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Online Shopping Motivation and the Influence of Persuasive Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Persuasive techniques are frequently utilized in online platforms like e-commerce to sway people's attitudes and behaviors in a noncoercive manner. Recent studies highlight the importance of tailoring these strategies to specific groups of individuals for enhanced effectiveness. In our research, we propose customizing six common influence strategies-scarcity, authority, consensus, liking, reciprocity, and commitment-based on the online shopping motivations of consumers. Through a study involving 226 online shoppers and employing Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), we developed a research model to explore how these strategies can be personalized according to shoppers' motivations. Our findings reveal that different strategies wield varying degrees of influence depending on the shopper's motivation. For instance, shoppers categorized as "Balanced buyers," who typically plan their purchases and seek information online, are particularly responsive to the commitment strategy. Conversely, "Convenience shoppers," motivated by the ease of online shopping, show a stronger response to scarcity tactics. Meanwhile, "Storeoriented shoppers," driven by social interaction and immediate possession, are most swayed by consensus strategies. Lastly, "Variety seekers," drawn to online shopping for its wide array of products and brands, exhibit a greater susceptibility to authority-based approaches.

KEYWORDS: persuasion, shopping motivation, Online shopping, shopper typology, persuasive strategies

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive e-commerce realm, merely presenting products online isn't sufficient for businesses to distinguish themselves. With numerous rivals vying for attention, companies are continuously seeking innovative strategies to sway consumer decisions in their favor.

Persuasion, the art of influencing people's attitudes and behaviors without coercion, is a central focus across various domains, including e-commerce. These persuasion techniques, often termed persuasive strategies, are implemented through customized messages and approaches aimed at specific audiences. For example, phrases like "Limited stock available" are commonly employed to instill a sense of urgency.

Research underscores the effectiveness of tailoring persuasive strategies to individual or group characteristics. While personality traits and demographics like age, gender, and culture have *How to cite this paper*: Rohit Gupta "Online Shopping Motivation and the Influence of Persuasive Strategies" Published in

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traditionally been utilized for this purpose, they might not always be available, particularly in e-commerce settings. Thus, there's a need to explore alternative factors that can inform tailored persuasive strategies. Our study seeks to address this gap by investigating whether consumers' shopping motivations can effectively inform the customization of influence strategies.

In e-commerce, consumers' intentions to purchase are closely linked to their shopping motivations. Different shoppers exhibit varying patterns and behaviors influenced by their unique motivations. Therefore, identifying these motivations becomes crucial for crafting personalized shopping experiences. We draw on the typology of Rohm and Swaminathan (2004), which categorizes consumers into convenience shoppers, store-oriented shoppers, balanced buyers, and variety seekers based on their motivations. Understanding which persuasive strategies resonate with each shopper type enables a more personalized shopping experience. For instance, leveraging consensus messages may sway variety seekers, who seek validation from similar others.

Our study, involving 226 e-commerce shoppers, examines how different shopper types, based on their motivations, respond to various persuasive strategies. We employ Cialdini's six influence strategies, widely used across domains, including e-commerce. Through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), we analyze survey data to unveil significant differences in susceptibility to these strategies among shopper types. Balanced buyers exhibit a strong inclination towards commitment strategies, while convenience shoppers respond more to scarcity tactics. Store-oriented shoppers are influenced by consensus, and variety seekers are swayed by authority.

These findings provide valuable insights for implementing persuasive strategies in e-commerce, paving the way for more effective and personalized approaches to influence consumer behavior and attitudes.

Literature review

Shopping Motivation: Research has highlighted the effectiveness of tailoring products to suit different consumer segments by categorizing customers based on their motivations for online shopping. Moreover, this classification informs businesses about what customers prioritize and their mindset during the shopping decision-making process.

Various taxonomies of online shoppers exist, such as the typology introduced by Keng Kau et al. (2003), which classifies e-commerce shoppers into six groups based on their information-seeking behaviors and online motivations during the shopping process. Another well-known typology is that of Rohm and Swaminathan (2004), which divides online shoppers into four categories: variety seekers, convenience shoppers, store-oriented shoppers, and balanced buyers, based on their shopping motivations.

According to Rohm and Swaminathan (2004), convenience shoppers are motivated by the ease and time-saving aspect of online shopping, without an immediate need for the products they purchase. Conversely, variety seekers are driven by the opportunity to explore multiple brands and products from various stores. Balanced buyers, distinct from variety seekers, typically plan their purchases in advance and are motivated by the ability to research product details online. Store-oriented shoppers are influenced by social interaction and the desire for immediate product acquisition. Analyzing consumers' online clickstream data can help identify these shopper categories. For example, variety seekers tend to spend more time comparing products and prices across different stores, while store-oriented shoppers engage in social interactions on e-commerce platforms before making purchases. Additionally, convenience shoppers prioritize time and effort savings, leading to focused browsing and less engagement in social interactions or willingness to pay extra for express delivery.

