

HOW DIGITALIZATION SHAPES MY SHOPPING EXPERIENCES? A CASE OF CONSUMERS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract

As digitization grows every day in developing and developed countries alike, this study aims to answer recently raised questions regarding whether digitization alters consumer purchase decisions and behaviors. To answer this question, data were collected via interview from 20 respondents selected through convenience sampling. All 20 respondents live in Thailand, while they had varied degrees of experience with online shopping, from no experience, to making frequent and regular online purchases. The interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The findings supported the theory that digitization affects consumer buying behavior, by indicating that there are both direct and interactive roles of technology advancement and online market platform factors which were found to have crucial effects on the relationship between digitization and consumer buying behavior. Moreover, the direct role of other variables such as payment methods, product qualifications, trustworthiness, and the presence of a world pandemic were found to be significant. It is therefore recommended that companies design digitized marketing and other strategies which suit consumers' new behavior; companies should emphasize the screening of product quality, seller trustworthiness, and fast delivery. The study findings provide practitioners and scholars with valuable information. Additionally, the limitations of the study and future research recommendations are discussed.

Keywords – Digitalization, Consumer behavior, Online purchase decision making

Paper Type – Research paper

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world has been introduced to the internet, information can now be reached more easily and excessively, shaping consumers and market behavior, and

facilitating e-commerce. Traditionally, it has been necessary for consumers to visit brick-and-mortar stores to buy goods, but this is no longer necessary at the current time. Initially, the number of online visitors who eventually made a purchase was relatively small

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compared to the huge number of active internet users (Roesler, 2018). However, things have changed abruptly since the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. Customers are now more willing to purchase online (Torkington, 2021). It is clear that after some time, they became comfortable doing transactions daily without visiting physical branches as they used to. For this reason, competition in the marketplace is getting fiercer, with various types of sellers flooding in for survival.

The ever-increasing internet penetration rate has influenced various aspects of Thai society including administration, education, business, communication, and other daily life activities, particularly shopping activities. In January 2021, over 48.59 million, or around 69.5% of the Thai population, used internet services, while 97.7% of these were able to use the internet through mobile services (Simon, 2021). This proves that use of digital technology has recently become common in Thailand. In addition, during COVID-19, Thailand's e-commerce grew by 35% in 2020 (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2020). Moreover, in July 2020, around 90% of digital visits were to online retail sites or stores (Leesa-Nguansuk, 2020). In July 2020, research by Muangtum stated that internet users expect to use online shopping more frequently even after the pandemic ends. Consumers of different age groups have all shown the same trend in increasing the frequency of online shopping. For instance, 48% of consumers aged 45 to 54 said they would shop more online during the pandemic; thus, this tendency signifies that after 2021 online shopping demand is potentially likely to increase (Muangtum, 2020).

After experiencing online shopping, some consumers might slowly change the way they make purchasing decisions. This change may be due to a variety of reasons. Although visiting a store can allow consumers to experience the actual product, online customers can look over various product choices from a collection of stores from multiple locations worldwide, which is more cost-effective and timesaving. In addition, a

sellers' profile, delivery time, product quality, and platform credibility, are 4 key elements which drive changes in how consumers order products. Of all the factors, trust is the most crucial aspect between a buyer and seller (Poon et al. 2017; Roberts-Lombard et al., 2019). Without trust, purchasing won't happen; this applies not only to physical stores but also to online stores.

In short, this study aims to reveal how digitalization has shaped consumer buying behavior in Bangkok. The structure of this study is organized accordingly. First, the theoretical foundation on prior studies is provided in Section 2, with the research methodology and research findings being illustrated in Sections 3 and 4. Next, the discussions and conclusions are explained in Section 5, while managerial implications are offered in Section 6.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Everyone in the world must constantly make decisions regarding their lives. There are many decisions to be made, while it is also hard for people to move on from a decision that they didn't yet make and the decisions that they have already made. The decisions that they have made or that they have not yet made can affect other decisions that they will make in the future. In this context, this study is articulated based on the theory of consumer behavior.

