

The Role of Final Delivery in Customer Satisfaction with Online Retail Experience*

Simge KEKLIKÇI ¹ 

Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University,
Institute of Social Sciences
Public Relations and Publicity
Department, Master Student,
Tokat, Türkiye

Murat SEYFİ ² 

Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University,
Niksar Faculty of Applied Sciences,
Public Relations and Advertising
Department, Tokat, Türkiye

ABSTRACT

Online retail has gained an important place in our daily lives. With the increasing number of consumers in the online retail experience, this concept has also become widespread in the marketing literature. In this study, the concept of online retail experience was investigated and the relationship between the final delivery step and customer satisfaction was revealed. In this context, the role of the last delivery step in the relationship between online retail experience and customer satisfaction was examined in the search conducted on consumers aged 18 and older who have online retail experience. The results of the search revealed that the online retail experience has a significant positive relationship between customer satisfaction and the final delivery step. In addition, the partial intermediary effect of the final delivery step was found between the online retail experience and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: E-Retailing, Customer Satisfaction, Online Shopping, Final Delivery.



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Corresponding author: Simge Keklikçi

E-mail: simgekeklikci1@gmail.com

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Introduction

The active use of the Internet is driving rapid changes in consumption trends and behaviors, which are developing in virtual environments. This process of development and change has brought about the concepts of online consumption and the online consumer, which have become the main characters of the marketing world. As customers' differing lifestyles and shopping tendencies increase over time, they participate in social media platforms (Saydan, 2008, p.400). Online shopping has the potential to restructure customer access and choice in the near future and in the future (Ellison, 2021).

E-shopping provides consumers with a wide range of options and the convenience of staying at home, which are associated with positive attitudes towards e-shopping (Frag et al., 2007; Mokhtarian et al., 2009). Saydan and Nart (2009, p.92), while calling internet users “the new consumers of the new age”, reported that online consumers' attitudes towards online shopping are positively influenced by features such as easy availability of products, ease of shopping, conformity to expectations, speed compared to traditional shopping, and ease of learning online shopping transactions. So far, there are many studies in the literature on online retail experience. In this study, it is prepared to investigate how it plays a mediating role in the satisfaction of individuals who show purchasing activity in the last delivery step and in this context, it is expected to bring innovation by differing from the studies in the literature.

Online Retail Experience

Online marketing is the process of promoting goods and services to producers and consumers via digital platforms with the objective of attracting online consumers and potential online consumption. The terms "email marketing," "search engine optimization," and "social media marketing" are frequently collectively referred to as "online marketing" (Kotane et al., 2019, p.29-30). E-commerce is a concept that has no clear boundaries and is in constant development. Thus, there are various definitions in the literature and according to some important international organizations, the definitions are as follows;

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); “commercial activities based on the processing and transmission of digitized data such as text, audio and visual images by individuals and organizations over open and closed networks are called electronic commerce” (OECD, 2001, p.8).

According to the World Trade Organization (WTO) definition; “E-commerce is the production, advertising, sale and distribution of goods and services over telecommunication networks” (WTO, 1998).

In Turkey, e-commerce is defined in the Law No. 6563 on the Regulation of Electronic Commerce as “all kinds of online economic and commercial activities carried out in the electronic environment without physical confrontation” (OECD Report on Measuring Digital Trade - OECD Report on Measuring Digital Trade- STD/CSPP/WPTGS, 2017).

With the discovery of the Internet, ARPANET was used for the first time in 1969 for communication and information transfer in universities and military units in the United States, a leading country in technological developments. By 1979, its use for producers and consumers was first popularized by Michael Aldrich. With Tesco in 1984, home orders were placed through closed circuit televisions for the first time. Pizza Hut, the first company to launch online sales, received its first order with a web browser in 1994 (Business Wire, 2014). The internet and electronic commerce, which are rapidly becoming widespread in different geographies, were introduced by Garanti Bank in Turkey in 1998. With the developments in the internet and technology, an increase in internet users has been observed over time (Erkan, 2012, p.12-13).

