

Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

THE EFFECT OF CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING ONLINE SHOPPING, VIRAL MARKETING AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY ON PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

It is of great importance for businesses that are in fierce competition in the online environment to understand the factors that will ensure loyalty in their customers, which can also change the purchasing behaviour of potential consumers who are in communication with existing customers. In this study, data were collected through a questionnaire from 1318 people in the age groups of 18 years and older living in the province of Istanbul. Pearson Correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between continuous variables including online customer loyalty and customer perception and multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the effect of word-of-mouth and perceptions of viral marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour. The results showed, that online customer perception of online shopping, customer loyalty, and word-of-mouth marketing affect purchasing behaviour. However, there was no identified effect of viral marketing on purchasing behaviour. In terms of sub-dimensions, there was an effect of utility and customer relationship dimensions on purchasing behaviour. The analysis of sub-dimensions also found that the perception of trust in the environment did not affect purchasing behaviour. Other sub-dimensions affect purchasing behaviour. There were limitations of this study including non-generalisability beyond the study sample and the quantitative nature of the analysis.

Keywords: Online Customer Perceptions, Customer Loyalty, Viral Marketing, Purchasing Behaviour.

JEL Classification Codes: M30, M31, M39.

ÇEVİRİM İÇİ MÜŞTERİ ALGISI, MÜŞTERİ SADAKATI VE VİRAL PAZARLAMA ALGILARININ SATIN ALMA DAVRANIŞI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

ÖZET

Çevrim içi ortamda kıyasıyla rekabet içinde olan işletmelerin, müşterilerinde sadakati sağlayacak ve onların diğer kişileri etkileyerek tüketicilerin satın alma davranışlarını değiştirebilecek faktörleri anlamaları büyük önem taşımaktadır. Yapılan çalışmada, İstanbul ilinde yaşayan 18 yaş ve üstü yaş gruplarında yer alan 1318 kişiden anket aracılığıyla veri toplanmıştır. Sürekli değişkenler arasındaki ilişki için Pearson Korelasyon analizi, Çevrim içi müşteri sadakat ve müşteri algısı ve ağızdan ağıza ve viral pazarlama algısının tüketici satın alma davranışı üzerindeki etkisini incelemek için çoklu doğrusal regresyon analizi yapılmıştır. Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, alt boyutlar açısından, yarar ve müşteri ilişkileri boyutlarının satın alma davranışı üzerinde etkisi ortaya çıkmıştır. Alt boyutlar üzerinden

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yapılan analizde de çevredeki güven algısının satın alma davranışını etkilemediği ortaya çıkmıştır. Diğer alt boyutlar ise satın alma davranışını etkilemektedir. Yapılan regresyon analizi sonucunda, Çevrim içi müşteri algısı, müşteri sadakati ve ağızdan ağıza pazarlamanın satın alma davranışını etkilediği bulunmuştur. Ancak, viral pazarlamanın satın alma davranışı üzerinde etkisi görülmemiştir. Bu çalışma, sadece seçilen örnekleme sınırlıdır ve analizler sadece nicel olarak yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çevrim İçi Müşteri Algısı, Müşteri Sadakati, Viral Pazarlama, Satın Alma Davranışı.*

1. Introduction

Technology is ubiquitous in all areas of life, including businesses and their functions. Marketing functions have become digital as consumers are more receptive to communication technologies and innovative marketing approaches. As these new approaches to marketing apply, customers have become harder to satisfy, and the factors affecting customer loyalty have been transformed. Customers feel more attached to a brand when they perceive loyalty through electronic media and processes. As the trend towards online shopping has increased, customers' attitudes towards online shopping has also become more positive. Building customer loyalty for businesses is a fundamental but laborious process. Some customers develop a sense of loyalty towards specific websites and have positive thoughts and attitudes about the site.

Loyal customers with ready money are an asset for any online shopping business. Thus, online shopping sites try to turn existing customers into loyal, returning customers through different strategies, including viral marketing and electronic Word-of mouth (WOM), and sharing and communicating customers' positive experiences through social media and social networks. Online shopping opportunities are offered to customers on many different platforms, including social media channels and these are now global rather than local. Recently, contemporary marketing has had to evolve because of the impact of greater international and local competition through new technological inventions, readily available to everyone with access to the Internet, that can be implemented as marketing tools (Alghizzawi, 2019:24). Thus, the viral marketing paradigm created a virtual space and new opportunities for effective communication to reach online consumers (Urdea & Constantin, 2021:672).

Building and retaining customer loyalty is crucial to increase sales, and profit. A core feature of loyalty is creating and retaining customers who will decline better offers from other trademarks/companies and convincing them to continue re-purchasing the same products or services. The philosophy of viral marketing is based on and dependent on the ubiquity of e-communication worldwide. WOM, face-to-face, and offline viral marketing are also used in selling and promoting goods and services. These marketing techniques rely on customers routinely forwarding information about products and services and promotional materials to their friends and colleagues. Thus, WOM has been a popular strategy used to influence customers' decision-making processes. Increasingly, online businesses have introduced new terms, including online customer loyalty (OCL), electronic WOM (e-WOM), the perception of viral marketing, and online purchasing behaviour. Some customers consider online marketing channels risky because of the separation between the seller and buyer - there is no face-to-face contact possible. Thus, this perceived risk for online purchasing inhibits some customers from making online transactions.

