
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Influence of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Towards Purchase Intention of Online Shoppers

Anfernee De Guzman Caro¹ ✉ Aaron Justin Aragon Mendoza², Hennie Ong Noble³ and Kryzl Alexa Bonoan Tanglao⁴

¹²³⁴*College of Commerce and Business Administration Major in Marketing Management, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines*

Corresponding Author: Earl E. Pantoja, MSAD, **E-mail:** eepantoja@ust.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has been a preferred and accessible way of marketing products and services by businesses primarily due to the pandemic's limitations. E-commerce platforms like Zalora's marketing approach heavily rely on search engine optimization and the quality of service it offers [Yousef, 2021]. However, web traffic and customer click-through rates do not necessarily result in purchase intention. This study aimed to assess customers' pre-purchasing intent by measuring the search engine optimization (SEO) engagement rate parameters of Zalora and identifying the factors that encourage customer purchase intention. Thus, the quantitative analysis allowed the measurement of customer engagement and purchase intention. The researchers examined the influence of SEO through Stratified Random Sampling and distributed online and printed survey questionnaires to three hundred seventy-five (375) online shoppers within Region III (Central Luzon), specifically Bulacan, Pampanga, and Tarlac. The findings stated that the factors of Quality Content, Website Interface, and Ranking Algorithm have a p-value of less than 0.05 with a probability of 0.0000, significantly influencing online shoppers' purchase intention. Aside from needs and wants, factors such as promos, visible prices, and ecstatic promotional statements within the URL link entice customers to view and purchase from the search results upon browsing the web. Thus, it provides vital information businesses could utilize to select keywords to include in their clickable search results.

KEYWORDS

Click-through rates, Purchase Intention, Search Engine Optimization, URL, and Zalora.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

As the pandemic arises, search engines have developed into a significant channel for extending the global reach of e-commerce platforms (Shopee, Lazada, Shein, Zalora, and many more) and competing with more established firms. It is designed to carry out web searches anytime and anywhere using the internet. E-commerce platforms like Zalora's marketing approach heavily rely on search engine optimization and the quality of service it offers [Yousef, 2021]. Additionally, Zalora's monthly visit, specifically in Quarter 2 of 2022 of 1.77 million [Statista, 2023], proves its substantiality and creates a sense of relevancy to this study. However, web traffic and customer click-through rates do not necessarily result in purchase intention as customers also consider factors such as quality content, website interface, and ranking algorithm as determinants to complete a transaction online. Thus, establishing a perception formulates their decision to purchase a product.

Search engine optimization focuses on enhancing the browsing experience for customers and bringing in online visibility from those actively looking for the brand, its services, and its products. Nowadays, the majority of customers have access to the internet.

In line with studies, every customer visits an online site at least once to learn more about various issues [Webgeeks, 2024]. The successes or failures resulting from measuring SEO performance can provide invaluable information to share with other teams. This study intends to discover the influence of search engine optimization (SEO) towards customers' intent to purchase a product online. The study aims to identify whether factors of SEO marketing (Quality Content, Website Interface, and Ranking Algorithm) on Zalora are necessary for purchase intention. Thus, it allows the measurement of customer engagement and purchase intention through quantitative analysis.

The influence of search engine optimization (SEO) on online shoppers' purchase intent has multifaceted implications. It assists businesses in recognizing factors influencing product selection in a highly competitive digital marketplace, aiding in strategic positioning through SEO marketing. Additionally, major e-commerce platforms can identify effective keywords that capture pre-purchase intent, potentially increasing website traffic and driving sales. For online shoppers, the findings shed light on how businesses and e-commerce sites shape online pre-purchase intent, fostering awareness of data usage in SEO marketing. Ultimately, this study serves as a foundational resource for future research endeavors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Online Shoppers

Online shoppers or buyers feel very convenient when shopping online, as it saves time [Chakravorty, 2018]. Online Shopping is also a common pastime wherein online shoppers are strongly affected by marketing cues [Rahman, 2022]. Online shoppers find shopping very convenient since it saves a lot of time. Unlike physical stores, all the products and services offered online are described through text, images, and multimedia files [Chakravorty, 2018]. However, online shopper's pre-purchase behavior is complex and can be influenced by many factors, such as purchase information [Akalamkam, 2017]. Additionally, some customers still prefer to touch the products in real-time at a physical store. Online stores still need to create memorable experiences that meet customers' needs and build trust in online shopping [Mendonca, 2022].

