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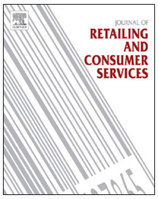

How convenient is it? Delivering online shopping convenience to enhance customer satisfaction and encourage e-WOM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to identify which dimensions of online convenience affect consumers' intention of using online shopping and explore a conceptual model to measuring consumer perceptions of online shopping convenience in order to surpass the shortcomings of previous studies that did not examine the consequences of convenience shopping experience. A sample of 250 Portuguese young individuals participate in the empirical study. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and a covariance-based Structural Equation Model (CB-SEM) were used to validate the measurement model and to test the relationships in the model. The results reveal that Possession, Transaction, and Evaluation are the dimensions with more influence in online shopping convenience. The outcomes of this study extend previous works on online convenience and help to understand which factors drive online satisfaction and enhance behavioral intentions and e-WOM. Contributions to the body of knowledge and the implications for e-commerce retailers are presented. In face of the findings, retailers should be conscious that customer expectations of online convenience have increased as a natural response to the service innovations introduced by website managers and marketers. Therefore, frequent monitoring of consumers' perceptions and expectations about online convenience is a prerequisite for achieving continuous improvement in rendering highly convenient online service.

1. Introduction

Consumer decision making is significantly influenced by both the speed and ease with which consumers can contact retail outlets. Many consumers turn to the Internet to reduce the effort associated with making a decision (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). While shopping consumers spend time and effort to complete multiple tasks and since today's customer is more time-starved than ever, it is appropriate to consider the benefits of providing online shopping convenience. Online convenience has been one of the principal promoters of customer's predisposition to adopt online purchasing (Jiang et al., 2013). Seiders et al. (2000) argue that the importance that customers put on convenience prompts retailers to redesign store operating systems and emphasize the efficiency of the service provided. At another level, retailers should focus on the increase of mobile apps and how they helped fuel and define how consumers value time and energy. The present study argues that consumers favor retailers that save them time and energy. Online retailers are certainly able to supply more convenience as store location becomes irrelevant and consumers may now shop from any location, 24 h a day, seven days a week (Beauchamp and Ponder, 2010). Therefore, companies must develop a more precise understanding of the impacts of online convenience. The main goal of the present study is to explore how consumers evaluate the dimension of convenience in the context of online retail, by focusing on the consumer experience with global retailers' websites. The research gap emerges from the need to validate the research by (Jiang et al., 2013) and from questions which were not answered by later studies by Mpinganjira (2015), Mehmood and Najmi (2017), Haridasan and Fernando (2018) and Pham et al. (2018) namely the meaning of attentiveness convenience and the relationship with behavioral outcomes.

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Exploring the literature on convenience it is evident that convenience encompasses several dimensions. However, there has been no agreement on what these dimensions are (Seiders et al., 2007). Given the above reasoning, this paper seeks to deepen the understanding concerning the importance of online convenience and its dimensions. Based on (Jiang et al., 2013) proposed model the current investigation provides a theoretical contribution by expanding the capacity of the original model via the addition of attentiveness convenience construct to the original formulation. Furthermore, the current study provides an assessment of which dimensions of convenience are most important to consumers when shopping online. Lastly, since the majority of studies addressing online convenience have mainly focused on the relationship with purchase intentions (e.g. Pham et al., 2018), the current study supplements the study by Roy et al. (2016) and closes the gap by investigating the relationship between online convenience, behavioral intentions, satisfaction, e-WOM.

In a practical sense, the identification of the dimensions that positively influence purchase behavior intentions and satisfaction can help managers to overcome obstacles to the delivery of an excellent and convenient service to customers, which represent a key driving force in enhancing companies' online competitiveness.

2. Online convenience

As consumers allocate less time to shopping and more to other endeavors, their wish for convenience has grown, and consequently, their attention has turned to online shopping (Kumar and Kashyap, 2018). The shortage of consumer's available time fosters the will to save time and effort when purchasing (Berry and Cooper, 1990). The concept of convenience was first used by Copeland (1923) to denote a measure of time and effort expended in purchasing a consumer product. Thus, retail convenience can be defined as consumers' time and effort costs associated with shopping in a retail environment.

These consumer resources of time and effort are defined in marketing literature as non-monetary costs that influence purchasing behavior (Bender, 1964; Herrmann and Beik, 1968). Retailers, aware of this need, have been focusing on providing services which are able to maximize the speed and ease of consumer's buying process (Shaheed, 2004).