Viral marketing provides the opportunity to conduct electronic commerce between interested parties by enabling communication with all people on the Internet and facilitating this process decisively (Yazıcı, 2014:47). Information shared about products on the Internet can be disseminated with greater accessibility and flexibility than other communication means. Actions, such as location notifications and events shared on the Internet and social networks, have created excellent global mobility in marketing. This tremendous mobility has increased the accessibility of everyone who uses the Internet and social networks to any business activity or organization in the online environment with fewer barriers to accessibility (Şahin & Dündar, 2019:145).

The study aims to analyse the relationships between viral marketing strategies and online customer loyalty and their effects on purchasing behaviour. This study is important as it investigates a contemporary research area which is rapidly developing and transforming with technological advancements and thus updates the existing literature in this field. Furthermore, this study is unique because the contribution of the sample is adequate to conduct the required analysis. The ethical codes for research and publication were complied with in this study.

2. Online Customer Loyalty and Customer Perception

The digital market has expanded as technological advances have powered all business processes. At the same time, customer preferences and demands have also changed compared to the past. New customers are more conscious of, demanding, and involved in production and marketing. Therefore, in recent years, the growth of online marketing in a global marketplace has transformed traditional marketing concepts. The internet transformation has dramatically changed the rules of the business environment worldwide (Ateş, 2018b:354). The digital market is a communication and distribution channel that enables consumers to shop online (Beig & Khan, 2018). In the past, assessing customer satisfaction has been essential in measuring business success and creating customer loyalty (Chen & Chang, 2011). The characteristics of online customers are different from traditional face-to-face customers. Customer loyalty within the online context is reflected in re-purchasing behaviour as well as giving positive feedback via online WOM (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Chang et al., 2009). To ensure customer loyalty, today's businesses need to know and focus on the profile of their online repeat customers, develop close virtual relationships with customers, and develop customer attachment to the brand, resulting in positive outcomes of purchasing behaviour. Online business websites provide market settings to retain remote customers and increase customer satisfaction, customer experience, and loyalty (Vakulenko et al., 2019:314; Ertemel et al., 2021:1). Research shows that loyal customers are more likely to be on online shopping sites and spread their positive thoughts by WOM to a broader audience (Liang et al., 2008:780).

Customer loyalty represents a strategic challenge for businesses, as creating loyal customers spreads positive WOM of purchased products and services. Creating favourable attitudes toward brands also promotes the brand to potential new customers (Cheng et al., 2020:4). Customer loyalty has been identified as the customers' attitude consisting of psychological commitment, behavioural loyalty resulting in re-purchase behaviour, and an integrated approach to loyalty (Albayrak et al., 2020:6). Customer loyalty is defined as the consumer intention to purchase for a specific product or service repeatedly, even at higher prices (Zeithaml et al., 1996). The concept of customer loyalty has two main dimensions, including customer attitude and

customer behaviour. Customer attitude refers to the consumer commitment to sustaining a valued relationship with the specific brand, having trust, and having a positive emotional attachment. Customer behaviour includes WOM and repeated purchases. Thus, customer loyalty is a process containing a positive attitude leading to positive behaviour (Bilgihan, 2016). Customer loyalty also includes the long-term relationship between customers and businesses with their products and services. When customers have strong loyalty, they want to return, demanding specific products and services, even despite the attractiveness of new products and services offered by competitors (Choi & Kim, 2004:13). Online customer loyalty has evolved from traditional customer loyalty referencing customers' favourable attitudes and behaviour toward a specific brand (Urdea & Constantin, 2021:674). However, it should be noted that online and traditional businesses have different features for maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty. In conventional business organizations, customers may see, touch and feel the product or service before purchasing. The main advantage of online businesses is that it is easier to compare price changes and offers across various sites (Swaminathan et al., 2018:1).

Customer loyalty and brand loyalty are different but interrelated concepts. Brand loyalty in online purchasing is essential for companies to retain customers satisfied with the product and services. Generating online customer satisfaction and loyalty has been the main objective of any marketing plan, as retaining customers is less expensive than finding new ones. Brand loyalty can influence purchasing behaviour directly by purchasing and indirectly through WOM marketing (Dilek & Aydın, 2020:273). Furthermore, loyal online customers would use WOM and e-WOM to give feedback to other potential customers (Pratminingsih et al., 2013:104). E-loyalty in online shopping creates returning customers who intend to purchase from the same company, not switch to another competitor (Dharmesti & Nugroho, 2013; Akbar & James, 2014). This outcome may be possible with the moderating effect of the process where affective commitment transforms into loyalty behaviour (Chiu et al., 2018:669).

