

A Systematic Literature Review on E-Commerce Success Factors



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Abstract Purchases from online stores are preferred by the majority of European customers. Thus, it has stimulated both academic and business interest the identification of the factors that can affect their success. The objective of this article is to increase the understanding of the factors affecting the success of an online store. Thus, it can be a tool for online shop managers to have an overview of the factors that are important for an e-shop success. To achieve this, we contact a systematic literature review which tries to determine the success factors. In order to achieve this, we examine 24 articles published between 2013 and 2017 from peer-reviewed journals and conferences. Then we classify the factors in four main categories design and site presentation, e-marketing techniques, trading, delivery and customer support before and after the purchases and site's reliability, safety and reputation.

Keywords Online retailing · E-commerce success factors · E-shop evaluation · Systematic literature review

1 Introduction

According to Eurostat seven out of ten internet users made an online purchase in 2017. The main buyers are users between the group age of 16–24 and 25–54 and the most popular purchases are clothes and sports goods (64%) following by travel and accommodation (53%). The biggest e-commerce markets in Europe are the United Kingdom (87%), Denmark (86%), Netherlands and Sweden (84% each) and Germany (82%). These percentage indicates that 80% of internet users made orders

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© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2020
A. Kavoura et al. (eds.), *Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism*,
Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36126-6_76

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for product or services over the Internet. However, the main problems that EU e-customers face are about the delivery process (17%) and having technical problems with the site while ordering or paying (11%) [1].

On the other hand, in Greece, there is a development of 15–20% of the Greek Online Business-Customers market even the fact that the number of online buyers remained stable. Greek online shoppers it is showed that they prefer mainly Greek online stores (85% of respondents replied that they make over 80% of their online purchases) and the reason that they choose online stores are because they find better prices and offers, bigger range of products and they save time because the processes are automated. The main problems that Greek customers faces are about the delivery process of the products and the support post-purchase [2].

The above surveys recorded two opinions of different consumer audiences. The first one describes the situation that exists in Europe e-commerce market and the second one describes the situation in the Greek market. However, both underline some factors that are important for an e-commerce store. Thus, we believe that is very interesting to summarize the factors that influence the success of an e-shop according to literature. The paper follows the above structure: first, it is presented the methodology of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Then, we present the results of the selected articles and we conclude with the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 Methodology

To conduct our Systematic Literature Review we use as the guidance proposed by Tranfield [3]. First, we plan the review by specifying the objectives of the research and the main data source of our review. Next, we conduct the review by setting the selection criteria, grouping the publication and classify the results. Finally, we comment on the results (in Sect. 3).

Our objective is to identify and categorize the main factors that affect the success of an e-commerce store. To achieve this the data collection came mainly from the sources such as Science Direct, Scopus, and Google Scholar. In order to identify the right content keywords, it is important to refer that they included the concepts of key points of the research, such as e-shop, electronic shop, online shop, electronic commerce, e-commerce combined with success factors or evaluation, quality. The above keywords led to a variety of results. In order to limit and identify the most suitable sources, the advanced search was made using combinations between the above terms and success. At the same time, as data in e-commerce is changing at a dizzying pace, a limitation on the release date was considered. The articles that explore the factors that an online store succeeds in are limited to the last 5 years with most being published between 2013 and 2017. A review of the research results was done by studying the summaries from articles and book chapters. Sources whose summaries did not include words related to e-commerce and its success were rejected by the study. A final audit was carried out in more than 80 articles, of

Table 1 Stages of literature review

Stage	Description of stage	Number of articles
First stage	Search in three main sources (Science Direct, Scopus, Scholar Google)	Extremely big number of articles
Second stage	Combination of keywords with terms such as success factors, evaluation or quality	Big number of articles
Third stage	Use of limitations (time frame 2013–2017 etc.)	80 Articles
Fourth stage	Study of summaries of both articles and chapters	24 Articles

which 24 were involved in analyzing the data for the conduct of this work. Table 1 summarizes the stages of the literature review.