Customer Satisfaction

Different terms have been used in the literature on the concepts of customers and customer satisfaction, which are the basic and most valuable concepts of profit-oriented organizations. According to Oliver

(1997), who frequently includes customer satisfaction in his studies, it is considered as “the qualities of goods and services, including the dimensions of inadequacy and adequacy, and the concept of adequacy that gives pleasure in fully personal, expenditure”. In his 1981 study, he defines satisfaction as the feelings of consumers who experience goods and services. Consumers' perceptions and service performances are formed by considering their feelings at the moments they experience (Oliver, 1981, p.25-26).

Satisfaction is a process before, after or during the use of a product (Shamsudin et al., 2018a). Therefore, customer satisfaction is essential to meet the various needs of customers and firms (Yi and Natarajan, 2018). The pursuit of customer satisfaction has become a strategic imperative for most firms that need to sustain and remain competitive (Yi & Natarajan, 2018).

In order to sustain their commercial activities, businesses need to show importance and sensitivity in the phenomenon of customer satisfaction. Businesses that ensure the satisfaction of consumers in their activities in the market and maintain continuity with continuity in these activities can survive (Gümüş, 2015, p.582).

As in traditional retailing, it is important to bring customers into the business and to ensure the satisfaction of existing customers in online retailing. Satisfaction in online retailing can be expressed as e-satisfaction. According to the 2003 study by Anderson and Srinivasan, satisfaction in online retailing is defined as “the state of being satisfied with the buying and selling activities of businesses that provide services in online channels” (Yapraklı & Yılmaz, 2008, p.141).

Last-Step Delivery

The emergence of electronic commerce or e-commerce has placed delivery to households at the heart of an important electronic supply chain system aimed at quality, speed and convenience (Agatz et al., 2011). Today, consumers who do not have time for shopping resort to home delivery services to obtain goods quickly and conveniently (Kâmâinen et al., 2001). Online ordering for retail goods, groceries and food is becoming increasingly popular all over the world, as the level of customer expectation for delivery has become ever more demanding with advances in information technology. Online retail has shown the most stable and high growth trend since its initial emergence in the early 1990s. Annual online retail sales in the United States increased from only 0.93% (\$27,608 million) of total retail sales in 2000 to 11% (\$601,747 million) in 2019 (Data: US Census Bureau, 2020). Online shopping is expected to continue to grow due to its convenience, wide range of choices, price advantages over physical store, etc. (Mokhtarian, 2004). In recent years, online food services such as Hungry Naki and Food Panda have become popular in cities (Export.gov, 2017), bringing home delivery services to the forefront of the sector. Even in developing countries such as Turkey, online delivery is popular and appreciated (Dirsehan & Çankat, 2021).

Methodology of the Research

One of the biggest tools of online retail experience, which is becoming widespread day by day, is to ensure customer satisfaction. For this purpose, it is investigated whether online retail experience as an influencing factor has a mediating role in the relationship between online retail experience and customer satisfaction of the last delivery step.

The satisfaction dimension of consumers' online retail experiences is an important topic of discussion in the academic field. Considering the scarcity of studies in the literature in this field, it is believed that this study will shed light on academic studies.

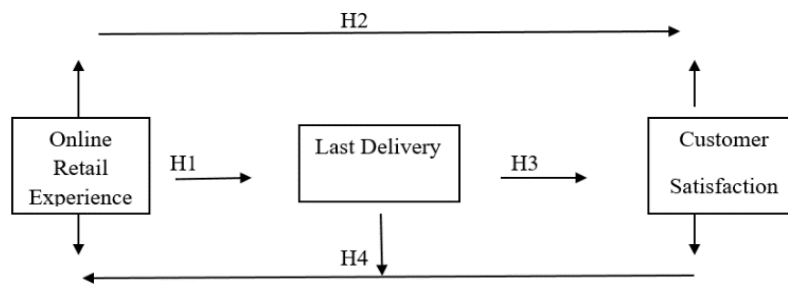
This research has 3 main variables. The variables are as follows;

