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Review Article

A Transition from Brick-and-Mortar to Online Stores and Its Role in Shifts in Consumer Buying Patterns

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Abstract

Online shopping is becoming a trend nowadays in the modern generation. People are shifting from traditional ways of shopping to modern ways. However, not each group is willing to accept the change. It is observed that a mixed response from the people is recorded related to the adaptation of novel shopping ways. The same trend is following in the automobile industry. The traditional method of brick and mortar purchasing the vehicles is now shifting towards online shopping. This study is focused on the behavior of the masses towards this new facility of purchasing cars online. Detailed research has been conducted through the data collection techniques employed in the research process. This includes some surveys and research on literature as well. Based on data collected results are drawn and recommendations are proposed. A comprehensive methodology has been used to calculate the findings.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, marketing, Online shopping.

Introduction

Online shopping is an accelerating trend in the retail economy of today in both developed and Underdeveloped countries. However, the automotive industry lags behind its 'counterparts'. There is a very rare purchasing of automobiles by means of online shopping. Following the recent market studies, it is forecasted that about 5% of all cars in the world are going to be sold online by 2020 (Frost & Sullivan, 2016a; Frost & Sullivan, 2016b). Some major market players like Ford and Tesla already sell their cars in the online environment (Ford, 2016). Nevertheless, the inability of online stores to create a buying experience similar to an offline shop as well as the lack of consumers' knowledge may significantly hamper the transition from brick-and-mortar to online stores in the automotive industry (Sinha and Kim, 2012).

Statistics demonstrate that online shopping is a growing business around the world, with more than 50% of all internet users have bought products and services online in 2015 (Statista, 2016a). Qatar is among the countries that demonstrate significant growth in online shopping. In comparison with traditional brick-and-mortar shops, online stores provide their owners with great advantages due to the growing popularity of the internet with consumers (Rezaei et al., 2014). Online shops provide a very flexible way to sell services and products since companies cut their costs on logistics, warehousing, and rent (AlGhamdi et al., 2011). Following Demangeot and Broderick (2007), the transition from the brick-and-mortar to online retailing is explained by the fact that online shopping is more efficient in addressing consumer needs and wants. Online shopping allows consumers to gain knowledge about a certain brand or product, its quality, the process, specifications, and availability in a fast and easy way (Merrilees and Fry, 2003). As a result, the transition from offline to online shopping has allowed consumers to make more intelligent purchasing decisions. In addition to buyer characteristics, situational factors, which led to consumers' willingness to participate in online shopping, can also explain the transition from the brick-and-mortar to online stores (Riaz and Raman, 2015). In their study, Demangeot and Broderick (2007) reported that the reason most buyers like to purchase goods and services online was due to a high level of accessibility as well as a great convenience. In 2009, around 4% of all global retail sales were online. In 2011, this trend accelerated to more than 11% (Singh, 2014). In certain industries such as entertainment and publishing, retailers collect more than half of their revenues online (Alrawi and Sabry, 2009).

Analysis

Barriers to the Adoption of E-Commerce by Car Retailers

The emergence of information technology has provided profit-driven organizations with access to more effective marketing communications channels (Demangeot and Broderick, 2007). Furthermore, the growing popularity of social media with consumers is another factor that adds to their attractiveness as marketing tools. As a result, there has been a clear trend towards shifting from brick-and-mortar retailing to e-commerce (Colla and Lapoule, 2012). The researchers concluded that the effectiveness of this transition from brick and mortar was hampered by a number of external and internal factors (Nazir et al., 2012). For example, the lack of perceived security, customers' previous experience and inability to try out products can be attributed to external barriers to the transition from brick-and-mortar to online stores (Colla and Lapoule, 2012).

At the same time, poor customer service, the lack of expertise and resources and vague product description is usually cited as the most formidable internal barriers to this transition. The identified barriers are also applicable to the automotive industry since many car retailers have recently shifted their business operations online (Solomon et al., 2010). AlGhamdi et al. (2011) found that the consumers' attitudes, preferences, and perceptions had the strongest negative effect on the transition of retailers from a traditional brick-and-mortar strategy to online. Alrawi and Sabry (2009) discovered that the lack of understanding, as well as a high level of resistance to new technology among consumers, was a considerable factor that limited the effectiveness of e-commerce in the retail industry. Furthermore, consumers may avoid purchasing online because of security issues, trust, poor customer service, inability to try out products and consumers' previous purchasing experience severely hamper the adoption of e-commerce in the Qatari automotive industry (Solomon et al., 2010).

