men are more satisfied on the prices, the interaction with the sales representative and the quality of the products, while women appreciate more the quick access to information and the website design. The general level of satisfaction is the same, both for men and women buyers of apparel products. As Table 1 indicates, men tend to perceive themselves as being more loyal, with a mean of 5.74, comparing to women (with a mean of 5.69).

In order to test if there are any significant differences between men and women regarding their level of satisfaction (measured on each factor affecting online satisfaction and on general level of satisfaction), we used Independent Samples Test. Table 2 presents the results of this test, for all five factors defining satisfaction.

As for *Price*, Table no. 2 indicates a Sig value of 0.909 (> 0.05) for the F test ($F= 0.013$), indicating that the variances are assumed to be equal. The t value is 0.347 and the Sig value is 0.729 (> 0.05). Based on these indicators, we conclude that there is not a significant difference between the level of price satisfaction of men and women, when they buy apparel products from their favorite websites.

Regarding *Information*, the Sig value of 0.023 (< 0.05) for the F test ($F= 5.239$) indicates that variances are not assumed to be equal. The t value is 2.61 and the Sig value is 0.011 (< 0.05), suggesting that there are significant differences between the level of information satisfaction of the two groups: women are more satisfied on the information presented on the websites and on quick access to information, comparing with men.

For *Interaction*, Table no. 2 indicates a Sig value of 0.662 (> 0.05) for the F test ($F= 0.191$), indicating that the variances are assumed to be equal. The t value is 0.385 and the Sig value is 0.7 (> 0.05). These indicators suggest that there are no significant differences between the level of

interaction satisfaction of men and women, when they buy apparel products from their favorite websites.

As for *website design*, the Sig value is 0.1 (>0.05) for F test (F= 2.67). Based on these results, no significant differences were identified between the levels of satisfaction regarding website design, on the two groups. The same conclusion can be drawn on *Product quality* factor. The t value is 0.98 and the Sig value is 0.32 (> 0.05).

Also, the indicators presented in Table 3 suggest that there are no significant differences between men and women on these *general satisfaction* (t=0.05, sig= 0.96> 0.05) and *online loyalty* (t=0.303, sig= 0.76>0.05).

Objective 2. Identify the important factors influencing male buyers' online satisfaction;

For measuring the importance of the factors in predicting satisfaction, we used linear regression with SPSS. 20. The dependent variable is online satisfaction, while the independents variables are: *Price, Information, Interaction, Site design* and *Quality of products*. The results of Regression Analysis are presented in Table no. 4.

The values of multiple correlation coefficient (R = 0.889) and coefficient of multiple determination (R Square = 0.790) suggest that the model with five independent variables has a high power of prediction and explains 79% of the total variance of Online satisfaction. For factor 1, 3 and 5, the values of Sig are smaller than 0.05 and the values of t-test are higher than 2. This result suggests that *Price, Interaction* and *Quality of products* are significant important factors for predicting men 'satisfaction on buying experience of purchasing apparel products.

The relation between the dependent and independent variables from the model is described with the regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Online satisfaction} = & (-0.436) + 0.175X (\text{Price}) \\ & + 0.279 X (\text{Interaction}) + 0.399 X (\text{Quality of} \\ & \text{products}) \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

According to the regression equation (1), a change with one unit on the perception of a website prices will lead to a change with 0.175 units on male customers' satisfaction. Also, changing male buyers' perceptions on interaction quality with one unit generates a change with 0.279 units on male customers' satisfaction. A change with one unit on the perception of products quality will lead to a change with 0.399 units on male customers' satisfaction.

Objective 3. Identify the direct impact of factors influencing satisfaction on buyers' online loyalty;

For identifying the impact of factors influencing satisfaction on buyers' online loyalty, we conducted another Regression analysis and its results are presented in Table no. 5. The dependent variable is online loyalty and the independents variables are: *Price, Information, Interaction, Site design* and *Quality of products*. The values of multiple correlation coefficient (R = 0.670) and coefficient of multiple determination (R Square = 0.456) suggest that the model with five independent variables has a good power of prediction and explains 45.6% of the total variance of Online loyalty. For factor 1 and 4, the values of Sig are smaller than 0.05 and the values of t-test are higher than 2. This result suggests that *Price* and *Website design* are significant important factors for predicting men 'loyalty to a specific website, when they purchase apparel products.