Classically, Walters (1974, p.7) defined consumer behavior as "the process whereby individuals decide whether, what, when, where, how, and from whom to purchase goods or services." In a similar vein, consumer behavior is identified as the study of a consumer's process in choosing, using, and disposing of products and services (Shah et al. 2021). When it comes to the online setting, online consumer behavior is therefore identified as the process through which consumers make purchase decisions in the e-commerce milieu (Wenzl, 2021). Regardless of whether it is online consumption or physical store consumption, the purpose of consumer purchase behavior is the same; that

is, consumption, but the methods and process to achieve this purpose are different. Therefore, from a theoretical point of view, the conventional theory of consumer behavior is placed as the cornerstone of the discussion. Basically, there are 4 types of consumer behavior:

- 1) Complex buying behavior: This behavior occurs when consumers must buy expensive products (Călin., 2015).
- 2) Dissonance-reducing buying behavior: This behavior is caused by comparing products. Some consumers must compare products before buying as they are scared that they will feel regret, if they didn't buy the best one (Oshikawa, 1969)
- 3) Habitual buying behavior: It is like routine behavior (Wood and Neal, 2009). For example, when a consumer is looking to buy instant noodles, they prefer to buy their favorite brand every time.
- 4) Variety seeking behavior: It is "the tendency of individuals to seek diversity in their choices of services or goods" (Kahn, 1995, p.130; see also Hong & Desai, 2020). For example, every time a consumer must go to buy shampoo, each time he/she will change the brand of shampoo. This is not because a consumer does not like the brand, but it is because he/she wants to get to know more variety. They want to try something different.

In addition, consumer behavior is inseparable from a series of influencing factors, while different schools classify these factors from different angles. According to Shah et al. (2021), there are three main factors that influence consumer behavior:

- 1) Personal Factors: Personal factors are about "an individual's interests or opinions that are affected by their demographics, such as age, culture, and gender (Boca, 2021, p.3, see also Gifford and Nilsson, 2014)
- 2) Psychological Factors: Psychological factors are about "an individual's response to marketing that depends on their perception or attitudes" (Boca, 2021, p.3). This factor is the hardest influential factor to measure or change, due to the

fact that consumers already have a variety of experiences and knowledge, which have shaped their beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. This can act as a barrier making marketers hard to reach, but it can also be an opportunity for marketers to innovate new products and strategies to reach their consumers.

- 3) Social Factors: Social factors refer to the influences of reference groups such as friends, family, colleagues, and neighbors (Boca, 2021). The importance of reference groups is widely recognized by marketers. Generally speaking, consumers tend to believe recommendations and advice from friends and family members, more than they do advertising (Nielsen, 2012).

Mainstream researchers have studied a variety of emphases regarding consumer behavior in the e-commerce setting. Zhu et al. (2019) studied consumer repurchase intentions for online shopping in Bangkok, with the findings revealing the importance of website security, online promotions, and trust, in triggering a consumer intention to continue shopping online. Rahman et al. (2018) conducted a study on consumer buying behavior regarding online shopping in Dhaka city, Bangladesh. The findings showed that Bangladesh consumers' online shopping behavior was influenced by net connectivity, website esthetics, website security, customer experience, age and learning, among others. Mohamed et al. (2014) revealed that price-oriented lifestyle, perceived ease of website use, and perceived usefulness of the website, promoted consumers' satisfaction with online shopping. Raman (2019) studied the intentions to shop online, of female Indian consumers, with findings confirming the importance of attitude, convenience, customer services and subjective norms. It is a fact that the majority of recent studies have been conducted using quantitative methods that are able to "generate knowledge and create understanding" (Ahmad et al. 2019, p. 2828) about e-commerce. However, in order to gain insight into the reasons, motivations, and obstacles behind online shopping. In

contrast, this study intends to apply qualitative research methods.

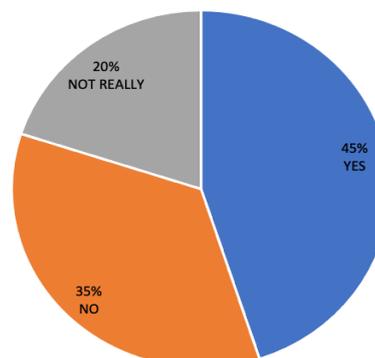
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to understand how digitalization influences consumers' buying behavior. For this purpose, interviews were conducted using 10 open-ended questions. 20 interviewees were involved in the interview, both who those who had experience online shopping and those who had never shopped online. The recruitment of 20 interviewees was in line with the recommendations of Latham (2013) who recommended 15 as a minimum number of interviews for qualitative data collection, especially when there is homogeneity among the participants. In terms of developing the interview questions, initially interviews were conducted with friends, family and classmates of the study authors, in order to better understand what they were most concerned with when shopping online, and what factors have the greatest impacts on their decisions. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the ideal number of interview questions for this type of interview is between 5 and 10. The main issues were extracted and developed to form 10 questions, accordingly. After gathering all the required information, a coding technique was used to categorize the information. Frequencies were then reported, and a pie chart provided for each question, providing a visual aid to understand the findings of the study. This analysis was deemed appropriate, as the setting of this study was to describe the basic phenomena of consumer buying behavior in the digital era.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section introduces any important issues identified in the study which relate to the research topic of the ability of digitalization to shape consumer buying behavior. The results discussed below are based on the 10 research questions, and aim to cover the main issues and thoughts relevant to consumer behavior while shopping online.

