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Digital Marketing and Enhancing Consumer Experience in Online Shopping

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Abstract:
The continuous expansion of the Internet volumes and business, online shopping has made online consumer, a priority issue in these expanding virtual markets. The developments are gradually transforming e-commerce into a mainstream business activity while at the same time online consumers are maturing and virtual vendors realize the importance and urgency for a professional and customer-oriented approach. B2C ecommerce sales may cross $1.7 trillion with mobile commerce in 2015. Online marketers are forced to invent new ways to attract consumers. Digital customer experience is an important topic which is debated, but studied for decades. The consumer buying process is similar to learning and can be divided into several steps like identification, search, evaluation and purchase. Buying can be dependent on the buyer's perceived notion and experience. The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of online shopping experience and perceptions associated with online shopping and highlight the theoretical implications. It also identifies Web elements, controlled by the e-marketer that can enhance online consumer's experience during virtual interactions.

Keywords: *Online Purchasing, Digital Marketing, Marketers, Web Aesthetics, Search Models*

1.0 Introduction

Online Shopping experiences include shopping behaviors and preferences. While many researchers do not see any fundamental differences between the traditional and online buying experience confidence in them is important [i]. In spite of the growing number of online shoppers, a higher percent of users have confusion [ii], due to the uncertainty associated with online purchasing [iii]. The perceived fears can negatively influence purchase intentions and behavior [iv]. They can be viewed as single dimensional constructs [v], but identified as multifaceted in past researches [vi]. They provide evidence of their influences in online purchases and behaviors [vii]. Financial risk is another strong predictor of online purchasing frequencies, where online shoppers also delay or think spending significant amounts online [viii]. Factors like online shopping experiences and perceptions influence online purchase intentions need to be researched more [ix]. Online shoppers rely on various information sources, are more experienced and hold different views based on the products being purchased. Their perceptions vary with varying products and product types [x]. The above detailed aspects represent an opportunity for sellers to understand customers and fill existing gaps. First time purchases require more participation than frequently purchased products [xi]. Marketing strategies can comprehend online choices, decisions and predictions based on customer interactions [xii]. Demographic, economic or psychological factors also affect consumer purchasing decisions [xiii]. Exposure of customers to the company can affect the decision-making with inputs for the consumer's black box [xiv]. Hence the purpose of this study is to examine and suggest enhancing online shopping experience on perceptions, while investigating the direct influences in online purchase intentions.

2. Problems with Online Shopping

Purchasing from a living room is more convenient than a store purchase. Online shopping has unlimited purchase choices and evaluation. Customers can also fall a prey to wrong items or online scams. If a customer does not receive purchased items, the seller is responsible for the error or refunding your money. Online auction sites resolve such disputes lesser, since they connect buyers and sellers. Customers find it difficult sometimes to resolve these issues when the seller acts in bad faith or becomes irresponsive.

Problems with online shopping can be especially difficult to resolve if the seller is located in a foreign country. Currency conversion into U.S. dollars is another issue, making customers view international online orders with caution. Gray market merchandise lacks warranty. Online extended service packs may be overpriced and not worth the value. Phishing or spoofing or identity theft is also possible in online shopping.

3. Marketer Influences

Several studies have identified digital experience as a crucial e-commerce marketing issue. Online shopping experience has successive transactions [xv]. Any online customer is also an information technology user and online experience is a complicated issue compared to physical shopping experiences. Their Web experiences are defined in terms of their impression about an online company or their exposure to virtual marketing tools. Enhancing digital control can influence the buying experience of an online customer. Online marketers can influence customer decisions by delivering true online experience, with a combination of functionality and information on products/ services. Web experience elements determine the outcome of the virtual interactions and help marketers recognize the nature and potential of their online strategies. Web experiences include searching, selecting, evaluating information, before interacting and transacting online. Customer's impression and actions are influenced by design and other elements experienced during their interactions. Web elements induce customer goodwill and affect the final outcome of an online interaction. Web experience can enhance customer curiosity and interest with news or weather or events thus acting as online intermediaries. Web experience is a major parameter of customer influence and becomes crucial for dotcoms and multi-channel vendors. Users online may abandon or change their opinion due to negative experiences, according to the Dieringer Research Group, Internet Surveys. Online experiences can be enhanced with elegant functioning and interactive Web site that is fast and usable. Web sites need to have credibility for persuading customers to stop and interact online. Psychological factors help online unfamiliar customers with online transactions to overcome fears of fraud and enhance the trustworthiness between the Web site and the vendor. Table 1 lists Web experiences that can enhance customer's digital experience. Fig. 1 depicts previous studies in web experience elements.