Increasing customer loyalty in terms of the strength of loyalty and the number of loyal customers is a tool to improve online business profitability. However, customer loyalty has been a significant challenge for online companies. Customer loyalty has been related to several factors, including trust, positive perceived value, and a positive emotional attachment to the customer (Pitta et al., 2006:422). Building loyalty for online customers follows the steps of trust, perceived value, and relationship building. This online customer loyalty has been more problematic for remote customers needing face-to-face communication. Online loyalty is defined as "the customer's online loyalty directing customers for repeated purchasing behaviour" (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003:125). The competitive nature of online businesses and increasing competitors make it more complex, and customers may search for alternatives online to easily switch their purchasing behaviour (Rafiq et al., 2013:494-495). Online customer loyalty is also known as e-loyalty. E-loyalty is important regarding customers' favourable attitudes and commitment towards repeat purchase behaviour. The essential rules for enhancing e-loyalty have been similar to the traditional marketing mix. However, online businesses need to adjust their marketing strategies faster than offline businesses, and the marketplace is generally much more fluid with many more competitors (Urdea & Constantin, 2021:673). Loyal online customers are willing to pay premium prices, which means reduced operating costs and profit growth for online businesses (Kim et al., 2009:239). Building online customer loyalty is difficult for online shopping sites as this ensures trust and customer satisfaction

for developing long-term customer relationships (Ateş, 2018a:111). Online customers would more easily purchase from online stores at discounted prices than traditional stores (Savila et al., 2019:861). It is suggested that good customer support and brand patronage are related to customer loyalty (Roy et al., 2014:6).

Customer perception relates to the main psychological factors influencing individuals' purchasing choices (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). Customer perception refers to an essential component of a relationship with customers and is the process of selecting, organizing, and interpreting information on the product and services by the customers (Xu et al., 2007). Customer perception is essential to any business's success based on customers' experience with products and services (Chee & Yazdanifard, 2021). Customer perception is based on different factors such as product/business quality and reputation, and customer factors including level of education, age, lifestyle, income, and personality characteristics (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011). Customer perception plays a role in online shopping behaviour, partly based on previous experiences (Tandiono et al., 2020). The relationship between online customer perceptions and customer loyalty has yet to be widely investigated (Fam et al., 2019). However, the relationship between customer perception and loyalty towards online shopping will likely be critical in understanding online customer communication and behaviour. Internal and external factors affect online customer perceptions of online purchasing behaviour, including ease of use or enjoyment and usefulness, product characteristics, situational factors, trust in online shopping, and online shopping experience (Aruna & Williams, 2015).

In addition, customers' beliefs are essential in purchasing decisions from online shopping sites as they are based on perception, motivation, learning, and attitude (Akbar & James, 2014). Some studies have shown that customer perceptions are influenced by customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Miller & Lammas, 2010; Chen & Chang, 2011; Eid, 2011; Chinomona & Sandada, 2013; Ercis et al., 2018; Ateş, 2018a). Critical factors for online customers include timely delivery, good customer support, good communication, secure payment, shopping methods, and an easy return process. Also, the total risk perception and benefit perception of customer satisfaction and loyalty is critical to customer perceptions. Taking only repeat purchase behaviour into account reflects the purchase decision process, and emotional and attitudinal dimensions of loyalty are excluded (Kim et al., 2009:240).

3. Viral Marketing and Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

In both theory and practice, marketing research has identified the nature of viral marketing and its impact on customer behaviour and purchasing behaviour. Viral marketing is “a marketing method using the internet and social networks, as well as digital tools to encourage customers to use WOM and e-WOM, enhancing the potential for growth in electronic marketing” (Mohr, 2017:11). Viral marketing reduces the cost of spreading promotion and advertising among customers in a short time. However, the messages of viral marketing spread depending on many factors, such as the sociality of the message receiver and how the message receiver feels about talking about specific products and services with others, their emotional state, and the practical value of the message (Sawaftah et al., 2020:1308). Datta et al. (2005) defined viral marketing as “network enhanced WOM and also a marketing tool which plans to use pre-existing social networks for brand awareness, spreading like a virus in the market” (72).

The literature on viral marketing goes back 20 years after the term “virus of marketing” was introduced by Jeffrey Rayport (1996). Viral marketing includes various strategies persuading customers to convey a marketing message to potential customers and multiplication of the message (like a virus). The message should be strong enough to influence the purchasing behaviour of message receivers (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021:856). Online customers are keener to learn from other customers rather than information specific companies share on their products and services (Fard & Marvi, 2019:288-289). However, customers’ opinions on specific marketing experiences may be favourable or unfavourable, and the motives for online customers to share their experiences with others may also be positive or negative.

According to another definition, viral marketing is a chat amongst people over the products they have bought through any phone conversation, via e-mail, or in an online chat environment. Viral marketing is an obscure version of the communication process. Sometimes, it is visible on social network platforms, and in this case, businesses need to give more importance to online customer relations and satisfaction (Şahin & Dündar, 2019:146). Social network platforms enable customers to interact with each other and share their experiences, resulting in social interaction and purchasing behaviour. Viral marketing is a low-cost and effective marketing technique when positive customers communicate with friends or relatives, resulting in changed purchasing behaviour (Öztürk, 2019:26). Customers spend their time entertaining with informative sessions, watching creative content, reading, and using social networks to reach large audiences (Kadyan & Aswal, 2014:297).

Viral marketing is a relatively new tool (Uyan & Hamidi, 2020:3). The rise of internet technologies and subsequent online platforms has resulted in attainable opportunities for online companies to benefit from viral marketing and e-WOM strategies. There are further developments in viral marketing due to cost advantages and its influence as a marketing strategy (Satriyo & Megawati, 2022:282). Viral marketing occurs in unlimited cyberspace, usually without time and place constraints, that enable global marketing communications. As an instrument of viral marketing, social media may strengthen relationships and develop trust between customers and companies (Mustikasari & Widaningsih, 2019:647).

