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Boosting the Intention to Purchase Online: An analysis of e-service quality among customers

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Abstract

This study intends to investigate the impact of e-service quality on Malaysian customers' propensity to make online purchase. Data collection was performed by distributing questionnaires to online shoppers in Klang Valley, Malaysia by employing purposive sampling technique. A total of 212 questionnaires were usable for data analysis by using PLS-SEM method. According to the findings, the likelihood to purchase online was positively impacted by all the e-service quality dimensions namely trust, shopping enjoyment, website design, and privacy. This study also discusses the practical implications and put forward several recommendations to be considered by future researchers.

Keywords: E-Service Quality; Purchase Intention; Online Retailers; PLS-SEM

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1.0 Introduction

Rapid advancement of the internet has undoubtedly benefited humankind. Its enormous impact is most visible in electronic transactions, as customers switch their purchasing approach from traditional methods to online platforms (Nurul Fazleen, Norshima & Muhammad Hafiz, 2022). Consonant with Zhao (2023), purchasing via online platform has become a trend among customers in Malaysia. From a customer's point of view, online shopping is beneficial as the price offered can be slightly lower, and more choices of products which can be easily chosen and picked without even moving from their desk.

The above notion demonstrates the rapid acceptance and development of customers' purchasing process via the online platform; thus, attention should also be directed to understand the significance of providing an exceptionally high level of service. In this study, electronic service quality (e-service quality) can be described as the entire stage of a customer's experience when interacting with the website during the purchasing process. In other words, it is the extent to which a website facilitates the efficient purchase and delivery of goods and services to customers (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Malhotra, 2000). Furthermore, numerous past studies have been performed to understand how e-service quality can influence customer satisfaction and loyalty (Saha & Mukherjee, 2022), while this study will examine the role of e-service quality towards online purchase intention. This study will assist online sellers in gaining a better understanding of the behavioral intentions of online customers, enabling them to take more suitable measures to make online buying experience more effective.

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Online purchase intention

According to Dig, Domingo, and Consignado (2017), purchase intention can be described as the customers' perceived judgment to purchase or not a particular product or service. On the other hand, El-Ansary and Roushdy (2013) identified purchase intention as the customers' inclination to make a purchase via the online platform. Customers today prefer to carry out tasks with minimal effort and maximum convenience. Due to this notion, online purchase becomes one of the most popular methods that customers used these days due to the benefit they can gain. Similar point of view is shared by So, Wong, and Sculli (2005) delineating that customer needs to feel the benefits of purchasing online to build their intention to purchase online. Moreover, according to Zuriati Azura (2010), Malaysians who buy products through the internet are looking for ways to cut the cost, saving time to travel, and avoiding stress.

According to Hair and Money (2011), purchase intention can be influenced by some factors such as the level of e-service quality. According to Lien, Wen, and Wu (2011), if the quality of e-service is enhanced, the service's value would rise and customer satisfaction will grow, hence boosting purchase intention. Therefore, in this study, online purchase intention will be tested as the endogenous construct to find out which dimension(s) of e-service quality can have influence on it.

2.2 E-Service quality

Most earlier studies focused on understanding how e-service quality can affect consumer satisfaction or loyalty. However, the current study dedicates attention to assess the influence of e-service quality on online purchase intention. One of the most prominent definitions of e-service quality was derived from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005) denoting that e-service quality is about how the website can benefit the customers to experience a well-organized and efficient shopping process. Looking from another perspective, Raje and Vandana (2012) claimed that e-service quality refers to the degree of efficiency and professionalism exhibited by online sellers in handling customer interactions and the complete purchasing process. Based on previous literature, it was found that e-service quality can possibly influence online purchase intention (Nikhashemi, Haque, Yasmin, & Khatibi, 2012). This is further reinforced by Lien et al. (2011), who found a positive correlation between the desire to make an online purchase and the quality of the e-service.

2.3 Trust

Trust has been regarded as a prominent aspect of e-service quality literature (Rowley, 2006). In the context of online transactions, trust is established as a result of the consumer's evaluation of the credibility of the website's information, how the website inspires customer confidence and meets their expectations (Promongsatorn, Sakthong, Chaipooirutana et al., 2012). Trust is garnered when the customers feel safe and comfortable navigating the website. Subsequently, online purchase intention will be developed as a result of trust. In agreement with the above discussion, Jamaludin and Ahmad (2013) stated that the level of customers' desire to make purchases online will improve if customers' trust in the website increases. The more customers put trust on the website, the higher customers' online purchase intention. Therefore, the below-mentioned hypothesis is suggested based on the preceding discussion:

H1: Trust can positively influence online purchase intention among Malaysian customers.