2.2 Quality Content

Content relevance is often critical in search engine optimization [Nagpal, 2020]. The content of websites is constructed around the chosen keywords. The quality of one's content includes accuracy, reliability, up-to-date, and ease of understanding of information to increase website quality [Dapas, 2019]. However, non-optimized high-quality content of a website can be outranked by optimized low-quality content, as trusted websites are prioritized in rankings [Schultheiß, 2022]. In order to establish trust with customers, it is essential to have the quality, quantity, and relevance of the information provided clearly on the website, as these are significant factors in having compelling website content [Athapaththu, 2018]. Furthermore, the possibility of consumers' purchasing intention is on the basis of the website interface and website content, in which the website should fulfill customers' demands or personal interests [Zarei, 2019].

H1: Quality Content greatly influences online shoppers' purchase intention.

2.3 Website Interface

The website interface is one of the consumers' touchpoints with an e-commerce website. It is noted that the importance of a well-balanced layout, the contrast between colors, proper spacing, and overall design is a consideration of purchase intention [Pelet, 2017]. The website's interface quality, such as the appropriateness of color, high-resolution images, visually appealing icons, and large enough fonts, is necessary for purchase intention as online shoppers only rely on what they see at the point of purchase. However, the website interface is considered the least important compared to quality content [Dapas, 2019] [Patel, 2020]. Aside from the observable factors mentioned above, emotional design features such as perceived visual appeal, ease of use, and usefulness are also associated with establishing trust that influences the intention of online shoppers to purchase [Pengnate, 2017]. Lastly, the overall layout of a website can instill customers with a high degree of trust and confidence in the quality of the product based on their pre-purchase beliefs. Thus, it establishes a positive expectation toward customers' purchase intention as it tends to believe that a well-developed website interface signals superior service quality [Pee, 2018]. However, it argued and proved that the website interface has no influence but significantly affects purchase intention [Watulingas, 2020].

H2: Website Interface greatly influences online shoppers' purchase intention.

2.4 Ranking Algorithm

To help websites improve their rankings for specific searched terms, search engine optimization (SEO) seeks to affect the ranking algorithm [Hingoro, 2021]. Ranking algorithms aim to quickly and efficiently sort through the database's hundreds of millions of web pages to identify the most relevant, valuable results. The ranking algorithm has proven its capability of influencing the accuracy of online shoppers' purchase intention towards e-commerce websites [Guo, 2019]. Aside from the search query accuracy, query diversity is also a determinant of purchase intention. Diversity in the sense that keywords provide multiple suggestions ranging

from product to brand-related search results. For instance, if the *entered keyword* were “Shoes,” then the suggested search queries would be “Running Shoes” or “Nike Shoes” [Song, 2023]. To boost visibility and user base and keep higher rankings in search results, developers and website owners must continuously improve and learn new SEO tactics. This is because search engines will continue to upgrade and enhance their search ranking algorithms due to the rapid evolution of technology [Sharma, 2019].

H3: Ranking Algorithm greatly influences online shoppers’ purchase intention.