Psychological Impact on Car Buyers

Research work attempts to identify specific preferences and attitudes, which shape and form car consumers' buying patterns. Chang

et al. (2005) offered a comprehensive classification of consumers' shopping activity in the online environment. The first group of factors consists of a wide range of web sale channel characteristics such as shopping experience, service quality, advantage, trust, and risk (Demangeot and Broderick, 2007). The next group of variables consists of risk reduction measures, web site features (e.g. design, the ease of use, avigation, and attractiveness) and product and service aspects. The third category consists of consumer-related characteristics such as shopping orientation, perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes (Tan and Thoen, 2001). The significance of the model suggested by Chang et al. (2005) is that it considers both external and internal factors that influence consumer buying patterns. Nevertheless, there are many additional factors, which were not taken into consideration by Chang et al. (2005). For example, marketing stimuli (i.e. price, promotion, place, and product) and post-purchase evaluation also have a strong impact on consumers' buying behavior (Uzun and Poturak, 2014). The black box model provides an insight into consumer purchasing behavior, the extent to which this theoretical model applies to the online environment remains underexplored (Colla and Lapoule, 2012). The researchers concluded that security perceptions, the lack of trust, and poor product information were among the most significant factors, which prevented consumers from purchasing goods and services in the online environment (Vasquez and Xu, 2009). Sinha and Kim (2012) perceived the risks such as financial risk, product risk, and convenience risk were the most important factors influencing consumers' attitudes towards online shopping, which, in turn, shaped and formed their online shopping behavior. In addition to the perceived risks, Uzun and Poturak (2014) found that service quality and infrastructure elements such as return policy and delivery concerns also impacted the attitudes of online shoppers.

Methodology

Since this research work explores how the transition from brick-and-mortar retailers is relevant to the future of marketing, the methodology is knowledge-based (Zikmund et al., 2003). A mixed-method approach has been adopted since this study is interested in the collection of qualitative and quantitative data. The main advantage of this approach is that the researcher can get access to multiple data sources and triangulate them to validate the research outcomes (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). At the same time, the adoption of the mixed method requires highly developed analysis and synthesis skills and competencies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Otherwise, the analysis process could result in the production of subjective and biased outcomes.

A survey strategy has been selected for this study to identify how the transition of car selects to the online environment has impacted consumer behavior in the Qatari automotive industry (Saunders et al., 2009). This choice is justified by the need to build cause-and-effect relationships and identify specific characteristics, which affect car consumers' purchasing behavior. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), surveys are much more cost-efficient in comparison with alternative research strategies such as observations or experiments. Limited time and financial resources have contributed to the researcher's decision to employ the survey strategy. However, the data collected utilizing this strategy is considered to be narrow-ranged and less diversified comparing to the mentioned alternative strategies (Saunders et al., 2009).

The survey strategy incorporates two major data collection techniques, namely questionnaires and interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2010). Self-administered questionnaires have been chosen as the main source of evidence since they provide the researcher with an opportunity for getting access to a sizeable population of car consumers in Qatar who prefer making purchases online (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The selection of self-administered questionnaires is also justified by the need to establish cause-and-effect links between the previously discussed psychological factors and customer purchasing behavior.

Alternatively to open-ended interviews, self-administered questionnaires are focused on the collection of quantitative data, which can be easily processed using statistical analysis instruments and tools (Bryman and Bell, 2010). By employing self-administered questionnaires, the researcher is capable of building statistical links between dependent and independent variables and identifying how the emergence of e-commerce has impacted consumer behavior in the Qatari automotive industry. However, this data collection technique is considered subjective and misleading (Saunders et al., 2009). This limitation is explained by the fact that the questionnaire survey participants' responses may be subjective and biased and, hence, threaten the validity and reliability of the produced research outcomes (Bryman and Bell, 2010).

Quantitative data was gathered utilizing self-administered questionnaires, which were distributed among 300 Qatari automotive consumers who prefer buying products and services online and searching for car-related information on the internet. Potential respondents were contacted via the most popular social networking services, including Facebook and Twitter, and asked to fill in a questionnaire on SurveyMonkey.com. The actual response rate is reported in the following chapter of this paper. The questionnaire, which can be found in Appendix A, offered respondents to identify the most important psychological factors that could impact their consumer behavior.