After the final choice of articles, a grouping process followed. At each source, researchers studied the subject of “e-shop success factors” from a different perspective. It was necessary to create broader sets of factors in order to limit them and study them effectively. According to Webster and Watson [4], the approach was based on the content of the sources (concept-centric). The contents of the latest scientific publications led to the creation of four major categories of factors. The conceptual pieces are factors related to site design and general presentation, factors related to marketing techniques, factors related to trading, delivery and customer support before and after the completion of their purchases; and finally, a category of factors related to the site’s reliability, safety and reputation.

As mentioned above, for this systematic literature review are selected 23 papers published between 2013 and 2017; the majority of them have been published in 2017 and in 2016 when were published 8 papers (see Fig. 1). Most articles have been published in Computers in Human Behavior (7), followed by Telematics and Informatics (2), Electronic Commerce Research and Applications (2), Information and Management (1), The Service Industries Journal (1), Conference/Congress (1),

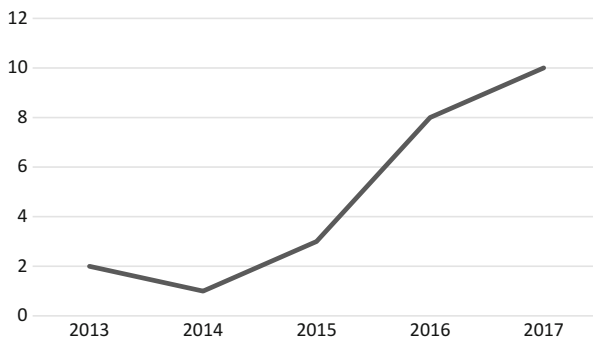


Fig. 1 Publication per year (2013–2017)

Asia Pacific Management Review (1), ACM Transactions on Management Information Systems (TMIS) (1), Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science (1), Computer Standards and Interfaces (1), International Journal of Information Management (1), International Journal of Production Economics (1), Industrial Management and Data Systems (1), IJASRD (1), Electronic Commerce Research (1) and The Electronic Library (1).

3 Results

3.1 Factors Related to Site Design and General Presentation

The most important factor during the design phase is to identify the sites' target group [3, 4] because different generations pay attention to different things. For example, Gen Y focus on site response time, presence, structure. Specifically, they want a fast site, a clear presence and simple structure [5]. Interactive interfaces and elements such as design, virtual arts and graphics [6], structure and site layout [7] consider key elements for a quality e-shop [6]. The ultimate goal for combining all these different elements is to create a satisfying [7] and enjoyable [8] site. Another element, that affects the satisfaction rate is the accurate guidance that receives when it is needed [9], services personalization and instant response to problems [10].

In an online store, there is not a physical presence, so the only touchpoint between customer and product is the product presentation. An interactive interface (using pictures, video, etc.), an accurate product description is extremely important because it creates a better picture for the presented product [11–13]. Except for the usability of content and product presentation Shin [6] adds the payment methods and customer services in site general presentation. As the online market has no limits the online stores should be able to adapt easily in different language and cultures maintaining its design and presentation [9]. Consequently, the site design process and site presentation is the result of a collaborative project between experts from different scientific fields [14].

3.2 Factors Related to Marketing Techniques

An online store has no physical presence, thus marketing is an extremely important factor for its survival and success [15]. Equally important is an attractive presentation which is a tool for the marketing manager to attract new customers and to create a sustainable competitive advantage [6]. The creation of a strong customer base through continual communication, interaction and having sufficient information about customers [14] is the key for an online shop successful. The customer base engages with the online store with comments/feedback for products or services

during and after purchase. Increasing engagement can be translated to improving customers' loyalty and increase online sales [16]. On the other hand, the online comments/feedback or recommendations can be the reason to attract new clients [13]. Social media is a big part of the Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM) because it offers a way for customers to communicate and express their opinions about a company. However, businesses have to be willing to learn about their experience and communicate with them during their customer journey [17].

