

Improving Online Customer Satisfaction: A Study on Biba

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to study the online shopping experience of Biba, the Indian brand for women's ethnic apparel to propose pertinent changes to improve the satisfaction of their customers when buying online in the context of the current global pandemic. This study employed a survey as a primary source, and relevant academic literature as secondary sources. The findings revealed the amount of apparel bought online has increased during the pandemic in addition to some general difficulties when buying clothes online and a general feeling of dissatisfaction. Other findings suggest that it is pertinent for Biba to make various changes, like a website makeover, the creation of a mobile phone application, and the diversification of their models' catalog.

Keywords: Apparel, Covid-19, Customer Satisfaction, India, Online Shopping

INTRODUCTION

Biba is an important Indian women's ethnic fashion brand founded in 1986. After browsing the brand's website, we found many things that could be added or changed to improve the online shopping experience. Also, Biba did not have an application available for mobile phones. Because of these, we propose a marketing strategy that acts on various fronts: it creates a mobile application, commonly known as an app allowing customers to buy clothes more comfortably.

At the same time, it adds features and makes changes to the existing brand's website, such as introducing a section explaining fabric characteristics, care instructions, and introducing the color information using the standardized Pantone matching system in the description of each product. Also, it encourages diversification in the models they currently present in the pictures for the description of each article. This diversification is in terms of age, height, race, and body shape.



The final components of the marketing strategy are to add a chat option on the website where the customers can ask questions, make recommendations and comments directly to brand personnel, and to integrate a 3D viewing option that allows the customer to rotate each human model with each article 360 degrees to see how the garment fits from different angles. This new marketing strategy aims to improve overall customer satisfaction with the product and the brand when buying online, thus creating a solid base of loyal online shoppers and preventing clothes returns is especially challenging in the online shopping process. Brands with as many brick-and-mortar stores as Biba normally get most of their profits from these stores, hence they have been focusing on the customer experience and their satisfaction. It was rational since, for example, the preference for online shopping was found to be minimal, most of them enjoying in-store experiences (Edirisinghe, Nazarian, Foroudi, & Lindridge, 2020).

Nowadays, with the global pandemic, apparel brands need to adapt more than ever to motivate people to buy, even if it is online. Existing behaviors and structures are being questioned. As crises can trigger fundamental economic and societal changes, companies need to understand consumer behavior at this particular time. The trends established during this crisis may remain stable into the future, inflicting serious consequences on brick-and-mortar stores due to a rapid increase in e-commerce (Koch, Frommeyer, & Schewe, 2020).

People are afraid to get out of their homes, and if they do, they fear going to stores and trying on clothes there. This explains why brands such as Biba are bound to become more dependent on the revenue, they gain from selling online. A total of 70% of our respondents say that they have increased or more or less increased their online shopping during the global pandemic. Because of this, they should start focusing more on improving the customer experience and their overall satisfaction with the online platforms. Why is this sensible for our case study of Biba?

First, almost all models portrayed on Biba's website are Indian, slim, and young women. There are no models of different races, even though they ship internationally, and curvy nor aged women. In addition, only one model shows each article, with the weight and height information of the model, which affects the way clothes look on her, was not disclosed. This is relevant since 88% percent of the respondents stated that it is essential to have pictures of models of different sizes, heights, races, and cultures for customer satisfaction buying clothes online. Even though savings may be derived from having a reduced number of models with similar characteristics on the brand's website, there is also a cost related to the dissatisfaction associated with wrong fit and returns.

It is an important concern because online shopping erases the possibility to try clothes on before purchase, and it is becoming trendy during the pandemic. According to our survey results, around half of the respondents have returned clothes after buying them online. In the context of online retailing, the difficulty of meaningful consumer assessment of a garment before purchase is highlighted. Online shopping forces the secondary and crucial assessment of clothes on the body to be done at home after the purchase has



taken place (Brownbridge, Gill, Grogan, Kilgariff, & Whalley, 2018). Seeing how it looks on a model similar to them (e.g., height, weight, and body type) can give customers a clearer idea of how the garment would look on them, thus reducing the risk of poor fit-related dissatisfaction. A total of 72% of the respondents answered that they are more likely to buy something online to see how the clothing looks on a similar model.