In our study, we utilized the typology of Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) due to its alignment with other existing typologies and its relevance to online shopping behavior. Furthermore, to our knowledge, no prior study has employed this widely recognized typology to tailor influence strategies in e-commerce.

Persuasive Strategies

Simons and Jones (2011) define persuasion as "human communication designed to influence the autonomous judgments and actions of others," emphasizing its aim to change people's thoughts or behaviors without coercion. It's typically up to the individual being persuaded to make the final decision on whether to alter their behavior.

Persuasive strategies encompass various methods employed to implement persuasion. The Persuasive Systems Design framework (PSD) proposed by Oinas-Kukkonen and Harjumaa (2008) presents 24 strategies categorized into primary task support, dialogue support, social support, and system credibility support. These strategies find wide application in e-commerce platforms, such as Amazon's 1-Click feature, which simplifies the purchasing process, and childrensplace.com's personalized product suggestions.

Another taxonomy of persuasive strategies is influence strategies, Cialdini's six including reciprocity, scarcity, commitment, authority. consensus, and liking (Cialdini, 2009). Reciprocity exploits people's inclination to return favors, seen in loyalty rewards programs like those offered by financial services companies. The commitment strategy capitalizes on humans' tendency for consistency, as demonstrated by wish lists on ecommerce platforms like Amazon.

Consensus, also known as social proof, relies on individuals mirroring the actions of others when uncertain, evident in features like "Customers who bought this item also bought..." on various ecommerce sites. Authority, drawing from people's deference to authoritative figures, is evident in endorsements by influencers or expert reviews. Liking leverages the preference for requests from those we like, shaping consumer behavior based on personalized recommendations and interactions.

Scarcity, according to Cialdini (2009), capitalizes on the allure of limited availability, as seen in promotions like "only three left in stock" on Amazon or "Hurry, n item(s) left for delivery" on Laura.ca.

Research by Kaptein and Eckles (2012) explored the impact of consensus, authority, and scarcity on behavior change in online systems. They found significant differences in the effectiveness of these strategies among individuals, emphasizing the importance of tailored approaches.

In our study, we chose to focus on Cialdini's six persuasive strategies due to their widespread use in consumer research and their distinctiveness compared to PSD strategies. Furthermore, our study aims to fill a gap by mapping shoppers' online motivations to the persuasive strategies they respond to, using Cialdini's framework.

Other Factors That Influence Shopping Motivation

This study delves into the impact of persuasive strategies on shopping motivation, particularly how different types of shoppers are affected. However, we acknowledge that various factors influence consumers' shopping motivation, including the value derived from the shopping experience. The concept of value proposition encompasses two main dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic values. Consumers with a high hedonic shopping value often make purchases for the pleasure or happiness derived from shopping rather than the practicality of the product or service.

Hedonic and utilitarian shopping values are actively researched in e-commerce. For example, Yu et al. (2018) explored the role of these values in consumers' purchase intentions during online shopping carnivals. They found that individuals with hedonic shopping values are swayed by entertainment aspects, while those with utilitarian values prioritize saving money, selection, and convenience. While our study focuses on shopping motivation through different shopper types, Yu et al.'s work centers on hedonic and utilitarian shopping values.

Additionally, Adaji et al. (2019) examined how influence strategies affect online consumers' shopping motivation based on their shopping values. They found that individuals with high hedonic value are inclined to purchase scarce or limited products, while those with high utilitarian value are influenced by their social circles. Our study differs from Adaji et al.'s in that while they defined shopping motivation based on hedonic and utilitarian shopping values, we categorized shopping motivation according to Rohm and Swaminathan's (2004) taxonomy of shopper types. To our knowledge, this approach has not been previously explored.

Research Question

The overarching research question that is addressed by this paper is the following:

How are e-commerce shoppers influenced by persuasive strategies based on their different motivations to shop online?

Research Methodology SMM

To address our research inquiry, we constructed a path model (depicted in Figure 1) using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This model aimed to gauge the susceptibility of four distinct shopper types—variety seekers, convenience shoppers, store-oriented shoppers, and balanced buyers—based on their online shopping motivations, to Cialdini's (2009) six influence strategies: scarcity, consensus, authority, commitment, reciprocation, and liking. The objective was to discern which persuasive strategy exerts the most significant influence on each shopper type.

Shopping motivation was assessed using Rohm's scale, comprising four constructs and 17 questions (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). The susceptibility to persuasive strategies was measured using Kaptein et al.'s (2009) scale, consisting of six constructs and 32 questions.