Conceptual Framework

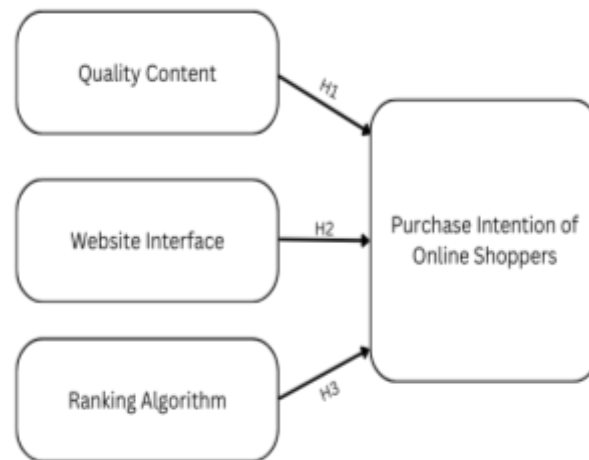


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

Utilizing a causal-comparative research design uncovered intricate relationships between SEO elements [Bhandari, 2023], including quality content, website interface, and ranking algorithm towards the purchase intentions of online customers that identify interplay among these variables. The instrument’s reliability was tested by computation and analysis of the observed variable’s Cronbach Alphas. Results proved that the reliability of the set of questions per variable was Acceptable while Good for Quality Content. The quantitative research method will provide substantial primary data to monitor how each independent variable affects consumers’ purchase intention through respondents’ numerical assessment and ratings in the questionnaire, which will consist primarily of a 4-point Likert Scale. The study also utilized different formats for the adapted set of questions, such as Multiple Choice, Ranking Scale, Matrix, and Open-ended formats. Thus, it will provide a comprehensive perspective on how different segments of online shoppers respond to various SEO strategies. Lastly, the primary data will be collected through online and printed survey questionnaires from three hundred seventy-five (375) qualified respondents and interpreted using descriptive statistics as a mode of analysis. Thus, the respondents were segmented by following the specified criteria: age range of 18-40, gender whether male or female, their location residing within Region III (Central Luzon), specifically the province of Bulacan, Pampanga, or Tarlac, and pre-purchasing intention that uses Zalora's platform for shopping garments online for the past three (3) months.

4. Results and Discussion

How do various factors influence the purchase intention of online shoppers on Zalora, particularly: Consumer shopping habits, Awareness source, Product preferences, Browsing behavior, Decision-making influencers, Exit triggers, Display preferences, and Keyword usage?

The study identified that Zalora’s presence and visibility across social media platforms are the primary sources of respondents’ awareness about the website. Regarding online shopping behavior, the respondents primarily use Zalora to purchase clothing, shoes, and accessories. These purchase decisions were influenced by the product’s availability, relevant descriptions, and reviews. However, these instances do not necessarily result in establishing online shoppers’ purchase intention as the study also identified gaps that negate experiences such as breach of personal information, product legitimacy, and lack of products. The importance of customer feedback and accurate product recommendations based on online shoppers’ search queries was also a determinant for establishing their purchase intention. This finding means online shoppers prioritize products that closely fit their search parameters and product filtering based on customer reviews and ratings. Moreover, brand integration is a significant consideration among online shoppers as they usually enter specific brand names (Nike) or brand-specific keywords (Nike Shoes) on search queries.

Lastly, The researchers’ survey highlights how important it is for online retailers, specifically Zalora, to gain the confidence of their clients. Providing safe payment methods and tailored suggestions is more than simply completing transactions; it is about establishing trust.

What is the combined impact of perceived influence and importance rating of SEO factors, including quality content, website interface, and ranking algorithm, on the purchase intention of online shoppers on Zalora?

It is evident that Quality Content, Website Interface, and Ranking Algorithm all have a significant influence on purchase intention, but among the three key variables impacting online shoppers’ intentions, Quality Content emerged as the most influential factor since the majority of respondents agreed with its significance. The Website Interface and Ranking Algorithm were also seen as an important influencer in Zalora’s online shoppers, but despite their importance, both variables were still below Quality Content. This highlights the importance of content in Zalora’s platform, which was supported by the previous results highlighting the importance of relevance, completeness, and informative content for the shopper.

Does quality content influence purchase intention among online shoppers?

The variable of Quality Content’s subquestions average "agree," which states that aspects such as a wide range of products, updated on the new releases, correct and complete product descriptions, true-to-life photos of the products, and the overall qualities of a website has significant influence to purchase intention. In relation to the study, the findings indicate that online shoppers are very concerned about the information on a website, which e-retailers should observe in creating trust as it plays a significant role in online purchase intention [Athapaththu, 2018].

Does website interface influence purchase intention among online shoppers?

Online shoppers consistently agreed that Zalora’s website interface influences its purchase intentions. Specifically, respondents expressed satisfaction with the design and layout of the website, highlighting factors. Furthermore, the website’s user-friendly interface was identified as a significant factor in facilitating quick product searches with effective filtering and sorting options, enhancing the ability to locate specific items. Additionally, Zalora’s related product suggestions were found to encourage the exploration of additional items, while clear categories and menus significantly influenced purchase decisions. This aligns with the studies that emphasize the importance of a website’s interface quality in influencing purchase decisions [Dapas, 2019] [Patel, 2020]. Additionally, it indicated that a website’s overall layout can enhance customers’ trust and confidence in the product quality based on their pre-purchase beliefs [Pee, 2018]. Therefore, a well-developed website interface signals superior service quality, fostering positive expectations for customers’ purchase intention.

