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BUSINESS-TO-CONSUMER (B2C) e-COMMERCE: A SURVEY

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JALANDHAR CANTT

ABSTRACT

Recently, internet has successfully served as a mile stone for Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-commerce due to convenience, product price comparison, vast variety of products, product specifications. In this paper the empirical investigations were made to study the attitude of e-consumers toward online shopping. Sample of 36 e-consumers from different age groups was studied through a structured questionnaire consisting of 35 questions. The data obtained from these 36 respondents was analyzed statistically to observe the attitude of e-consumers toward online shopping. Education, personal perceptions, individual thinking, cultural, social, environment, economic, psychological and availability of resources, trust and confidence between the consumer and the online seller were the main concerning factor.

KEYWORDS

business-to-consumer (b2c), consumer behaviour, online shopping, survey.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the utilization of the internet resources as a bridge between the business companies and customers has grown tremendously. According to Donthu et al. (1999) the internet has now become an integral part of daily life and consumers avail the internet resources for purchasing various economic commodities comprising goods and services. With the rapid innovation in the field of internet, retailers frame new strategies and policies to facilitate online shopping. Yuan Guo (2005) explained four types of antecedents including personal factors, product factors, media factors and situational factors affecting online shopping behaviour. Internet successfully serves as a platform for Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-commerce, owing to convenience, product price comparison, vast variety of products, product specification etc. (Janssen M. et al. 2000 and Yuan G. 2005). Consumers now can shop online 24/7/365 without any geographic limits. Fast globalization and the development of the internet have provided companies a platform for the promotion and sale of their products or services through the cyberspace. Additionally, internet provides an alternate and easy way to foster business through promotions, advertisements of the products and services (Barry S. 2002). According to a report, India's e-commerce industry has grown more than 30% from 2012 to \$12.6 billion in 2013 (Laus P. 2014). According to another report, on-line retail sale in the U.S. is about \$20 billion to \$30 billion each year and will extend to approximately \$327 billion by 2016 (Reuter T. 2012). The fast expansion of e-commerce has eventually dominated the world economy. The importance of e-commerce lies in the fact that the scenario of traditional commerce had changed considerably and is impacting largely the global economy.

Another factor which has stimulated the e-commerce services is the rapid mobile adoption and availability of easy and cheap broadband services. However, the most important factor which affects the online trading is the consumer behaviour, which differs from individual to individual and further depends upon the buying choices, habits which in turn are affected by psychological and social factors. Consumer behaviour is unpredictable and difficult to explain as far as decision making is concerned. Thus it becomes important to figure out the potential factors which affect the consumer's online shopping behaviour.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present research are:

- Qualitatively investigation of the perceived benefits of online shopping.
- Qualitatively investigation of the perceived risks of online shopping.
- To evaluate the factors affecting the attitude towards online shopping.
- Evaluation of the factors which can affect the future of B2C e-commerce.

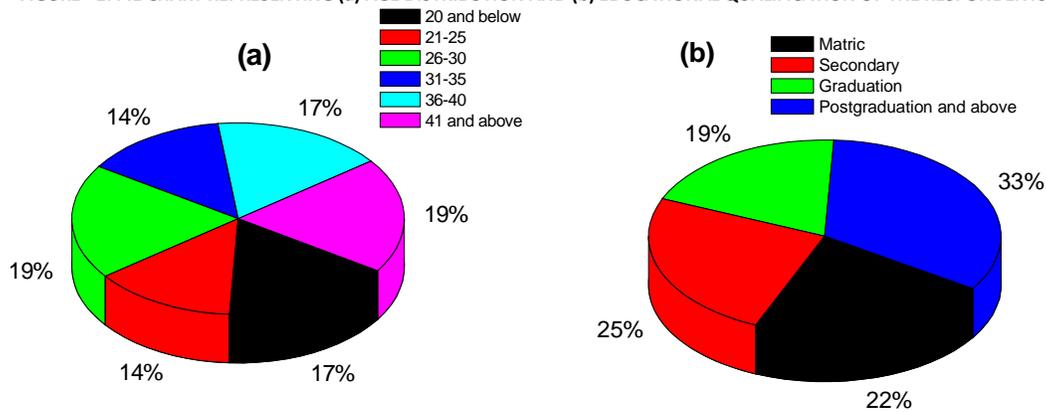
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To meet these objectives, a sample survey was conducted using a structured and close ended questionnaire comprising 35 questions. The questionnaire was distributed through either e-mail or through personal contacts to 50 respondents, out of which only 36 responded. The data obtained from these 36 respondents was analyzed statistically to observe the attitude of e-consumers toward online shopping. The questionnaires were distributed randomly in electronic form to people who were asked to complete them anonymously and return them. The questionnaire was divided in to four parts; first part comprising questions related to demographic data and included information regarding gender, age, educational qualification; second part consisted of questions for collecting information regarding internet use; third part consisted of questions regarding general information about online e-commerce such as frequency of online shopping, role of web contents, factors influencing the product perception, types of articles purchased, mode of payment etc. and the fourth and concluding part consisted of the questions based on likert scale covering the various risk factors and the factors promoting the trends of online shopping.