Viral marketing has become popular in the marketing literature and marketing applications. Businesses may create viral content concerning their product and services on social networks to improve their image among potential and existing customers. Viral marketing is one of the activities of online marketing, and it is also like the online version of WOM, e-WOM (Laudon & Traver, 2017). Viral marketing has been described as “the holy grail” of online marketing (Akpınar & Bergen, 2017). The dissemination of information on products and services has been accelerated through viral marketing, primarily through social media. Likewise, Bhattacharya et al. (2019:478) suggested that social networks and the destination of a message are undeniably crucial in reaching the audience and emphasizing the marketers’ support role in promotion activities and the success of the campaign. The main points of viral marketing are to attract more online visitors and get recommendations - WOM to attract potential customers (Taufik et al., 2022:1). WOM marketing consists of a tranche of recommendations of satisfied and loyal customers for the product and services they purchased. It is also about the purchasing decision-making process of customers and their positive or negative experiences of products or services. Online businesses manage and shape their customers’ perceptions using marketing communication techniques (Çekerol & Şeker, 2021:314).

Viral marketing can attract interest and potentially market any brand through the virus-like spread of messages worldwide (Liu & Wang, 2019:72). Viral marketing is closely related to WOM or e-WOM and “buzz marketing” as a strategy for creating a setting where customers can purchase and interact with other customers (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003:1). Trust between online stores and customers has a central role in this relationship. After ensuring trust, viral marketing operates smoothly and spreads information to a potentially huge global audience. Viral marketing was termed the ‘word of the mouse’ (Klopper, 2002) as a pun on the old concept of WOM. Electronic mail, texting, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and instant messaging tools are at the forefront of opportunities to accelerate the dissemination of market information and customer opinions (Sharma & Kaur, 2019).

Social media and viral marketing have become the latest strategies in modern marketing. Loyal customers have become influencers for specific products and services and customers’ purchasing decision-making process (Hendrayati & Pamungkas, 2020:41). Online branding studies show that e-WOM has a decisive role in building and retaining the brand image. Successful WOM has eight dimensions: Platform, Economic Intensive, Expressing Positive Emotions, Social Benefits, Helping Company, Advice Seeking, Venting Negative Feelings, and Concern for Others (Taufik et al., 2022:2). E-WOM may occur in different settings, such as customer opinions, discussions, and comments on products and services on social media platforms and in weblogs, discussion rooms, and website reviews. E-WOM spreads more quickly than any other means of referrals, and in this respect, it is a vital marketing communication technique that businesses can use (Ligery & Swastika, 2020:617).

Viral marketing may also be part of the portfolio of marketing strategies in online and offline forms. Viral marketing tools encourage customers to make referrals to their families and friends. Hence, it is a strategy to persuade customers to convey marketing experiences and messages to other customers or potential customers. Technological developments have served the increasing usage of viral marketing tools with company websites, social networking sites, and blogs (Choshaly & Mirabolghasemi, 2020:2). Viral marketing campaigns rely on the interpretation and acceptance of marketing messages by customers. Viral marketing has become famous worldwide due to the pace and size of the viral marketing area (Rollins et al., 2014:2). WOM and viral marketing (e-WOM) affect purchasing intention. However, the effect seems more significant for WOM marketing tools (Baker et al., 2016). The reason for this is that people generally spread their opinions in traditional ways (old-fashioned WOM) rather than online (e-WOM) due to the social risks perceived for e-WOM (Eisingerich et al., 2015). However, e-WOM has some advantages over traditional WOM, including the potential for exponential growth, rapid proliferation, and, importantly, improved measurability (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Baker et al., 2016).

Viral marketing represents a substantial investment to build brand equity and serves to enhance sustainable competitive advantage. Viral marketing is also perceived as more credible, as viral messages are often considered unbiased and perfectly normal (Puriwat & Tripopsakul, 2021:856). Some factors in viral marketing are recognized as necessary, including informativeness, irritation, credibility, and entertainment (Choshaly & Mirabolghasemi, 2020:2). Some studies show viral marketing results in virtual networks that significantly affect purchasing intentions (Fard & Marvi, 2019:289). WOM and viral marketing occur together when satisfied

customers share positive experiences. Positive messages and comments enhance the possibility of having a sense of loyalty towards the brand and also create more purchasing behaviour. In this context, customer satisfaction and loyalty have been vital, and customer loyalty triggers purchasing behaviour, and positive WOM moderates this relationship (Ercis et al., 2018:217). This study aimed to investigate online customer loyalty and perceptions of viral marketing concerning customers' purchasing behaviour. Purchasing behaviour literature will be reviewed to analyse the research framework.

4. Purchasing Behaviour

Viral marketing techniques have advantages over traditional marketing techniques when influencing purchasing behaviour. Viral marketing enables online businesses to transmit marketing messages rapidly with minimum cost (Uyan & Hamidi, 2019:5). Customers show their reactions towards the marketing messages based on perceived values of entertainment, informativeness, irritation, and source credibility (Zernigah & Sohail, 2012). There has been a positive relationship between entertainment (reported enjoyment) and advertisement effectiveness (Uyan & Hamidi, 2019:5). When advertising contains offensive, annoying, insulting, or manipulating elements, customers will likely perceive it negatively. Purchasing intention is related to the consumer decision-making process. Behavioural intentions are used in some models, such as the theory of planned behaviour and the theory of reasoned action. Marketing professionals employ promotions and advertising to stimulate purchasing intentions (Liu & Wang, 2019:73).

