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EXPLORING POSITIVE ONLINE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FORMATION: A STUDY OF FOOD WASTE SHOPPERS

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EXPLORING POSITIVE ONLINE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE FORMATION: A STUDY OF FOOD WASTE SHOPPERS

Research full-length paper

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the formation of positive online customer experiences in the context of online grocery shopping. This study analyzes customers' written descriptions of the causes of their positive experiences when visiting an online store. Data were collected with an online survey of 581 respondents. The case company is a Finnish online retailer, Fiksuruoka Ltd. Fiksuruoka's business idea is to sell food waste; its product range consists of surplus groceries that are in danger of being disposed of. The findings show that four main themes contribute positively to the online customer experience. Positive customer experiences were explained by factors related to 1) the shopping process and online store features, 2) shoppers' finds, 3) pricing, and 4) the shopping context (food waste). Under these themes, 17 subthemes were identified. The findings emphasize the smoothness of the shopping process and low prices in a positive customer experience. It is also essential that the online store foster feelings of success, enjoyment, and self-satisfaction among customers. The joy of discovery and the ability to act for a good cause were identified as essential contributors to a positive online customer experience.

Keywords: Online customer experience, Online shopping, Food retail, Grocery shopping, Food waste, E-commerce.

1 Introduction

A positive customer experience is one of the most critical competitive assets of companies today. The customer experience has become essential as the use of the Internet and social media has become widespread. Because of the worldwide web, customers have many choices. Numerous companies offer similar products and services in the online environment. Whereas local brick-and-mortar stores used to have considerable influence on customers' purchasing decisions, customers today are increasingly making purchase decisions without location-bound restrictions. Moreover, customers often rely on peer reviews when choosing retailers and making purchase decisions, and negative customer experiences, in particular, quickly gain visibility on different social media channels, causing damage to the company's reputation. It has been stated that the power in today's market has flowed from the companies to the customers (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2018).

The customer experience is a critical issue, especially in e-commerce (Kawaf and Tagg, 2017). Customers can switch to a competitor with just a few clicks. Online shopping is also based on self-service, which emphasizes customers' conclusions and abilities to operate in the store. To remain competitive, online retailers must think carefully about how to attract customers to their stores and how to provide them with positive customer experiences to entice them to return. If a retailer provides positive experiences, its customers are more likely to recommend the company's products and services to others and

engage with the company's products and services themselves (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Rose et al., 2012).

However, although the customer experience has been identified as a critical contributor to a company's success (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016) and has been frequently discussed in marketing and information systems research as well as in management practice, understanding of the customer experience remains limited, especially in the online consumption context (Singh and Söderlund, 2020). While the customer experience discussion has focused intensely on the service provider perspective, customer-oriented views have attracted less attention. Klaus and Kuppelwieser (2021) note that the majority of customer experience research is conceptual and focuses on customer experience creation, experience design, and customer experience management. The literature highlights quality aspects such as website quality and online service quality (Singh and Söderlund, 2020). Klaus and Kuppelwieser (2021) argue that extraordinarily little empirical work has investigated the customer experience's dynamic nature. They state that customer experience dynamics are often strongly associated with the emotions customers experience during direct and indirect interactions with a firm, and emotions are the key determinants of the experience. In addition, a more holistic understanding of the customer experience as part of the overall customer journey has been called for (De Keyser et al., 2020).

This qualitative study aims to advance understanding of the online customer experience by examining customer experience formation from the customer's perspective. This study analyzes customers' written descriptions of the causes of their positive experiences when visiting an online store and how customers explain their positive emotions during their store visit. The study provides new insights into the customer experience discussion of customers' sensemaking processes. In addition to the theoretical contributions, understanding customers' thoughts and reflections is an essential starting point for online retailers to manage and develop the customer experience.

The context of the study is online grocery shopping—more specifically, food waste shopping. Food waste is a huge problem, especially in Western societies. In Finland, for instance, up to 15% of all food ends up as waste (Sitra, 2021). In the European Union, around 88 million tons of food waste are generated annually, and the associated costs are estimated to be €143 billion (European Commission, n.d.). Food waste is problematic because it contributes to global warming and climate change. It produces harmful greenhouse gases (e.g., methane and carbon dioxide) when disposed of in landfills. In addition, natural resources, such as freshwater, land, fossil fuels, and human resources, are wasted (Stenmarck et al., 2016). In recent years, more attention has been paid to this issue, and new business ideas have been sought to tackle the food waste problem.

The case company of this study is a Finnish online retailer, Fiksuruoka Ltd, founded in 2016. The business idea of Fiksuruoka (freely translated as “Smart Food”) is to reduce the amount of food waste in Finland and offer its customers a wide range of affordable groceries. Fiksuruoka's product range consists of marked-down and leftover items, which the company buys from Finnish manufacturers, importers, and wholesale chains. The product range includes surplus products that are in danger of being disposed of. This is typically due to an approaching best-before date, a product being discontinued, a new sales package, or too much stock. Fiksuruoka sells mainly groceries such as bread and bakery products, canned food, soups, candies, cereals, and spices that can be stored at room temperature. The range also includes sports and health products and pet food. Data were collected with an online survey of 581 Fiksuruoka customers.