The variety of personal data give businesses the opportunity to follow a customer-centric strategy where the customer is in the center of business processes. In the case of an online store, this strategy (having a detailed profile of customers) can influence customer satisfaction and its survival [18]. Furthermore, recommendation systems are an important parameter for customer-centric strategies. Recommendations purpose products to customers that are similar or products that can be combined with their purchase. A customer who has a solid relationship with an online store trusts easier the proposed recommendations [19]. Same results have personalized messages which are more successful in the case that customers have an opinion about a product [20].

A big part of an online marketing campaign is online advertising and especially the advertising in search engines [14, 21]. An e-shop must have good representation in the organic results of search engines. For example, Lu [21] points out that the existents of a link with the brand name of the company are very important for recognition purposes. On the other hand, the landing page of the link plays an important role in the creation of a relationship with customers. The reputation, site security and interactions with customers influence the choice of customers. Quick response to customer message can influence customers' intentions about the site [22].

Advertisement through social media is another way an online shop to be promoted. However, this type of advertisement has to focus only on existing customers in order to be successful because they respond better to the advertising message [14]. Media multitasking advertisement offers a complete view of the products because they encompass different source of information. Thus, they are more effective [23].

Digital marketing can improve the communication, interactions, and responses between the online store and customers. In addition, digital marketing can be the reason that a company starts its digital transformation processes by improving the back end processes [24].

3.3 Factors Related to Trading, Delivery and Customer Support Before and After the Purchases

The term e-services include services that are capable to satisfy their customers such as information search, required services to make a deal, services to fulfill a deal,

services after selling a product [25]. Consequently, there is a connection between the information and the e-services that an online shop provides. Two conditions should be existed in order to offer advanced services, improved main activities related to site services (order fulfillment, privacy precaution) and enhance services after the selling process (customer services, recovery services, etc.) [12]. Each online store can offer different services related to product types, risk rate [25]. Offered services can increase the sales rate [12, 25] customer royalty, create additional value and customer satisfaction [25].

Payment services [26] and different type of costs (delivery or transaction) [12] are considered important factors that underline an e-shop success. There are two main payment methods. Pay-to-order method is the most common and it is used by the variety of online stores. Pay-on-delivery is an upcoming payment method which can improve the quality of offered services but it more expensive for sellers. Furthermore, this type of payment is capable to attract new customers that are unfamiliar with online shopping [26].

3.4 Factors Related to the Site's Reliability, Safety and Reputation

The lack of trust is the main reason that customers do not choose an online shop to make their purchase [27]. In a physical shop, trust can be achieved through the conversation with a salesperson. However, in online stores trust can be created through fast transactions, having no additional charges, fulfill obligations and responsibilities and through standardized customer services [27]. Extremely important for the reputation of an online shop is the reliability and the support after the purchase [8]. Call centers play an important role in online stores because it is a way that customers communicate with the business [14].

4 Conclusions

The preference of European customers to shop online has increased the competition between online stores which try to increase their market share by offering sophisticated services. In the domestic market, online shopping is in intermediate stage, namely, it is not in its infancy neither it is mature enough. Furthermore, Greek customers preference to shop from online stores creates an opportunity for domestic online market to grow and thrive. Thus, this research can be an informative tool for managers, policies in order to pay attention to specific characteristics that can affect the success of an online store.

The results of the Systematic Literature Review indicate that there are four main categories that influence the success of an online shop. Site design and

presentation (speed, structure, product presentation, easy navigation), marketing techniques (customer-centric strategy, e-WOM, marketing campaign), offered services including services before and after the purchases and factors related to trust such as payment methods, protection of personal data, etc. However, this separation cannot be strict because there is interdependence of the factors. For example, simple design or safety issues can be helpful for improving marketing results and sites' reputation.

This research has some limitations. An important limitation is the small number of articles that are used in order to conduct the SLR given the fact that the time span is 5 years (2013–2017). The SLR results have not been tested in quantitative research in order to check their significance. Nevertheless, these limitations can be suggestions for future research. The small number of articles can be considered an indication that a factor categorization exists, and researchers should scale up the existing research by including many more articles. Finally, it is important to test which of these factors are considered more important for online shops managers by testing these factors in the field in markets which different maturity.

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