2.4 Shopping enjoyment

Shopping enjoyment symbolizes the customer's sense of delight when performing online shopping. When the customer feels happy, they will feel more excited going into details until their expectations are met. Ingham, Cadieux, and Berrada (2015) described shopping enjoyment as the customer's feeling of delight and the pleasure perceived while navigating the website. It implies that a sense of enjoyment is created when customers navigate the website, exploring and enjoying it without hassle. Similar to the viewpoint of Im and Ha (2011), the degree of intent to perform online purchasing will increase when the customers have a positive and enjoyable experience exploring the website. Furthermore, the study conducted by Dutta (2016) discovered that the pleasure of shopping online significantly impacts purchase intention. Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: Shopping enjoyment can positively influence online purchase intention among Malaysian customers.

2.5 Web design

Website design can be described as the website's information quality and overall design, such as the appropriate use of colors, images/graphics, and size (Papadomichelaki & Mentzas, 2012). A website with a good arrangement, attractive information, and exciting design will entice the users to navigate the website. The significance of website design should not be disregarded since it has been the subject of countless studies in the past. According to Wu et al. (2017), website design can significantly influence customers' emotional arousal, which can lead customers to online purchase intention. A retail website with an appealing interface can entice customers to visit their website because most people prefer to shop at websites with sophisticated designs. As a result of the above discussion, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Website design can positively influence online purchase intention among Malaysian customers.

2.6 Privacy

Customers consider privacy and trust as substantial factors that can reflect the reliability of online payment systems, data transfer during the transaction, and data storage. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra (2000), privacy can be defined as the customer's sense of confidence to believe that the website cannot be hacked and is free from fraud. It is common for customers to concern about their privacy as it may prevent the regret of being cheated by the online seller. As online sellers, they need to protect customer privacy which can convince customers to purchase online on their website. A safe online shopping ecosystem is needed to safeguard customers from information leakage to irresponsible parties (Weisberg, Te'eni & Arman, 2011). Findings by Kim, Kim, and Park (2010) demonstrate that privacy significantly influences online shopping intention. In light of the preceding discussion, the following theory is proposed:

H4: Privacy can positively influence online purchase intention among Malaysian customers.

3.0 Methodology

The current study employed correlational research design as it involved the examination of constructs (Zikmund et al., 2012) namely trust, shopping enjoyment, web design, privacy, and online purchase intention. Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to customers in Klang Valley, Malaysia, who had at least one online buying experience on any website. The questionnaire items were derived from past research as shown in Table 1 and validated by marketing experts to ensure the suitability of it prior to actual data collection.

The Likert scale was used to evaluate each item on the questionnaire. A few filtering questions were included at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that only respondents with a website-based online shopping experience participated in the study. A total of 212 completed questionnaires were collected from the respondents by using purposive sampling technique. 212 responses are deemed acceptable as the minimum required number of respondents for this study was 129 based on the calculation using G*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). The purposive sampling technique is considered appropriate, primarily when the respondents required by the researcher must fulfil specific characteristics to be chosen (Muhammad Hafiz et. al., 2022; Collins, 2017). Additionally, a statistical technique known as Harman's single – factor test was utilized to evaluate the potential impact of Common Method Variance (CMV) as recommended by Omar et al. (2021) and the analysis found that the major variance that could be attributed to a single component was below 50%. Thus, it can be claimed that CMV was not a possible threat. Subsequently, Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) has been utilized to test the hypothesized relationship.

4.0 Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic data describes the overall picture and characteristics of the respondents in this study. Female respondents made up 51.4% of the sample, while male respondents made up 48.6%. Most of the respondents were between the age of 21 and 30 (40.1%), followed by those between 31 and 40 (31.1%), 20 years and below (13.7%), and only 25 respondents were between the age of 41 - 50 (11.8%). The bulk of respondents had a bachelor's degree (48.6%), followed by diploma (23.1%), SPM (15.1%), master (10.8%), and PhD (2.2%). This indicates that most of the respondents are highly educated. Additionally, most of the respondents indicated that Shopee is their most favorite online shopping website (39.6%), followed by Lazada (32.1%), Zalora (14.2%), 11Street (5.2%), and others (8.9%).

