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A STUDY OF ONLINE SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR OF INDIAN CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to identify and understand the various aspects of online shopping behaviour to help ascertain the issues that further lead to research questions, specifically in context of Indian Consumers' Online Shopping Behaviour. The paper has been divided into five sections that focus on: Size and Nature of Online Consumer in India, Factors Influencing Online Purchase, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, Perceived Risk and Privacy Issues and E-Commerce Industry: Categories of Online Shopping. The paper is descriptive in nature and makes use of secondary data and literature review for the purpose of analysis. Five main factors have been identified in influencing online purchase as revealed in the literature review - Role of Price, Convenience/Time Saving, Online Store Attributes, Product Characteristics and Shopping Orientation. Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty is seen to be arising out of the service quality provided by the e-commerce site. There were various conflicts found in literature with respect to importance of prices, influence of product characteristics on consumers' intention to shop, nature and extent to which privacy concerns are relevant for online consumers etc. Very few studies have been conducted on understanding the online shopping behaviour of consumers in India and this paper attempts to fill this gap by providing a holistic view of the various issues that need further attention by researchers.

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KEYWORDS

Online Consumer Behaviour, Electronic Commerce, Retailing, Shopping Online, Indian Consumers.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the fastest growing e-commerce markets in the world. According to a report by KPMG and Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) the Indian e-commerce industry experienced a 150% growth rate, increasing from \$3.8 billion in 2009 to \$9.5 billion in 2012 (IAMAI & KPMG, 2013). India would be having close to 243 million Internet users by June 2014 with mobile Internet users reaching 185 million by June 2014 (IAMAI & IMRB, 2013). According to a report by Google and TNS Australia, Online Shopping in India saw a growth of 128% in interest from the consumers in 2011 to 2012 in comparison to 40% growth in 2010 to 2011, making 2012 as the tipping point for online shopping in India (YourStory, 2013). E-commerce websites experienced a 47 percent growth in unique hits from 2011 to 2012, from 26.1 million to 37.5 million, according to a report released by comScore (2013).

In such a scenario it is impossible to ignore the present and future of E-Commerce Transactions in India. The success of a business depends upon apt knowledge of its consumers. It not only refers to being aware about who the consumers are, what they buy but also the process of deciding their brand and place they assign to that brand (Ramachandra, 1988). A company needs to decide upon its value proposition. The value proposition comprises of the cluster of benefits that a company promises to deliver. It is a statement about the experiences customers will gain from the company's market offering (Kotler, Kelly, Koshy and Jha, 2009). It becomes important as it differentiates a company's offering from the rest and thus can help gain customer's attention. Customers will estimate which offer delivers the maximum perceived value and act on it (Kotler et al 2009). Hence, understanding consumer behavior becomes the basis for formulating marketing strategies and a source of competitive advantage. These arguments are applicable to E-Commerce Companies each of whom is seen as a distinct brand in the Indian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The paper has been divided into four sections that focus on: I Size and Nature of Online Consumer in India, II Factors Influencing Online Purchase, III Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, IV Perceived Risk and Privacy Issues

I. THE SIZE AND NATURE OF ONLINE CONSUMERS IN INDIA

According to report by Internet and Mobile Association of India 2013, as of October 2013 there were 205 million Internet Users in India, making it the third largest internet population in the world: 137 million from urban India and 68 million from the rural parts of the country (IAMAI & KPMG, 2013). This is expected to go up to 243 million users by June 2014 with 185 million mobile Internet users. The number of broadband subscribers is also expected to increase to 100 million by 2014 from 12.8 million subscribers as of Sept 2011 (Ernst & Young, 2013). Mobile is coming up as a major source of Internet access and is redefining how the users stay online. The adoption of 3G, coupled with the declining prices of smartphones, is further expected to increase Internet usage in the country. Mobile internet users are expected to account for more than 60% of user base in India, considering that their number is forecasted to reach 200 million by 2015 (Ernst & Young, 2013) According to a BCG Report 2013, the internet has the highest penetration among people aged 18 to 24 (48%) and the lowest among those older than 54 (6%) (Subramanian, 2013). The Internet is projected to reach smaller towns and the lower rungs of the economic ladder more quickly than retail chains, bridging the geographic barriers and feeding the growing appetite for consumer goods.