Does the ranking algorithm influence purchase intention among online shoppers?

It was prominent that the majority of the responses leaned towards agreement on all the questions. A common consensus among respondents indicated their tendency to be influenced and explore more about Zalora’s site and product listing when visibility, ranking order in search results, tailored recommendations, and relevancy upon entering a query exist in an e-commerce website. In relation to the study, the ranking algorithm’s capability to recommend entries based on online shoppers’ queries positively influenced the accuracy of their purchase intention on e-commerce platforms such as Zalora [Guo, 2019]. Furthermore, findings supported the conclusion, verifying that both the diversity and accuracy of the ranking algorithm are significant considerations of online shoppers’ purchasing intention [Song, 2023].

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
QUALITY CONTENT	0.236543	0.045359	5.214861	0.0000
WEBSITE INTERFACE	0.205743	0.050056	4.110253	0.0000
RANKING ALGORITHM	0.249734	0.038551	6.478010	0.0000

Table 1. Statistical Result of Independent Variables to Purchase Intention of Online Shoppers

The table above shows the statistical result of the p-value for each observed independent variable. All factors had a probability of 0.0000, indicating a significant correlation with the dependent variable. This proves the study’s hypothesis by observing whether Quality Content, Website Interface, and Ranking Algorithm greatly influence the purchase intention of online shoppers.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Quality Content

The results of this study indicated that Zalora's Quality Content significantly influenced online shoppers' purchase intention. In the Statistical Result of Independent variables to Dependent variables, the p-value was less than 0.05, indicating no error. In line with that, variable-based questions of quality content, including the accuracy, reliability, up-to-date, and ease of understanding of information, showed an average result of agreement from respondents [Dapas, 2019].

5.2 Website Interface

The research findings confirmed a strong correlation between Zalora's website interface and online shoppers' purchase intention. Analysis of survey responses revealed that aspects such as design, user-friendliness, filtering options, related product suggestions, and menu clarity significantly influenced purchase decisions. These results highlight the importance of website interface quality in shaping consumer behavior. [Dapas, 2019] [Patel, 2020]. Overall, a well-developed website interface plays a significant role in fostering positive purchase intentions among online shoppers, underscoring the importance of optimizing e-commerce platforms for enhanced customer engagement and satisfaction [Pee, 2016].

5.3 Ranking Algorithm

The findings suggested that the ranking algorithm played an essential role in developing consumers' purchase intention. Specifically, respondents' increased tendency to explore more about Zalora's site and product listings when it is prominently displayed and featured in search results. Additionally, higher-ranked products get more attention, engagement, and preference, which sways consumers' purchase intention. Respondents also favored the appeal of tailored recommendations that underscored the importance of personalized product and brand recommendations based on their previous search queries. Thus, it highlighted the importance of search relevance, influencing consumers' purchase intention [Guo, 2019] [Song, 2023].

These results demonstrated the influence of online visits on purchase intention. These results exposed significant obstacles, including product availability, website functionality, and data security, highlighting Zalora's focus on improved customer satisfaction influencing purchase intention. Overall, the study highlighted the substantial influence of Quality Content, Website Interface, and Ranking Algorithm on shaping the purchase intention of Zalora's online shoppers. These variables significantly prompted their customer journey by guiding their purchase intentions through informative content, appealing layouts, and accurate search results. Moreover, these variables work collectively to establish a pleasant shopping experience that encourages and influences online shoppers to purchase. Lastly, the capabilities of the mentioned SEO factors significantly correlate with online shoppers' purchase intention since their determinants include having relevant product descriptions, complete reviews, and a web page layout. Thus, it proved its significance.