- a) Online retail experience
- b) Customer satisfaction

c) The last delivery steps

The research model revealing the relationship between these variables is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The Mediating Role of the Last Delivery Step in Online Retail Experience and Customer Satisfaction



The final stage of the process, known as last-step delivery, is regarded as the most challenging aspect of the supply chain in online retailing (Esper et al., 2003). In this final stage of the delivery process, producers can deliver the ordered products, such as communication documents, to the households of online consumers, to their places of work, such as offices, shops, and workplaces, to easily accessible boxes, or to the centers and cabinets where the products are assembled (Bouwman, 2017).

When all the processes in all logistics network operations are analyzed, 28% of the logistics fees on orders are generated from the distribution points or from the manufacturer to the buyers (Wang et al., 2018).

With population growth in urban areas, e-commerce and the latest technologies, the demand for the delivery process is increasing. In this context, proper design, planning and management of the last delivery step process plays an important role in the online retail experience. The first hypothesis formed according to the literature review:

H₁: There is a positive effect between online retail experience and the last delivery step.

Customer satisfaction is one of the most important factors in online retailing. In customer satisfaction, the perceived quality of the Web site is directly related to the satisfaction of the individual (Parasuraman et al., 2005; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Cristobal et al., 2007).

The quality perceived by the consumer is directly related to consumer satisfaction with the website. Likewise, it has a positive and direct effect on the consumer's loyalty levels to the website (Cristobal et al., 2007).

The results of the studies conducted in Turkey on the quality perception of electronic services show similar qualities to these studies (Altunışık et al., 2010; İliter, 2009; Çelik & Başaran, 2008; Barutçu, 2008). Researchers examining the relationship between consumer satisfaction and quality perception of services in our country have obtained significant and positive findings showing a direct proportion in the relationship between consumer satisfaction and quality perception of services. For this reason, as the perceived quality increases in all digital or non-digital services, consumer satisfaction increases. In the light of these studies, the following hypothesis was developed.

H₂: There is a positive effect between online retail experience and customer satisfaction.

In the literature, there are many studies showing the positive effect of last-step delivery on customer satisfaction in studies showing the relationship between the elements of last-step delivery (logistics) and customer satisfaction in e-commerce. In the studies (Yıldız et al., 2020; Krishnamoorthy & Sandhiya, 2020), it has been determined that the relationship between customer satisfaction and last delivery is positive. Other studies have evaluated customer satisfaction through the elements of last-step delivery. In these studies, elements such as return policies and service reception (Avarkan et al., 2018), order quality,

accuracy and procedures, on-time delivery, information quality, responsiveness, logistics support, personnel (Lin et al., 2016; Karadeniz & Işık, 2014; Chen et al., 2012; Mentzer et al., 2001; Ho and Wu, 1999) were found to have an impact on customer satisfaction. In this context, customer satisfaction has a significant and positive effect on the relationship between market share and customer loyalty in last delivery services (Stank et al., 2003). The following hypothesis was developed within the scope of the studies.

H₃: There is a positive effect between the last delivery step and customer satisfaction.

In the literature review, there are some studies showing the relationship between customer satisfaction and several elements of e-commerce logistics. Customer satisfaction was evaluated through these elements. In these studies, elements such as return policies and service reception (Avarkan et al., 2018), order quality, accuracy and procedures, on-time delivery, information quality, responsiveness, logistics support, personnel (Lin et al., 2016; Karadeniz & Işık, 2014; Chen et al., 2012; Mentzer et al., 2001; Ho and Wu, 1999) were found to have an impact on customer satisfaction. There is no study on the mediating role of final delivery in e-commerce. In the light of this information, our hypothesis is:

H₄: The last delivery step mediates the online retail experience and customer satisfaction.

