Designing E-commerce Marketing Strategies for the Online Retail Industry: The Influence of Filipino Consumer Preference Towards Online Shopping

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Abstract
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an evident increase of online retail sellers and demand in e-commerce. To which, there is also an increasing number of complaints in regards to price deception and false marketing that affected the sales of online retailers. The researchers aimed to provide a solution by recommending new marketing strategies. This study investigated which among the factors: Customer Reviews, Customer Loyalty, Price, Advertisement, Hedonic Motivation, Rewards, Customer Care, Gender, Education Level, Income Group, and lastly Age Group would have a significant effect on consumer's online preference. A questionnaire with 51 questions was developed and disseminated through convenience sampling method. 502 responses from Filipino online consumers were acquired and the data was analyzed through Structural Equation Modeling using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 and IBM SPSS Amos. Results showed that Customer Reviews have the most significant effect on consumer's online preference, followed by Customer Loyalty, Price, Advertisement, and Hedonic Motivation. Through the significant factors found and certain demographic profiles that were relevant, marketing strategies were formed that catered on what influenced online consumers. The results of this study will be beneficial to the online retail sellers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords
Consumer Preference, Marketing Strategies, Online Retail Sellers, E-commerce, False Marketing

1. Introduction
December 2019 was the month to reckon with as an outbreak of pneumonia cases occurred in Wuhan City in China and the identified cause was a novel coronavirus which is a new strain of coronavirus that has not been recognized in humans (DOH 2020). As the pandemic highlighted the movement of adopting social media and the increased sales of e-commerce platforms, changes in consumptions of customers have also been seen (UNCTAD 2020). The implementation of national lockdowns, travel restrictions and business closures have impacted consumer behavior in which they are encouraged to do online shopping rather than traditional shopping (UNCTAD 2021).

Before the pandemic, the GDP of the Philippines was steadily growing from 5.7 % in the first quarter of 2019 to 6.7% in the last quarter of 2019. As stated by Mapa (2021), at the beginning of the first quarter of 2020, the Philippines' GDP had a growth rate of -0.7 %. The second quarter had the lowest growth rate of -16.9 %, -11.4 % in the third

quarter, and lastly -8.3 % in the last quarter. Due to this, the Philippines had a -9.5 % growth rate for the full year of 2020.

Even though the pandemic negatively affected the GDP growth rate of the Philippines, by summing the total business registrations under the Philippine Standard Industrial Classification Code (PSIC) 47913 described as "Retail Sale via Internet" per month in the year 2020, there were exactly 88,574 total registrations with 99.9% (88,484) being new registrations and 0.10% (90) being renewals (DTI 2020). Furthermore, this has led the business activity Retail Sale via Internet to stay within the top 5 ranking of business activity starting from the second quarter until the fourth quarter of 2020 (DTI 2020). Before the COVID-19 Pandemic struck the Philippines at the beginning of 2020, Filipino businesses have benefitted from brick-and-mortar stores (Marasigan 2020). Due to prohibition of traditional shopping channels, customers decided to switch towards e-commerce platforms to secure purchases and transactions (Mallorca, 2020). IPrice (2020) indicated that the Philippines increased by approximately 53% in terms of shopping app usage, which is the highest among the Southeast Asia countries in the second quarter of 2020. In terms of social media shops especially in Facebook, Fenol (2021) stated that Filipinos prefer convenience, live selling and mobile payments when shopping online during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Fenol (2021), approximately 87% of Filipino respondents are willing to spend more for ease of access to products or services while 93% said that they highly consider convenience alongside price when purchasing online. Moreover, the Philippines experienced the highest increase in online spending among the Southeast Asia countries with approximately 57% increase in the average basket size growth in the same year.