For the PLS-SEM analysis, bootstrapping was employed with a random sample size of 5,000 (with replacement) to establish the distribution for the various constructs, as recommended by Hair et al. (2016). Additionally, we evaluated the indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of our model to ensure they met the minimum requirements for PLS-SEM analysis, as outlined by Hair et al. (2016). These findings are detailed in the Evaluation of Global Measurements section. Furthermore, we computed the path coefficient, β , between constructs.

To validate the model, we administered an online survey using the aforementioned instruments. All items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 7 indicating "strongly agree."

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The survey data was analyzed using the SmartPLS tool2, which is widely utilized for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). SmartPLS is favored in the research community due to its user-friendly interface and the straightforward interpretation of results (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016).

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)

PLS-SEM is primarily utilized in exploratory research for theory development, focusing on explaining the variance of dependent variables within a research model. It's noted for its ability to produce significant statistical results even with smaller sample sizes, and it doesn't rely on the distributional assumptions of other statistical methods (Hair et al., 2016). Instead of assuming a specific distribution, PLS-SEM employs bootstrapping, where random subsamples are repeatedly selected and replaced from the original dataset. For our structural model analysis, bootstrapping was conducted with a random sample size of 5,000 (with replacement), following the recommendation by Hair et al. (2016).

Assessment of Global Measurements

Before examining the relationships between constructs, it's crucial to evaluate the relationships between the indicators (measures of each construct or the questions posed for each construct). This involves assessing a model's internal consistency reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2016). The results of these evaluations are detailed below.

Internal Consistency Reliability

The use of Cronbach's alpha to gauge internal in Discriminant Validity consistency reliability is discouraged because it arc assumes equal reliability among all indicators of a lo construct, which may not always hold true due to variations in outer loadings. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha tends to increase with the addition of more items, regardless of their relevance (Hair et al., 2016). A preferable alternative for assessing internal consistency is composite reliability, which indicates the extent to which indicator variables effectively measure a construct (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016). Table 3 indicates that all constructs exhibit composite reliability values exceeding 0.6, the acceptable threshold (Hair et al., 2016), signifying high levels of composite reliability across all constructs.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity refers to the correlation between indicators of a construct, with higher correlations indicating stronger convergent validity. Since indicators of a construct are intended to measure the same underlying concept, they should exhibit substantial shared variance. In structural equation modeling, convergent validity is often assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE) (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016). Table 3 reveals that all constructs in the model achieve AVE values meeting the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.5 (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016), indicating satisfactory convergent validity.

Indicator Reliability

Indicator reliability refers to the strength of the relationship between indicators comprising a construct and the construct itself (Hair et al., 2016). It is recommended that this relationship, known as the outer loadings, should be at least 0.4 for exploratory studies (Hulland, 1999; Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016). As demonstrated in Table 4, the outer loadings in the model satisfy this criterion.

Constructs	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Convenience shopper	0.875	0.637
Store oriented shopper	0.816	0.600
Balanced buyer	0.863	0.677
Variety seeker	0.638	0.50
Reciprocity	0.897	0.638
Scarcity	0.789	0.50
Authority	0.868	0.569
Commitment	0.832	0.50
Consensus	0.860	0.607
Liking _{al} 🔰 💋	0.853	0.537

Discriminant validity assesses the extent to which constructs in a model are distinct from each other. Establishing discriminant validity indicates that each construct in the model captures a unique aspect (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016). A commonly used method to establish discriminant validity is by comparing the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with its highest correlation with other constructs. If the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlation values in each row, discriminant validity is affirmed (Wong, 2013; Hair et al., 2016). As indicated in Table 5, the bold square root of the AVE exceeds the correlation values in each respective row. Hence, we conclude that discriminant validity is confirmed.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

The structural model's outcomes reveal the strength and significance of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, as well as the extent to which the variances of the independent variables are explained by the dependent variables. Path coefficients (β) between constructs illustrate these relationships, with significance levels denoted by asterisks ranging from 1 to 4, indicating p-values of < 0.05, < 0.01, < 0.001, and < 0.0001, respectively (Table 6).

Among the shopper types, balanced buyers exhibit the strongest susceptibility to the commitment strategy ($\beta = 0.327$), while other strategies demonstrate insignificant effects. This suggests that balanced buyers are particularly responsive to commitment-based approaches. Conversely, convenience shoppers are most influenced by scarcity, while consensus exerts the greatest impact on store-oriented shoppers. Additionally, variety seekers are predominantly influenced by the authority strategy.

Discussion

This study aims to discern which persuasive strategy resonates most with each shopper type. Our findings provide insights into the significant variations in the effects of persuasive strategies on e-commerce shoppers, driven by their diverse motivations for online shopping. For instance, while commitment strongly influences balanced buyers ($\beta = 0.327$), store-oriented shoppers are notably susceptible to consensus ($\beta = 0.276$).