6. Study Limitations

This study focused on the influence of search engine optimization on online shoppers 18-40 years old within Region III (Central Luzon) who have purchased recently in the Zalora app, adopting the metrics of utilizing online shoppers' duration in their recent purchases on e-commerce websites for the past three (3) months, specifically in Bulacan, Pampanga, and Tarlac [Kamalul, 2018]. The range of 18-40 years old spend most of their time shopping on Zalora [Southeast Asia Trender Report, 2020]. Region III (Central Luzon) is located at the heart of Asia, between Manila and Northern Luzon. It was considered one of the dynamic and vibrant regions in the Philippines that desires to penetrate Asia by catering to European and American business organizations [Department of Environment and Natural Resources, n.d]. The researchers discovered the vast economic growth in Region III (Central Luzon), ascending as the third-largest growth contributor in 2022 [Philippine Statistics Authority n.d].

Furthermore, the provinces, as mentioned above, have a much denser population compared to other areas within the region, which was beneficial in gathering accurate and appropriate data. Considering that 38% of e-commerce transactions occur in Metro Manila alone, previous studies have covered NCR as its population. Thus, this study aimed to shift the focus to Region III (Central Luzon), specifically the provinces of Bulacan, Pampanga, and Tarlac [Masigan, 2020].

7. Recommendations based on the findings of the study

After an in-depth analysis and comprehensive review of related literature, the following recommendations are proposed to the following stakeholders:

7.1 For the Company (Zalora):

Implement effective SEO strategies: Improve ranking algorithms to ensure that Zalora appears prominently in search engine results, increasing visibility and attracting more potential customers. Effective SEO practices positively influence purchase decisions by improving the visibility of products [Guo, 2019]. Enhance the Website's quality content: Continuously improve and maintain the website's quality content to encourage online shoppers to revisit the website [Tarabieh, 2020]. Provide High-quality and definitive

images: The study indicated that high-resolution images increase customers' click-through rates [Chae, 2018], which positively influences purchase intention, as online shoppers rely on what they see at the point of purchase [Dapas, 2019] [Patel, 2020]. This study's findings provide valuable insights to help Zalora identify opportunities and gain a competitive edge in the market.

7.2 For the Shopper:

Consider browsing preferences: Familiarize yourself with the website layout and navigation tools to streamline your shopping experience and locate desired items more efficiently. A well-designed website layout enhances trust and confidence in product quality [Pee, 2018]. Pay attention to product reviews: Utilize customer reviews and ratings to gauge the quality and reliability of products before making a purchase decision. Product reviews significantly influence purchase intention among online shoppers [Patel, 2020]. Read product information: Read and Understand information or descriptions of a product provided to know more about its overall quality, size, form, etc., as it is essential in a pre-purchase search for a product [Nagpal, 2020]. This study's findings provide online shoppers' awareness of Zalora's website and offerings, empowering online shoppers' to make informed decisions.

7.3 For the Industry:

Foster trust and confidence: Prioritize website interface and quality content to enhance customer trust and confidence, increasing online shopping activity. As stated, the research underscored the importance of trust in driving purchase decisions [Guo, 2019] [Patel, 2020]. Promote competitiveness: Encourage industry companies to invest in SEO and user-friendly website design to remain competitive in the digital marketplace and attract a more extensive customer base. It highlighted the role of SEO in expanding the global reach of e-commerce platforms [Calvez, 2023] [Das, 2021]. Drive innovation: Analyze consumer preferences and behavior to identify areas for improvement and innovation, driving continuous enhancement of the online shopping experience. It emphasized the need for constant improvement in quality content and website interface to meet evolving customer expectations [Athapaththu, 2018].

This study's findings encourage the industry to innovate, developing improved and efficient online shopping experiences.

8. Future Research

Addressing the limitations and gaps the researchers encountered allowed the development of a more robust academic research paper and further contributed to this field's knowledge. The researchers encouraged the inclusion of moderating and intervening variables to identify alternative outcomes that could contribute to the result presented in this study. Additionally, integrating a more diverse segmentation profile of respondents, particularly their location and age range, allowed more generalizable findings for future studies. Moreover, the researchers suggested a comparative analysis between multiple e-commerce platforms to identify how these variables influenced the purchase intention of online shoppers who browsed or purchased from these platforms. Lastly, implementing a mixed-method approach could yield a more comprehensive understanding by utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to provide context and statistical generalizability.

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