

An Integrative Analysis of Product Differentiation Strategies and Customer Experience in Enhancing Loyalty in the E-Commerce Industry

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Abstract. The e-commerce industry has undergone significant transformation over the past decades, driven by advances in digital technology and shifts in consumer behavior. Increasingly, consumers are turning to e-commerce platforms to meet their daily needs, from clothing to household goods. This research aims to explore how product differentiation strategies and customer experience can be effectively integrated to enhance customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. This study employs a literature review method with a qualitative approach. Data for this research is sourced from Google Scholar, with publications limited to the period between 2014 and 2024. Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that product differentiation strategies and customer experience play crucial roles in enhancing customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. Product differentiation, through innovation, quality, and unique features, can attract customer attention and distinguish a company from its competitors. Meanwhile, a positive customer experience, encompassing the entire shopping journey from product search to after-sales service, can increase satisfaction and foster long-term loyalty.

Keywords: Product Differentiation, Customer Experience, Loyalty, E-Commerce

1. Introduction

The e-commerce industry has undergone significant transformation over the past decades, driven by advances in digital technology and shifts in consumer behavior [1]. Increasingly, consumers are turning to e-commerce platforms to meet their daily needs, from clothing to household goods. This rise has also spurred intense competition among e-commerce players, compelling companies to continually innovate and seek ways to retain and enhance customer loyalty. To meet these challenges, e-commerce companies often rely on two main strategies: product differentiation and superior customer experience. These strategies are vital for distinguishing companies in a crowded market and ensuring customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Product differentiation is a strategy aimed at making a company's products or services appear unique and more appealing compared to competitors. This can be achieved through various means, such as product innovation, quality enhancement, special features, or attractive design. In the context of e-commerce, product differentiation could mean offering exclusive products or providing services not available elsewhere. Previous research indicates that unique and innovative products tend to attract more consumer attention and can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty [2]. For instance, e-commerce platforms offering exclusive collaborations or limited edition products often receive higher engagement and repeat purchases from customers.

Customer experience also plays a critical role in the e-commerce industry. Customer experience encompasses the entire journey of interactions customers have with an e-commerce platform, from product search, website navigation, purchase process, to after-sales service. Research shows that a positive customer experience can enhance customer satisfaction and encourage them to return to the same platform for future purchases. For example, a study by [3] found that a good customer experience significantly contributes to increased customer loyalty and the intention to recommend the platform to others. These findings underscore the importance of optimizing every touchpoint in the customer journey to create a seamless and enjoyable shopping experience.



Further, research by [4] also highlights the importance of elements such as reliability, responsiveness, and service personalization in creating a satisfying customer experience. In the context of e-commerce, this means providing easy payment processes, fast and reliable delivery services, and responsive and helpful customer support. Superior customer experience can create lasting positive impressions, making customers more likely to return to the same platform for future purchases. The emphasis on high-quality service and support reflects a broader understanding that enhancing the overall customer experience is key to building long-term loyalty and satisfaction.

Although much research has been conducted separately on product differentiation and customer experience, there is still a gap in the literature on how these two strategies can be effectively integrated to enhance customer loyalty in the e-commerce context. Research by [5] shows that integrating various elements of the customer experience can create greater value for customers. However, this research has not specifically explored how product differentiation can be combined with customer experience to achieve optimal results. This indicates a need for further investigation into how to effectively manage the combination of these strategies to enhance customer loyalty.

Advances in digital technology also open new opportunities for personalization and enhancement of customer experience. Data analytics and artificial intelligence enable companies to better understand customer needs and preferences, allowing them to offer more tailored products and services. Research by [6] indicates that technology-supported personalization can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Implementing this technology can support both product differentiation and customer experience strategies, creating a more personalized and satisfying shopping experience for customers. The integration of technology into these e-commerce strategies is an important area for future exploration and implementation.

Additionally, market trends and changes in consumer behavior need to be considered in designing product differentiation and customer experience strategies. Consumers increasingly demand transparency, speed, and convenience in online shopping. A study by [7] emphasizes the importance of responding to market trends and changes in consumer behavior to remain relevant and competitive. Therefore, e-commerce companies must continuously adapt and innovate to meet evolving consumer expectations. The dynamic nature of consumer preferences highlights the need for ongoing research and adaptation in e-commerce strategies.

In this context, this research aims to explore how product differentiation strategies and customer experience can be effectively integrated to enhance customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. This research hopes to provide deeper and more comprehensive insights into the dynamics of these strategies by reviewing existing literature and investigating case studies of successful e-commerce companies. The results of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to academic literature and business practice, as well as help e-commerce companies design more effective strategies to achieve higher customer loyalty.

