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YOUNG E-SHOPPERS' PERCEPTIONS ON LEADING ONLINE RETAILERS - WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO E-SERVICE QUALITY AND E-RECOVERY DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Internet shoppers in India are growing day by day. Though low price and web presence were initially thought to be the drivers of success, service quality issues soon became pivotal in online retailing. When consumers could not complete transactions, products were not delivered on time or at all, e-mails were not answered, and desired information could not be accessed, the viability of web channels was threatened. Apart from e-service quality e-recovery measures are extremely important with online service quality because consumers are just one click away from switching to another e-retailer. Many researchers have focused on Web site interactive quality while ignoring other aspects such as outcome quality and recovery that could have just as much impact on quality perceptions of an online experience. The present study aims at understanding e-shoppers' perceptions on e-service quality and e-recovery dimensions of leading online retailers in India.

KEYWORDS

Internet shoppers, E-tailers, E-Service Quality, E-Recovery, Loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of electronic retail market has been rapid in India since the beginning of year 2000. It dramatically expanded its reach (people/location) and range (variety) of information. Initially only companies such as Amazon distributed products and services solely through web channels. Now gradually many companies are creating web channels as sources for prepurchase information (cars, mobile phones) and as alternative ways to buy products. If these channels are to be viable, they must be perceived by consumers as effective and efficient. The retention of an online consumer is difficult and expensive. Online consumers can easily evaluate (and compare) the services offered by various providers and thus switch from one e-tailer to another with ease. Service quality has been shown to promote customer loyalty and retention (Imrie, Durden, and Cadogan 2000), which is important to any retailer, including online retailers. Apart from providing service quality marketer should be good at e-recovery too. Consumers place an important emphasis on the outcome of the service, and if an e-retailer fails to deliver the product or service in the manner desired, then previous evaluations of Web site interactivity will mean very little in the evaluation of e-service quality. Hence E-Service Quality as well as E-Recovery dimensions are equally important to acquire and retain e-shoppers.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous research on service quality in regards to the Internet has primarily focused on the interaction of the consumer and the Web site (Yoo and Donthu 2001). Such studies provide an adequate framework for measuring Web site interactivity but have failed to look at the broader picture. In fact e-service quality is more than just how a consumer interacts with a Web site. It actually relates to customers' perceptions of the outcome of the service along with recovery perceptions if a problem should occur. A recent study of online failures stated that consumers noted delivery problems as the most frequently stated problem (Holloway and Beatty 2003). Although consumers are concerned about Web site interactivity, the main concern for consumers is the delivery of the desired product or service. In addition, how a service provider responds to a failure is extremely important when a buyer and seller are physically separated. Holloway and Beatty's (2003) online failure study showed that the majority of consumers surveyed were dissatisfied with recovery attempts, and this dissatisfaction affected intentions to repurchase through a specific company's Web site. Research by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra (2002) states that expectations are not well formed in e-service quality. This adds further support that perceptions and reasoned action should be the basis for measuring e-service quality. Research also has demonstrated that 'service recovery' dimension has a direct relationship with factors such as trust, repurchase intention, commitment, and word of mouth, which all play a crucial role in success for e-retailers (Blodgett, Hill, and Tax 1997; Goodwin and Ross 1992; Mohr and Bitner 1995). A company must be able to deal with e-service failure problems when they occur because the resolution of these problems ultimately has an effect on repeat patronage and customer loyalty (Bitner, Brown, and Meuter 2000; Holloway and Beatty 2003).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study primarily aims at understanding e-shoppers' perceptions on some of the e-retail sites. And it also attempts to understand why they perceive the way they do, and understand impact of their perceptions on their loyalty. Most specifically the study objectives include the following:

1. To understand e-shoppers' perceptions on e-service quality of various online retailers.
2. To know how leading e-tailers' e-recovery dimension is rated by internet shoppers.
3. To determine how the above perceptions influenced their patronage with a website.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of study was exploratory, descriptive, and analytical. The study aims at finding customer perceptions on leading internet stores. Review of related literature on e-service quality, e-recovery dimensions, and internet store loyalty and also interactions with various online buyers and non-buyers have given an idea on factors to be considered for analytical study of measuring e-service quality and e-recovery dimensions. Primary data for the study is collected during Nov-Dec 2014. Target audience comprised post graduate students of leading business schools from Hyderabad, where majority do online shopping on a regular basis. Internet users, who have purchased products like fashion and accessories through e-tailers, at least once during the three months previous to the accomplishment of the survey were considered as the population for survey. Out of 234 filled up questionnaires 212 valid responses from e-shoppers were used for the study.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The primary data gathered through personal and mail surveys are analyzed in terms of simple percentages and mean scores are calculated for e-service quality and e-recovery dimensions of each online retailer chosen for the study. This helped to identify which retailer scored high on various chosen factors for the study. Respondents were asked to rate these parameters on a 5 point scale. Where 1 is poor, 2 average, 3 satisfactory, 4 good and 5 excellent.

