A Framework for Relationships in eCommerce Websites

Ahmad Ghandour, Al Ain University, UAE*

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4445-7443

Mathew Parackal, University of Otago, New Zealand

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2124-8876

Kenneth R. Deans, Excelia Business School, France

ABSTRACT

Consumers are increasingly shifting their purchase patterns from in-store to online. Consequently, retailers have had to go online to remain competitive. Research pundits argued the success of going online lies in the website's ability to create and maintain relationships with customers. This research aimed at investigating the relationship development process from the perspective of merchants to point out independent variables that influence such relation. The study is picking on the dyadic nature of the interaction in building relationship among people and apply it to the online relationships. In particular, the role of self-disclosure and privacy for enhancing this relationship was investigated. A deductive thematic approach was used based on a predefined themes informed by the literature guided the information collection through a semi-structured interview with eCommerce website owners. The study offers useful insights in establishing the pathway to creating and maintaining a loyal customer through a framework with propositions that are useful for eCommerce website managers.

KEYWORDS

Loyalty, Privacy, Relationship Development Process, Relationship Marketing, Relationships, Self-Disclosure, Trust

INTRODUCTION

The past two years have shown unprecedented growth in eCommerce and a host of new opportunities has emerged because of the global COVID19 pandemic. Consumers shifted their purchase patterns from in-store to online. Consequently, retailers have had to go online to remain competitive (Al-maaitah, Tha'er Majali, & Almaaitah, 2021). Research pundits argue the success of going online lies in the website's ability to create and maintain relationships with customers through direct interaction (Adjei & Clark, 2010; Campbell, 2019; Ha & Lee, 2012; Otieno & Getuno, 2016). Adam and Deans (2000) observed that firms used websites for a variety of purposes that includes communications, transactions and relationship building. They found firms moving from one type of usage to another

*Corresponding Author

according to their marketing strategy and the responsiveness of their customers. Typically, firms would pursue one of two usages, depending on the target market. In most cases, they set up the websites for communication purposes, and over time use them for online transactions and relationship building. Firms may also start using websites for building trusted relationships that then move on to facilitate transactions. However, increasingly firms are recognizing the need to be relational focused, evident in the shift from a transactional basis to a relationship one (Campbell, 2019).

Indeed, the increasing use of websites in B2C is experiencing a paradigm shift from transitional to relationship marketing. While relationship marketing is well established in offline setting, the paradigm shift is warranting examining the key elements of building relationships with customers on the Internet. The act of establishing, developing, and maintaining successful online relational exchanges or relational marketing constitutes a major shift in marketing theory and practice (Adjei & Clark, 2010; Akrout, Diallo Mbaye Fall, Akrout Wafa, & Chandon Jean-Louis, 2016; Al-Adwan, Kokash, Adwan, Alhorani, & Yaseen, 2020; van Tonder & Petzer, 2018).

The aim of building relationship when selling is to foster trust in customers to enable the delivery of value over an extended period (Agariya & Singh, 2011). Mimicking the same in an online context is challenging, that is, to get eCommerce websites foster trust with customers for the exchange of mutual benefits. While it can be argued that the way relationships formed offline are different to offline, a common thread between them is the dyadic nature of the interactions (Storch, 2002). However, this has not been studied in the context of managing or advancing online relationships. Although online relationships have been discussed in the psychology literature, they were mostly interpersonal relationships, not in the context of eCommerce (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Cozby, 1973; Harvey & Omarzu, 1997). The current research lies at the intersection of relationship-building theory (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; O. N. Ndubisi, 2007) and eCommerce theory (Al-Adwan et al., 2020; Bhagat, 2009; Joinson, Reips, Buchanan, & Schofield, 2010; Metzger, 2004; N. O. Ndubisi, Malhotra, & Wah, 2008; Noble & Phillips, 2004). Interaction, however, appears to be independent, that is, individuals decide on the amount of interaction to advance the relationship. Therefore, there is a need to examine the relationship development process in its entirety to determine independent variables for creating customer relationships in the online context. The current study considered the role of self-disclosure and privacy for managing online relationships for new and repeat purchase customers from the vendor's perspective.

This article is structured as follows. First, we review the relationship development process with regard to the variables (dependent and independent) incorporated in our proposed model and discuss their interrelationships. This is followed by a description of the methodology, results and analysis and finally discussion and conclusions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study aims at understanding the building block of relationships with online customers for the purpose of establishing the pathway to creating and maintaining loyal customers. Owing to the exploratory nature of the research, the suggestions from previous studies in the relationship-building literature were used as the theoretical basis for the online relational development process and the formulation of the proposition in this research.

The literature on relationship marketing recognizes trust and commitment as the building blocks of a relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, & Kumar, 1996; Kumar, Hibbard, & Stern, 1995; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wilson, 1994). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), trust and commitment are at the heart of any successful relationship with customers. Trust is considered as the key element in long term relationships. It is the confidence placed on the word or promise of another (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985) and a key determinant of a relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Otieno & Getuno, 2016; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Wilson, 1994). When a promise is kept, it leads to a healthy

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/a-framework-for-relationships-in-ecommerce-websites/317411

Related Content

Two Faces of Mobile Shopping: Self-Efficacy and Impulsivity
Thaemin Lee, Cheol Parkand Jongkun Jun (2014). *International Journal of E-Business Research (pp. 15-32).*
www.irma-international.org/article/two-faces-of-mobile-shopping/110931

The Ecosystem of FinTech Companies in India: A Futuristic Perspective
Bino Joyand Asha E. Thomas (2022). *International Journal of E-Business Research (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-ecosystem-of-fintech-companies-in-india/316148

IT Development and the Separation of Banking and Commerce: Comparative Perspectives of the U.S. and Japan
Takashi Kubota (2008). *Cyberlaw for Global E-business: Finance, Payments and Dispute Resolution (pp. 53-66).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/development-separation-banking-commerce/7489

Semantic Location Modeling for Mobile Enterprises
Soe-Tsyr Yuanand Pei-Hung Hsieh (2008). *Agent Systems in Electronic Business (pp. 289-322).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/semantic-location-modeling-mobile-enterprises/5022

A Study of Networking and Information Exchange Factors Influencing User Participation in Niche Social Networking Sites
Carlos Andres Osorioand Savvas Papagiannidis (2019). *International Journal of E-Business Research (pp. 1-21).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-study-of-networking-and-information-exchange-factors-influencing-user-participation-in-niche-social-networking-sites/224964