As the popularity of e-commerce has risen among Filipino consumers, a high volume of customer complaints has also taken place. According to Mercado (2020), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has recorded 14,869 complaints involving online transactions for the span of January 1 to October 31, 2020. Stevens et al. (2018) indicated that four out of five shoppers have changed their decision to purchase a product or service based only on a negative review they read online. Moreover, in the first quarter of the mentioned year, 985 complaints were documented by the government agency and significantly increased in the months of April and May 2020 with 8,059 complaints, associated with a 54.20% increase, which is identified to be issues related to price and false marketing (Fenol 2020). In which, the problem that the researchers want to address is the negative impact of price deception and false marketing to the sales of online retailers.

1.1 Objectives
In pursuit of offering a solution to the problem, this study aimed to investigate and determine the factors that affect Filipino consumers in their online shopping preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers designed marketing strategies that are associated with the online consumer preferences which could potentially help online retail sellers to increase their sales.

2. Literature Review
Asia is the fastest-growing region in terms of the global e-commerce marketplace and has the largest share of the world's business-to-consumer e-commerce market (ESCAP 2018). Global e-commerce sales have been increasing in the past years and from 2019 to 2020 it has increased by 26.9% which led up to 2,534,809.7 million USD sales in the year 2020 (Euromonitor 2021). The e-commerce sales of Asia have also been increasing and in 2020, its value is 1,182,848.1 million USD. The said region has also accounted for most of the global online retail sales (59.1%) even though it has decreased by 2.2% from the previous year (Davis 2021). The key consumers here are Chinese consumers who make a little over one-third of the world's one-third of online retail sales (34.9%) (Davis 2021). Among the world's top markets with the highest online shopping penetration rate are Singapore (60%), Malaysia (52%), and Thailand (51%). Generally, the scale of the digital economy in ASEAN is projected to increase by 5.5 times by 2025 (Think with Google 2017).

However, as the world entered 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck everyone, forcing the government to implement lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing that made consumers stay in their homes most of the time. Due to the prohibition of traditional shopping channels, customers decided to switch to e-commerce platforms to secure purchases and transactions (Ong et al. 2021, Mallorca, 2020). This led business owners to explore electronic transactions with a digitizing system in doing business activities (Harahap 2020). A survey conducted by Global Web shows that 48% of Filipinos plan to do more online shopping even if the pandemic is over. In terms of demographics,

72% of Filipino online shoppers are female while 28% are male. The age range between 25 to 35 years old is 45%, 22% are between 18 to 24 years old, 16% are between 35 to 44 years old, and lastly, 17% are 45 years old or older.

Therefore, it is understood that in marketing, strategy begins with understanding the goals that the business wants to achieve, or the problem it plans to solve. Afterward, it considers the environment in which the business and its competitors operate in order to gain an advantage and add value (Stokes 2018, Barone 2021). However, false marketing or the act of misleading, untrue marketing claims and usually makes misrepresentations about the company's own products to induce customers to pay more or even purchase a product that they would not have considered otherwise is still present (Davis 2018). This misrepresentation of the facts will result in an unacceptable number of people that will get wrong information or make incorrect decisions (Doborji and Hamed 2016).