Regarding online marketing, website performance is one of the most important antecedents of customer satisfaction through online purchasing-information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchasing behaviour, and post-purchase stages, such as delivery and customer service. Online customer loyalty and WOM communications affect potential customers' perceptions, purchase decisions, attitudes, expectations, and post-usage perceptions toward products or services. E-WOM and viral marketing facilitate traditional communication and social network channels transmitting commercial messages. Moreover, transaction ability, security/privacy, payment, and responsiveness are critical to online customer satisfaction (Nurlaela et al., 2019:232). Online customer experience is the primary strategy in marketing for online purchases, and satisfied customers are the main objective of online marketing initiatives. These personalized customer experiences are shaped by customer preferences (Urdea & Constantin, 2021:673).

The theory of reasoned action model contains four variables: "attitude, intention, behaviour and subjective norms." Intention to purchase behaviour is the main predictor of this theory as a behaviour with normative belief and personal attitude (Coleman et al., 2011). Customer behaviour is the customer's actions stimulated by external or internal factors to meet their needs as a set of procedures. The steps of the process are: searching for information; assessing alternatives; actual purchasing steps; and post-purchase feedback. The target is to make customers recognize the added value and increase customer satisfaction (Sawaftah et al., 2020:1309).

Research into the feeling of security during online shopping and customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been shown to play a significant role in the perception of consumers; one of the most important factors when deciding on shopping and online shopping sites is a

perception of lack of security (Eid, 2011; Chen, 2012). According to Karaoğlan & Durukan (2020), the time spent on the internet, and thus familiarity with it, increases the benefit perceived from online shopping. Kölemenoglu (2018), on the other hand, showed that the satisfaction formed in shopping positively affects the consumer's perception of benefits. According to Zhadko (2014), the consumer's perception of trust affects purchasing behaviour. Customer loyalty also has a regulatory effect on the positive relationship between the perception of trust and purchasing behaviour. Kültür Demirgüneş (2016) showed that utilitarian value perception positively affects online customer loyalty in his study of 540 online shoppers in Ankara Province. In addition, online customer loyalty positively affects word-of-mouth communication. Kaya & Özen (2012) concluded that value perception positively affects purchasing behaviour. In his study, Çelebi (2019) analysed the existence of a positive relationship between re-purchasing behaviour and WOM. Biçer & Erciş (2020) concluded that the perception of viral marketing significantly positively affects consumer purchasing behaviour. Again, other studies (Marangoz, 2007; Saadeghvaziri & Hosseini, 2011; Shashikala & Mahapatro, 2015) support this conclusion. Thus, there is evidence that online customer loyalty and e-WOM are related to purchasing behaviour.

Hutter et al. (2013) concluded that viral marketing positively affects brand awareness, WOM, and customer purchase intention. Balakrishnan et al. (2014) examined the impact of viral marketing, such as eWOM, online advertisements, and online communities, and found a positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention. Dehghani & Tumer (2015) concluded that social media advertising significantly and positively affects customers' purchase intention. Gautam & Sharma (2017) showed how viral marketing and online customer relationships positively affect purchase intention. Sheth & Kim (2017) emphasized that viral marketing positively and significantly affects customer purchase intention. Yadav & Rahman (2017) concluded that viral marketing activities positively affect brand equity and customer purchase intention. Therefore, viral marketing (Keh & Xie, 2008; Öztamur & Karakadılar, 2014; See-To & Ho, 2014) and brand loyalty significantly affect customers' purchase intention (Portal et al., 2015; Pandey & Srivastava, 2016; Chen et al., 2016; Almohaimmeed, 2019).

5. Methodology

The present study investigated the effect of online customer loyalty, customer perception, WOM, and perceptions concerning viral marketing on consumer purchasing behaviour. This study was undertaken because of recent popular literature concerning online marketing variables, and there is insufficient research into this topic in Turkey. The main research question was: "What is the effect of online customer perception, customer loyalty, WOM marketing, and viral marketing on purchasing behaviour?" The research questions have been answered through hypothesis testing in the following section.

The study population consisted of people aged 18 years and older living in the province of Istanbul, and the sample consisted of 1318 people. The convenience sampling method was used in this research, and the data collection process was performed online between September and October 2022. The present study complied with the ethical procedures for research and publication.

5.1. Questionnaire Design and Research Variable

The online customer perception scale consists of 17 items, including four items for benefit perception (Wu, 2013:170), four items for value perception (Chen, 2012:207), four items for security perception, and five items for customer service perception (Srinivasan, 2002:47). The customer loyalty scale consists of four items (Eid, 2011:85). The data were collected using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha value of the customer perception scale is 0.92, and for the perception of customer loyalty, Cronbach's alpha value is 0.83.