4. GENERAL INFORMATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the collected data. 56 % of the respondents were male and 44% were female. 17% of the respondents were below 20 years, 14% were between 21 to 25 years, 19% were 26 to 30 years, 14 % were 31 to 35 years, 17% were 36 to 40 years and the remaining 19% were 41 years of age or above (Figure-1 (a)). As far as educational qualification was concerned, 22% of the total respondents were matriculated, 25% were having qualification up to secondary level, 19% were graduates and the remaining 33% were postgraduate or of higher educational qualification (Figure-1 (b)).

FIGURE - 1: PIE CHART REPRESENTING (a) AGE DISTRIBUTION AND (b) EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION OF THE RESPONDENTS

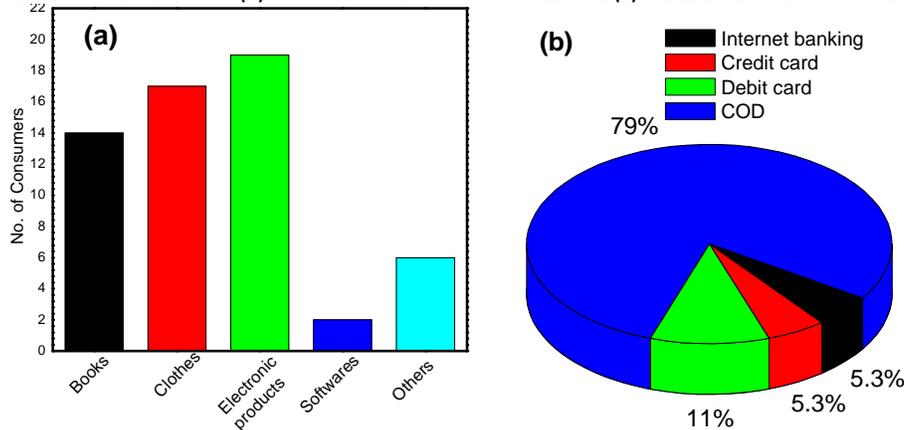


Regarding the ability to access internet resources and computer literacy, 14% respondents were somewhat skillful, majority i.e. 57% were skillful whereas 29% were very skillful. Maximum of the respondents (84%) prefer home place or work office as the primary area to access the internet services. About 90% of the respondents spend 20-40 hours a week on internet. 23% of the respondents were using internet services from 1-3 years, 33% from 4-6 years and 44% were using these services from more than 7 years. Majority of the respondents prefer to shop online only during the offer or festival seasons.

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Mostly, the online shopping behaviour of the collected sample was found to be affected by the need of the product (41%), usual internet surfing (35%) and advertisements (16%). Books clothes and electronic products were the best choices for the online shopping (Figure-2 (a)). The main choice of the male respondents was the electronic items like mobile phones, cameras etc. whereas female respondents prefer clothes for buying online. Product quality, price and varieties were the main concerns which attract the consumers to buy things online. 26 respondents consider product quality as the most important factor influencing the product perception. 79% of the respondents prefer cash on delivery (COD) as the safest, reliable and convenient way of various payment modes as shown in figure-2 (b). The favorite ways of communicating with online retailer were emails and telephones (50%) if the buyer wants to enquire about the concerned transactions, delivery time of the product and other enquiries.