The relation between the dependent and independent variables from the model is described with the following regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Online loyalty} = & 0.951 + 0.274 X (\text{Price}) + 0.329 X \\ & (\text{Website design}) \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

According to the regression equation (2), a change with one unit on the perception of a website prices will lead to a change with 0.274 units on male customers' loyalty. Also, changing male buyers' perceptions on website design with one unit generates a change with 0.329 units on male customers' loyalty.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the factors influencing online satisfaction of male buyers who purchase apparel products from a specific website. The first research objective refers to compare the level of men and women satisfaction on the experience of purchasing apparel products from the Internet. Comparing to women, men are more satisfied on the prices, the interaction with the sales representative and the quality of the products from their favourite websites. These are important reasons for men when they choose a specific website to buy from. Investigating the significant differences between man and women regarding the factors affecting online satisfaction, we conclude that men are less satisfied by the information describing the products and the indications on delivery, payment and ordering. Even if their level of general online satisfaction is the same, men tend to perceive themselves as being more loyal, comparing with women.

For the second objective, we concluded that the most important factors that predict male buyers' satisfaction on purchasing apparel products are

products quality, interaction and prices. For the third objective, we identified that *Price* and *Website design* are significant important factors for predicting men 'loyalty to a specific website.

Research implications

The research presents an original approach on online purchasing experience, focusing on men buyers. Usually, the research on this topic doesn't compare men and women perspectives or doesn't focus on a single category to investigate the relation between the level of satisfaction and buyers' gender. The methodology can be used for any other category of products, besides apparel products.

Managerial implications

The results of the research are useful for the managers of websites that sell apparel products. They should pay more attention on information presented on the sites, describing the products or the steps for ordering, payment and delivery. Also, in order to increase the level of satisfaction for male buyers, the managers of these websites should improve the quality of the products, the communication with the customers and adjust the prices to clients' psychological price level and to competition prices.

Limitations of the research

The fact that the sample consisted only in students is a limitation of this research due to the fact that the results of the study cannot be expanded on other categories of buyers. Students are active buyers of different products from the Internet but there are other segments of buyers that have not been investigated in the present research. Another limitation is related to sample size. In order to conduct Regression analysis on more variables, the sample size should be improved.

Future research

A future direction is to expand the research on a larger sample and also to include in the research sample other categories of online buyers, like online buyers with ages between 25 and 40 years old. Another future research direction is to explore the factors that influence online satisfaction and online loyalty for women customers who buy apparel products. Also, other categories of products can be explored.

Biographical sketch

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Tables

Table no. 1

The level of satisfaction and loyalty. Comparative perspective

Factor	Mean value for men	Mean value for women
Price	5.63	5.58
Information	5.88	6.27
Interaction	5.12	5.05
Website design	5.50	5.68
Quality of products	5.89	5.75
General satisfaction	5.94	5.94
Online loyalty	5.74	5.69

Table no. 2

Independent Samples Test – Gender and Factors affecting satisfaction

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Price	Equal variances assumed	.013	.909	-.347	298	.729	.27897	-.05581
	Equal variances not assumed			-.363	93.723	.718	.27897	-.05581
Information	Equal variances assumed	5.23	.023	3.176	298	.002	.38818	.12223
	Equal variances not assumed			2.617	73.481	.011	.38818	.14836
Interaction	Equal variances assumed	.191	.662	-.385	298	.700	-.07110	.18462
	Equal variances not assumed			-.385	88.443	.701	-.07110	.18488
Site design	Equal variances assumed	2.65	.104	1.216	298	.225	.18041	.14832
	Equal variances not assumed			1.083	78.451	.282	.18041	.16652
Product quality	Equal variances assumed	.260	.610	-.980	298	.328	-.14312	.14603
	Equal variances not assumed			-.983	88.924	.328	-.14312	.14558

Table no. 3
Independent Samples Test – Gender and Satisfaction -Loyalty

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	.457	.500	.050	298	.960	.00745	.14776
	Equal variances not assumed			.048	82.833	.962	.00745	.15692
Loyalty	Equal variances assumed	.021	.885	-.303	298	.762	-.05033	.16610
	Equal variances not assumed			-.311	91.663	.756	-.05033	.16159

Table no. 4
Regression coefficients - The important factors affecting satisfaction of men buyers

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.436	.470		-.927	.358
	Price_	.175	.083	.166	2.107	.040
	Information_	.114	.085	.123	1.346	.184
	Interaction_	.279	.110	.273	2.537	.014
	Site design_	.148	.075	.172	1.973	.054
	Quality of products	.399	.122	.364	3.279	.002

R= 0.889; R Square = 0.790;

Table no. 5
Regression coefficients - The importance of satisfaction factors on men buyers' loyalty

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.951	.758		1.255	.215
	Price_	.274	.134	.260	2.051	.045
	Information_	.240	.178	.234	1.351	.183
	Interaction_	-.041	.121	-.048	-.342	.733
	Site design_	.329	.137	.353	2.405	.020
	Quality of products	.041	.196	.037	.207	.836

R= 0.670; R Square = 0.456