In turn, qualitative data were obtained from 10 Qatari consumers with the help of open-ended interviews. During the data collection process, the interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards and perceptions of online purchasing (Nandagopal et al., 2009). The non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed to get access to the most easily contacted Qatari consumers. Excel was used to construct a set of raw data and build graphs and charts. In turn, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to process the gathered data statistically and establish cause-and-effect links between dependent and independent variables (Carver and Nash, 2011; Bryman and Cramar, 2011).

Results and Discussion

Response Rate and Respondent Profile

According to the methodology section, 300 questionnaires were distributed among potential respondents. In turn, 153 questionnaires were returned to the researcher. 27 questionnaires were excluded from the sample due to missing data. The remaining 126 questionnaires were used for this study. Taking into account the number of questionnaires used in this study, it is relevant to state that the response rate is 42%. Following Zhou et al. (2007), the majority of social media users are young individuals between 18 and 30 years old. This statement is partly consistent with the outcomes of the graphical analysis, the results of which are presented utilizing the chart below.

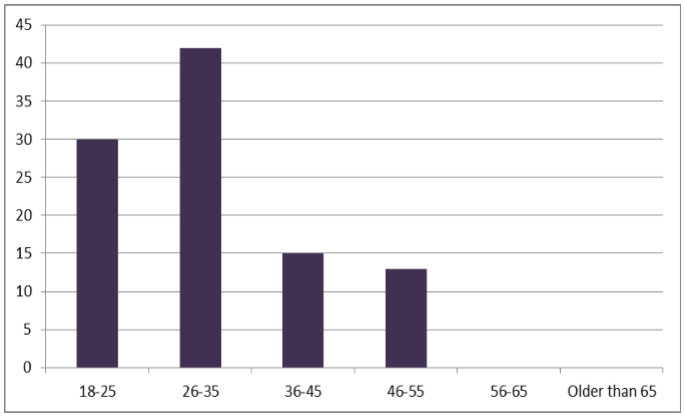

Figure 1: How Old Are You? (%)

The majority of 42% of the sample reported they were between 26 and 35 years. Almost one third or 30% of the respondents indicated they belonged to the '18-25' age group. The individuals who asserted they were between 36 and 45 years accounted for 15% of the sample. The remaining 13% of the participants were between 46 and 55 years. None of the Qatari consumers reported they were older than 55 years. Hence, individuals between 18 and 55 years participated in the questionnaire survey. The degree to which the participants actively use the internet to search for car-related information is shown as follows.

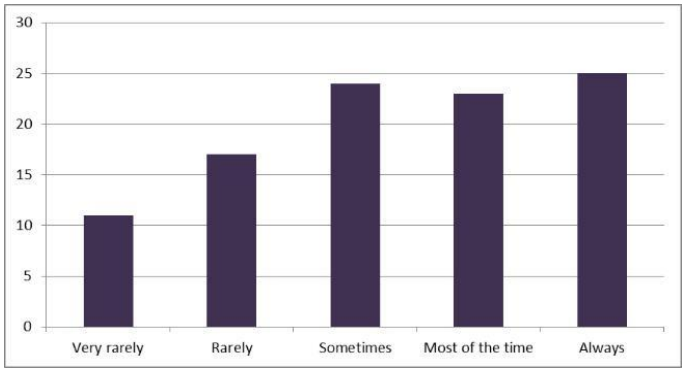

Figure 2: How Frequently Do You Use the Internet to Search for Car-Related Information? (%)

Psychological Factors Affecting Consumer Buying Patterns:

The psychological patterns affecting consumer buying are shown in the below graphs as per the results of the survey conducted.