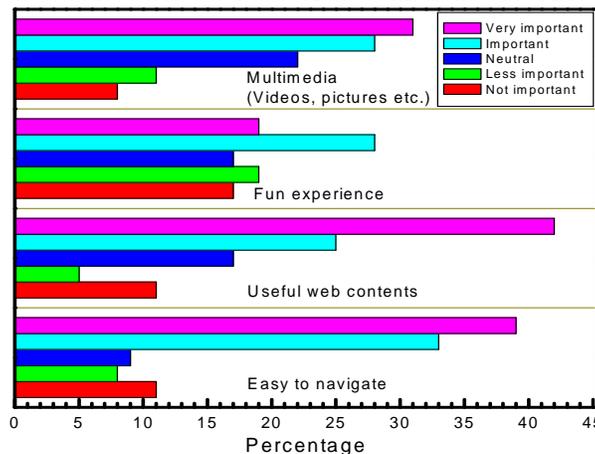
FIGURE - 2: DIAGRAMS REPRESENTING (A) PRODUCTS GENERALLY PURCHASED AND (B) PREFERENCE OF VARIOUS MODES OF PAYMENT



5.1. ROLE OF WEB CONTENT

According to Van Y. et al. (2009) human computer interaction (HCI), concerned with website contents, web page display, easy to navigate the site, visual effects and attractiveness greatly affect consumer behaviour toward online shopping. The bar diagram in figure-3 clearly shows that consumer online shopping behaviour of majority of the respondents is strongly affected by the web contents particularly, ease of navigations, useful web contents and web designing stimulated by multimedia (videos, pictures etc.) 42% of the respondents considered usefulness of web contents to be very important.

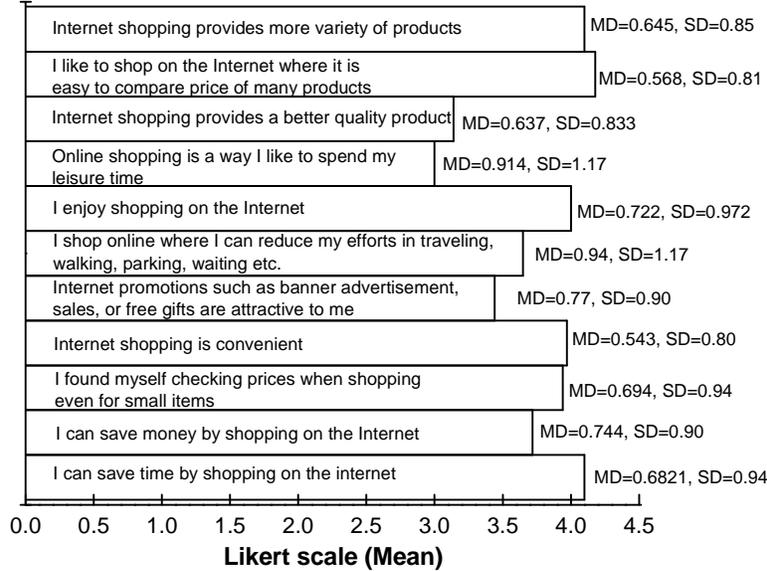
FIGURE - 3: ROLE OF WEB CONTENTS AFFECTING ONLINE SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR



5.2. FACTORS PROMOTING ONLINE SHOPPING

Among the various controllable and uncontrollable factors such as education, personal perceptions, individual thinking, cultural, social, environment, economic, psychological and availability of resources etc. influencing the online shopping behaviour, trust and confidence between the consumer and the online seller is the main concerning factor. Trust factor encourages the consumers to proceed with the payment transaction during online shopping. Safety, privacy of payment details and information, security and product delivery etc. are the elements which increase the trust factor. In order to analyze the various factors affecting e-commerce 11 questions were asked from the respondents. The results are displayed in the form of a bar diagram in figure-4 on a likert scale (mean). The corresponding mean deviations (MD) and standard deviations (SD) are also presented.

FIGURE – 4: REPRESENTATION OF THE VARIOUS FACTORS PROMOTING ONLINE SHOPPING ON A LIKERT SCALE

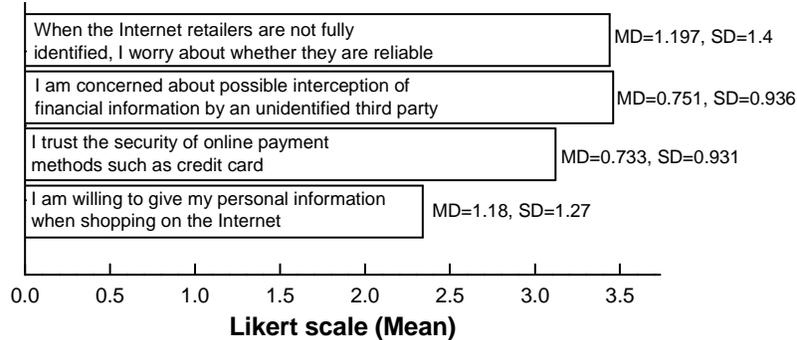


The main factors which promote the online shopping include the variety of the products (mean likert value=4.1), product price comparison (mean likert value=4.18), intellectual joy during online shopping (mean likert value=4.0), convenience (mean likert value=3.97), price comparison even for small items (mean likert value=3.94), saving money (mean likert value=3.65) and time (mean likert value=4.1). On the other hand factors like online shopping as a leisure time, better quality product and promotional strategies were found to be least effective.