According to a report by comScore in 2011, 75% of India's e-Commerce users fall below the age of 35 and more number of transactors fall in the age group of 35 – 44. (comSCORE, 2011) These younger users interact more with the site and post reviews about products, engage with these companies on social media and such. Off which 60% users are men and 40% women, which is consistent across all categories of products. According to the report, 15-24 year olds in India are the heaviest Internet users and young males spend more time online than females in most age groups. It is important to note that the number of Indian users transacting online has increased from 3 million in 2000 to 11 million in 2011 and is expected to reach 38 million by 2015 (Ernst & Young, 2013). However, online sales account for less than 1% of all retail sales in India in 2012 (yStats, 2013).

II. FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE PURCHASE

We have been able to identify four main issues affecting online purchase as revealed by the literature review. Those include: Role of Price, Convenience/Time Saving, Product Characteristics and Shopping Orientation.

II.I ROLE OF PRICE

The Indian consumers are price sensitive, and discounts offer a major push for shopping online. E-tailers offer products at reduced prices along with wide product assortment and convenience of shopping at one's own comfort acting as a major driver of online sales (Ernst and Young, 2013). Consumers place excessive emphasis on value for money and in some cases it has been given more importance than image/ prestige (Credit Suisse India Consumer Survey, 2011). According to Nielsen's (2011) 'Global Online Shopping and Saving Strategies Survey' the primary reason for an Indian shopper to choose a retailer depends upon the value for money they perceive the store offers.

Brynjolfsson and Smith (1999) found that it is due to the ease of comparing prices across e-tailers that puts added price pressure on the e-tailers. Given that the same product is being offered by different e-tailers, customers tend to select the lowest cost provider. Lepowska-White (2004) found that online browsers are less time pressured and less focused on the convenience of shopping online and more interested in lower prices than online consumers. For these reasons they probably do not appreciate the advantages of online shopping as much as online consumers. This could mean that online browsers and online buyers form two different groups that need to be studied to understand their preference between convenience and lower prices.

Some argue that price will play a lesser role on the Internet with the opportunity for more non-price information to be provided. Alba et al. (1997) believed that price sensitivity would be lower online than in traditional outlets when non-price attributes are of greater importance and when there is more product differentiation among choices. Greater amount of non-price information leads to higher post-purchase satisfaction, thus, increasing levels of loyalty (Reibstein, 2002). The increased loyalty levels would be reflected in lower levels of price sensitivity.

Due to the conflicting conclusions about the role of price in influencing online shopping behaviour, it is important to take a closer look at the impact of price in choice of retail channel and the level of price differences that will affect consumers' selection of shopping channels.

II.II CONVENIENCE/TIME SAVING

The distinct characteristic of online shopping is its convenience and has been found to be the major motive for consumers to shop online (Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1997). In their survey of 220 consumers, Jarvenpaa and Todd (1997) found that convenience was the chief benefit of online shopping. Similarly, Burke (1998) conducted six focus groups in different regions of United States and found that convenience was the most frequently cited reason for consumers to engage in online shopping. Chiang and Dholakia (2003) found that convenience influences consumers' intention to shop online. When consumers perceive shopping offline as inconvenient, they are more likely to shop on the Internet.

II.III PRODUCT CHARACTERISTICS

One common way to classify the products is search and experience goods. According to Nelson (1974), a good is defined as a "search good" when full information of the product attributes can be known prior to purchase. Examples of search goods are books, electronics etc. regarding which information can be obtained prior to purchasing them. On the other hand, experience good is defined as a good regarding which full information on product attribute can only be known with direct experience. For such goods information search is more difficult example: clothes, shoes etc. Chiang and Dholakia (2003) revealed that product type influences consumers' intention to shop online. For search goods such as books, intention to shop online was higher than for experience goods. As experience goods have the touch and feel factor prior to purchase it is possible that consumer's intention to shop online is lower for experience goods than search goods.

However this trend is gradually changing as experience goods like clothes, shoes and accessories are one of the top categories, globally, which consumers intend to purchase online (Nielson, 2010). There is a need to further investigate how product types can influence the consumers' intention to shop online.

II.IV SHOPPING ORIENTATION

The most cited classification of shopping orientation of consumers is on the basis of recreational and convenience shoppers (Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980). They proposed that the social aspect of shopping motivates recreational shoppers. The convenience shoppers would like to economize their shopping efforts. They also found that women had the tendency to seek enjoyment out of the shopping experience. Sinha (2003) classified the shoppers on a similar basis of fun shoppers vs. work shoppers. For fun shoppers, shopping is a means of enjoyment; they seek product variety and like to talk about their shopping experiences. Work shoppers on the other hand consider shopping as a task and would prefer to shop from home. It was found that Indian shoppers show an orientation that is based more on entertainment values than functional values. Alba et al (1997) also suggests that the Internet is less attractive to those who value social interactions more, as it allows for limited interactions compared other retail formats.