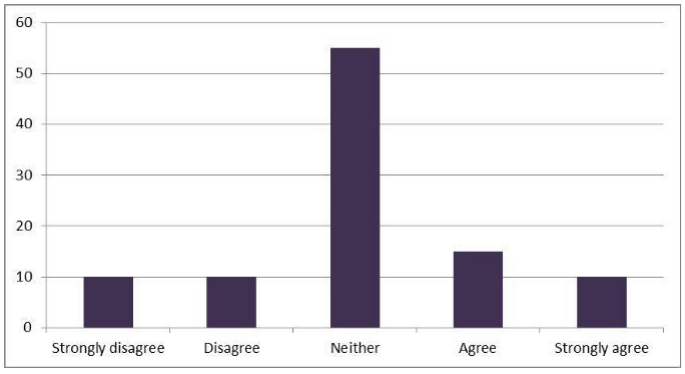

Figure 3: Online Car Retailers Provide Me with a Sufficient Level of Security (%)

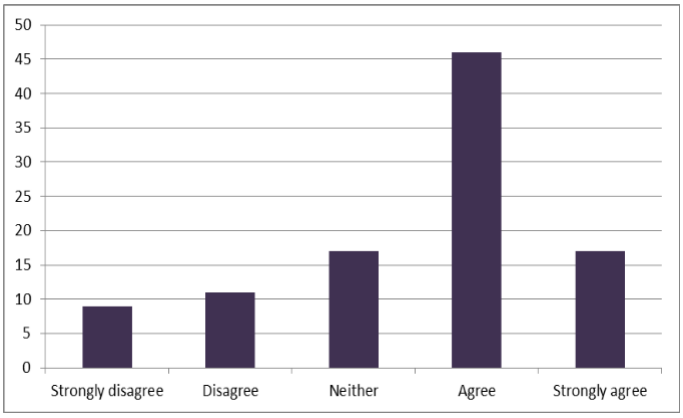

Figure 4: I Place Great Trust in Car Retailers Operating Online (%)

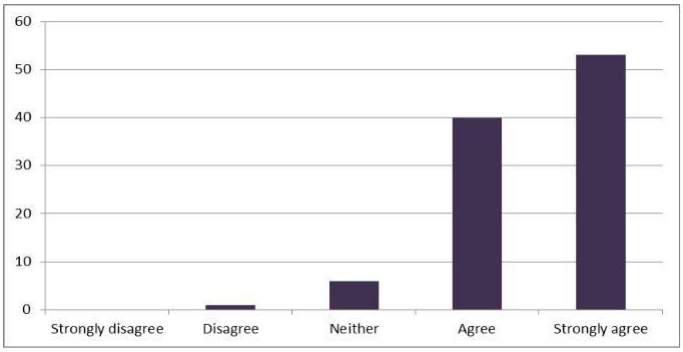

Figure 5: Online Car Retailers Promptly Respond to My Queries and Questions (%)

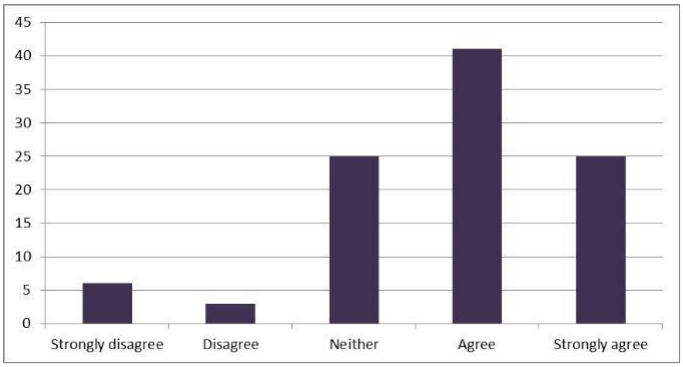

Figure 6: I Can Easily Use My Computer/Mobile Devices to Get Access to the Internet and Make Purchases Online (%)

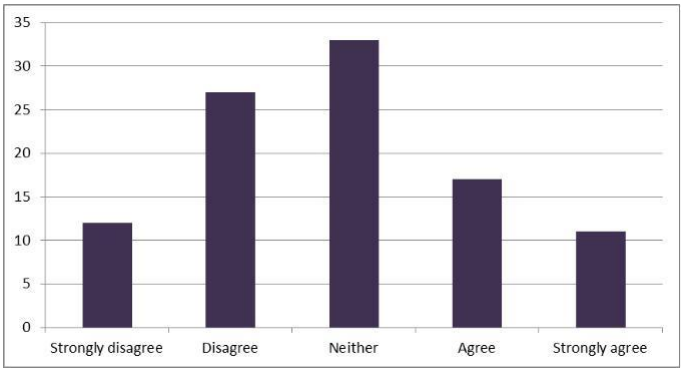

Figure 7: I Have Considerable Experience in Purchasing Online (%)