4.1 When You Were First Introduced to Online Shopping, Did it Change Your Shopping Behavior? If So, How?

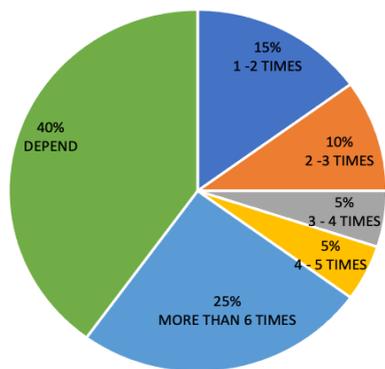


This question was analyzed to determine if digitalization did change customers shopping behavior. 45% of the respondents stated that digitalization has changed their buying behavior. On the other hand, 35% of the respondents stated that digitalization did not affect their buying behavior. The remaining 20% of the interviewees stated that digitalization does not really affect their buying behavior.

Based on the feedback from the interviewees who answered “Yes”, we can see that digitalization does change consumer behavior by providing more convenient access, digital coupons, and promotions, saving time from traveling, and supporting cashless payment systems. In addition, some respondents did not trust online shopping platforms. For example, some online businesses use online platforms mainly to update prices and promotions, rather than to better serve customers.

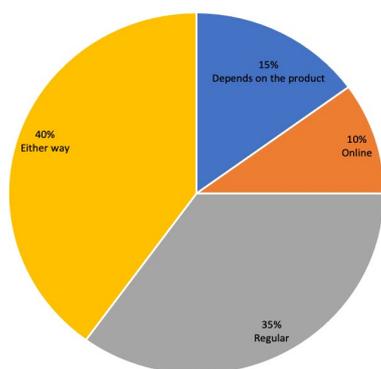
4.2 How Often Do You Use Online Shopping Services in A Month?

This question looks at the frequency of use for online shopping among the interviewees, with frequency measures as times used per month. 40% of the respondents stated that their frequency of online shopping depends on their current needs. 25% of respondents stated that they use online shopping more than 6 times each month. 15% of the respondents stated that they use online



shopping 1 to 2 times each month, while 10% stated that they use online shopping 2 to 3 times per month. Of the remaining 10% of respondents, 5% stated that they shop online around 3 to 4 times per month, while the other 5% stated that they shop online around 4 to 5 times per month. These two groups, in combination with the 25% of respondents who shop online 6 times per month, can be classified as frequent shoppers who have made online purchasing habitual. In conclusion, digitalization has more or less made online shopping a part of life.

4.3 If There Were No More COVID-19 Situations, Would You Like to Go Back to Shopping in Regular Stores or Continue Shopping Online, or Both?

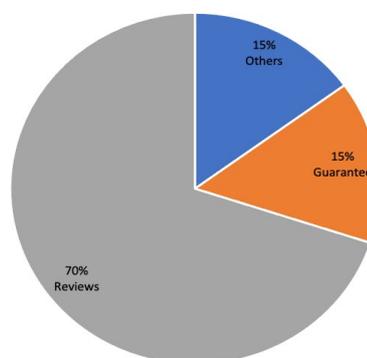


This question attempts to analyze how the current pandemic situation (aka. Covid restrictions) has shaped the respondents' buying patterns. As the graph shows, most respondents (40% of them) don't mind shopping either online or in physical stores, even if Covid restrictions are lifted. Furthermore, 35% of the respondents still prefer shopping in physical or regular stores,

rather than online, indicating a need to go to shops of any kind. 15% of the respondents think that the decision to shop online or in physical stores depends on the product being purchased. Meanwhile, the final 10% of respondents would prefer to continue shopping online, even without Covid-19 restrictions.

In conclusion, the responses to this question strongly indicate that the current condition which has led to people being engulfed mandatory online purchasing, has not changed these peoples' willingness for purchasing in physical stores.