In the second place, on Biba's website, there are lots of fabric options. Nevertheless, there is no section talking about the characteristics of each fabric, its care instructions and color specifications for each article on the website are limited and unstandardized. The picture of the clothes on the model for each article fails to show the complete nature of the fabric. Fabric and its characteristics are the key factors when deciding which clothes to buy because the appearance of the whole garment can change if the fabric or the color is different. Concerning the care, some fabrics are delicate. When the care information is not displayed on the website to the customers, they might damage the clothes and be dissatisfied. That is why we think it would be pertinent to add a section where fabric care and characteristics are exposed and the description of each article to include all the different colors in the garment according to the Pantone matching system. This is because Pantone offers a standardized way to identify and compare the exact colors; thus, the client would have color information of their article as accurately as possible.

In third place, Biba does not have an app to buy from mobile phones. An app for Biba company should be developed as 59% of the respondents prefer buying clothes online with their cellphones. A difference between mobile and web services is the usage context (Oinas-Kukkonen, Oinas, Kurkela, & Oy, 2003). People often use mobile devices in noisy and distracting environments. However, real-time contextual information, including peer-to-peer information and recommendations, generates new consumer behaviors in the market (Balague & Zhao, 2015).

Creating an app can be costly, in which "the median cost range is between \$37,913 and \$171,450 but could climb up to \$500,000 or higher" (Craigmile, 2015). Still, with the size of Biba company, it can be afforded and would be a good investment and opportunity to increase sales and brand awareness, especially in the context of Covid-19 when people tend to spend more time on their phones. An article which talks about the mobile app usage boom during the Covid-19 pandemic shows that "At a high level, consumers spent 1.6 trillion hours on mobile in the first half of 2020 with a 220% increase in time spent in business apps" (Dignan, 2020).

Also, the use of apps tends to increase brand interest. "The development of mobile applications has represented a challenge and opportunity for companies to market their brands and products through a new channel" (Balague & Zhao, 2015). Creating this mobile app aims to improve the communication of products and customer relationship management to generate more customer loyalty, which is especially relevant in the context of online selling (Pandey, et al., 2021). "Loyal customers are prepared to spend



more, buy more, are easy to reach, repeatedly return and are positive promoters of a company” (Harris & Goode in Ashman & Vazquez, 2012).

All of this ultimately increases sales. It would be an M-commerce-centric app whose goal is to sell products. We would like the app to have some new features, more than just a literal transfer of content from the website to the app. First, we would like to implement a virtual mirror technology (Reflects the user’s image) to check how branded products look on customers. We would also like it to have an option for mobile payments (users can pay for the products from their mobile phones, anywhere and anytime they want more easily). And finally, an option to see clothes and swipe (left if they don’t like it and right if they do like it, like the Tinder app). This makes the shopping experience funnier and more interactive through multitouch gestures (Balague & Zhao, 2015).

Customer dissatisfaction is a real problem when buying online in general. A total of 62% of the respondents have purchased online that looks a certain way in the website picture yet looks completely different on them. Some of the words the people interviewed used to describe how they felt when this happened were angry, disappointed, upset, horrible, unsatisfied, ugly, useless, bad, betrayed, cheated, horrible, irritable, sad, and uncomfortable. No customer should feel that way; it is the brand’s responsibility to do as much as possible to ensure customer satisfaction. We can tell Biba wants its customers to be as satisfied as possible. While browsing through their website, highly positive things were implemented and worth highlighting to improve customer satisfaction.

First, we noticed that the measures in centimeters for each of their sizes are specified on Biba’s website. It is highly pertinent because sizes between retailers tend to vary considerably. Secondly, Biba’s website offers a tool, only for some products, to simulate a virtual fitting room called Astrafit. On this tool, each customer can enter their body parameters in centimeters of chest, waist, hips, arm, height, thigh, head circumference, hand circumference, finger length, circumference at navel level, and shoulder width. This information offers a specific fitting rate from 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, to all the different sizes offered. The customer can change the skin color of the dummy portrayed to show how the different clothes might fit them.

Nevertheless, the fitting dummy shows are superficial and do not consider specific colors or characteristics of each item. Also, Biba offers an option to write a review and rate each product with stars. Despite this option, most products do not have any customer reviews or ratings. Successful product presentation is beneficial for online fashion industry due to the fundamental experience characteristics of garments (Kim et al. in Ashman & Vazquez, 2012). If there is enough information about each item, the customer can assess these aspects successfully before buying it. Therefore, it is more likely that the customer ends up being satisfied with the product purchased.

We believe that even more can be done aiming towards customer satisfaction. When shopping online, the information communication via product presentation must be comprehensible and efficient since it is the sole interaction a particular consumer has



with a product before purchasing (Flavian et al. in Ashman & Vazquez, 2012). Now, the realistic human models and 3D viewing options are preferred for clothing items (Park et al. in Ashman & Vazquez, 2012). We propose integrating a 3D viewing option that allows the customer to rotate each human model with each article 360 degrees to see how the garment fits from different angles.