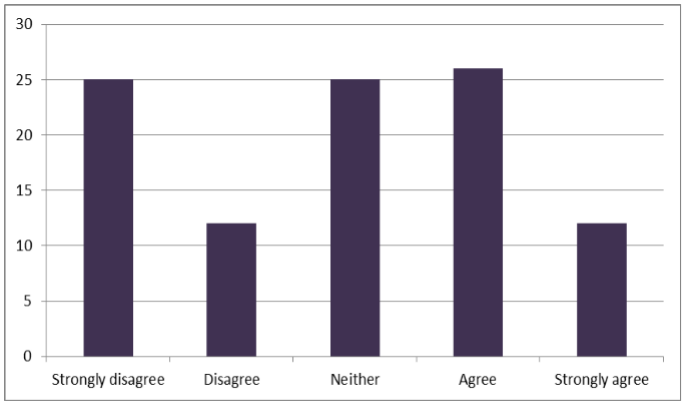

Figure 8: The Level of Online Shopping Convenience Is High (%)

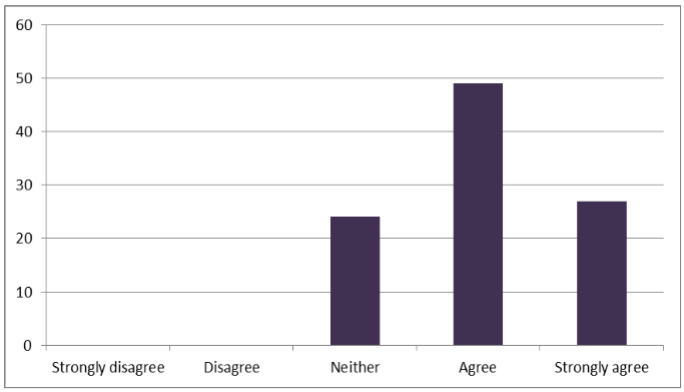

Figure 9: Online Shopping Activity Is Pleasant and Exiting (%)

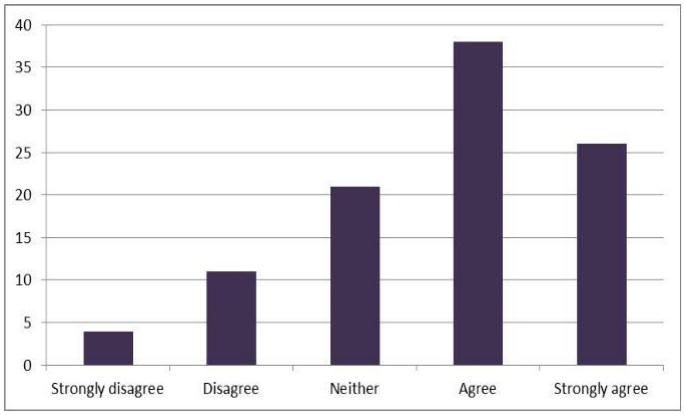

Figure 10: Online Car Retailers' Web Sites Have a Highly Attractive Design (%)

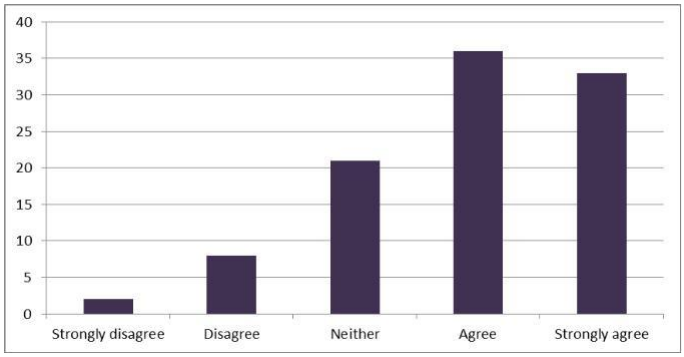

Figure 11: I Can Easily Navigate through Online Car Retailers' Web Sites (%)

The Relationship between Psychological Factors and Consumer Behaviour

The linear regression function was performed in the SPSS software package to establish statistically significant links between the previously identified psychological factors and consumer behavior. The statistical analysis outcomes are presented utilizing the following table.

