

Exploring Santoon's Customers' Preferences That Affect Their Purchase Decision For Buying Fashion Products

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Abstract

There is a significant shift towards online shopping in the digital era, particularly within the fashion industry. Despite this trend, Santoon, a clothing brand in Indonesia, faces challenges with online sales being considerably lower than offline sales, even though many of its customers and target market prefer purchasing fashion products online. This study aims to identify the preferences of Santoon's customers that impact their decision-making process when buying fashion products. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research utilizes semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights. A non-probability purposive sampling technique focused on Santoon's past customers and target market. The study reveals that design, quality, and sizing are the primary factors influencing customers' preferences for fashion products. Additionally, detailed product descriptions and customer reviews are crucial in shaping online shopping preferences. Although customers often visit offline stores to see and sample products, the final purchase decision is frequently made online. The findings underscore the importance of enhancing online product descriptions and leveraging customer reviews to build trust. Integrating online and offline shopping experiences is essential to cater to hybrid customer behaviour. Recommendations for Santoon include improving the detail and accuracy of online product descriptions, utilizing customer reviews to foster trust, and merging online and offline shopping experiences. Furthermore, optimizing Instagram marketing by posting content related to the daily use of Santoon's products is advised, given the significant overlap between the brand's target market and Indonesian Instagram users.

Keywords: Customers' Preferences; Purchase Decision; Customers' Preferences

A. INTRODUCTION

There has been a notable shift from offline to online shopping in the digital era, particularly within the fashion industry. Today, most consumers prefer to conduct their purchases online. According to (Statista, 2024), the number of e-commerce users in Indonesia reached 87.31 million in 2023 and is projected to increase by 34.3 million new users (+35.35 per cent) between 2024 and 2028. With Indonesia's growing number of e-commerce users, companies are increasingly adopting e-commerce strategies. In 2022, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) reported nearly 2.9 million e-commerce companies across Indonesia, with 76.38% in Java.

Santoon, a company in the ready-to-wear sector, has begun utilizing e-commerce platforms. Since adopting digital marketing strategies in 2019, Santoon has gained substantial recognition and opportunities for collaboration and participation in fashion events. The company primarily uses Instagram and Shopee for online marketing, targeting urban women in their 20s to 30s who value gender equality and distinctive fashion. Despite Santoon's strong online presence and substantial Instagram following, online sales have disappointed. From September 2023 to February 2024, only five products were sold via WhatsApp, with no sales recorded on Shopee. In contrast, a similar competitor experiences significantly higher online sales. Preliminary research suggests that Santoon's target customers prefer offline shopping, indicating that customer preferences influence purchase decisions. Research by (Khalida, 2022) and others supports understanding customer preferences for effective strategy development. Santoon's offline sales are robust, with 770 products sold over six months, highlighting a significant disparity with online sales. This gap is concerning, especially since many customers fitting Santoon's target market profile frequently shop online but opt to purchase Santoon products offline. This study aims to identify the factors influencing customer

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preferences for online versus offline shopping and provide actionable recommendations for Santoon to refine its marketing strategy, aligning it with customer preferences to optimize sales. Research has demonstrated that customer preferences significantly impact purchase decisions (Jacoby et al., 1971). Furthermore, (Tuli et al., 2007) emphasize the importance of understanding customer preferences and their influencing factors.

Purchase Decision

A customer's purchase decision involves a complex process of evaluating alternatives, considering various factors, and ultimately selecting a product or service. (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2008) describe this process as the selection between two or more alternatives, emphasizing the necessity of having multiple options to initiate decision-making. According to (Khalida, 2022), customer preferences significantly impact these decisions. (Kotler and Keller, 2016) outline the process, beginning with the identification of a need. The consumer then searches for specific benefits from the product or service and evaluates each option based on its characteristics and ability to deliver the desired outcomes. Preferences are established among these alternatives, potentially forming a purchase intention.

However, two common factors can disrupt the transition from intention to decision. The first factor is the influence of others' attitudes, which can affect the customer depending on the intensity of negative attitudes and the customer's motivation to comply. The second factor involves unanticipated situational changes, such as urgent alternative purchases, price increases, job loss, changes in family income, major medical expenses, or the unavailability of the preferred brand. Despite these potential disruptions, the customer decides what or how to buy after navigating the evaluation process and considering these factors.