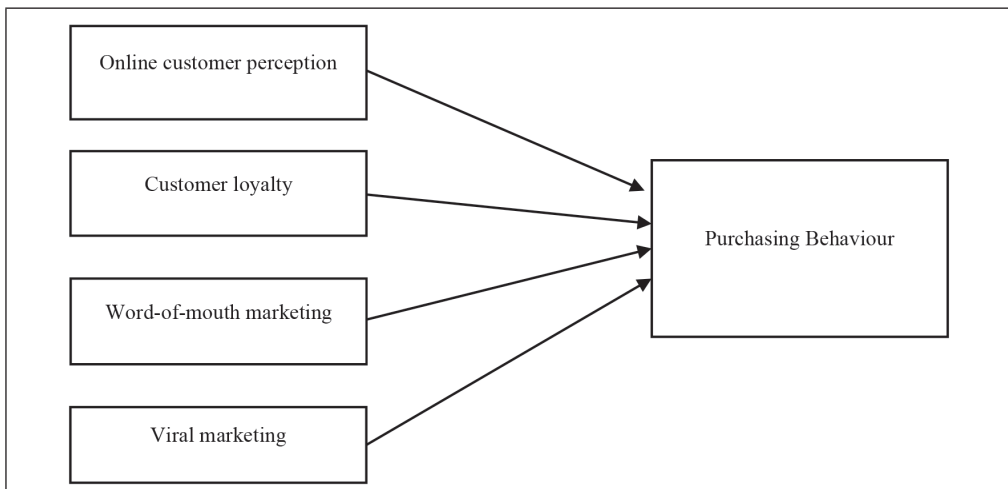
The word-of-mouth marketing scale consists of 15 items, including four items for being practical, nine for being safe and ease of information transfer, and two items for trust in others. Viral marketing consists of two items. The answers were collected using a 5-point Likert scale. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The viral marketing and e-WOM scales were taken from Onurlubaş & Dinçer (2016). The Cronbach alpha value of the word-of-mouth marketing scale was 0.89, and the Cronbach alpha value of the viral marketing scale was 0.72.

The scale of purchasing behaviour is taken from Buerke et al. (2017), and the scale consists of five items. The answers were again collected using a 5-point Likert scale. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha value of the scale was 0.82.

5.2. Research Model and Hypotheses

The research model for this study is shown below.

Figure 1: Research Model



H1: Online customer perception has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.

H2: Customer loyalty has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.

H3: Word-of-mouth marketing has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.

H4: Viral marketing has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.

5.3. Analysis of Data

The data collected were analysed using the IBM SPSS, version 24.00 program. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to analyse the relationship between variables. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationships between perceptions of WOM and viral marketing, online customer loyalty, customer perception, and consumer purchasing behaviour.

5.4. Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the consumers who participated and were shopping from online shopping sites are shown in Table 1.

One thousand three hundred eighteen consumers participated in the research, 60.5% of them were women, and 39.5% were men; 62.4% were 18-24 years old, 20.4% were 25-34 years old, 11.0% were 35-44 years old, 4.9% were 45-54 years old, 1.3% were 55 years old and over; 26.3% of them were married, and 73.7% of them were single; 5.4% of them were primary school, 29.5% high school, 34.7% associate degree, 27.1% undergraduate, 3.3% graduate and above; 45.1% of them have income below the minimum wage, 20.6% of them have a minimum wage, 34.3% of them have income above the minimum wage; It was determined that 42.2% of them were working and 57.8% were not working.

When we look at the average daily time spent on the Internet by consumers, 5.5% less than 1 hour, 25.9% 1-3 hours, 33.2% 3-5 hours, 20.9% 5-7 hours, 7.1% 7-9 hours, 7.4% 9 hours It has been observed that they spend more time on the Internet. When we look at the frequency of shopping from online shopping sites, it was determined that 6.2% shopped almost every day, 21.8% shopped once a week, 50.6% shopped once a month, and 21.4% shopped several times a year.

Table 1: Demographical Features

		Frequency	%
Sex	Female	798	60.5
	Male	520	39.5
Age	18-24	823	62.4
	25-34	269	20.4
	35-44	145	11.0
	45-54	64	4.9
	Age 55 and over	17	1.3
Marital Status	Married	347	26.3
	Single	971	73.7
Education	Primary	71	5.4
	High School	389	29.5
	Undergraduate	457	34.7
	BA	357	27.1
	Master degree and over	44	3.3
Monthly Average Income	Below minimum wage (Below 4.253TL)	594	45.1
	Minimum wage (4.253TL)	272	20.6
	Over minimum wage (Over 4.253TL)	452	34.3
Working Status	Working	556	42.2
	Not working	762	57.8
How many hours do you spend on the Internet on average per day?	Less than 1 hour	73	5.5
	1-3 hour	341	25.9
	3-5 hours	438	33.2
	5-7 hours	276	20.9
	7-9 hours	93	7.1
	More than 9 hours	97	7.4
How often do you shop from online shopping sites?	Almost every day	82	6.2
	Once every week	287	21.8
	Once a month	667	50.6
	A few times a year	282	21.4
Total		1318	100

Factor analysis was performed for the validity of the online customer perception scale. The KMO value resulting from the analysis was .943, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value ($p < 0.001$, chi-square: 11636.875, df:136) showed that the data set is suitable for factor analysis. In Table 2, factor loads, explanatory variances of factors and reliability coefficient numbers of factors are indicated.