Finally, it is important that the customers feel listened to. Implementing a text-based automated conversational agent enables the customer to interact with the website, express their opinions by making recommendations and comments, and solve their doubts by making questions. To improve customer service, many companies are using this tool on their websites in chatbots, for example. These are required to communicate in a friendly manner to give the customers the information or the place to be listened to when they need it (Chen, Thu Tran, & Le, 2021). In addition to communicating more easily and quickly, without having to call or send an email that takes longer to be replied to, the customer can help the brand improve its shopping experience. In general, it is beneficial to make interaction easier on the website by making it more appealing to improve satisfaction and customer relationships, ultimately leading to more loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2004; Gommans, Krishnan, & Scheffold, 2001).

The rest of this paper will further explore the problems and ideas mentioned before in the context of the current global pandemic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a mixed research method comprising a quantitative survey and a comprehensive literature review. The survey contained both open and closed questions regarding customer satisfaction when buying clothes online. The survey was conducted online and managed to collect 100 people worldwide, from countries such as India, Colombia, Austria, Brazil, Germany, France, Mexico, the United States, Canada, Indonesia, Kuwait, Russia, and Tunisia. Around 48% of the people who participated are from India, where our case study company is located. Most of the respondents were between 18 and 29 years old. This allowed the research team to gain both statistical data and customers' qualitative perceptions to understand what a potential customer looks for in a clothing brand when buying online. These results were further illustrated through a comprehensive literature review based on scientific articles published in indexed journals available in databases. These academic articles were fundamental to collect more information about the current market trends amidst the global pandemic.

Some of the research questions that guided the literature review aimed to understand how the clothing shopping practices have changed during the current global pandemic, the consumers' satisfaction problems when buying clothes online, the overall fashion industry dysmorphia with sizes and models stereotypes, e-service quality, and online marketing strategies. The literature review also focused on studies about online shoppers in Indian, which is especially relevant for our case study since the company we are reviewing is located there. The results observed in the survey and the trends



obtained from the literature review were confronted to provide the company with sound business recommendations. Finally, to gain a deeper understanding of buying online, we gathered some information regarding delivery.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative research conducted is to explore the current trends of the market after the current global pandemic we. The results were focused on the investigation of such traits that we could apply to the improvement of the e-commerce and online sale of the Biba brand. It shows different opportunities for improvement in terms of customer service, innovation, and the products themselves.

Also, we discovered the costs of creating a mobile application. The cost of publishing it in the different stores has to be considered. For 2020, a license for publishing mobile applications on Apple Store costs \$99 per year (Apple Inc., 2021), and Google Store has a one-time cost of \$25 to publish apps (Google, 2021). These are the most popular platforms, thus Biba's mobile application should be published on both to have a wide reach. In addition, Biba has a strong presence on social media. For example, on Instagram, it has 365.000 followers and posts frequently. This channel could further promote the renewals on the website and the mobile application created without the additional costs that otherwise paid advertising represents. Social media sites are a great stage for retailers to create an experience and retailers use information stored to improve user experience (Husain, Ghufuran, & Chaubey, 2016).

Biba could apply to make the front of the changes in the e-commerce and the wide range of expectations of the current consumers that changed their consumption habits due to the pandemic. First, there is augmented reality. It is important because people want to see how clothes fit them and rather than the models. This brand mainly posts photos of skinny models and the ones that comply with society's stereotypes. Mainly young women are aware that young women have different ideas of how the "perfect body" should be and support self-love movements. Second, it is voice search. Young people right now depend on voice search to complete daily tasks, and this will represent a great opportunity for e-commerce platforms to generate content and improve their search with keywords. By 2025 75% of U.S households will own a smart speaker (Bigcommerce, 2021).

Finally, there is AI (artificial intelligence) and big data to learn about shoppers. It could be the "best friend" for Biba to improve customer experience and customer service. It enables them to collect data of clients about their preferences, how they shop, what they often look for, and with all of this, they could offer a personalized experience to each client, and as far as customer service could have instant replies for their customers and resolve different issues with chatbots as 80% of business will use chatbots in 2021 (Bigcommerce, 2021).

