



# Evaluating the Attributes of Online Bookstores: Empirical Evidence from Young Consumers in Vietnam

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## Abstract

In recent times there has been a proliferation of online bookstores, especially in emerging market economies. The purpose of this study was to explore the evaluation of online bookstore attributes among young consumers in Vietnam. A paper-based survey was employed to obtain data from consumers up to the age of 24 who had recently purchased books online. The empirical results revealed the following six key attributes of online bookstores: website design, order fulfillment, communication, merchandise, security and privacy, and promotion. The findings also demonstrate that consumers hold unfavorable evaluation with respect to website communication and website security and privacy. These findings have important implications for publishers and retailers who aim to increase their online sales.

**Keywords** Bookstores · Website · Online channels · Young consumers · Website design · Website communication · Website security and privacy

## Introduction

The digitalization of published material as a result of the Internet and the information revolution has a significant impact on the distribution of books [1]. Publishers and booksellers have increasingly distributed their products using online channels.

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Online bookstores profess to offer consumers unique shopping qualities including convenience, wide range of products, reduced prices and special offers [2]. Despite the expansion of the online bookselling market globally, its overall market share in Vietnam remains rather limited. Two plausible explanations for this anomaly are that shoppers prefer to patronize brick-and-mortar stores to select books and also that the use of online payment is still not popular in Vietnam [3]. However, it is expected that the sales of books through online channels will increase in the coming years thanks to the growing number of Internet users and owners of mobile devices [4, 5] and sustained marketing efforts of online booksellers. Popular online bookstores such as *vinabook.com*, *fahasa.com*, *tiki.vn* and *bookbuy.vn* have sought to improve the quality of their websites as well as providing special offers for online shoppers. These online booksellers have increasingly targeted young consumers who represent a significant portion of the Vietnamese population and are prospective customers of online books [3]. Several studies have sought to investigate consumers' evaluation of website service quality and online store attributes [6–9]. However, the attributes of online bookstores have largely been unexplored, especially in the context of emerging markets like Vietnam. More in-depth knowledge on consumers' evaluation of such attributes is essential so that publishers and retailers can increase their online sales. This study therefore aims to explore the diverse attributes of online bookstores. It also enriches the literature on online shopping in emerging markets by examining the attributes of bookstores' websites among young consumers in Vietnam.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the research methodology including the survey method and sample is discussed. Following this, the data analysis is explained, and the results are discussed. The final section discusses implication of the results and provides concluding remarks.

## Research Methodology

A paper-based survey was employed to obtain data from young consumers in Vietnam up to the age of 24 who had purchased books from online bookstores. The survey instrument consisted of three main sections, i.e. (1) Introduction including information about the research study and some screening questions; (2) Online bookstore attributes and (3) Socio-demographic items. On the basis of the scales measuring online store attributes suggested by Jin and Park [9], the authors developed 21 items to measure six attributes of online bookstore. These attributes included website design, order fulfillment, communication, merchandize, security and privacy, and promotion. All the items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale anchored at 1 for “strongly disagree” and 5 for “strongly agree”. Prior to the data collection phase, the survey instrument was pretested using interviews with four online shoppers and three university professors who taught in the areas of management and marketing.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students of two universities who had purchased books online were selected as respondents of the survey. This is in line with a number of prior studies which have suggested using students to represent young consumers [10, 11]. Also, students often seek relevant information about books online [12].

A convenient sampling was used, and participation was on a voluntary basis. The survey instrument was administered to the respondents during meetings between students and faculties of the two universities. The researchers attended each meeting and explained the data collection process and also the informed consent to the respondents. They remained in the meeting rooms to collect the completed surveys. The final effective sample included 460 respondents. Of these, 56% (258) were female and 44% (202) were male. The majority of the respondents were undergraduate students (80%) and single (92.4%).

## Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

To examine the valid dimensionalities of online bookstore attributes, the data were subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Axis Factoring extraction (PAF) and Varimax rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) using Bartlett’s Test was 0.841 and significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the data were regarded as being suitable for factor analysis. The results are illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1** Results of EFA

Item labels	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
WD3	0.855					
WD2	0.469					
WD1	0.458					
OF2		0.772				
OF3		0.701				
OF1		0.592				
CO5			0.859			
CO4			0.841			
CO3			0.839			
CO2			0.802			
CO1			0.764			
ME1				0.799		
ME2				0.790		
ME3				0.787		
ME4				0.740		
SP3					0.854	
SP1					0.770	
SP2					0.628	
PR2						0.685
PR1						0.646
PR3						0.597

The items are indicated in Table 2

Six factors with Eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 were generated by the 21 items which operationalized the attributes of online bookstores. The factor loadings of items were all above the recommended threshold of 0.3 [13]. In total the six factors accounted for approximately 66% of the item variance. The reliability of these factors was also examined using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ). As shown in Table 2,  $\alpha$  values ranged from a low of 0.744 to a high of 0.924, ensuring good internal consistency of reliability [13]. Hence, the six factors and associated items were included in further descriptive analysis.