1.1. Product Differentiation

Product differentiation is a strategy used by companies to make their products appear unique and more attractive compared to competitors' products, with the aim of creating added value for customers and standing out in a competitive market [8]. This strategy can involve various aspects such as product innovation, quality improvement, unique features, attractive design, and additional services not available in other products. In the e-commerce industry, product differentiation can mean offering exclusive or limited edition products, providing a personalized shopping experience through product recommendations tailored to customer preferences, or offering faster and more reliable delivery services. Companies can attract more customers and build stronger loyalty by creating products with competitive advantages [9].

1.2. Customer Experience

Customer experience encompasses the entire perception and interaction experienced by customers when engaging with a company or brand, covering all touchpoints from product search, website navigation, purchase process, to after-sales service [10]. In the e-commerce industry, customer experience includes ease of site navigation, speed and efficiency of the payment process, reliability of delivery, and the quality of customer support provided. Positive experiences, such as responsive customer service and fast delivery processes, can enhance customer satisfaction and build long-term loyalty. Conversely, negative experiences, such as slow websites or unhelpful customer service, can damage a company's reputation and cause customers to switch to competitors. Therefore, creating and managing a superior customer experience is a crucial key to retaining and enhancing customer loyalty in the e-commerce sector [11].

1.3. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a strong commitment from customers to continue choosing and making repeat purchases from a particular brand or company, despite the availability of alternative options [12]. This loyalty is characterized by repeat behaviors such as repeat purchases, increased purchase frequency, and a tendency to recommend the product or service to others. Factors driving customer loyalty include consistent product quality, positive customer experiences, and an emotional bond between customers and the brand [13]. In the context of e-commerce, customer loyalty is crucial because loyal customers not only provide ongoing revenue but also act as brand ambassadors, promoting the business through word-of-mouth. Therefore, companies must focus on strategies that not only attract new customers but also retain and enhance the loyalty of existing customers through superior service and consistent added value.

1.4. E-commerce

E-commerce is the process of buying and selling goods and services over the internet, encompassing various business activities from retail to wholesale, digital services, and business-to-business (B2B) transactions [14]. E-commerce enables customers to shop online from various devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones, providing greater convenience and access compared to physical stores. E-commerce platforms facilitate various functions, including product catalogs, electronic payment systems, inventory management, and delivery services. The advancement of digital technology and increased internet access have significantly driven the growth of e-commerce, creating new opportunities for businesses to reach a wider market and enhance operational efficiency [15]. For consumers, e-commerce offers convenience, a variety of products, and often more competitive prices, making it an increasingly popular shopping option in the digital era.

2. Method

This research uses a literature review method with a qualitative approach to analyze product differentiation strategies and customer experience in enhancing loyalty in the e-commerce industry. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the concepts and dynamics related to the research topic. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the findings and trends emerging from the reviewed literature. The data in this study was sourced from Google Scholar, with the publication period limited to between 2014 and 2024. Initially, the literature search yielded 44 articles relevant to the research topic. However, after a rigorous selection process based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 24 articles were used for further analysis. This selection was made to ensure that the chosen articles have high relevance and significant contributions to understanding product differentiation, customer experience, and customer loyalty in the context of e-commerce. The analysis process involved deeply reading each selected article, identifying main themes, and compiling consistent and contradictory findings. The results of this analysis were then compiled into a descriptive narrative providing a comprehensive overview of how product differentiation strategies and customer experience can be applied to enhance customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. Through this method, the research is expected to make significant contributions to literature and business practices in the field of e-commerce.

3. Result and Discussion

In the highly competitive world of e-commerce, product differentiation and customer experience strategies play a crucial role in building and maintaining customer loyalty. This research reviews literature related to these two strategies to provide deep insights into effective methods that e-commerce companies can implement. The findings of this literature review indicate that integrating product differentiation and customer experience can create significant added value for customers, thereby enhancing their loyalty. For example, in the case of Zalora, a fashion e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia, product differentiation is achieved by offering exclusive collections from local designers not available on other platforms. This strategy attracts customers seeking unique products and strengthens Zalora's brand identity as an authentic and trendy fashion destination. Through this approach, Zalora successfully attracts customers who value exclusivity and quality, while building strong loyalty to their brand.

Superior customer experience is also a key factor in building loyalty [16]. A relevant case study is Tokopedia, one of the largest e-commerce platforms in Indonesia. Tokopedia invests heavily in technology and infrastructure to ensure a seamless customer experience from start to finish. From an intuitive user interface, easy payment processes, to fast and timely delivery services, Tokopedia creates a positive shopping experience for its customers. Tokopedia also integrates additional features such as chat with sellers and responsive customer support, further enhancing the shopping experience and overall customer satisfaction.