Functionality	Psychological	Content
Usability and Interactivity	Transaction security	Design /Marketing mix
Site speed/ navigation Convenience	Customer Trust on Data Safety	Aesthetics/ Presentation quality
Ordering process comfort	Firm guarantees for payment returns on failed transactions	Product Design elements
Search facilities	Reduced uncertanities	Style/atmosphere
After sales service and company interactions	Promotion/Promotion	Communication speed characteristics

Table 1: Web Experience Factors

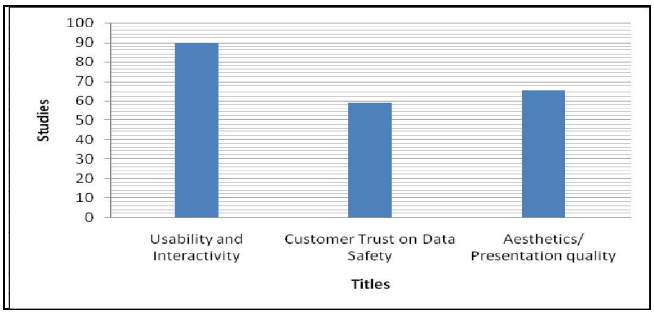

Figure 1: Web element studies [xvi]

4. Enhancing Digital Customer Experience

Any eCommerce website is not easy to handle and it is essential to make sure the bases are covered from a visitor's point of view. Customers enticed by 24/7 availability gravitate more towards online stores, creating a demand for sophisticated ecommerce software. They are engines which keep online stores running and certain features can help boost customer confidence encouraging repeated sales. The following section suggests in detail ways to enhance customer interactions on the internet for online marketing. Fig. 2 depicts a general online search and buy model

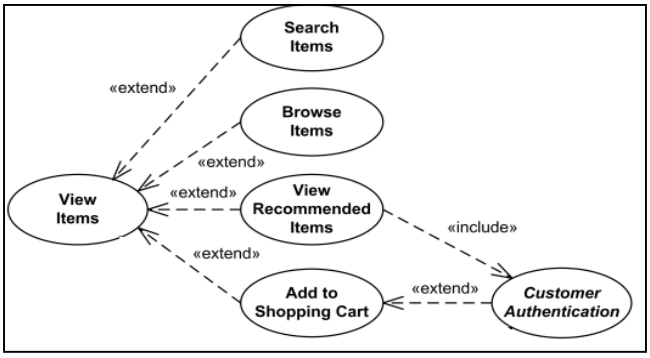

Figure 2: Online Shopping Model

4.1. Speed

In a speedy website, where pages take less than second or two to load, everything feels different. Customers navigate more, thus delivering a sense of time and increasing sales. Slow page loads annoy customers, thus affecting search rankings. The test pages need to be analyzed on mobile devices and desktops. The pages load time can be tested on Pingdom tools for load time and bottlenecks. Images need to be appropriately sized. An image has to be about thousand pixels for quality1,000. JPEG images take lesser time to load than PNG images. Use of a Content Delivery Network which allows static files to be copied to different nodes, helps send these files from the nearest geographically located shoppers from the nodes. Limiting the use of HTTP redirects cuts out additional wait time for users.

4.2. Design

The first step is the impression of a website by visitors. Design matters and good website design signals the strength of a company. Every word or a picture matters and a good designer can be hired to make design a priority. Meta tags and descriptions are the first branded contact with potential customers. They are the entry points from search to saving web pages. The average position of a keyword is within the top 10. Additional web pages like About Us, Contact Us are neglected by online stores. When a customer is directed to sign up for newsletter or further offers making endless possibilities for customers to return. A friendly error 404 page with a search box or contact information, helps customers morality. Responsive site design ensures site displays across devices, since, more than 70% of mobile users use a search engine before buying and more than 80% purchase in less than 24 hours according to Google mobile path study.