TABLE1: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON E-SERVICE QUALITY OF FLIPKART

Efficiency	System Availability	Fulfillment	Privacy
3.605769	3.615384615	3.60805861	3.65812

TABLE2: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON E-SERVICE QUALITY OF AMAZON

Efficiency	System Availability	Fulfillment	Privacy
2.30405405	2.189189189	3.44787645	3.48648649

TABLE3: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON E-SERVICE QUALITY OF JABONG

Efficiency	System Availability	Fulfillment	Privacy
3.35	3.583333333	3.31428571	3.333333

TABLE 4: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON E-SERVICE QUALITY OF MYNTRA

Efficiency	System Availability	Fulfillment	Privacy
3.864583	3.854166667	3.73809524	3.25

- Above tables clearly depict that on web-site efficiency parameter except Amazon all other retailers scored between 3-4 on a 5 point scale. Which meant, these e-sites are simple to use, informative, loads their pages fast, and sites are well organized.
- System availability meant, the site is always available for business, the sites launches and runs right away, the site does not crash, and pages on site do not freeze. On this particular parameter too except Amazon all the other 3 sites were perceived to be good.
- Fulfillment meant that the e-retailer delivers orders when promised. All the 4 e-shops chosen for the study perceived to be good on fulfillment.
- Privacy and Security meant protection of information about e-shoppers' web-shopping behavior, site protects information about the customers' credit card and symbols and messages that signal the site is secure are present on e-retailers' website. All the chosen e-retailers did score more than 3 on 5 point scale, which meant customers are more than satisfied with the privacy and security provided by these websites.

TABLE 5: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON E-RECOVERY DIMENSIONS OF FLIPKART

Responsiveness	Compensation	Contact
2.317647059	2.352941176	3.90196078

TABLE 6: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON E-RECOVERY DIMENSIONS OF AMAZON

Responsiveness	Compensation	Contact
3.385714286	3.142857143	3.42857143

TABLE7: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON E-RECOVERY DIMENSIONS OF JABONG

Responsiveness	Compensation	Contact
3.933333333	3.833333333	3.66666667

TABLE 8: RESPONDENTS PERCEPTIONS ON E-RECOVERY DIMENSIONS OF MYNTRA

Responsiveness	Compensation	Contact
2.73	2.53	2.28

The above four tables clearly depict that Jabong scores very high on responsiveness, compensation and contact the three important factors that induce e-recovery. And Amazon too is considered to be good at recovering its dissatisfied customers. But Flipkart and Myntra have scored low on e-recovery dimensions. To understand the impact of customer perceptions' of e-recovery dimensions on their repeat patronage, loyalty index of these e-shoppers is measured on a 5 point scale. They were asked to rate how likely will they spread positive word of mouth communication on a specific website, how likely will they recommend a site, how likely will they encourage friends, and how likely are they going to do future business with the website.

- Of the respondents 81% for Jabong, 79% for Amazon, 54% for Flipkart and 52% for Myntra were ready to spread positive word about their online shopping experience.
- More than three fourth of the respondents were ready to recommend Amazon and Jabong. But only approximately 40% of respondents are ready to recommend Flipkart and Myntra. And similarly a good majority is ready to encourage Amazon and Jabong over Flipkart and Myntra.
- 95% of Amazon, 91% of Jabong customers are ready to patronize with these sites, but only 66% of Flipkart customers and 62% of Myntra customers are ready to repurchase on these sites.
- There is a clear indication from the above facts that the higher the customers' satisfaction on e-recovery dimensions the greater the chances of customer loyalty with the website.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Mounting business and academic evidence demonstrated a widespread lack of Previous research on e-service quality have focused on Web site interactive quality while ignoring other aspects such as outcome quality and recovery that could have just as much impact on quality perceptions of an online experience. Based on present study the following recommendations can be made to these leading e-retailers:

1. Communication between the online retailers and its users is a major determinant of consumer trust. When an e-shopper faces a problem with outcome quality of his online experience, there should be a ready mechanism to fix the issue. The customer has to be heard. Online chat with the customer service executive, an immediate reply to the complaint made by him meant a lot to the dissatisfied customer. Jabong and Amazon customers are happy with these mechanisms. But Flipkart was considered to be not so responsive, when customer had an issue to complain.
2. Liberal return policies of Jabong were well acclaimed by customers. But Flipkart scores low on the same. Especially for goods like apparel, if there is a free return policy it would put the mind of any customer at ease as this enable the customer to treat the website like any regular offline store where he can return the product if it is not up to the expected standards.
3. For majority of online shoppers price is the most important factor in drawing them to a site. Flipkart prices were considered to be high for fashion and personal accessories. Just because the site is attractive does not mean e-shoppers are likely to come back. It is necessary to attract them with low prices when compared to competitors.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To improve the sample and chances of surveying more consumers in the internet population, future researchers might consider obtaining a national random sample. The sample chosen for study comprised of only students aged around 22-27 years. Expanding the sample to other generations would allow intergenerational comparisons to be made. Further research could explore the impact of variable such as personality traits on the customer's decision to with his or her current service provider.

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