Table 2: Online Customer Perception Factor Analysis

Factors	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Reliability
Value Perception		5.011	.81
When I look at the prices, I pay for the products I buy from online shopping sites; these purchases are very profitable.	.778		
Considering the time I spend buying products from online shopping sites, it makes sense to shop from them.	.696		
Shopping from online shopping sites is worth the effort expended.	.704		
The purchases I make from online shopping sites constitute a “fairly high rate” among my purchases	.665		
Benefit Perception		45.005	.87
Online shopping sites help research and buy products.	.701		
Online shopping sites make it easy to search for and purchase products.	.795		
Online shopping sites allow me to research and buy products faster.	.777		
Online shopping sites increase my options for researching and buying products.	.792		
Customer Relationship Perception		6.607	.83
I have been okay with billing my previous purchases on online shopping sites.	.577		
The products I purchased from online shopping sites were delivered on time.	.680		
Online shopping sites are sensitive to the problems I encounter.	.744		
The return policies of purchased products on online shopping sites are customer-friendly.	.696		
I believe that online shopping sites are interested in their customers at an adequate level.	.599		
Security Perception		10.765	.82
Online shopping sites have an infrastructure that allows the secure transmission of personal information belonging to their users.	.696		
Online shopping sites have the technical capacity to prevent hackers from accessing the personal data of their users.	.796		
Shopping on online shopping sites does not lead to financial risks.	.776		
It is safe to pay electronically on online shopping sites.	.747		
Total variance explained		67.389	.92

Table 3: Word of Mouth Marketing and Viral Marketing Factor Analysis

Factors	Factor Loading	Explained Variance	Reliability
Being safe and transferring information		36.858	.85
I talk to others about the quality of the products belonging to the product	.672		
The person whose opinion I get is reliable.	.587		
I communicate brands that make me feel unique with other users	.686		
I buy products or services taking into account experience, information, advice or opinions	.685		
I use the information of those around me on TV, radio, the Internet, magazines, etc. I find it more reliable than sources	.491		
I consult my close circle before deciding to buy the product	.645		
I easily transfer information about a product, service or brand that I have heard about on the Internet to others	.588		
If I am satisfied with the products I buy, I would recommend that product to those around me	.761		
I communicate with brands that are trying to give their customers a better experience with other users via the Internet	.482		
Trust		9.510	.80
Word of mouth and viral marketing is the most reliable tool.	.802		
Word of mouth and viral marketing is the most honest tool.	.810		
Being useful		6.397	.72
Word-of-mouth marketing is invisible.	.755		
Word-of-mouth marketing saves money.	.621		
Word-of-mouth marketing allows the consumer to share the good or bad characteristics of the product they have purchased and tried with other consumers.	.560		
Word-of-mouth marketing saves time.	.461		
Viral marketing		4.728	.73
If the information on social media about the product I will buy is created by the people who bought it, I trust that information.	.838		
I buy products or services through information and experiences spread on the Internet.	.815		
Total variance explained		57.492	.89

In Table 3, factor analysis was performed for WOM and viral marketing scales. The KMO value at the end of the analysis was .943, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$, chi-square: 11636.875, df:136) showed that the data set was suitable for factor analysis. The table above indicates factor loads, explanatory variances of factors and reliability coefficient numbers of factors.

Correlation analysis results between online customer perception, brand loyalty, WOM marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour of viral marketing are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Online customer perception	Customer loyalty	Word-of-mouth marketing	Viral marketing	Purchasing Behaviour
Online customer perception	5.22	.94	1	.734**	.434**	.342**	.378**
Customer loyalty	5.06	1.18	.734**	1	.400**	.329**	.293**
Word-of-mouth marketing	3.40	.52	.434**	.400**	1	.514**	.612**
Viral marketing	3.38	.84	.342**	.329**	.514**	1	.352**
Purchasing Behaviour	3.92	.70	.378**	.293**	.612**	.352**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Online customer perception was positively correlated with each of purchasing behaviour ($r=0.37$, $p<0.01$), customer loyalty ($r=0.29$, $p<0.01$), viral marketing ($r=0.352$, $p<0.01$), and word-of-mouth marketing ($r=0.612$, $p<0.01$).

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of the Effect of Online Customer Perception, Customer Loyalty, Word of Mouth, and Viral Marketing on Purchasing Behaviour

Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour	B	t	p
Constant	.83	7.61	.00
Online Customer Perception	.13	5.56	.00
Customer Loyalty	-.04	-2.13	.03
Word of Mouth Marketing	.73	20.43	.00
Viral Marketing	.02	1.31	.18

F=212.09, p=.00, R=.62, R²=.39, Adjusted R²=.39

According to the multiple linear regression analysis results, the model was significant (F=212.09, $p<0.05$); the effect of online customer perception (B= .13, $p<0.05$), customer loyalty (B= -.04, $p<0.05$), and word-of-mouth marketing (B= .73, $p<0.05$) on purchasing behaviour. However, it was determined that viral marketing (B= .02, $p>0.05$) did not affect purchasing behaviour.

Table 6: The Effect of Online Customer Perception Sub-Dimensions on Purchasing Behaviour

Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour	B	t	p
Constant	2.32	23.35	.00
Value Perception	.00	.11	.90
Benefit Perception	.23	10.88	.00
Customer Relationship Perception	.55	2.31	.02
Security Perception	-.00	-.24	.80
F=77.50, p=.00, R=.43, R ² =.19, Adjusted R ² =.19			

According to the results of the multiple regression analysis, the perception of utility (B= .23, p<0.05) and the perception of customer service (B= .55, p<0.05) are effective in purchasing behaviour. It was determined that the perception of value (B= .90, p>0.05) and the perception of security (B= -.00, p>0.05) did not affect purchasing behaviour.