Customers' Preferences

(Kotler, 2000) defines customer preferences as the relative liking for products or services, where the most preferred option is the one with the highest degree of liking. This comparative nature of preferences underscores customers' ability to differentiate between alternatives based on perceived value and desirability. (Marwan, 1990) elaborates that customer preferences are driven by perceived value and satisfaction, linking preferences to a product or service's benefits. (Rajpurohit and Vasita, 2011) indicate that preferences reflect choices among valued options. (Bhusanur, 2020) identifies factors influencing consumer preferences in fashion, such as quality, price, and durability of apparel. (Mission, 2023) outlines factors affecting online shopping preferences, including convenience, product variety, competitive pricing, time-saving, customer reviews, product comparison, and return policies. In contrast, offline shopping preferences are influenced by the ability to see and sample products, immediate availability, personalized service, shopping experience, avoidance of shipping fees, and product quality assurance.

Preliminary research indicates that customer preferences significantly impact purchase decisions. This study aims to help Santoon gain a deeper understanding of these preferences. By examining their customers' preferences, the research provides insights to guide Santoon in developing effective marketing strategies. The objective is to determine whether Santoon should enhance its online marketing and e-commerce efforts, improve its offline marketing and sales, or adopt an integrated approach to optimize online and offline channels.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

An inductive approach within a qualitative framework is utilized in this study, allowing for the emergence of themes and patterns directly from the data. This method comprehensively explores customer preferences that influence purchase decisions in fashion products. The research employs qualitative methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of these preferences and decision-making processes,

focusing on uncovering the underlying reasons behind purchasing behaviour. Preliminary research involved qualitative methods and observational techniques, including interviews with Santoon's owner, past customers, and target market participants. This phase assessed performance disparities between offline and online stores and identified the root causes of these differences. Purposive sampling, a non-probability technique, was used to select participants with specific characteristics relevant to the study. The sample consisted of 6-10 participants, including three past customers of Santoon and seven individuals from Santoon's target market, ensuring data saturation and relevance.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants, offering flexibility to explore key themes in depth. An interview guide was developed to address crucial topics while allowing for open-ended questions and probing, facilitating a thorough exploration of customer preferences and decision-making factors. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data, involving identifying recurring themes and patterns through careful coding and categorization. This analysis aimed to illuminate factors influencing customer preferences and their impact on purchase decisions. Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This involved comparing data from multiple sources, including validation with the company owner and alignment with existing research on customer decision-making in the fashion industry. Triangulation provided a nuanced and reliable analysis, strengthening the validity of the research conclusions.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research involved categorizing participants into two distinct groups: past customers of Santoon and Santoon's target market. The target market comprises urban individuals in their 20s to late 30s who exhibit high social activity and a strong fashion sense. Data saturation was achieved as repetitive responses indicated comprehensive coverage of the research questions. The study identified that customers recognize a need for new clothing primarily due to social activities. Participants often realize the need for new fashion items when preparing for social events or gatherings. This aligns with (Mishra, 2018), who notes that need recognition is the initial stage where consumers identify a need for a product. For Santoon's target market, the high social activity triggers the recognition that new fashion items are necessary, initiating the purchasing process. Once a need is recognized, participants begin gathering information. They rely on multiple sources, such as online reviews, social media, and recommendations from friends. This behaviour is consistent with (Zhang et al., 2015), who highlight that internet availability aids consumers in collecting specific and accurate information. Participants engage with digital content, using social media platforms to gauge public opinion and gather detailed product insights. They also expressed the need for clear, comprehensive product descriptions and visuals on Santoon's website to aid their decision-making. As they gather information, they establish preferences among the alternatives.

Several key factors influencing customers' preferences when buying fashion products were identified. Quality emerged as the most critical factor, followed by design, sizing, fitting, and price. Brand familiarity also played a significant role. Participants prefer brands they have previously purchased from and trust, emphasizing the importance of quality and design in their purchasing decisions. When evaluating online shopping options, detailed product descriptions were paramount. Participants highlighted the need for comprehensive product details, including sizing information and clear images. The absence of such details on Santoon's online platforms was a deterrent. Customer reviews were crucial, as they helped assess product quality and suitability. Convenience, competitive pricing, and a wide product variety further favoured online shopping.