According to different studies, target and segment customers are a current need in the online shopping market. Internet-based shopping has enabled marketers to target customized offerings to niche segments and focus on individual customer needs (Kotler, 1994). However, to address the rapid pace of changes in the online arena, firms continually need to assess the heterogeneous needs of customers, target and retain attractive segments and manage their offerings through relevant marketing strategies (Ries & Trout, 1986). Given that traditional bases like age and gender may not be discriminatory for the segmentation of experienced online shoppers (Hernández, Jiménez, & José Martín, 2011), with artificial intelligence, we could identify new bases like perceptions of e-shopping (e-lifestyles) and website quality as apt bases for segmentation of online clothing shoppers.

This involves knowledge related to both tangible and intangible aspects of the offerings within a segment and across the segments to develop segment-specific marketing strategies (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004). To date, people need to have information available anywhere they are, suggesting the creation of the app for Biba will represent an increment of the sales because people will purchase and have the complete shopping experience through the app and their cellphones. According to our survey results, almost 60% of people prefer buying clothes from an app or the specific app of the brand. This signifies mobile shopping app is important.

We need to address the mental imagery concept that is well developed in online shopping experiences. Mental imagery is an image-based thought people have in their mind (Kosslyn, Ganis, & Thompson, 2001) and is related to the pre-consumption imagery consumers have while browsing or shopping at a store before purchasing (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Mental imagery plays an important role in assisting consumers process information (Schlosser, 2003). In the context of online apparel shopping, the importance of mental imagery in evoking positive shopping outcomes is well-addressed (e.g., Overmars & Poels, 2015; Yoo & Kim, 2014). However, its application in a physical setting is limited. Based on the essential role of sensory experiences in physical stores and the importance of mental imagery in consumer decision-making processes, thus, this research proposes that mental imagery influenced by sensory experiences impacting various consumer shopping behaviors and buying decisions in the context of in-store shopping (Kim, Kim, Yoo, & Park, 2021).

Getting feedback from customers has never been so important that any interaction, or mainly those that include a purchase, should lead the clients to a customer service and experience survey. Normally, clients are willing to express their opinion if they have a great experience or if, on the contrary, a great experience. According to our survey, 61% of people are willing to fill out a satisfaction survey at the end of their experience.

In regards of the website renewal, it is important to consider three important visual aspects for successful Websites for apparel shopping: images of the online product in its closest representation of end-use, displays in conjunction with similar items, and views from various angles such as front and back (Delong, 1999). Nevertheless, it has been



reported that apparel retailers have not demonstrated successful internet penetration. (Kim & Kim, 2004).

In respect of the delivery policies, Biba claims that they strive to deliver products with excellent condition in the quickest time possible, normally within 7 days. Also, Biba provides 15 days to return the product when the buyers select the mode of refund. When sutomers make online payments, the amount will be credited back to their account. When they pay cash on delivery, they must provide bank details to which the refund has to be credited. Biba automatically converts the money to Biba credit upon return/cancellation of orders and expires the credit in just one year. This needs to change. They should give back the money, because customers might not like anything else from the store collections of that year, ending up with losing their money or buying a product they do not like. This policy creates additional pressure that eventually leads to dissatisfaction. (Biba, 2021).

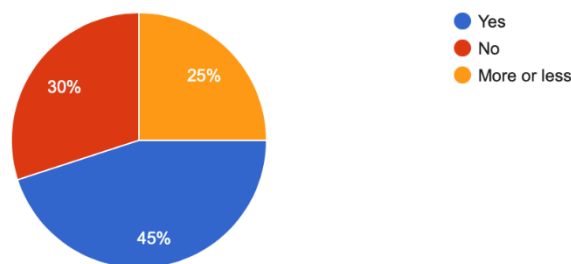
Regarding our investigation done through the survey we created and sent out, it's important to consider that it might be subjected to gender or locations biases since 72% of people that answer our survey were women between 18 to 29 years old and 48% of the people who responded to our survey are from India. It encompasses general aspects that we consider can be applied to the specific case of Biba, which is a well- known brand in India amongst young women. After analyzing the results, Biba must improve the strategies they are currently using for their online sales.

People are buying more clothing items through online platforms in the context of the global pandemic. There are two main reasons for that. The first and most obvious one encompasses the mobility restrictions that most governments around the world are setting to reduce the number of Covid-19 patients. These include the temporal closing of shopping malls, total quarantines, and prohibition of social reunions. The second reason is about the lack of motivation and fear. After spending many times indoors, some people do not want to go out anymore, even when the restrictions are more flexible, and they lack the motivation to take a shower, get dressed and drive to the closest brick and mortar store. Especially, when in most stores they cannot try on clothes anymore due to biosecurity protocols. Some people might think it is not really worth it. Also, fear is real. The virus has killed millions of people and even though there are vaccines. Most countries are far from being over this health crisis. This might cause people to stay indoors, they do not want to risk getting infected for going out to buy clothes they might not even get to wear anytime soon (Turambi & Wuryaningrat, 2020).