In this study, it was determined what factors/variables that affect the preference of a customer when doing online shopping. These variables are Customer Reviews, Price, Rewards, Advertisement, Customer Loyalty, Customer Care, Gender, Hedonic Motivation, Education level, Income group, and lastly Age group. From other studies, these variables are significant to the online consumers, such that for online reviews, consumers trust online reviews more than the seller's statements (Zhu et al. 2017) and read product reviews to reduce the risk associated with a purchase decision (Malowska et al. 2017). In terms of price, it was revealed that as the price of a product increases, online shopping decreases and that sales on that website decreases (Muneer 2019). For rewards, having an effective rewards program can be used to positively influence a customer's behavior (Azpiral 2021). Southgate (2017) further suggests that having a creative attribute such as humor in an advertisement has a positive influence on the majority of Gen X, Y, and Z. For customer loyalty, a company has a 5-20% possibility of selling to a non-customer. But for existing customers, it is phenomenal that it increases by about 60-70%. Here the significance of client loyalty is reflected (Netigate 2020). Furthermore, providing an easy and simple e-shopping experience for the customers is needed to attract more customers (Sarwar et al. 2016) in terms of customer care. Similarly, hedonic customers enjoy the gratification of shopping (Atulkar and Kesari 2017) and found that when shopping trip is pleasurable, customers become more satisfied and more motivated in making their buying decisions and the consumers uses their experience as reference for future repurchases. In terms of their demographics such as gender, education, income group, and age group, it poses to be significant consumer demographics as an online shopping factor (Akhlaq and Ahmed 2016, Rafiq and Javeid 2018, Lubis 2018, Pratap 2019). Each variable is hypothesized whether which variables have an effect on the preference of the customer or whether each of the variables is significant to the current study. In the end, this will determine which factors/variables affect the preference of the customer, and later be used in formulating concrete and established marketing strategies that online retailers can use.

3. Methods

The researchers decided to use Structural Equation Modeling to determine the factors that affect Filipino online consumers' preference and to create new marketing strategies for online retailers. According to Hair et al. (2021), the minimum sample size for a study which has more than seven latent variables was at least 500 respondents. The researchers conducted an online survey which was deployed through Facebook, E-mail, and Instagram. Convenience sampling technique was applied in gathering the data because of the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

IBM SPSS Statistics 24 was utilized to analyze the descriptive statistics of the respondents. Subsequently, the researchers transferred the data from IBM SPSS Statistics 24 to IBM SPSS Amos to test the reliability of the conceptual framework. Latent variables that have a p-value greater than 0.05 and indicators that have a standardized regression weight of less than 0.5 will be removed in the initial model. Removing the insignificant latent variables and indicators will improve the accuracy of the structural model. The final model shown in Figure 1 indicates that Customer Reviews (CR), Customer Loyalty (CL), Price (P), Advertisement (A), and Hedonic Motivation (HM) are the significant latent variables that affect Filipino online consumers' preference.
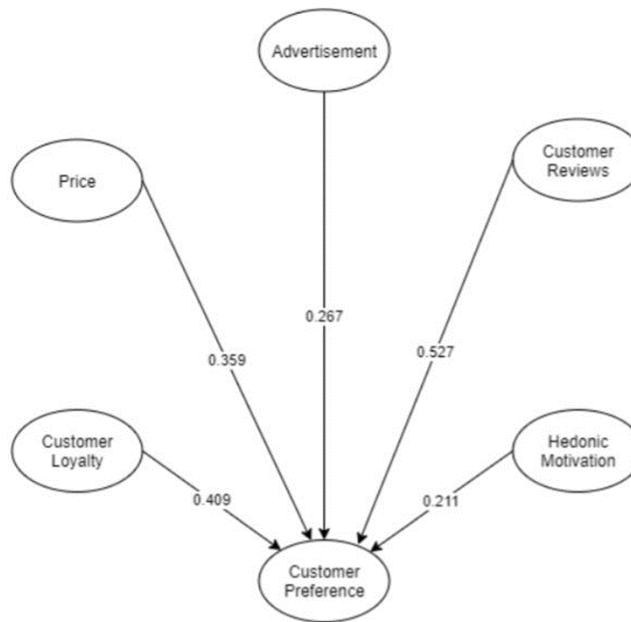
Figure 1. Final SEM Model

4. Data Collection

Due to the restrictions by the COVID-19 pandemic, an online survey questionnaire was formulated through google form to gather the data. The survey questionnaire consists of personal factors, marketability factors, psychological factors, and customer preference. The personal factors were measured through demographic questions, while marketability factors, psychological factors, and customer preference were measured through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A total of five hundred two respondents from fifteen regions in the Philippines voluntarily answered the survey questionnaire. Table 1 shows the latent variables and their corresponding indicators.