The ability to physically see and sample products was a major influence on offline shopping. This tactile experience allowed participants to ensure product quality and fit, aspects harder to ascertain online. Participants valued the opportunity to assess materials and try on clothing in physical stores. After evaluating alternatives, customers form a purchase intention for their preferred option. However, if

customers are uncertain, they may continue searching even if they have a purchase intention. Some respondents preferred to visit offline stores to finalize their decision, underscoring the importance of physical stores in decision-making. Factors that influence customers to cancel or postpone their purchase decision include the attitudes of others and unanticipated situational changes, as noted by Kotler and Keller (2016). This highlights the need for Santoon to address potential concerns and provide reassurances to facilitate the final purchase decision.

Triangulation was used to validate the research findings by comparing data from multiple sources, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the results. Data triangulation included interviews, company perspectives, and existing literature. The triangulation process involved theory triangulation, method triangulation, and data source triangulation. Key findings revealed that customers' need recognition and information-gathering stages are influenced by their high social activity, which is consistent with Santoon's target market. These stages align with the EBM model's pre-purchase phase. Customers frequently use social media for information gathering, with preferences shaped by factors such as design, brand familiarity, and sizing. Additional factors influencing online shopping include detailed product descriptions and the ability to place repeat orders. Offline shopping preferences are influenced by the ability to see physically and sample products. These findings were corroborated by the company owner, who observed similar customer behaviour trends.

Discussion

The research results align closely with the original questions and objectives outlined in the introduction, focusing on understanding the consumer decision-making process for purchasing fashion products from Santoon. The findings support the EBM model, which includes stages such as need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives. Customers' preferences, influenced by factors such as design, quality, and sizing, corroborate previous studies (Kohda et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2017) and are validated by the observations of the company owner.

The study reveals that detailed product descriptions and the availability of repeat orders are crucial for influencing online shopping preferences. These findings align with (Immanuel and Peter, 2022), who emphasized the importance of comprehensive product information. However, the research also highlights a significant gap: the lack of detailed product descriptions on Santoon's social media platforms undermines customer confidence and affects purchase decisions.

The hybrid shopping behaviour observed—where customers prefer physical stores for tactile assessments but finalize purchases online—suggests that Santoon needs to enhance its online presence. Improving the quality of online product descriptions and integrating detailed, accurate information are essential steps. Additionally, encouraging customer reviews and seamless integration between online and offline shopping experiences are recommended strategies to address identified gaps and better cater to customer preferences.

D. CONCLUSION

This research aimed to explore the factors influencing customers' preferences for purchasing fashion products online and offline, specifically focusing on Santoon's customer base. Guided by the purchase decision process outlined, the study examined evaluating alternatives. Key factors such as quality, price, and durability are critical, as well as additional considerations affecting online and offline shopping preferences. The findings reveal that Santoon's customers prioritize design, quality, and sizing/fitting, with price being a secondary concern as long as it aligns with the product's quality. For online shopping, preferences include competitive pricing, convenience, detailed product descriptions, and time-saving benefits. Conversely, offline shopping preferences emphasize the ability to see physically and sample

products, ensuring their quality. Customers often form a purchase intention based on their preferred alternatives but may seek further confirmation in offline stores before making the final purchase online.

Based on these insights, several recommendations for Santoon are proposed. Enhancing product descriptions and visuals on platforms like Instagram and Shopee is crucial. High-quality images and detailed descriptions should highlight fabric quality, sizing details, and unique design aspects, especially the distinctive doodles of Santoon's products. Leveraging customer reviews and providing comprehensive size charts can help new customers make informed decisions. Improving online customer service through real-time support and a comprehensive FAQ section can also enhance the customer experience. Additionally, promoting online-exclusive offers, such as limited-time discounts and free shipping, can incentivize online purchases. Integrating online and offline experiences—such as allowing customers to reserve products online and pick them up in-store—can create a seamless shopping experience. Utilizing influencer marketing and regularly updating social media with engaging content can further drive engagement and sales. These strategies aim to align Santoon with customer preferences and enhance its digital presence, ultimately boosting online sales.

For future research, expanding the sample size to include a more diverse demographic can improve the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future studies could employ quantitative methods to quantify the relationships between the identified factors and purchase decisions, providing deeper insights into consumer behaviour in the fashion industry.

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