4.3. Search

More than 5 billion searches happen on Google every year. More than 25% of the visitors who intent to purchase, use search boxes with names. Effective search implies better usability for customers to find things quickly, thus generating higher sales. Site searches can also offer merchandising opportunities. Intuitive searches result in higher conversion rates. A better user experience result in increased site usage and customers spend more time on the site. The customer undergoes a sense of loyalty, when it is easy to find more products. An improved usage also implies customer satisfaction and better customer journey compared to other competitor websites. Navigation, including site search boxes, should be visible in all the pages and placed in a prominent position for visitors to find it easily. They are placed in the top above the navigation bar, as visitors would expect to find the search box there. Having a search box on each page makes it easy for customers to get back to a product search from anywhere thus providing an alternative method of navigation. Creating familiarity speeds up shopping and search boxes should be simple and easy to find. Search boxes need to be positioned away from other boxes like postcode searches. Labeling a search box with the use of color, attracts visitor's attention. The keyword search clearly defines the purpose. A disappearing text within the search box can explain to a casual user, the proper usage of a search box. Starting a search with the enter key helps, since visitors may be more comfortable pressing the enter key after entering a keyword in the box. Auto completes in a search box speeds up the search process and helps avoid misspellings, thus ensuring searches return a valid result.

4.4. Online Purchases

Customer should be indicated about the cost early, since after confirming a purchase, a user may withdraw due to unexpectedly high shipping costs or unrecognized payment methods. Posting shipping costs on the product page eliminates the surprise and allows the user to calculate the total cost. A shipping policy displayed with how shipping and return of products is handled plays a critical role in conversion rates of business as no one likes surprise costs. Payment gateways or checks and pay orders, gives more comfort to the customers to close a deal. Avoiding compulsory creation of accounts, which does not benefit the user in any way helps free purchases. On completion of a purchase, an online receipt or a receipt via email with the order number, order contents and social media links of the marketer can greatly help business. Offering a return or exchange policy can make online sales. Above 90% customers buy again after experiencing a positive return. Providing a comprehensive policy and upholding product returns and exchange policy instills confidence in the marketed products and company. Above 60% of shoppers abandon sites due to lack of trust. A web based order management function with status and tracking, improves customer confidence greatly.

4.5. Product Displays and Reviews

Most companies may not have a large product selection, though it costs sales. Lesser products on display helps customers decide and choose fast. Too many products of the same category may paralyze a customer and the effective number of clicks will then be on other pages. Product selection should be strategized as product inventory may play havoc on logistics creating a frustrated customer. Attractive offers and reasonable prices on the products page attracts customers. Products can be sorted by category and brands help users who aren't sure of the brand. A product search on the product page greatly attracts customers and generates his inquisitiveness. Thumbnails for products can also greatly increase customers interest and helps have a pre-view of the product. The best product pages can take advantage of pictures and video. A real-time inventory management on the products page stops from blushes, since a customer never returns to the site on finding zero stock on completion of a purchase.

4.6. Keeping in Touch

Marketers need to scrutinize all emails sent by customer for registration, newsletter, order confirmations, order refunds and even password reset email. Marketers need to verify social information links and ensure the information is correct. Email is the least expensive and highest marketing and conversion tool. Replied mails reflect the brand and drives home the personalized touch and view for the customer. Online Customers can buy gifts for special occasions. Registered users information can be used to greet them on occasions and a wish list allowing customers to save items while shopping and purchase them at a later date.

Customer reviews promote products as reviews by other customers have a great impact. Above 60% of the customers are more likely to purchase from a site with ratings and reviews. Acknowledging reviews of registered customers from the marketers makes customer feel they are important and wanted.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Customer expectations on interactive and immersive visual experiences have increased. Moving images and interactive clickable videos allow customers to learn more about products. Research on factors influencing online decision making has similarities and differences between traditional purchases. Tools used by online marketers to influence buying vary. This paper has indicated difficult elements experienced in virtual interaction and ways of overcoming them. The paper has discussed usability, interactivity and aesthetic aspects of the online presentation for marketers. Moreover mobile commerce sales in future will account for nearly half of total Web sales in a few years as customers interact through smart phones and tablets, thus making it compulsory for marketers to adhere to the aforesaid guidelines

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