Table 1. Psychological Factors and Purchase Frequency (Linear Regression)

Variable	Un Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig	Co Linearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Erisserr			Tolerance	VIP
A	7.806	1.208	6.459	0.000		
SEC	-0.055	0.089	-0.611	0.542	0.946	1.057
TRU	-0.125	0.105	-1.190	0.236	0.901	1.110
RES	-0.314	0.158	-1.988	0.049	0.951	1.051
ACC	0.001	0.095	0.013	0.989	0.974	1.027
EXP	-0.056	0.090	-0.628	0.531	0.917	1.090
CON	-0.340	0.075	-4.512	0.000	0.949	1.054
EXT	-0.010	0.097	-0.108	0.914	0.911	1.098
ATT	-0.094	0.143	-0.657	0.512	0.963	1.038
NAV	-0.161	0.098	-1.630	0.106	0.974	1.026

The relationship between the RES and FRE variables is statistically significant at 95% since the Significance (Sig.) of the predictor is equal to 0.049, which is lower than the threshold value of 0.05. B coefficient is negative, meaning the link between the variables is also negative. Therefore, the established relationship can be interpreted as follows: the more promptly online car retailers respond to consumers' quires and questions, the less frequently they purchase online. These outcomes may demonstrate that high-quality customer service adds to consumers' confidence and willingness to purchase from an online shop. On the contrary, poor customer service forces Qatari consumers to go to another online store and ask their questions there. As a result, consumers make less frequent purchases online. These findings are in keeping with Solomon et al. (2010) who also argued that the lack of customer service was a formidable internal barrier to the transition from brick-and-mortar to online stores.

The table above also demonstrates that CON and FRE form another statistically significant relationship since the Sig. of the independent variable is much lower than the threshold value. Considering the negative B coefficient, it is relevant to interpret the established link as follows: the less online shopping is convenient for Qatari consumers, the more frequently they purchase online. These outcomes correlate with the interview survey findings. Interviewee 4 stated that "[the convenience of shopping online] should not be high, because it is easier to fool me online than in person. So not safe" (Appendix C). Therefore, the inconvenience of online shopping is perceived by Qatari consumers as a factor that adds to its attractiveness. Alternatively to this market study, Zhou et al. (2007) concluded that the convenience of online shopping was perceived as higher in comparison with more traditional ways of purchasing goods and services. This statement was supported by some interviewees. For example, as reported by Interviewee 10, "I can [make online purchases] before I go to sleep when I am in bed when I wake up when I am in a boring meeting, when my car is breaking down, anytime" (Appendix C). None of the remaining predictors form any statistically significant link with the independent variable since their Sig. is higher than 0.05, which is the threshold value. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which measures collinearity in the regression model, is within its normal range (n = 5). Hence, the statistical analysis

outcomes do not show multicollinearity and none of the predictors should be excluded from the constructed model. The following table demonstrates whether the previously identified psychological factors influence the extent to which the participants actively search for car-related information using the internet.

Table 2: Psychological Factors and Information Search (Linear Regression)

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIP
A	4.324	1.262	3.425	0.001		
SEC	0.090	0.093	0.960	0.339	0.946	1.057
TRU	0.251	0.110	2.290	0.024	0.901	1.110
RES	0.082	0.165	0.494	0.622	0.951	1.051
ACC	-0.202	0.099	-2.038	0.044	0.974	1.027
EXP	-0.228	0.094	-2.428	0.017	0.917	1.090
CON	-0.106	0.079	-1.352	0.179	0.949	1.054
EXT	0.067	0.101	0.662	0.510	0.911	1.098
ATT	-0.099	0.150	-0.662	0.509	0.963	1.038
NAV	-0.033	0.103	-0.317	0.752	0.974	1.026

The linear regression analysis findings indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between the TRU and SEA variables since the Sig. of the predictor is lower than the threshold value and equal to 0.024. THE positive B coefficient allows for stating that the link is positive. Hence, the more Qatari consumers trust online car retailers, the more actively they use the internet to search for car-related information. These outcomes are in keeping with Demangeot and Broderick (2007) who also concluded that the extent to which consumers trust online stores determined their adoption of e-commerce as well as the use of the internet as a means of making purchases.

The linear regression outcomes also demonstrate that the Sig. of the ACC variable is equal to 0.044, which is lower than the threshold value. Considering the negative B coefficient, it is possible to interpret the statistical relationship as follows: the more consumers use their computers and mobile devices to get access to the internet, the less active they use it to search for car-related information. Following The Telegraph (2016), individuals between 16 and 24 years spend around 27 hours a week online. This time is spent on both leisure and work, meaning the proportion of time spent on searching for car-related information to the remaining internet consumption habits is getting more significant over time. However, the validity and reliability of these findings may be limited by the fact that individuals between 18 and 35 years formed the overwhelming majority of the sample. According to Liu and Forsythe (2010), young consumers use social media and mobile technology more actively comparing to individuals who belong to an older generation.