## Evaluation of Online Bookstore Attributes

The descriptive statistics of consumers' evaluation of online bookstore attributes are illustrated in Table 2. The items in one factor were averaged to generate the mean

**Table 2** Consumers' evaluation of attributes of online bookstores

Online bookstore attributes	M	SD
<i>Website design</i> (M=3.16; SD=1.036; $\alpha$ =0.744)		
WD1. In this website, I can enlarge book cover and pictures	3.40	1.224
WD2. This website provides book cover and pictures from various angles	3.16	1.229
WD3. This website design has a nice impression	2.94	1.367
<i>Order fulfillment</i> (M=3.55; SD=.897; $\alpha$ =0.744)		
OF1. This website provides error-free ordering and delivery	3.24	1.083
OF2. Information on delivery time and fee is available	3.97	1.105
OF3. This website delivers ordered books without defects	3.46	1.122
<i>Communication</i> (M=2.94; SD=1.013; $\alpha$ =0.924)		
CO1. This website provides personalized information for me	2.47	1.210
CO2. This website makes purchase recommendations that match my needs	2.84	1.243
CO3. This website cares about business with me by sending thankyou mail	3.10	1.077
CO4. I feel that this website appreciates my business	3.05	1.110
CO5. This website sends me information that is related to the purchased books	3.24	1.141
<i>Merchandise</i> (M=3.14; SD=0.997; $\alpha$ =0.897)		
ME1. Detailed information about books is provided	3.30	1.178
ME2. I can easily find the book that I need in this website	3.15	1.058
ME3. Purchase procedure is fast and easy in this website	2.85	1.115
ME4. Wide variety of books is provided in this website	3.25	1.209
<i>Security and privacy</i> (M=2.70; SD=0.966; $\alpha$ =0.817)		
SP1. My personal information is confidential in this website	2.49	1.225
SP2. Payment card information is secure in this website	2.77	1.080
SP3. This website clearly states privacy policy	2.83	1.078
<i>Promotion</i> (M=3.38; SD=0.954; $\alpha$ =0.807)		
PR1. Online discounts are provided in this website	3.30	1.043
PR2. This website provides loyalty programs	3.22	0.924
PR3. This website offers free delivery for first order or high value orders	3.61	1.357

M mean, SD standard deviation

score for the factor. Using this, “order fulfillment” received the highest mean score of 3.55, followed by promotion ( $M=3.38$ ), “website design” ( $M=3.16$ ), “merchandise” ( $M=3.14$ ). On the other hand, “security and privacy” and “communication” received the lowest mean scores of 2.70 and 2.94 respectively. In general, these mean scores demonstrate that young consumers manifested unfavorable perceptions on the attributes of online bookstores.

It is important to note that the mean scores of all the items were below 4.0 and seven items had mean scores below the mid-point of 3.0. Specifically, young consumers held negative perceptions about the provision of personalized information ( $M=2.47$ ) and purchase recommendations ( $M=2.84$ ) by bookstore websites. Notably, they indicated their concerns about the confidentiality of personal information ( $M=2.49$ ), the security of online payments ( $M=2.77$ ) and privacy policy ( $M=2.83$ ). Additionally, consumers did not believe that the purchase procedure was fast and user friendly ( $M=2.85$ ). They also demonstrated negative evaluation towards the overall impression of the website design ( $M=2.94$ ).

## Implications and Conclusion

This study contributes to the relevant literature primarily in two ways. First, the study examined a scale measuring online bookstore attributes. This scale comprised 21 items operationalizing six attributes (dimensions) of online bookstores including website design, order fulfillment, communication, merchandising, security and privacy, and promotion. Second, this study explored the evaluation of online bookstore attributes among young consumers in Vietnam who are prospective buyers expected to drive the increase in book sales through online channels. The findings demonstrated that such consumers hold negative perceptions about different attributes of the websites of bookstores, especially with respect to security, privacy and communication.

The findings of this study provide fresh insights that can be directly applied to the marketing of books online. First, advanced technology should be utilized to enhance website security and consumer privacy. Publishers and book retailers should clearly state their privacy policy emphasizing how information about consumers is managed and protected. Second, effective communication is important to enhance consumers’ perceived value of online bookstores. In this regard, personalized information and purchase recommendations should be developed based on consumers’ profile, preferences and previous orders. Such information should be communicated to consumers through websites and emails. Third, website design, which is a critical success factor of website, should be consumer-driven in a manner that facilitates convenient and user friendly purchase procedure. Websites should also use appropriate fonts and color, and they should be compatible when using different devices. Finally, given the financial constraint of young consumers in emerging markets, promotional initiatives such as discount coupons/codes, accumulated points reward system and free gifts should be considered.

Given that this study intentionally focused on young consumers, future research could extend this study by evaluating online bookstore attributes amongst different demographic group of consumers. It is desirable to develop more comprehensive scales measuring diverse attributes of online bookstores. Future research could also investigate the impact of online bookstore attributes on consumer trust, loyalty and purchasing behavior.

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