Table 1. Factors and Corresponding Constructs

Variable	Code	Constructs
Advertisement	A1	I believe advertisement is essential.
	A2	I believe advertisements influence me to search more about online retail stores immediately.
	A3	I am certain that advertisements influence me to compare online retail stores to other alternatives.
	A4	I believe advertisements influence me to change my perception of online retail stores.
	A5	In my opinion, advertisements influence me to buy from a new online retail seller/store.
	A6	I think I will explore more about the advertised online retail store ifit has driven my interest first rather than my need.
Price	P1	I consider the shipping costs of online retail stores when making a purchase.

	P2	I believe comparing the prices with other online retail stores before purchase is important.
	P3	I consider the amount of money that would be saved from promotions and discounts offered by online retail stores.
Customer Reviews	CR1	I think other consumers' opinions and reviews are helpful when I'm considering a purchase.
	CR3	I believe a high shop rating influences me to purchase from online retail stores.
	CR4	I favor online retail stores that have a larger number of positive customer reviews than negative customer reviews.
Customer Loyalty	CL1	I believe that I would recommend my trusted online retail store/s to others because I have positive remarks about them.
	CL2	I believe that I genuinely care about my trusted online retail store's future.
	CL3	I consider myself to be a loyal buyer to my trusted online retail store/s that I encountered in the past.
	CL4	I am certain that I will not go to other online retail stores if my trusted online retail store/s that I encountered in the past still exist.
Hedonic Motivation	HM1	I believe online shopping removes my negative thoughts and emotions.
	HM2	I think online shopping makes me relaxed and refreshed from my daily stressful lifestyle.
	HM3	In my opinion, gratification shopping gives me a better feeling while shopping.
	HM4	I believe online shopping is an activity done in an enjoyable and interesting online retail environment.
	HM5	I believe purchasing from big brands satisfies my shopping experience and increases my self-esteem.
	HM6	I am certain that discovering discounts in an online retail store improves my enthusiasm.
	HM8	I believe that online shopping is the best way for me to spend my leisure time with my family members.
Customer Preference	CP1	I favor the language I'm comfortable with when shopping online.
	CP2	I prefer shopping online from prominent online retail stores.
	CP3	I favor online retail stores that offer fast delivery.

5. Results and Discussion
5.1 Numerical Results
The study intended to examine different factors that affect Filipino consumers' online shopping preferences. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to investigate the causal relationships between the latent factors. Table 2 represents the six model fit indices of the resulting SEM model. The table includes fit indices such as Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The criterion for having an acceptable value for AGFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, and GFI is close to 1 (Abbas et al. 2021), and the upper limit of the RMSEA should be < 0.08 (Hooper et al. 2008). According to multiple studies (Gefen et al. 2000, Abbas et al. 2021, Hooper et al. 2008), all results have met these criteria and dictates that the model is acceptable and well-fitted. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to measure the internal consistency of each variable. It was found that each variable had a Cronbach's alpha that is greater than 0.6. According to the studies of Gharlegi et al. (2015) and Daud et al. (2018), having a Cronbach alpha of greater than 0.6 is considered acceptable hence, all the variables are acceptable shown in Table 3.

Table 2. Model Fit Indices

Goodness of Fit Measures	Parameter Estimates	Level of Acceptance	Suggested by
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.832	Close to 1	Abbas et al. (2021)
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.804	Close to 1	Abbas et al. (2021)
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.831	Close to 1	Abbas et al. (2021)
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.818	Close to 1	Abbas et al. (2021)
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.774	Close to 1	Abbas et al. (2021)
Root Mean Square Error (RMSEA)	0.077	< 0.08	Hooper et al. (2008)

Table 3. Result of Cronbach's Alpha

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Advertisement	0.807	6
Price	0.761	3
Customer Reviews	0.741	3
Customer Loyalty	0.775	4
Hedonic Motivation	0.888	7
Customer Preference	0.615	3

5.2 Discussion
Based on the Final SEM Model, Customer Reviews (CR) had the highest significant direct effect on Customer Preference (CP) with a value of $\beta=0.517$ (p = 0.001), second is Customer Loyalty (CL) with a value of $\beta=0.409$ (p = 0.003), third is Price (P) with a value of $\beta=0.359$ (p = 0.001), fourth is Advertisement (A) with a value of $\beta=0.267$ (p = 0.003), and last is Hedonic Motivation (HM) with a value of $\beta=0.221$ (p = 0.011).