Table 7: The Effect of WOM Sub-Dimensions on Purchasing Behaviour

Dependent Variable: Purchasing Behaviour	B	t	p
Constant	1.03	10.43	.00
Being safe and transferring information	.63	20.36	.00
Being useful	.17	5.77	.00
Trust in the environment	-.03	-1.80	.07
F=299.07, p=.00, R=.63, R ² =.40, Adjusted R ² =.40			

Once again multiple regression analysis of sub-dimensions showed, being safe and transferring information (B= .63, p<0.05) and being useful (B= .17, p<0.05) were effective on purchasing behaviour. It was determined that trust in the environment (B= -.03, p>0.05) did not affect purchasing behaviour.

Table 8: Acceptance/Rejection of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Acceptance/Rejection
H1: Online customer perception has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.	Accepted
H2: Customer loyalty has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.	Accepted
H3: Word of mouth has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.	Accepted
H4: Viral marketing has a positive effect on purchasing behaviour.	Rejected

Online customer perception with purchasing behaviour, customer loyalty, viral marketing, and WOM marketing were positively correlated. All the hypotheses, except the positive relationship between viral marketing and purchasing behaviour, were accepted. Thus, viral marketing did not affect purchasing behaviour. Multiple regression analysis indicated a posi-

tive relationship between being safe and transferring information. However, trust in the environment did not affect purchasing behaviour.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In today's competitive environment and rapidly developing technological world, different information sources influence consumers' online purchasing decisions and loyal customer perceptions. Among these resources, WOM and viral marketing are significant resources. Viral marketing, the exchange of opinions and experiences through forums, social media, and blogs created by online consumers, is increasingly influential in consumer thinking. Although the shared information, in terms of business interests, ideally should be positive, when this information is negative, it will impact potential sales. Companies try to secure online customer loyalty using WOM and viral marketing to reach consumers positively and promote their products, including those who have had an unwanted experience. Therefore, they might share it again to prevent any adverse effects.

The present research results support and confirm the conclusions of other studies. This study investigated the effects of customer loyalty, WOM marketing, and viral marketing on purchasing behaviour and is one of Turkey's few studies on this topic. In one of the few previous studies from Turkey, Çelebi (2019) found a positive relationship between WOM marketing and re-purchasing behaviour. Our findings supported this research outcome. Marangoz (2007), Öztamur & Karakadılar (2014), and Biçer & Erciş (2020) found that the perception of viral marketing positively affects consumer purchasing behaviour. However, our results contrast with these earlier findings.

In the international literature, some studies related to our research framework may be compared to our findings. Some studies have reported that viral marketing significantly affected purchase intention (Keh & Xie, 2008; See-To & Ho, 2014). Our analysis did not support these findings. However, other studies show that brand loyalty significantly affects customers' purchase intention (Portal et al., 2015; Pandey & Srivastava, 2016; Chen et al., 2016). These results comply with our research findings.

In-depth analysis, based on sub-dimensions, revealed that the perception of value and security did not affect purchasing behaviour. Benefits and customer relationships did have a positive impact on purchasing behaviour. Further analysis based on the sub-dimensions also found that the perception of trust in the virtual environment did not affect purchasing behaviour. At the same time, other dimensions affected purchasing behaviour. Regression analysis suggested that online customer perception, loyalty, and word-of-mouth marketing affected purchasing behaviour. However, viral marketing did not affect purchasing behaviour.

When the literature was examined, no other study examined the effect of online customer loyalty and viral marketing perceptions on purchasing behaviour. Interest in customer experience and customer loyalty in the literature is currently high. However, online customer experience is a relatively new concept that has attracted attention only in recent years. This study aimed to create a framework for customer value creation based on online experience and its relationship with customer loyalty, contributing to the online customer experience literature, especially in enhancing customer loyalty. Moreover, this study approached these notions from different angles, exploring the impact of online customer experience on customer loyalty ele-

ments, attitude, and behaviour. Therefore, we first defined online customer experience with the four-dimension scale and the notion of customer loyalty through attitude and behaviour. The discussion offers valuable insights that focus on developing an experiential marketing strategy that might be the primary determinant of customer loyalty. Therefore, this research model implies numerous strategies marketing practitioners could use to enhance customer loyalty through online customer experience and digital marketing performance.

This study has some limitations. This research was limited to the sample chosen, and analysis was made only quantitatively. As a general assessment of the results obtained from the study, the fact that the research was conducted on consumers living in Istanbul is a significant limitation. Extending this research to other cities and sample groups will extend the available data and provide more generalized insights into this topic in the Turkish market. Also, this research used the data generated from the cross-sectional study at one point. Thus, future research also may employ different research constructs and research tools. In the future, more in-depth research strategies may be used to give a broader framework perspective. Our proposed research model serves as a framework for future research planning and develops a quantitative strategy for online customer loyalty and viral marketing through online purchase behaviour. Despite the lack of physical contact with customers, many online opportunities exist to use innovative digital technologies to increase customer loyalty.

Brand loyalty is a very influential factor in enhancing customer purchase intention. Online loyal customers have specific reasons for preferring any particular brand amongst the usually extensive range of brands available in a digital marketplace. They also have significant drivers to re-purchase the particular brand. Thus, online brand loyalty results in purchase intention. Businesses should consider online customer loyalty to the brand for enhancing their engagement in social media platforms so that building loyalty leads to re-purchase decisions. Successful online marketing and customer satisfaction improve brand loyalty and purchase intention.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Author's Contribution Statement

The author contributed to all phases of the study.

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