A Longitudinal Analysis of E-Service Attributes Available on Apparel E-Retailing Sites

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U.S. e-commerce sales in 2015 accounted for 7.1% of retail sales compared to 14.4% in the UK and 10.2% in Asia-Pacific (eMarketer, 2016). Wi-Fi technology has transformed people's lives around the globe and marketplaces where physical borders are fast disappearing (Tshin & Tanakinjal, 2014). Despite its potential, U.S. e-commerce growth rates have declined and growing competition from other countries' e-retailers is expected. To continue growth and respond to consumers' shifting shopping preferences, e-retailers need to monitor factors that affect online shopping. In e-retail with no human-to-human interaction, e-service quality is an essential factor affecting the online shopping experience (Turk, Scholz, & Berresheim, 2012).

The three-component model developed by Rust and Oliver (1994) guided the conceptual development of this study. The model delineates three influencers of service quality: service product (i.e., what consumers get as an outcome), service delivery (i.e., how consumers get it), and service environment (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). Because interactions are virtual in e-retail, the service delivery component is a critical part of e-service quality. With the growth of e-commerce, e-service quality has received scholarly attention (e.g., Kim, Kim, & Lennon, 2011; Turk et al., 2012). Yet, we lack understanding of how e-retail sites have evolved over time in service quality performance. Thus, the purpose of this descriptive study was to take a longitudinal approach to examine the evolution of e-retail sites in performance related e-service attributes. Based on the importance of e-service attributes and the details provided in Kim et al., this study used results from Kim et al. as baseline data and replicated their process to gather current comparison data. Kim et al. originally content analyzed 97 men's and women's apparel sites in terms of e-service attributes.

Method. We focused only on women's apparel sites because women are the dominant e-shoppers (Complex, 2015) and apparel is an important e-commerce sales category (Internet Retailer, 2012). In particular, e-service attributes related to apparel was the focus of the study since apparel is a risky online purchase due to the inability to feel, hold, and try on. Kim et al. (2011)'s coding guide was used for coding. Three people coded the sites; inter-coder reliability was .91. Of the 97 women's apparel sites included in Kim et al., 19 were not available. The remaining 78 sites were content analyzed. Nine new product-related attributes (e.g., magnified view, full screen view, customer review and rating) were identified and included in a revised coding guide. The final 32 e-service attributes coded on the product pages were divided into 12 product description attributes (PDAs) and 20 product presentation attributes (PPAs).

Results. A χ^2 goodness of fit test was conducted to compare availability of e-service attributes in 2011 and 2016. Results revealed that differences exist between the two data sets. With regards to PDAs, over 87% of current sites provided size charts; about 34% provided measurement guides with pictures (30% increase compared to 2011 research); and nearly 80%

provided customer reviews and ratings (new). About 52% of sites provided shipping and return information on the product page. For PPAs, 68% of current sites provided back views (40% increase), 50% provided magnified view (new), and 45% provided full screen views (new).

Yet, current apparel sites failed to provide important information needed for purchasing apparel online. For PDAs, over 13% of current sites did not provide item availability information (7% increase) and about 40% did not provide detailed information such as country of origin and fabric content (18% decrease). An interactive shopping aid was only available on 21% of the sites (6% increase). Size request (request a stockout size) was not available on over 90% of the sites (new). Store availability (available in store) information was available on only 33% of the sites (new). For PPAs, 27% provided side views (19.2% increase), 1.5% of the sites provided 3-D rotation (no increase). Close-ups were available on 27% of the sites (23% decrease) and a larger view was also available on 27% of the sites (64% decrease).

Conclusion and implications. Findings show that current apparel sites provide more service attributes related to products on their sites than in the past, but still not at a satisfactory level. PDAs are crucial when shopping online for apparel. Some PPAs were less available in current apparel sites. Yet, product related information using various product presentations enhance customer's decision-making. As retail businesses move towards omni-channel retailing, some online apparel retailers have added new service attributes to improve the shopping experience across channels such as store availability. However those attributes are infrequently available on online apparel sites. Current online apparel retailers need to give attention to service attributes on their sites to enhance service quality, improve the shopping experience, and increase consumer satisfaction.

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