4.2 Assessment of measurement model

It is necessary to assess the measurement model to verify the data's reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2022). Indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were the criteria that were used in this study to evaluate the measurement model. According to Hulin, Netemeyer and Cudeck (2001), a typically accepted rule for Cronbach's Alpha is that the value of 0.6 - 0.7 signifies a satisfactory level of reliability, and 0.8 or higher is an excellent level. Meanwhile, composite reliability (CR) values greater than 0.70 are required to ensure internal consistency reliability, as stated by Gefen, Straub, and Boudreau (2000) and Nunally (1978).

Additionally, the loadings of the items should be at least 0.708 or higher to confirm indicator reliability. In terms of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), values higher than 0.50 is suggested to achieve convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022). The following Table 1 indicates the results pertaining to the indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity which were all meeting the suggested values.

Subsequently, the procedures for examining discriminant validity were employed to assess how a particular construct varies from the other constructs included in the research (Muhammad Hafiz et. al., 2022; Ramayah, Cheah, Chuah, Ting, & Memon, 2018). The principles outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981) are regularly used to assess discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is proven if the correlations for each construct under study are less than the AVE's square root. Thus, it is sufficed to claim that discriminant validity was achieved based on the results in Table 2. Accordingly, diagonals reflect the AVE's square root, while the other values signify the correlations.

Alternatively, the cross-loadings of the measurement items (indicators) can be used to assess discriminant validity. According to Hair et al. (2022), discriminant validity is demonstrated when an item's loadings on its own construct (variable) exceed all of its cross-loadings with other constructs in the study. As a conclusion of the assessment of the cross-loadings, the results in Table 3 revealed that

discriminant validity was established.

Table 1. Internal consistency and convergent validity

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's	CR	AVE
Online Purchase Intention (OPI) Source: Im and Ha (2011)	OPI1	0.886	0.894	0.927	0.759
	OPI2	0.872			
	OPI3	0.845			
	OPI4	0.881			
Privacy (P) Source: Ha and Stoel (2012)	P1	0.905	0.936	0.954	0.839
	P2	0.933			
	P3	0.931			
	P4	0.894			
Shopping Enjoyment (SE) Source: Hassanein and Head (2004)	SE1	0.835	0.887	0.922	0.748
	SE2	0.849			
	SE3	0.913			
	SE4	0.859			
Trust (T) Source: Aliyar and Mutambala (2015)	T1	0.787	0.866	0.909	0.713
	T2	0.888			
	T3	0.834			
	T4	0.865			
Web Design (WD) Source: Ting et al. (2016)	WD1	0.826	0.854	0.901	0.695
	WD2	0.845			
	WD3	0.817			
	WD4	0.846			

Table 2. Results of discriminant validity

	P	OPI	SE	T	WD
Privacy (P)	0.916				
Online Purchase Intention (OPI)	0.611	0.871			
Shopping Enjoyment (SE)	0.551	0.651	0.865		
Trust (T)	0.688	0.644	0.556	0.845	
Web Design (WD)	0.568	0.64	0.632	0.579	0.834

Table 3. Results of cross-loadings

	P	OPI	SE	T	WD
P1	0.905	0.569	0.561	0.623	0.54
P2	0.933	0.53	0.437	0.615	0.473
P3	0.931	0.585	0.498	0.653	0.479
P4	0.894	0.551	0.518	0.626	0.589
OPI1	0.573	0.886	0.601	0.585	0.571
OPI2	0.444	0.872	0.544	0.511	0.533
OPI3	0.535	0.845	0.511	0.571	0.515
OPI4	0.569	0.881	0.605	0.573	0.607
SE1	0.427	0.548	0.835	0.537	0.537
SE2	0.48	0.493	0.849	0.384	0.516
SE3	0.488	0.612	0.913	0.514	0.611
SE4	0.51	0.585	0.859	0.477	0.516
T1	0.477	0.56	0.542	0.787	0.465
T2	0.635	0.596	0.523	0.888	0.525
T3	0.611	0.441	0.363	0.834	0.454
T4	0.605	0.553	0.423	0.865	0.502
WD1	0.465	0.538	0.585	0.515	0.826
WD2	0.49	0.518	0.528	0.52	0.845
WD3	0.446	0.499	0.477	0.42	0.817
WD4	0.492	0.575	0.515	0.474	0.846

Discriminant validity was also examined using another rigorous technique called as HTMT criterion developed by Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2015). This method is deemed effective as HTMT criterion is regarded as a strict measure that could identify the possible in-discriminant among the constructs.

With reference to Table 4, all the values satisfy the criterion of HTMT_{.90} (Gold, Malhotra & Segars, 2001) and the HTMT_{.85} (Kline, 2011). This implies that discriminant validity has been confirmed. Additionally, the outcome of HTMT inference also demonstrates that the confidence interval does not indicate a value of absolute 1 on any of the constructs (Henseler et al., 2015), which also proves discriminant validity.