Figure 1. The Increase of Online Shopping during the Pandemic

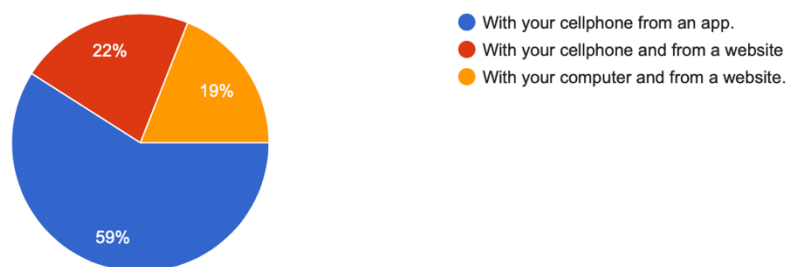
Have you increased your online clothing shopping during the global pandemic?
 100 responses



However, even with the current situation, it is not particularly often that people buy clothes online. There is still a lot of taboo regarding online shopping, and with so many people losing their jobs and the economic situations getting worse, most might think that it is not the best time to spend money on something that might not be such a basic need as clothing. Online shopping is not necessarily through the brand’s website or on a computer. It can also mean buying through the brand’s application and on mobile phone. People prefer to make purchases through the respective application for mobile phones of each brand, which is surprising that Biba still does not have one (see Figure 2). Thus, we recommend investing in the creation of an app as it is not too costly and might represent a real opportunity to get to more people.

Figure 2. Channel Preferences when Buying Apparel Online

How do you prefer to buy clothes online?
 100 responses



Finally, the increase of online clothing shopping has been evidently accelerated due to the covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 1). However, we are left with some questions: Once the health emergency is over, will it continue to grow at such a rhythm? Will it plummet back? Or will it stay the same? Even though we cannot know with certainty what the



future may hold. This increase trend will continue to go on, even when the current health crisis is neutralized, as companies continue to invest more in their websites and cellphone applications, and more sophisticated tools are being developed to make the online shopping experience easier. It ends up being cheaper for the companies than having many brick and mortar stores and it allows them, with a good delivery system, to get to more customers in more places. And for the customer, it ends up being easier and faster. By saying this we do not mean that all brick-and-mortar stores will disappear, yet there might be less of them, and a bigger balance with the online store.

Some people still like, despite all the online available tools and the ones to be developed, to try on clothes and to live the experience of going to a mall which they might do with friends, shopping while hanging out, whereas some other people prefer the convenience of being able to buy clothes online since they might not have the time or motivation, or simply they do not like going shopping to a mall. It is the responsibility of clothing companies to understand this, offer the respective alternatives in the proportions they see fit for their specific audience and characteristics, and understand that customer satisfaction online depends on different things than in brick-and-mortar stores where what matters is good employee training and service attitude (Nair, et al., 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Due to the current global pandemic of Covid-19 and the restrictions that it implies, the modality of online shopping has increased significantly, as has the usage of mobile apps. Biba makes significant efforts to ensure customer satisfaction on its website, such as the specification of measures (chest, waist, hips, arm, height, thigh, head circumference, hand circumference, finger length, circumference at navel level, and shoulder width) in centimeters for each of their sizes, the offering of a tool, for some products, to simulate a virtual fitting room called AstraFit and an option to write a review and rate each product with stars. Nevertheless, we suggest to improve the online shopping experience further, considering the importance of e-commerce during 2020 and 2021. We underlined the lack of a Biba brand's mobile application and the need for the creation of one to diversify the channels and to increase sales due to the preference of customers to buy from apps on their mobile phones.

Consumer dissatisfaction is a relevant and common problem since, due to the inability to try on clothes, touch the fabric and see the product per se, the clothes tend to fit or look differently than they do on the website. Therefore, the alternative tools offered for online apparel retailing should be used as much as possible. We also identified an additional difficulty and cost when returning clothes when buying online. This ensures customer satisfaction to avoid returns can save the company lots of money and face eventually. In the online scenario, customer loyalty is especially important since the so-called window shopping cannot be done to gain brand awareness. Biba should invest more in customer relationship enhancement and brand awareness, through chatbots, a mobile application, or other initiatives like discount offerings after a determined amount of money bought in clothes. Also, the money return policy should be modified to get

money rather than Biba credit back to ensure its satisfaction with both the brand and the product.

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