Different demographic profiles have also been found to have an effect on consumer's online preference. Gender differences also have an impact, given that the study has more female respondents (60.8%) than male respondents (39.2%). Fogel and Zachariah (2017) stated that online reviews have different influences by sex as women were more affected by both positive and negative reviews as compared with men. Compared to males, female consumers have

more hedonic behavior during shopping (Yilmaz and Kogoclu 2018), are more social and purchase products from big brands which increases their satisfaction, confidence and self-esteem (Atulkar and Kesari 2017).

The ages and current employment status of each consumer is significant in their online shopping preference. When customers consider a brand to be of excellent value to them, they are more inclined to purchase the brand in the future which leads to customer loyalty of the college students (Su and Chang 2017). Most of the respondents are students which made them more cautious in reading reviews when shopping online (Fogel and Zachariah 2017). Helversen et al. (2018) found in their research that consumer ratings and positive reviews strongly influenced students. On the contrary, younger and older adults are more affected by negative reviews than consumer ratings and positive reviews (Helversen et al. 2018). Furthermore, as this study's respondents are mostly students (74.7%) and part of the lower-middle income class (55.4%). Unemployed consumers exhibit more hedonic shopping which is caused by the financial difficulty that they experience (Yilmaz and Kogoclu 2018). Students also find a hedonic value in shopping since they consider shopping to be an activity that they can enjoy and flee from stress (Hudin et al. 2019).

Since respondents of this study are within the age range of 15-24 years old (83.7%) and 74.7% are students, having goods to be of great value to them influence them significantly. Most of the respondents in this study are ages between 15 to 35 years old (95%), students (74.4%), and have an average of 32000 pesos monthly income. A study in Bangladesh (Rahman et al. 2018) shows that online shoppers are mostly below 40 years old and that young shoppers do online shopping because of convenience. Advertisements with creative attributes such as humor or having a celebrity in it make it influence customers highly, especially generation Z (Southgate 2017). 83.7% of the total respondents belong to the generation Z in which choosing the right type of advertisement will positively influence them.

Income class of the consumer has also been found to have an effect on their online preference. Similar to the study of Chakkambath et al. (2021), most online shoppers have a monthly income of Rs35000 or 23000 pesos and revealed that the price factor could affect the frequent purchases online. The financial difficulties that unemployed Filipinos face could cause them to worry and psychological distress (Aruta 2021), and might impact their hedonic attitude in shopping (Yilmaz and Kogoclu 2018).

5.3 Proposed Improvements

A strategy implies an advantageous direction for a business to be prosperous over a defined period of time. Creating knowledgeable plans or decisions in regards with the brand promotion, the product or service will lead to an effective marketing strategy (Stokes 2018). The online consumer preference of Filipinos must be identified and integrated in marketing strategies in order for the online retail sellers to have effective marketing strategies and increase sales. Table 4 is the summary of the appropriate marketing strategies and considerations based on the findings and analysis of this study.

Table 4. Summary of Recommendations

Significant Factors	Demographics	Applied Marketing Strategy
Customer Reviews	• Younger than 40 years old frequently check online reviews than those above the age 40 years old. • Consumer ratings and positive reviews strongly influenced students. • Online reviews have different influences by sex as women were more affected by both positive and negative reviews as compared with men. • Women tend to be more comprehensive by taking both subjective and objective information into consideration, while men tend to prioritize objective information.	• Utilization of digital and social media marketing by creating a review platform through websites and other social media platforms. • Directly asking satisfied customers for reviews which serves as an online advocate of the company. • Initiating Q & A sessions through digital and social media platforms to build strong relationships with the customers.