4.4 Trust is Very Important While Buying Online. What are the Trust-Related Factors That Make You Choose to Shop Online?

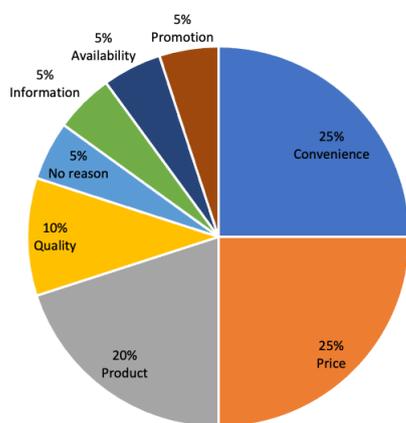


This question attempted to analyze which attributes of a website can be used as a trust indicator for customers when shopping online. 70% of the respondents chose reviews and ratings as their priority in terms of trust factors. In other words, the more positive reviews there are of a brand or product, the more customers will trust that brand or product when purchasing products on the brand's platform. 15% of respondents selected the presence of a Guarantee for the particular product as the most important trust indicator, while the remaining 15% mentioned other trust factors, such as the availability of a price comparison, having a padlock in the URL, or regular shipping updates.

Through this question, the importance of good reviews on a certain product or brand

can be understood, as it is by far the most trusted indicator to make decisions for purchasing.

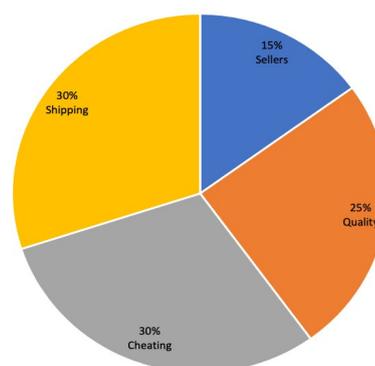
4.5 What is the Most Important Factor When Purchasing Online? Why?



There are 8 factors influencing consumers to shop online. Most of the interviewees stated that convenience or price most influenced their choice to purchase online, with each factor accounting for 25% of responses. Meanwhile, 20% of respondents stated that product choice was the most important factor, and 10% stated quality. The remaining factor choices of promotion, availability, information, and no reason, each accounted for 5% of responses. In conclusion, convenience, and price were determined to be the factors which have the biggest effect on consumers' decisions to purchase online. Consumers value these factors the most as they do not want to waste time and money in traveling to physical stores, and because prices online are often much cheaper. This shows that the interviewees' online shopping behavior was shaped by a constellation of psychological factors, as their responses to the activity were based on their own perceptions, opinions, and attitudes (Boca, 2021).

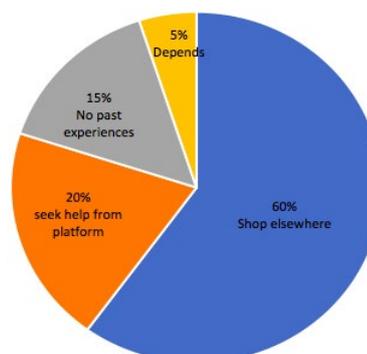
4.6 What are Your Biggest Concerns About Purchasing Online?

The concerns of purchasing can be grouped into 4 categories. The first two concerns are product shipping and cheating



behavior, with each concern accounting for 30% of responses. The interviewees may be afraid that the product will not be delivered on time and are aware of the possibility of cheating after transferring money to the seller. The third concern related to the quality of the product, with 25% of respondents stating that they would check whether products are fake or real and if it is the correct one that they chose or not. Sellers were indicated as being the lowest concern, selected by only 15% of respondents. Some consumers have had experience with a seller who repeatedly fails to reply to their messages after purchasing products, and with no delivery; these consumers are understandably weary that the same situation might happen again. In conclusion, shipping and cheating are the most concerning factors in online purchasing, followed by the quality of product and seller's behavior respectively.

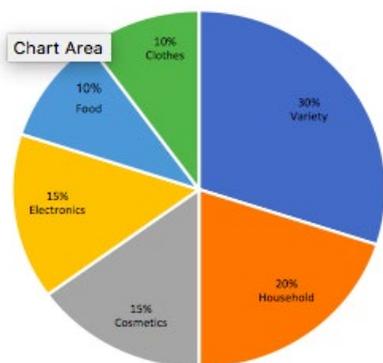
4.7 Referring to Question 6, After These Concerns Had Affected You, How Did You Regain Your Trust?