However, focusing on only one aspect, either product differentiation or customer experience, is not sufficient to ensure customer loyalty. Research shows that the combination of both can produce a stronger synergistic effect. For instance, Shopee, another e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia, integrates product differentiation strategies with superior customer experience. Shopee offers various unique products through exclusive partnerships with renowned and local brands, as well as providing interactive features like live shopping and product reviews that help customers make purchasing decisions. The integration of differentiated products and interactive experiences creates significant added value for customers, ultimately strengthening loyalty to the platform [17].

Product differentiation and customer experience can enhance loyalty while contributing to increased customer trust. Trust is a key element in online transactions, where customers cannot see or touch the product before purchasing [18]. Bukalapak, another example from Indonesia, builds customer trust through programs such as money-back guarantees and offering products from verified sellers. These programs provide customers with a sense of security, which in turn enhances their loyalty. Bukalapak successfully creates deep trust among its customers by providing satisfaction guarantees and transaction protection.

Moreover, data analysis shows that e-commerce companies that successfully integrate product differentiation and customer experience strategies often have a deep understanding of their customers' needs and preferences [19]. This data can be obtained from various sources, including web analytics, customer feedback, and market trends. Lazada, for instance, uses data analytics to personalize product recommendations and offer relevant promotions to each customer. By doing so, Lazada can provide a more personalized and engaging shopping experience, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Utilizing data to tailor offers and communication is key to creating closer relationships with customers.

It is important to note that technological innovation plays a significant role in enhancing product differentiation and customer experience. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) allow companies to automate and improve various aspects of the customer experience [20]. Amazon, the global e-commerce giant, uses AI to manage inventory, personalize product recommendations, and provide responsive customer service. The use of these technologies helps Amazon stay at the forefront in terms of customer experience and product differentiation. Continuous technological innovation provides a significant competitive advantage for e-commerce companies that can effectively leverage it.

The success of these strategies also depends on the company's ability to adapt to changes in consumer behavior. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many e-commerce companies quickly adapted to meet the increased demand for online shopping [21]. Companies like Blibli in Indonesia developed faster delivery services and offered essential products to address changing consumer needs. This quick adaptation helped the companies survive during the crisis and strengthened customer loyalty by responding promptly to their needs. The ability to quickly adapt to market changes is a crucial factor in maintaining relevance and competitiveness.

In addition to product differentiation and customer experience, e-commerce companies must consider the importance of effective communication with customers. Transparent and timely communication regarding order status, handling complaints, and product information can enhance customer trust and loyalty [22]. Companies like JD.ID in Indonesia implement efficient communication systems with customers through various channels, including email, social media, and direct customer service. This approach ensures that customers are always up-to-date and feel valued. Good communication helps build stronger relationships and reinforces customer loyalty.

Case studies from successful e-commerce companies show that integrating product differentiation and customer experience strategies is relevant for both large companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). SMEs can leverage the uniqueness of local products and personalized services, which are often harder for large companies to achieve. For instance, Berrybenka, a fashion e-commerce company in Indonesia, combines local fashion product offerings with quick and personalized customer service. This approach helps Berrybenka attract and retain customers in a competitive market. SMEs that can capitalize on local strengths and personalized services can effectively compete with larger players in the e-commerce industry [23].

Moreover, the importance of customer feedback should not be overlooked. Constructive feedback can provide valuable insights into areas needing improvement and new opportunities for product differentiation. Companies like MatahariMall.com implement effective feedback collection systems and use this data to continuously improve their services and products. Companies can show they care about customer needs and satisfaction, thereby enhancing loyalty by responding to customer feedback. Continuous improvement based on customer feedback is a key strategy in maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty [24].

Overall, findings from this literature review indicate that product differentiation and customer experience strategies are key factors in building customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. Effective integration of these two strategies can create significant added value for customers and provide a competitive advantage for companies. Case studies from various successful e-commerce companies provide empirical evidence of the

effectiveness of these strategies and offer valuable lessons that can be applied by other companies. By continuously innovating and adapting to market changes, e-commerce companies can maintain their relevance and competitiveness in the digital era.

Table 1. Key Findings from the Discussion on Product Differentiation, Customer Experience, and Loyalty in E-Commerce