The table above also indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between EXP and SEA since the Sig. of the predictor is 0.017. B coefficient is negative, meaning the link is also negative. Therefore, the more Qatari consumers are inexperienced in purchasing online, the less active they use the internet to search for car-related information. These findings correlate strongly with the graphical analysis outcomes, according to which the participants do not put great trust in car retailers operating online. It should be critically remarked, however, that the respondents' experience in purchasing online has also been discovered as not considerable. This fact may limit the validity and reliability of the established statistical links (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). The produced findings are also in line with Colla and Lapoule (2012) who argued that customers' previous experience was a formidable barrier to the transition from brick-and-mortar to online stores. The VIF of the predictors is lower than the threshold value of 5, indicating there is no multicollinearity associated with the independent variables (Saunders et al., 2009).

Limitations

The first limitation concerns the validity and reliability of the produced outcomes. In addition to the previously mentioned reliability issues (e.g. the lack of individual experience in online shopping and the bias of the sample towards young internet users), it should be noted that the sample was drawn from 70 nationals and 56 foreigners. The exclusion of foreigners from the sample could have allowed the researcher to draw a more homogeneous sample and add to the significance of the established statistical links. Nevertheless, 92% of Qatar's population consists of immigrants, making it a highly diversified country (The Guardian, 2016). Considering the limited financial and time resources, it was decided not to modify the sample.

The next limitation is access to the target population. It was difficult for the researcher to record some of the local female consumers' responses as they thought it was rude and inappropriate to do. The quality of responses is another limitation. This study has not been ensured against the participants' bias and errors. No pilot tests were conducted to ensure that all questionnaire questions and statements are easy to understand. Furthermore, the majority of these questions were designed with the help of the Likert scale methodology. Thus, there is a possibility that Qatari consumers could overreact or underreact to certain statements (Sinha and Kim, 2012). Finally, not all psychological factors were included in the conceptual framework of this project, which is another limitation. For example, web site performance in terms of speed and error avoidance is considered as an important factor that affects consumer purchasing behavior (Almousa, 2013).

Recommendations

Taking into account the graphical, statistical, and content analysis results, it is recommended that Qatar-based online car retailers should further develop consumer trust in their goods and services. For this purpose, it is recommended that Qatari online car retailers should place security logos and site seals on their web sites. Following Alghamdi et al. (2011), this action is common practice in the online environment. By putting these logos on their web sites, online car retailers can reassure consumers unfamiliar with their site that it is safe to enter their card details (Nazir et al., 2012). It can also be recommended that Qatari online car retailers should provide their customers with social proof in the form of other customers' reviews. This strategy can help Qatar-based online retailers push shoppers towards buying their goods and services (Alrawi and Sabry, 2009).

The analysis results have demonstrated that the level of online shopping convenience is not perceived by Qatari consumers as high. Therefore, it can be recommended that Qatari online car retailers should make the process of online shopping more convenient for their customers. To do that, it is recommended that Qatar-based online car retailers should track their customers' online shopping habits to accordingly reward their loyalty with targeted offers, special discounts and coupons (Uzun and Poturak, 2014). However, cars belong to durable goods, meaning that the effectiveness of this strategy concerning car retailers is limited. Nevertheless, online car retailers that sell car parts and equipment may benefit from this recommendation. Therefore, by providing their customers with online offers based on what they buy, Qatari car retailers are capable of adding to the level of online shopping convenience (Liu and Forsythe, 2010).

Conclusion

It is relevant to summarise that the extent to which e-commerce is widespread in the car industry in Qatar is still limited (Colla and Lapoule, 2012). This statement is explained by the psychological factors such as the lack of customers' previous experience, poorly perceived trust in car retailers operating online, and the low level of online shopping convenience. Nevertheless, it can be summarised that the Qatari car retail industry is currently in a transition from the brick-and-mortar to the online mode of operation (Liu and Forsythe, 2010). By placing security logos and site seals on their web sites, Qatari online car retailers can contribute to their customers' confidence and trust and make the online shopping process more convenient (Nazir et al., 2012).

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