This question aims to reveal how respondents begin to trust the online shopping experience again, after a poor experience. The

majority (60%) answered that they simply would no longer buy from the retailer that caused them complications, choosing to purchase the same products from a different seller. 20% responded that they would seek help from the platform where they bought the products and would inquire with the platform regarding what services they can provide when the shopping experience is not good. Not all respondents had faced problems during or after shopping online, as 15% of respondents stated that they had not experienced any troubles. Lastly, 5% of interviewees reported that it would depend on the situation. It can be concluded that with so many retail options available online, people have plenty of choice. Individual online shops can lose the trust of their customers very easily, indicating that customer loyalty plays a big role in the success of an online business. People that have faced problems would choose to no longer shop at a problematic store and would rather purchase from different online retailers.

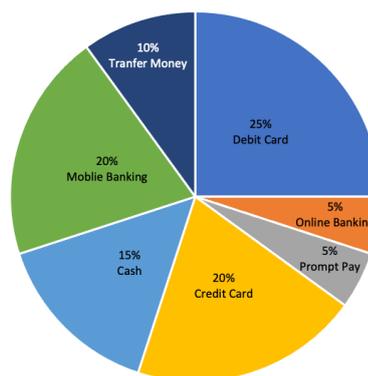
4.8 What Category of Products Do You Look for When Shopping Online?



The answers from this question provide insight regarding the category preferences of the respondents. Most of the respondents (30%) did not choose a particular category but rather indicated their interest in a variety of categories. 20% responded that household items were their main category. Cosmetics and electronics shared third place, each with votes from 15% of the respondents. Lastly, the categories food and clothes, also received

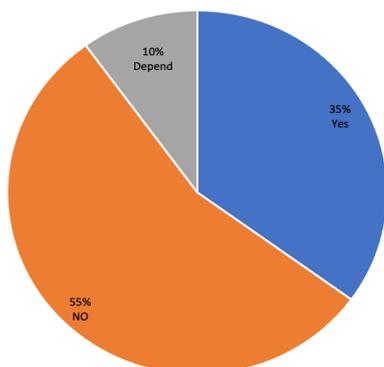
equal votes, at 10% of the respondents. From the many categories answered it can be concluded that different people have different preferences when it comes to online shopping, and that most online shoppers would search significantly when purchasing products from different categories. Thus, the purchasing behavior of the interviewees can be categorized as variety-seeking behavior.

4.9 Which Payment Method Do You Prefer to Use? Why?



This question analyses consumers preferred methods of payment, which were found to include money transfer over the counter, via debit card, mobile banking, online banking, prompt pay, credit card, and cash. 25% of respondents chose debit card as their preferred payment option, while credit card and mobile banking each accounted for 20% of responses. In addition, 15% of the interviewees chose to use cash on delivery, 10% chose to pay via a counter service, and lastly online banking and prompt pay each accounted for 5% of responses. In conclusion most people prefer to use a debit card, followed by credit cards, and online banking. One of the reasons for this is likely to be security. Digitalization has made payment easy and fast, but concern over the transaction risk derived from security has made the majority of interviewees choose the conventional payment methods of debit card and credit card. This also emphasizes the importance of building a more secure and stable online payment system in the context of the gradual popularization of digitalization.

4.10. If You Have Any Concerns While Purchasing Online, Would You Still Take the Risk? Why?



Regarding the perceived risk of purchasing online, 55% of respondents stated that they would not take the risks at all if there was any trust issue, believing that it is better to find a new shop that is more trustworthy instead. This was followed by 35% of consumers who were willing to take the risk, because some of the products were rare and not many shops sell the product they want. The remainder of respondents (10%) stated that their willingness to take the risk would depend on the product and situation. In short, most people think that it is not worth wasting money on things that may not work properly or cannot be delivered at all. Few people are willing to take the risk just because it saves time, with the remainder stating that it depends on the product itself.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main issues influencing consumer motivation to shop online, and those that may hinder consumers' engagement in shopping online have been analysed via the research findings. In correspondence to the aforementioned consumer behavior theory, the interviewees present variety-seeking behavior, while their online shopping behavior tends to be influenced by psychological factors derived from their own perceptions, opinions, or attitudes. This section will focus on the problems of online shopping, and the possible recommendations or solutions to solve these problems.