Table 4. HTMT Criterion

	P	OPI	SE	T	WD
Privacy (P)					
Online Purchase Intention (OPI)	0.664				
Shopping Enjoyment (SE)	0.603	0.725			
Trust (T)	0.765	0.723	0.622		
Web Design (WD)	0.635	0.729	0.724	0.67	

4.3 Assessment of structural model

Multicollinearity assessment was first completed before performing the hypotheses testing as the presence of multicollinearity can possibly be harmful which can lead to a troublesome regression model (Pallant, 2013). In addressing multicollinearity issues, a variance inflation factor (VIF) below 5.0 is recommended to prove that the constructs under study do not suffer from multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2022). According to the results in Table 5, multicollinearity was not a concern for this study because all of the VIF values did not surpass 5.0.

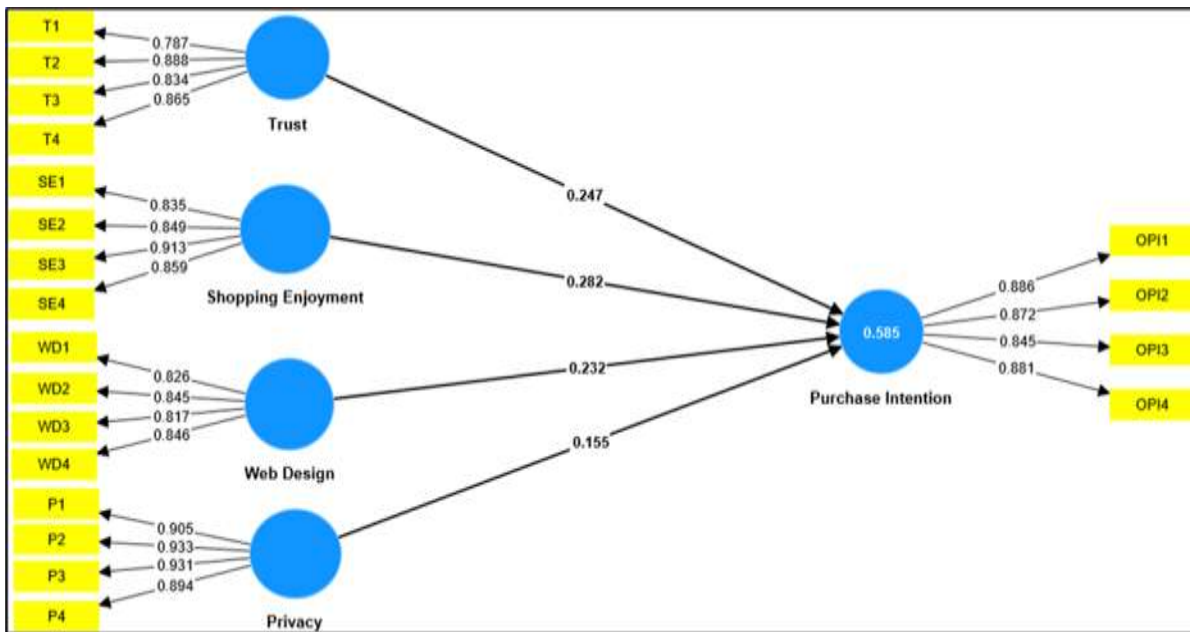


Fig. 1: PLS-SEM structural model

Table 5. Collinearity assessment

	Purchase Intention
Purchase Intention	-
Privacy	2.133
Shopping Enjoyment	1.887
Trust	2.172
Web Design	1.971

Subsequently, a procedure known as PLS algorithm was applied for hypotheses testing. Furthermore, the bootstrapping resampling technique was employed using 5000 sub-samples to confirm the accuracy of the PLS estimates (Hair et al., 2022). As indicated in Table 8, the results revealed four significant direct relationships at the 95% confidence interval (Trust -> Online Purchase Intention, $\beta = 0.247$; Shopping Enjoyment -> Online Purchase Intention, $\beta = 0.282$; Website Design -> Online Purchase Intention, $\beta = 0.232$; Privacy -> Online Purchase Intention, $\beta = 0.155$).