It is important to do a wider scale study in understanding the shopping orientation of Indian consumers in relation to demographics, SEC categories and also identify whether consumers shopping online have recreational orientation or not.

III. ONLINE STORE ATTRIBUTES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is a result of their experiences during various purchasing stages: (a) need recognition, (b) information search (c) evaluation of alternatives (d) purchase decision and (e) post-purchase behavior (Kotler, 2009). According to the study by Kinney et al (2002), web-customer satisfaction is a result of satisfaction with the quality of websites' content and satisfaction with its performance in delivering information. Even if the information available on the Web site is of high quality, if the site downloading and delivery mechanisms are poor, customers are likely to leave the site. Therefore, a distinction between information quality and service quality relating to customer satisfaction has important implications in the Web-design process.

Most researchers have tried to focus on identifying key constructs of Web-customer satisfaction and developing validated instruments to measure them. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra (2002) suggest that dimensions to measure e-Service Quality should include (1) information availability and content, (2) ease of use or usability, (3) privacy/security, (4) graphic style, and (5) fulfillment. It is important to note that while many researchers have focused on web site experience as an important factor in influencing customer satisfaction e-business involves not only the front-end process (e.g. the design of the website), but also back-end processes (e.g. delivery, and returns). Fulfillment involves back-end processes like on-time delivery, correctness of order fulfillment, billing accuracy etc. According to the study by Hsu (2011) online retail should focus more on the fulfillment aspects to improve customer satisfaction.

Loyal customers visit a web site more frequently than newly acquired customers and can be served at a reduced operating cost. Reibstein (2011) in his study looked into the attributes that result in repeat purchases. Factors that affected likelihood to buy again from a site were: customer support, on-time delivery and product representation. Sites that were rated poorly on customer service were least likely to be shopped again. Interestingly, price had the lowest correlation with likelihood to be shopped again. This reflects that although price had been identified as the most important factor in attracting customers to a site, it is not important for customer retention.

IV. PERCEIVED RISK AND PRIVACY ISSUES

Perceived Risk and Privacy Issues have been understood under two headings namely: types of perceived risks, influence of perceived risk on online consumer behaviour.

IV.I TYPES OF PERCEIVED RISK

Cox and Rich (1964) believe that consumers perceive risk when faced with uncertainty and potentially undesirable consequences due to a purchase. Perceived risk is more influential in explaining consumers' behavior since consumers are often motivated to avoid mistakes than maximize utility in their purchasing decisions (Mitchell, 1999). Various researchers have classified perceived risk into 4 broad categories in context of online shopping: Financial risk, Privacy Risk, Time Risk and Social Risk.

Financial risk refers to the potential loss related to the purchase price or/and subsequent maintenance cost due to fraud (Cuningham, 1967; Stone and Gronhaug, 1993). The chances of potential financial loss can also be related to cost of returning the product like shipping etc. (Hassan, Kunz, Pearson and Mohamed, 2006). Privacy risk refers to the potential loss of control over personal data, when it is used without permission (Stone and Gronhaug, 1993; Zhang et al, 2012). Loss of credit card details, sensitive information etc. falls under privacy risk. Time risk is the potential loss of time due to a bad purchasing decision resulting in time wasted in researching, shopping, or replacing the purchased goods (Cuningham, 1967; Stone and Gronhaug, 1993). It could also relate to the loss of time and inconvenience incurred due to difficulty in navigation and/or submitting order or delay in receiving the products (Forsythe and Shi, 2003). Social risk refers to the potential loss of status in ones social group by purchasing a product or service (Cuningham, 1967; Stone and Gronhaug, 1993; Zhang et al, 2012).

Forsythe and Shi (2003) considered product performance risk apart from financial risk and time risk. Product performance risk relates to the potential loss if the product does not perform as expected. They also considered psychological risk that is more or less similar to privacy risk. It refers to the disappointment or frustration due to disclosure of personal information. However, Hassan et. al (2006) has described psychological risk as discomfort or tension due to online shopping. Zhang et al (2012) added 3 more dimensions to perceived risk namely: health risk, delivery risk and after sales risk. Health risk refers to the potential loss of health due to extensive use of computer resulting in fatigue, visual impairment or harm to one's health due to fake products. Delivery risk refers to the

potential loss of delivery due to damaged goods or loss of goods. After-sale risk refers to the potential loss of after-sales related with product problems, service guarantees etc.