The time-saving aspect of convenience has been extensively studied in consumer waiting experience, particularly with respect to the consequences of long waiting times (Gehrt and Yale, 1993). Objectively, time spent waiting frequently translates into an opportunity cost (Berry et al., 2002) which may represent a valuable asset in daily life. The concept of effort-saving relates to the decrement of cognitive, physical, and emotional activities that consumers must support to purchase goods and services such as searching for product information, locating the product they wish to buy (Emrich et al., 2015) or completing the checkout process (Berry et al., 2002). The latter authors established that the greater the time costs associated with a service, the lower the degree of consumers' perceived service convenience. Hui et al. (1998) claim the more the effort made by a customer, the more customer' resources are committed, and the higher is the potential for frustration.

By saving customers time and energy through convenience improvement, retailers increase the value of their market offer (Seiders et al., 2000). The Internet is currently an appropriate option for consumers wanting to save time and effort. People find online stores more attractive because their lives are typically more time constrained due to increased professional demands, which in turn reduces the available time to daily tasks, forcing them to choose retail formats where they have to spend the least time possible (Bhatnagar et al., 2000). Their focus is on efficiently completing the shopping experience and obtaining the product with minimum effort (Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006).

Existing empirical findings focusing on convenience indicate that this concept plays a decisive role in the relationship between customers and service providers, since the lack of convenience has been shown to be a reason why customers churn (Keaveney, 1995; Pan and Zinkhan, 2006), whereas convenience has been shown to be a major reason for strengthening the relationship (Seiders et al., 2007).

Despite its importance, there is no general consensus on the components of online convenience. For some authors (Farquhar and Rowley, 2009) online convenience is not an inherent characteristic of a service being offered, but a proxy of the resources being used by customers. For others, (Berry, 2000; Berry et al., 2002; Yale and Venkatesh, 1986), convenience is a multidimensional construct, or as a second-order construct comprising different types of time and effort costs. Although it has been conceded that convenience encompasses several dimensions, there has been no agreement on what these dimensions are (Reimers and Chao, 2014; Seiders et al., 2007). Berry et al. (2002) suggest that service convenience is a multidimensional construct entailing five components, namely: decision convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, benefit convenience, and post-benefit convenience. Berry et al. (2002) conceptual proposal was further developed into a five-dimension instrument - the SERVCON scale proposed by Seiders et al. (2007). However, the SERVCON scale, developed in the context of traditional offline shopping does not comprehend the unique facets of online shopping convenience. Beauchamp and Ponder (2010), conscious of this gap in the research, have developed a set of convenience dimensions, common to both online and offline shopping (access, search, transaction, possession) and examine the relative importance of each dimension from the perspective of online and offline shoppers. Lastly, based on the consumer buying stages, Jiang et al. (2013) develop five categories of convenience: access, search, evaluation, transaction, and possession/post-purchase convenience.

3. Online convenience dimensions and relationships analysis

Based on the literature, the proposed model depicts the relations among the dimensions of convenience that are crucial for improving customer's perceptions about online convenience. For that, seven dimensions of online convenience are analyzed, and the relations hypothesized.

3.1. Access convenience

According to (Seiders et al., 2000, 89) this dimension is "characterized as the speed and ease with which consumers can reach a retailer". Access convenience is a deeply important dimension of retail convenience, considering that if the consumer cannot access the retailer, then he/she will never have the opportunity to experience the service. Contrary to traditional retail where access convenience could be upgraded by moving the store location (Seiders et al., 2000) in the online environment store location becomes irrelevant (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004) as consumers may shop online from any location. Even so, the accessibility of websites is considered as the most important factor in determining consumer perceived online shopping convenience according to King and Liou (2004). This can be accomplished using more user-friendly and easy to remember URL's, having tools for automatic bookmarking and placing ads strategically on social media websites. Based on this it is proposed that:

H1:. *The greater the perceived access convenience, the greater the perceived online convenience.*

3.2. Search convenience

Beauchamp and Ponder (2010, 52) define search convenience as the "speed and ease with which consumers identify and select products they wish to buy". Internet has supplied numerous tools that allowed retailers to improve the communication with potential clients by reinforcing the capability to provide tailored information, either by placing it in their website and using paid advertising to redirect traffic, or

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