	• Men are more likely to read reviews for electronics, cars, and insurance, while women tend to read reviews for household appliances, clothes, and beauty products	
Customer Loyalty	• Students are more likely to be loyal patrons if the goods offered by an online retailer are of excellent value to them.	• Content marketing was chosen since it uses the perspective of consumers to build relationships by creating and sharing relatable content in social media that reflects their daily lives.
Price	• Most online shoppers are students and have a monthly income of Rs 35000 or Php 23000 and revealed that the price factor could affect the frequent purchases online.	• Retailers should have an appropriate pricing policy to improve their sales and build a positive image in the market.
Advertisement	• 15-24 yrs. old are more inclined to view unique/creative advertisements.	• Social Media Marketing is the best strategy since it improves the brand and product awareness. It reaches a broader range of customers and is cost-effective.
Hedonic Motivation	• Students and those from lower middle-income class also have their own stresses such as studies and financial difficulties are found to have more hedonic motivation in shopping. • Women exhibit more hedonic behavior. They are also more social and purchase products from big brands.	• Consumers should gain pleasure or be able to relieve stress during their online shopping experience. • Websites should offer hedonic values. • Discounts should be shown to the consumers as they browse or through the marketing strategy to increase enthusiasm.

6. Conclusion

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines' GDP decreased in 2020 while the number of online retail sellers from the beginning to the end of 2020 significantly increased. Since the restrictions of the COVID-19 prohibited consumers from traditional shopping, customers decided to switch towards e-commerce platforms to secure purchases and transactions. Unfortunately, even though the popularity of e-commerce increased among Filipinos, there has been a high volume of complaints among customers, having 14,869 complaints that involve online transactions recorded by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). In relation to the complaints, the researchers wanted to address the negative impact of price deception and false marketing on online retailers' sales. With this, the researchers aimed to investigate and determine the factors affecting Filipino consumers' online shopping preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic and design marketing strategies associated with consumers' preferences. Furthermore, the study will still be significant in the post-pandemic based on the research conducted by Visa (2020), which exemplified that 59% of Filipino online consumers favor shopping online rather than going to physical stores. Therefore, online retail sellers will continue to profit because consumers will continue to shop online.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to examine the causal relationship of the latent variables: Advertisement, Customer Care, Price, Rewards, Customer Reviews, Customer Loyalty, Hedonic Motivation towards Customer Preference. The results showed that Customer Reviews (β: 0.517; p = 0.001) has the most significant effect on consumer's online preference, followed by Customer Loyalty (β: 0.409; p = 0.003), Price (β: 0.359; p=0.001), Advertisement (β: 0.267; p = 0.003), and Hedonic Motivation (β: 0.211, p = 0.01) respectively. The SEM result provides a reliable model and findings for online retail sellers to analyze and improve their marketing strategy to attract consumers and increase sales. With the acceleration of online transactions in the Philippines, the result of the study will not only benefit the online retailer sellers during the pandemic but for the long term. Furthermore, the study can be broadened and improved by applying it to other countries with potential growth for e-commerce in the succeeding years.

6.1. Areas for Further Study

For future researchers, it is recommended to revise the questions in the survey questionnaire for the customer preference to further increase its internal consistency. Since the result showed that two out of seven independent variables are insignificant, the researchers suggest adding more variables such as utilitarian, ease of use, etc. to investigate if such latent variables would influence the online shopping preferences of Filipino consumers. It is also recommended to increase the sample size which will produce a more accurate solution if problems regarding the data and measurements are encountered. Lastly, future researchers may apply the study to other countries as it may pose a different result due to varying culture and government policies.

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