Researchers have attempted to study perceived risk from different dimensions. They have not confined the risk types to the basic four dimensions of financial, time, social and privacy risks but also brought in newer dimensions like health risk, delivery risk and attempted to relate these with impact on online shopping preferences. It is important to note that different researchers have defined risk dimensions differently.

IV.II INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED RISK ON ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Forsythe and Shi (2003) studied to identify the influence of perceived risk on online shopping behaviour of consumers. They divided the sample into three categories: online browsers, moderate online buyers and heavy online buyers. The most cited reason across the three groups for not purchasing online was performance risk that relates to difficulty in assessing the quality of products. Their findings suggested that financial risk was also a significant predictor of frequency of buying online and amount spent on the web. It is also likely to deter online consumers to initiate the shopping process. However according to the study by Zhang et al (2012) financial risk was not found to be of importance in influencing consumers purchase behaviour. A possible explanation could be that with passage of time the websites have improved their transaction security, come up with escrow accounts and consumers are more aware about which sites are secure to be dealt with. However this aspect needs a closer inspection to find out the impact of perceived financial risks on online shoppers. Also the influence of perceived financial risk may vary with frequency of online shopping and past experience. Heavy online shoppers were found to trust a web site based on their previous satisfaction, whereas users who perceive more risks would trust the firm has a good reputation (Martin, Camarero, 2009). Heavy shoppers were found to perceive lower risk than browsers and moderate shoppers (Forsythe and Shi, 2003).

Quality risks, after-sales risks, delivery risks, time risks and health risks were found to have a negative impact on consumer's online purchasing behaviour (Zhang et al, 2012). Perceived source risk was also dimension considered by Hassan et al (2006) while developing a scale to measure online perceived risk. Perceived source risk refers to the concern over whether the shopper can trust the online vendors and feel comfortable in transacting with them. Vendor Characteristics like reliability of a vendor were found to have a positive influence on the number of purchases on the Internet (Swaminathan, Lepowaski White and Rao, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The Indian E-Commerce market has been growing at a fast pace with growing Internet penetration and evolving consumer mindset. With growing income levels and changing consumer lifestyle the need for time saving and convenience rose in importance. This provides greater scope for e-tailers to reach out to the online consumers.

Researchers have studied various factors influencing online purchase behaviour of consumers; however literature review reveals four major issues affecting online purchase. These are: Role of Price, Convenience/Time Saving, Product Characteristics and Shopping Orientation. The role of prices in influencing online consumer behaviour has raised certain conflicts in literature. While some have concluded that price is the most important factor in attracting customers to a site, others have argued the importance of non-price information in making selection about products and resulting in higher level of satisfaction. Consumers underlying orientation towards shopping has suggested that those who view shopping as a task are found to be more attracted towards shopping online. This would have implications for website developers in developing a more interactive and entertaining user interface.

Product characteristics also were found to influence consumer's intention to shop online. As Chiang and Dholakia (2003) found that consumers have a higher intention to shop for 'search goods' online as compared to 'experience goods'. However, experience goods like clothing, accessories are one of the top categories from which consumers are making purchases globally. Hence this finding needs to be further investigated.

Customer Satisfaction has been measured by developing various indices some related only to information quality and service quality while others used the scale to relate satisfaction levels to customer loyalty. Thus factors taken into consideration for the purpose of customer satisfaction may not necessarily be the same for customer loyalty.

Financial risk was found to have conflicting impacts on consumers purchase behaviour in the literature reviewed. Also privacy concerns were more or less found to be related to perceived financial risk (loss of credit card details etc.). The nature and extent to which privacy concerns are relevant for online consumer in India needs to be found out.

There are very few studies that have been conducted on understanding the online shopping behaviour of consumers in India. Those that we came across in the literature were limited to a small sample and focused only on limited aspects of consumer behaviour like perceived risk or antecedents to online purchases etc. Hence, there is a need for a holistic study focused on the online shopping behaviour of Indian Consumers. This paper attempted to identify and understand some of the aspects of online shopping behaviour to help ascertain the issues that could further lead to research questions in the Indian context.

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