

The Online Apparel Shopping Experience of Blind Consumers:

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BACKGROUND

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain an understanding of the experiences of consumers with total blindness shopping online for apparel. This study bridged a gap between customer experience (CX) marketing literature and user experience (UX) human-computer interaction literature instead of focusing on the two as silos.

CX: overall impression a customer receives from interacting with a company's online website, products or customer service (Varshneya & Das, 2017)

- CX has become a positioning method using technology such as AR and VR to provide memorable experiences

UX: focuses on the infrastructure design of the experience itself on websites and computer applications (Ritonummi, 2020; Sohaib et al., 2011)

- Common goal is to make everyday products, services, and technology as user-friendly and accessible as possible

Research Question: What are the online apparel retail shopping experiences of individuals with total blindness?

- What are the unique experiences of blind consumers shopping online for apparel?
- What challenges do blind consumers experience when shopping online for apparel?

Methodology

- 11 participants recruited through the National Federation of the Blind and virtually interviewed over Zoom.
- 2 males; 9 females | 8 Caucasians; 2 Asians; 1 Hispanic
Ages 26 – 71

Data Analysis

Zoom produced automated transcript → checked for accuracy → information coded to categorize the data → two main themes emerged

Implications

Academic: further analyze how specific online features impact totally blind customers shopping experience taking into consideration the device used to shop online.

Industry: address the design of experience from a diverse and inclusive perspective ensuring that market research and user testing samples include individuals from the totally blind population.

Recommendations

Address customer experience through user experience elements (strategy, scope, structure, skeleton and surface) and user experience honeycomb facets (useful, valuable, credible, desirable, findable, usable, and accessible)

THEME 1: FROM OUR HEART TO YOURS

Website features and challenges that assisted or hindered the online shopping experience for participants:

- Descriptions
- Reviews
- Live chats
- Return policies
- Selection of words chosen to communicate to customers

External resources such as support from family and friends contributed to the kind of experience a participant would have as well.

THEME 2: BEHIND THE SCENES

Technical features and challenges (related to the construction of a website through coding) that participants have during their online shopping experience when purchasing clothes.

"...Visually a picture on the screen and an email or an app can say 15% off use code blah blah blah and with somebody with sight can see that and say "Oh great, I can just enter this later". A lot of times with Siri and VoiceOver it'll say "picture" or say "graphic" and because it's not been coded with the people in the background in such a way to say coupon fifty percent off use access code blah, blah, blah, I miss out on the discount and that sucks."

"There's nothing wrong with plum but when you put it right next to purple does that mean it's like lavender purple? Does that mean it's royal purple?... The worst Amazon does, another time there was gray one and gray two was color options."

"I have a guide dog and I carry poop bags with me so pockets are necessary but the company I was using in the description it was nothing about pockets. But in the reviews someone had said "oh, these have pockets", but like who's going to go read 5,000 reviews before they shop for a pair of pants just to find that information."

"I love Charlie Brown. They have a Charlie Brown sweatshirt and a Charlie Brown t-shirt right now. And it says all the peanuts gang, you know from Charlie Brown and so I was like oh, that's cute, I want it. Do I know exactly what they're doing? No. Had it been described to me? No."

"I use a mixture of Google Chrome, I use Brave, I use Firefox and I use Microsoft Edge. So if I'm not getting the information I'm looking for, hoping for on one browser I'll copy that URL out of one browser and put into another browser and see which one works best. Or if it's the website or if it's the browser, or if it's me or a combination of all of it. I use multiple ones to get the information I need which is frustrating but it's what you gotta do."

"I make sure the store I'm using has an easy and straightforward return policy and then I get two sizes of the same thing and return one to make sure it fits properly."

"It's really hard for me to return things...I need help if I want to do that. So, it's not like the easiest thing for me to actually like return something which is part of the frustration. I need to have somebody with me to."

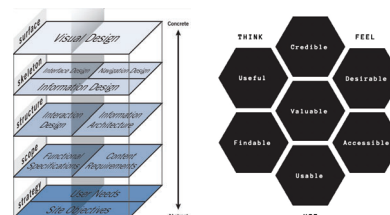
"The sites where I purchase other things are likely where I'd keep coming back to, not necessarily because they're my first choice...but because they are usable and that's what they should be, they should be easy to access."

I don't really like to rely too much on my friends or my family for that and it's like a personal preference. I don't like to, they're busy, they have their own things going on... Sometimes when I use Aira [paid sighted agents] like of course they're going to have different opinions or different styles...It's like sort of having to rely on their secondary interpretation of it."

"Some ads come up on the mobile device but you can't find the button to close them out. Even after they've run their course and they're just sitting there with the screen saying "Learn More" but because the tags haven't been coded in properly, you can't find that "X" so you have to close out the app, and then open it back up and hopefully what you were looking at is going to be easy to find... I had to close out the app then open the Safari window, hit my history, go back there and what I had put in my cart was gone. So it meant I had to go and shop all over again and hopefully remember what I had purchased or wanted to purchase."

"I've noticed with these online shopping platforms, you can go and choose um like the size that you need but as soon as you go to choose the color that you want what will happen sometimes is the actual site will divert back to the only colors they have in the size you're looking for and it doesn't announce that to you. So I have to be very careful when I go and look at my checkout cart to make sure that they didn't automatically make that switch for me because it doesn't give you any indication of that."

- Features should be useful, usable and accessible; Content should be valuable
- Add detailed text to describe products and colors
- Provide audio describing the brand, current campaign and its colors, the aesthetic and organization of their website to give context to the totally blind customer



Selected References

- Ritonummi, S. (2020). User Experience on an ecommerce website—A case study. *Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics*.
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- Varshneya, G., & Das, G. (2017). Experiential value: Multi-item scale development and validation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 48–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.09.010>