In the data collection process, consumers aged 18 and over who have online retail experience in Turkey were utilized. The randomness sampling method was selected with the aim of reaching the maximum possible sample. The data of the research were collected online between 06.04.2022 - 30.08.2022 by using the online survey method google forms application. The first part of the survey is aimed at determining the demographic characteristics and consumption preferences of the consumers participating in the research. In answering the questions in the questionnaire; 5-point Likert rating scale was used as “(1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree”. The data obtained from the survey questions were analyzed with the SPSS-25 program. It is thought that consumers gave consistent, reliable, accurate and unbiased answers to the questions specified in the survey form of the research they participated in.

Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the ethics committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University (Date: June 17, 2022, Session No: 09 Number: 01-45/09-17). An informed consent was not obtained for this study.

Results

The reliability of the scales used in this study was determined through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Regression Analyses were conducted to test the hypotheses. Online retail experience, last delivery step and customer satisfaction Alpha Value are given in table 1 below.

Table 1. Online Retail Experience, Final Delivery Step and Customer satisfaction Cronbach's Alpha Values

Online Retail Experience Alpha Value	
Cronbach's Alpha Value	Number of Statements
0.917	12
Last Delivery Step Alpha Value	
Cronbach's Alpha Value	Number of Statements
0.919	12
Customer Satisfaction Alpha Value	
Cronbach's Alpha Value	Number of Statements

0.885	4
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When Cronbach's Alpha values are examined, the online retail experience Alpha value is 0.917, the last delivery step Alpha value is 0.919 and the customer satisfaction Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.885. The fact that the Alpha value is in the range of $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$ indicates that the scale is a highly reliable scale.

The demographic characteristics of the consumers participating in the research, which were determined in terms of gender, marital status, age, educational status and monthly income, are given in Table 2 with their explanations.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Women	182	49.9
Man	183	50.1
Total	365	100
Age		
18-24 years	154	42.2
25-34 years	120	32.9
35-44 years	56	15.3
45-54 years	33	9.0
55 years and over	2	0.5
Total	365	100
Marriage Status		
Married	115	31.5
Single	250	68.5
Total	365	100
Education Status		
Literate	2	0.5
Primary education	10	2.7
High School	110	30.1
Associate degree	43	11.8
Bachelor's degree	144	39.5
Graduate	56	15.3
Total	365	100
Income Status		
2000 TL and below	91	24.9
2001-3500	30	8.2
3501-5000	41	11.2
5001-8000	91	24.9
8000 TL and over	112	30.7
Total	365	100

According to the gender variable in Table 2, 49.9% of the participants were female and 50.1% were male. The 18-24 age group, who participated in the research the most, constitutes 42.2%. When marital status is analyzed, 68.5% of the participants are men. In the educational status data, 39.5% of the respondents are bachelor's degree graduates. When the income distribution of the individuals is analyzed, the

individuals who participated in the survey are mostly in the income group of 8000 TL and above with 30.7%.

Univariate and multivariate regression analyses were applied to test the hypotheses of the study. Baron and Kenny's (1986) method was used to test the mediation effect of the last delivery step.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Model Summaries

Model No	Model	Adapted R ²	Estimated Standard Error	F Value	p Value
1	L.S.D= b_0+b_1x O.R.E*	0.671	0.36287	742.039	0.000
2	C.S= b_0+b_1x O.R.E*	0.530	0.47733	411.047	0.000
3	C.S= b_0+b_1x L.S.D*	0.570	0.45641	483.683	0.000
4	C.S= b_0+b_1x O.R.E + b_2x L.S.D	0.606	0.43719	280.363	0.000
*p<0.01; L.S.D: Last-Step Delivery; O.R.E: Online retail experience; C.S: Customer Satisfaction					

According to Table 3, the independent variable "Online retail experience" explains 67% of the variance of the dependent variable "Last delivery step". "Online retail experience" explains 53% of the variance of the dependent variable 'Customer satisfaction'. "Last delivery step" explains the variance of the dependent variable 'Customer satisfaction' by 57%. "Online retail experience" and 'Last delivery step' explain the variance of the dependent variable 'Customer satisfaction' by 60%. Since all significance values in Table 3 are $p < 0.05$, it is seen that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. In this context, hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are supported.