Convenience Shoppers

Convenience shoppers are primarily motivated by the ease and time-saving aspects of online shopping, rather than seeking variety across retailers (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). They do not expect immediate product delivery and are less inclined towards social interaction during the shopping process. Our findings indicate that scarcity ($\beta = 0.295$) significantly influences convenience shoppers. Given their preference for convenience over variety, it's unsurprising that they are swayed by items that are limited.

Implementing scarcity, as suggested by Cialdini (2001), involves emphasizing the unique benefits and exclusivity of a product. E-commerce platforms often highlight limited stock or rare items to create a sense of urgency. For instance, Amazon displays "n items in stock" (with 'n' representing a low number) when supplies are dwindling. Similarly, Laura, a Canadian retailer, uses phrases like "Hurry, n item(s) left for delivery" to signal limited stock, as illustrated in Figure 3A.

These findings highlight the importance of considering shopping motivation when tailoring persuasive strategies for e-commerce, especially in the absence of demographic data.

Store-Oriented Shoppers

Store-oriented shoppers are motivated by the desire for immediate product possession and social interaction while shopping online (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). Our study reveals that this category of shoppers is most influenced by the consensus strategy ($\beta = 0.276$). Consensus, also known as social proof, suggests that people tend to emulate others similar to them, especially when uncertain (Cialdini, 2001). Given their inclination towards social interaction, store-oriented shoppers are likely to seek input from others when making purchasing decisions.

Cialdini (2001) recommends leveraging peer power in implementing the consensus strategy. For example, displaying reviews from satisfied customers who share similarities with prospective buyers can be effective. In e-commerce, showing products frequently purchased together or recommendations based on previous purchases can influence decisionmaking. Amazon employs phrases like "Customers who read this also read" to showcase such recommendations, as depicted in Figure 4.

These results underscore the significance of considering shopping motivation when tailoring persuasive strategies for e-commerce.

Variety Seekers

Variety seekers are motivated by the desire to seek a variety of products across various stores, product types, and brands (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). Our findings suggest that this category of shoppers is most strongly influenced by the persuasive strategy authority ($\beta = 0.260$). This result is plausible because variety seekers, who compare products across various channels, are likely to encounter several reviews from experts who are knowledgeable about the product.

The authority strategy leverages the tendency of individuals to trust experts more than non-experts (Cialdini, 2001). Thus, presenting statements from experts can significantly influence variety seekers, who are predisposed to this strategy, to change their attitude or behavior. Implementing authority in ecommerce can involve using titles like Dr., Prof., CEO, or endorsements from credible sources. For instance, displaying book reviews from prominent authors or reviewers can sway variety seekers, as shown in Figure 5 with Amazon.

These findings highlight the importance of considering shopping motivation when tailoring persuasive strategies for e-commerce.

Best General Strategy for Shopper Types

For system designers aiming for an overall average effect across all shopper types, we recommend focusing on two strategies: liking and commitment. Liking exhibits significant influence on three out of four shopper types, surpassing authority and other strategies in effectiveness. Commitment, on the other hand, is the sole strategy with a notable impact on balanced buyers. Thus, for comprehensive effectiveness across all shopper types, implementing both liking and commitment strategies is advisable.

However, if the design objective is to maximize the effect of persuasive strategies on individual shopper types, tailored approaches are recommended. For balanced buyers, commitment is the optimal strategy, while convenience shoppers are most influenced by scarcity. Store-oriented shoppers exhibit a strong response to consensus, and variety seekers are particularly swayed by authority.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the results rely on self-reported data rather than direct observation, a common practice in consumer-based research. Secondly, the sample size of 226 participants represents only a fraction of global e-commerce shoppers. However, despite these limitations, we believe that the thorough analysis conducted ensures the validity and reliability of the results obtained.

Conclusion and Future Work

This study significantly contributes to research in ecommerce personalization by demonstrating the differential effectiveness of persuasive strategies across various shopper types. Tailoring strategies to individual shopper motivations enhances their efficacy in influencing attitudes and behaviors. For instance, commitment emerges as particularly influential for balanced buyers, while scarcity resonates strongly with convenience shoppers.

Our findings offer valuable insights for e-commerce platforms seeking to optimize persuasive strategies. For example, highlighting limited or rare products may appeal to convenience shoppers, while leveraging social proof can sway store-oriented shoppers. Moving forward, we plan to expand our study with a larger participant pool and implement and test these strategies on an online shopping platform.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated for this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

Ethics Statement

The study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the University of Saskatchewan Human Ethics Review Board. All participants provided informed consent.

Author Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research and have approved the final manuscript for publication.

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