5.1 Problems of Online Shopping

From the interview, the possible problems that might have occurred to influence the answer of each respondent were determined.

- 1) *The Untrustworthy Seller:* Some respondents might have experienced an untrustworthy seller in the past. The only reason for not trusting is because of the communication channel, which causes miscommunication to occur. Sometimes, sellers do not respond to the customers after they make a payment leading to customers feeling curious about whether the seller is lying or not.
- 2) *Long Delivery Time:* In some shopping applications, the customer is informed who will ship the product and how long it will take. Some delivery information is accurate, some is not. Many sellers purposely lie or cannot follow what they have told the customers about the delivery time.
- 3) *Product Quality:* Some customers are concerned about the product quality as they have no chance to see the real product before they buy. Also, fake products are one of the problems they have faced in the past. Sometimes, they are curious that the goods they have ordered will be the correct one or not. Those goods might not look like what it seems to be in the picture.
- 4) *Trust:* Sellers tend to receive less trust when they have no reviews, no guarantees, and no detail as the respondents showed a lack of trusting behavior when some factors were not indicated during the process of making a purchasing decision.

5.2 Solutions

According to the above problems, there are some recommendations for online retailers to avoid these problems.

- 1) Sellers should ensure the availability of all information for every product before putting the product on sale. A middle

website for sellers to sell must allow the seller to sell only when all the required information is complete. If the information doesn't fulfill the requirements then the website shouldn't allow the seller to sell.

- 2) The middleman, such as a website or application, should deal with the seller regarding the delivery time. Both the middleman and the seller must be concerned with who will ship the product. The delivery time should be set-up in such a way that it accounts for the possibility of any accident situation that might occur during shipping. If the delivery time goes beyond the settled period, the middleman or the seller must provide some discount to secure the relationship between the senders and the customer.
- 3) Sellers should make sure that they are distributing the correct product to the customers and that it is well packed for protection and to maintain the quality of the product during shipping.
- 4) To gain trust from customers, sellers are recommended to provide deep detail of the product, including reviews and a guarantee so that customers can increase their trust in the store.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

As the world moves forward, digital technology is becoming an increasing part of our lives, while everything we want is at our fingertips. Just one click and an online purchase can be complete. Greater convenience, better prices, more variety, easy to send gifts, easy price comparisons, and no crowds, are just some of the advantages people obtain through online shopping. However, at the same time consumers face some challenges with shopping online. These include online payment security risks, goods not being delivered on time or not being accurately delivered to consumers, big differences between the physical goods and the goods displayed online. This section provides some managerial guidelines for improving the delivery of products or services

available through online platforms.

Managers should check every shop that wants to use their online platform to ensure they have followed every regulation, especially making sure they have included all necessary information for their products, before making them available for purchase. This will help every shop to gain consumers' trust which will lead to greater demand for buying products from these shops. The reason is that consumers will feel secure in buying the product because the information is very clear.

In reference to the previous suggestion, customer satisfaction or trust isn't only important when choosing a product, but after receiving the product as well. Sometimes customers require help after they have received the product. One real challenge is to provide adequate customer support; if there is good support after receiving the product, the customer will be more likely to give a good review, which can in turn lead to higher trust between the customer and the shop.

Considering the recommendation related to trust, managers can provide short duration guarantees for their goods to make consumers feel secure about their products. They can also ask for a review and give some rewards in return. For luxury and expensive goods, each shop should provide enough evidence showing that those products are real and improve credibility.

Another pillar to trust building strategies would be to improve seller communication, where as soon as a customer shows interest towards a certain online product (by either putting in his/her cart, wish list or buying list), the seller should be in direct contact with the customer, providing arrival dates, possible delays, constant updates on the product, and a phone number for any questions regarding the delivery. This initiative would not only give a sense of security to the customer, but also be a sign of quality service.

Online shopping provides consumers with a wide variety of products and retailers to choose from. This research has revealed that people will not hesitate to change retailers in the event of a bad shopping experience,

indicating the major role played by brand loyalty in the online context. Brand loyalty is critical in company performance in that it takes less time, effort, and capital, to retain loyal customers than obtaining new customers. To achieve a loyal customer base, it is important that an online retailer stays consistent. This consistency includes delivery service, product quality, and most importantly the brand. Every time a customer meets marketing emails, web pages, or any other kind of marketing tool they should have a feeling of familiarity. All marketing materials should be consistently branded, and the focus of the brand should be narrowed down so that customers know what a brand stands for and what it is specialized in.

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