Table 4. Coefficients of Regression Models

	Beta	t	P
Model 1			
Constant		6.521	0.000
O.R.E	0.812	27.240	0.000
Model 2			
Constant		5.637	0.000
O.R.E	0.795	20.275	0.000
Model 3			
Constant		4.634	0.000
L.S.D	0.832	21.993	0.000
Model 4			
Constant		3.100	0.002
O.R.E	0.363	5.797	0.000

L.S.D	0.532	8.409	0.000
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To test the mediation effect of hypothesis H4, the method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was employed. In this context, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, the relationship between the independent variable and the mediating variable, the relationship between the mediating variable and the dependent variable, and finally, how the relationship between the independent and dependent variables changes when the mediating variable is added to the model, must be considered. Once the final delivery step has been incorporated into the model, if the direct relationship between the online retail experience and customer satisfaction variables remains statistically significant but the Beta coefficient demonstrates a reduction in magnitude, this indicates the presence of a partial mediation role. Upon the addition of the final delivery step variable to the model of online retail experience and customer satisfaction, the beta value of the online retail variable decreased from 0.795 to 0.363. In this context, the last delivery step exerts a partial mediation effect on the relationship between online retail experience and customer satisfaction (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176). In light of the aforementioned evidence, hypothesis H4 is accepted.

Conclusion

The development of technology and the widespread use of the internet have also affected consumption habits. Consumers, who used to shop by visiting physical stores, have experienced shopping from wherever they are without going to the store thanks to digital devices and online shopping sites. Online shopping sites, which have a wide range of products, have many features such as easy access to products and the opportunity to compare similar products with no time and space restrictions. Online shopping, which offers convenient and easy shopping opportunities, has led consumers to use online sites more than physical stores.

Ensuring customer satisfaction is also an important factor for people who experience online shopping. Factors such as quality, expectation, performance, perceived value and trust affect customer satisfaction. Another process is the delivery step. Disruptions in the final delivery step after the product is ordered, failure of the product to meet expectations, and lack of trust in the retailer reduce the satisfaction of customers in the online shopping experience. However, one of the main goals of online retailers is to ensure the satisfaction of consumers with the online shopping experience and the final delivery step. In this context; both the impact of online retail experience on the last delivery step and customer satisfaction and the impact of the last delivery step on customer satisfaction were examined.

Half of the participants selected by convenience sampling method were male consumers (50.1%) and those who marked their marital status as single (68.5%). In the study conducted by Özgüven (2011), it was determined that online shopping is preferred by young consumers by showing changes in consumer behavior according to age. When we look at the age distribution of the participants, the majority are between the ages of 18-24 (42.2%) and 25-34 (32.9%). The most common education level was marked as undergraduate (39.5%). According to the income distribution of the consumers participating in the research, it is seen that the majority is 8000 TL and above (30.7%).

As a result of the data obtained from the research, firstly, the relationship between the online retail experience and the last delivery step and customer satisfaction is discussed. Then, the interaction between the last delivery step and customer satisfaction was examined. In line with the results, it was determined that there is a positive and significant relationship between the three variables. In addition, a partial mediation effect of the last delivery step was found in the relationship between online retail experience and customer satisfaction.

As a result of the research, it was revealed that online retail experience leads to customer satisfaction.

This is because customer satisfaction is positively ensured by the wide range of products and the ease of online transactions in the online purchasing process. The last delivery step was found to have a mediating effect in the relationship between online retail experience and customer satisfaction (partial mediation). This situation reveals that consumers are satisfied with the enjoyment of the last delivery step process in terms of purchasing. These findings are consistent with the studies on online retail experience, last delivery step and customer satisfaction in the literature.

This study was conducted using the variables of online retail experience, last delivery step and customer satisfaction. Future studies can address the concept of online retail experience, which is the main variable of this study, using different dependent and independent variables.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the ethics committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpasa University.

Informed Consent: An informed consent was not obtained for this study.

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