5.3. RISK FACTORS

The degree to which consumer believes that on-line shopping is trustworthy and secure is perceived credibility. According to Wang et al. (2003) perceived credibility is mainly concerned with privacy which refers to keep the identity confidential during the course of a transaction and the protection of payment data and secondly the security of the information from unsanctioned intrusions or outflows (Ratnasingham P. 1998). Lack of security is considered to be the most affecting factor for the growth and development of e-commerce (Wang et al. 2003). Broadly there are two major categories of perceived risk associated with e-commerce viz. perceived risk with products/services (PRP) and perceived risk in the context of on-line transactions (PRT) (Lee D. 2001).

FIGURE – 5: REPRESENTATION OF THE VARIOUS PERCEIVED RISK FACTORS AFFECTING ONLINE SHOPPING ON A LIKERT SCALE

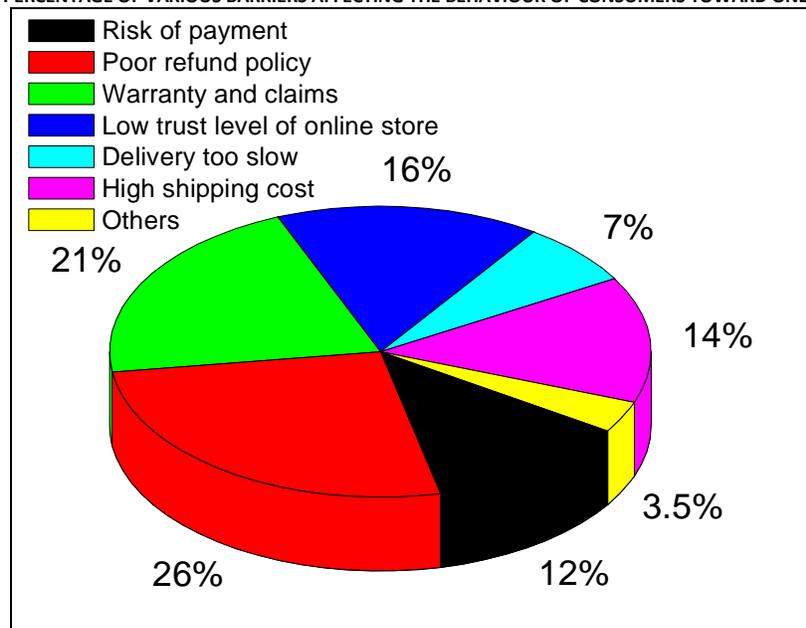


In the present case, the majority of the respondents were not willing to provide personal information. Also the trust on the security of payment data either directly or through intervening third party during transaction is on the unfavorable side of the likert scale (Figure-5). Majority of the respondents (93%) usually discuss with friends or family members about the product purchased online.

5.4. MAIN BARRIERS

The main hurdle which affects the behavioural attitude toward online shopping as an outcome of the survey is risk of payments. 26% of the respondents were worried about the refund of the money if the product purchased is not up to the expectations in spite of the promise made by online retailer to either refund within a stipulated time or exchange the product. Another major barrier observed was the warranty and claims of the products. In traditional shopping the consumer can directly approach the retailer for these attributes but online shopping is devoid of these things. 16 % of the respondents still not trust the online stores. High shipping cost for small articles and risk of payments are other major issues concerned with online shopping (Figure-6).

FIGURE – 6: PERCENTAGE OF VARIOUS BARRIERS AFFECTING THE BEHAVIOUR OF CONSUMERS TOWARD ONLINE SHOPPING



6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

The results of the present study express the important role of online shopping in the modern life of the consumers. In light of the research findings, internal beliefs, attitudes, intention for online shopping, social network, personal experience, convenience, marketing, mass media and internet greatly affect the mind set for the online shopping behaviour. The proposal constructs involving perceived credibility, security, trust, privacy and risk factors have a strong effect on behaviour attitude. As far as the privacy and security factors are concerned, the designers of websites, banks should provide full attention for minimizing the security concerns. In order to attract and motivate the consumers toward online shopping, vendors and retailers must provide discounts and other benefits like free home delivery, free gifts etc. The governments must frame proper and strict laws and regulations to solve the legal issues arising from commercial transactions through internet.

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