Key Finding	Description	Example
Product Differentiation	Differentiating products through innovation, quality, or unique features can attract customers and stand out from competitors	Zalora offers exclusive collections from local designers.
Customer Experience	Providing a positive and seamless customer experience across all touchpoints enhances satisfaction and fosters loyalty.	Tokopedia invests in technology for a smooth shopping experience.
Synergistic Effect	Combining product differentiation with a superior customer experience creates a stronger impact on customer loyalty	Shopee integrates unique product offerings with interactive features
Trust Building	Building customer trust through reliable services and transparent policies contributes to increased loyalty	Bukalapak provides money-back guarantees and verified sellers
Data Analytics	Utilizing data analytics for personalization and efficiency improves customer experience and drives loyalty	Lazada uses data to personalize recommendations and offers
Technological Innovation	Implementing technologies like AI can enhance both product differentiation and customer experience.	Amazon uses AI for inventory management and personalized recommendations.
Market Adaptation	Adapting to changes in consumer behavior and market trends is crucial for maintaining relevance and competitiveness	Blibli adapts to increased online demand during the pandemic
Effective Communication	Clear and timely communication about order status and customer support enhances trust and loyalty	JD.ID uses various channels for effective customer communication
Small and Medium Business Opportunities	SMEs can leverage local product uniqueness and personalized service to compete effectively in the market.	Berrybenka combines local fashion with personal customer service
Customer Feedback Utilization	Regular collection and analysis of customer feedback can help in improving services and products.	MatahariMall.com uses feedback to refine their offerings and services.
Loyalty Programs	Developing attractive loyalty programs encourages repeat purchases and customer referrals.	Reward programs with discounts or exclusive access can enhance loyalty
Segment-Specific Strategies	Tailoring strategies to specific market segments can provide a competitive edge	Researching preferences of target segments to adapt product and service strategies.
Strategy Evaluation and Adjustment	Regular evaluation and adjustment of strategies based on performance can optimize effectiveness	Continuous assessment of differentiation and experience strategies for improvements.

4. Conclusion

Based on the literature review conducted in this study, it can be concluded that product differentiation strategy and customer experience play a very important role in increasing customer loyalty in the e-commerce industry. Product differentiation, through innovation, quality, and unique features, can attract customers' attention and differentiate the company from competitors. Meanwhile, a positive customer experience, covering

the entire shopping journey from product search to after-sales service, can increase satisfaction and drive long-term loyalty. The research also shows that the integration between product differentiation and customer experience creates a stronger synergistic effect than if the two strategies are implemented separately. Case studies of e-commerce companies such as Zalora, Tokopedia, Shopee and Amazon confirm the importance of combining these two strategies to build and maintain customer loyalty. Digital technologies, such as data analytics and artificial intelligence, play an important role in improving the personalisation and efficiency of the customer experience, while effective and responsive communication strengthens the relationship between companies and customers. However, it should be noted that while many e-commerce companies have successfully implemented these strategies, there are challenges to be faced, such as rapid changes in consumer behaviour and intensifying competition. Therefore, companies must continue to innovate and adapt to meet customers' evolving needs and expectations. Suggestions that can be given for the results of this study include:

1. **Continuous Innovation in Products:** E-commerce companies are advised to continuously invest in product innovation to maintain differentiation in a competitive market. This can be done through new product development, exclusive offers, or continuous quality improvement. Further research is needed to explore how product innovation can be combined with the latest market trends to create additional value for customers.
2. **Customer Experience Improvement:** A focus on improving customer experience should be a top priority. Companies should leverage technologies such as artificial intelligence to personalise the shopping experience and provide responsive service. Regular collection and analysis of customer feedback can assist companies in identifying areas for improvement and in devising more effective strategies.
3. **Use of Digital Technology:** E-commerce companies should utilise digital technology to improve operational efficiency and customer experience. Investments in data analytics and automation systems can help companies better understand customer needs and optimise services. Further research into the application of new technologies in e-commerce can provide additional insights for the development of more effective strategies.
4. **Adaptation to Market Changes:** Companies need to be flexible and adaptive to changes in consumer behaviour and market trends. Proactively observing these changes and adjusting marketing and operational strategies can help companies stay relevant and competitive. Further research on the impact of market changes on e-commerce strategies would be beneficial.
5. **Improved Communication and Transparency:** To build customer trust and loyalty, companies should focus on clear and transparent communication. Providing accurate information on order status, return policies, and customer support can increase customer satisfaction and reduce uncertainty. Additional research on effective communication techniques in e-commerce can provide practical guidance for companies.
6. **Loyalty Programme Development:** Companies can develop attractive loyalty programmes to encourage repeat purchases and recommendations from customers. These programmes may include incentives such as discounts, reward points, or exclusive access to certain products. Further studies on the effectiveness of different types of loyalty programmes in the context of e-commerce can provide valuable insights.
7. **Focus on Specific Market Segments:** Understanding and catering to specific market segments with specialised needs can provide a competitive advantage. E-commerce companies should research the preferences and behaviours of their target market segments to develop more targeted strategies. Further research on how product differentiation and customer experience can be adapted for specific market segments would be useful.
8. **Strategy Evaluation and Adjustment:** Companies should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their product differentiation and customer experience strategies and make adjustments where necessary. Conducting periodic performance evaluations and analysing the results can help in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented strategy. Ongoing research into strategy evaluation and adjustment methods can provide useful guidance.

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