Table 6. Hypotheses testing

		Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Trust -> Online Purchase Intention	0.247	0.091	2.715	0.003	Supported
H2	Shopping Enjoyment -> Online Purchase Intention	0.282	0.062	4.553	0.000	Supported
H3	Website Design -> Online Purchase Intention	0.232	0.066	3.496	0.000	Supported
H4	Privacy -> Online Purchase Intention	0.155	0.072	2.144	0.016	Supported

Following the assessment of the hypothesized relationships, the values of predictive relevance (Q^2), coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect size (f^2) were also computed and illustrated in Table 7. As indicated in Table 7, the R^2 values of 0.585 imply that the exogenous construct in this study accounts for 58.5% of variances in online purchase intention. Cohen (1988) recommended that the R^2 values of 0.26, 0.13, or 0.02 should be used to classify the endogenous construct as substantial, moderate, or weak respectively. Thus, the endogenous construct of online purchasing intention can be characterized as substantial. The value of Q^2 , signifying the research model's prediction power was obtained using the PLS-SEM blindfolding technique (Hair et al., 2022; Ramayah et al., 2018). The outcomes from the blindfolding procedure revealed that the value of Q^2 for online purchase intention was 0.557. Thus, it can be explained that all exogenous constructs demonstrate predictive relevance towards the endogenous construct as the Q^2 value was higher than zero (Hair et al., 2022). On the contrary, values of f^2 are described as the effect size of a particular exogenous construct on the model's endogenous construct (Hair et al., 2022). As shown in Table 7, it was found that the effect size of trust, shopping enjoyment, web design, and privacy on online purchase intention were 0.068, 0.101, 0.066, and 0.027 respectively. Thus, it can be interpreted that the effect of all exogenous constructs on online shopping intention was small based on the general guidelines provided by Cohen (1988).

Table 7. Assessment of R^2 , Q^2 , and f^2

	R^2	Q^2	f^2
OPI	0.585 (Substantial)	0.557	
T			0.068 (Small)
SE			0.101 (Small)
WD			0.066 (Small)
P			0.027 (Small)

5.0 Discussion, implications, and future research

The study's findings illustrate the need to focus on all aspects of e-service quality, including trust, shopping enjoyment, web design, and privacy. Based on the findings, it was discovered that trust has a significant effect on online purchase intention; consequently, H1 is supported. This result corroborates with the findings of previous research conducted by Delafrooz, Paim, and Khatibi (2011), indicating that trust positively correlates with online purchase intention. In accordance with Richard and Guppy (2014), trust is seen as a significant component that encourages customers to make online purchases since trust can reduce the reluctance to perform both online and physical purchase intentions. Regarding shopping enjoyment, the findings revealed the strongest relationship with online purchase intention. This corroborates with the findings from the study by Patel and Asthana (2015), which discovered that shopping enjoyment positively influences customers' online purchasing intention. In a similar vein, a study by Ahmed, Rehman, Rizwan, et al. (2013) indicated that consumers' willingness to shop online strongly correlates with how much they enjoy doing it. In terms of website design, a positive relationship was found and therefore H3 was supported. This finding is in line with previous research that was carried out by Ruchi, Ashish, and Gupta (2010). Website design is vital as it is considered as the first impression of the website from the customers' eyes. According to Lee and Lin (2005), customers will be satisfied with their online shopping experience if they encounter a decent and user-friendly website. They will have a far more favorable intention to purchase from customers who have had negative shopping experiences. In terms of privacy, the findings suggested that privacy has a substantial positive link with online purchase intent; consequently, H4 was supported. This result is consistent with the findings of prior research by Niranjnamurthy and Dharmendra (2013), who theorized that trust is positively associated with the desire to make an online purchase. Due to this belief, online shops must offer customers privacy protection, a sense of safety, and proper security measures.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study may fulfil the literature gap in the context of Malaysian customers, as this area remains inconclusive. Thus, it formulates a knowledge base for future researchers who wish to investigate the consequence of e-service quality, specifically among Asians, as the result may be different if data is collected from customers in western countries. Regarding managerial implications, the findings provide e-retailers with insights for formulating and refining their company strategies to increase customers' online purchases effectively. Besides, this study may assist e-retailers by providing a relevant conceptual model that will give them a clearer picture of their customers' expectations regarding the best practice of e-service quality.

This study also put forward several recommendations for future researchers. Firstly, future researcher may consider to include moderating or mediating variable to the framework as it may yield different findings and enhance the current study. Secondly, future researcher is suggested to employ mixed method which can be done by interviewing relevant key informants followed by data collection by using questionnaire. The usage of qualitative method can help to obtain more detail data from the interview and can reduce the drawback of merely employing questionnaire where the respondents can be asked directly.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper enhances the body of knowledge in the area of service quality, consumer behavior, and online retailing.

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