The paper is structured as follows. First, the existing online customer experience literature is discussed. Then the study's methodology and findings are presented. Last, the study's contributions and managerial implications are discussed.

2 Theoretical background: Online customer experience and grocery shopping

The customer experience has been a widely researched topic in marketing research since the 1990s. At the time, the focus was on customer experiences in physical environments and brick-and-mortar stores, referred to as servicescapes (Bitner, 1992), for instance. With the development of technology and the growth of e-commerce, customer experience research has shifted to investigating online environments and combinations of physical and online—omnichannel—environments. While the customer experience and service experience concepts have been employed in marketing research, information systems research has investigated similar issues focusing on technology and the concept of user experience (Law et al., 2009; Pappas, 2018). Marketing and information systems researchers typically agree that customers' or users' experiences are subjective, context-dependent, and dynamic.

Although there is no consensus about the definition of online customer experience, it has often been defined as a customer's affective and cognitive assessment of direct or indirect interaction with a company operating in the online environment (Rose et al., 2011). It is commonly assumed that firms can control the customer experience. It has been found that customers encounter numerous stimuli capable of influencing their experiences (McLean and Wilson, 2016). Therefore, the key elements of the customer experience are typically examined by measuring the effects of different online store attributes on the customer experience. The antecedents and consequences of customer experiences have been sufficiently identified in various studies (Rose et al., 2012). Furthermore, many studies have investigated the interaction between online service providers and customers (Constantinides, 2004; McLean and Osei-Frimpong, 2017) during visits to online stores. A significant amount of research has investigated the features of high-quality e-commerce platforms and how different online store attributes directly affect online customer experiences within the business-to-consumer context (Cho and Park, 2001; Novak et al., 2000). However, the approach that considers the customer experience as a mere reaction or response has also been criticized (Rose et al., 2011). Kemppainen and Uusitalo (2022), for instance, propose that the customer experience is more complicated and is formed in the customer's mind through sensemaking. The customer is seen as an active actor whose customer experience can be shaped by other contributors beyond the company, including social norms and trends, for instance (Kemppainen and Uusitalo, 2022).

Despite significant interest in the topic, recent studies have argued that customer experience research remains limited (Klaus and Kuppelwieser, 2021). It has been proposed that perspectives that consider customers more holistically than focusing on the performance evaluations of offer attributes are needed (Singh and Söderlund, 2020). Consumption can include many other vital activities and meanings other than those visible to the retailer through direct interactions with customers in the online store (Heinonen and Strandvik, 2018). Therefore, when applying firm-based measurements to the customer experience, the understanding of the total customer experience is limited. It provides no information on how the customer experience is influenced by other actors and factors beyond the company's control (Trischler et al., 2018).

In the context of online food retail, consumer behavior has been investigated in many studies (Chu et al., 2010; Dawes and Nenycz-Thiel, 2014). Despite this, studies on customer experience are scarce, with some exceptions (Singh, 2019; Singh and Söderlund, 2020). It also has been argued that grocery shopping is different from other purchase contexts because it is strongly characterized by habitual purchase patterns. Thus, studies conducted in other contexts are not directly transferrable to the grocery shopping context (Melis et al., 2015). Previous research has noted that shoppers tend to revisit the same grocery store because familiarity with the store reduces the need for in-store searches and other efforts (Briesch et al., 2009). However, it has also been suggested that the online grocery shopping experience may be different from traditional supermarkets as the same revisit logic does not apply in an online shopping context. The switching costs are lower compared to offline channels (Melis et al., 2015); for instance, there is no need to travel, and it is easier to compare offerings (Brynjolfsson and

Smith, 2000). Because of these notions, off- and online grocery shopping experiences may be different and need to be examined separately.

3 Methodology

As the purpose of this study was to better understand the formation of online customer experience formation in the grocery and food waste contexts, a qualitative approach was chosen. The study data were collected via an online survey conducted between September and December 2018. Fiksuruoka customers were shown a link to the survey on a tab that appeared after they had successfully placed an order. The respondents were first briefly asked about their demographics (age and gender), online shopping habits (how often they made online purchases), and the current purchase (what they had ordered and how many times they had purchased from this particular online store).

After the background information, the respondents were asked about the emotions they had experienced during their online shopping encounter. The respondents were asked to describe in their own words the emotions they had experienced and to explain what made them feel the strongest positive or negative emotions. In addition, the respondents were asked to rate the emotions they had experienced and their recommendation and repurchase intentions. The emotions were measured based on a set of 28 specific emotions according to Laros and Steenkamp (2005): 1 indicated that they had not experienced that specific emotion at all, while 7 indicated that they had experienced that specific emotion very strongly during the online shopping encounter. However, as this study focuses on customers' written descriptions collected with open-ended questions, emotion measurements and recommendation and repurchase intentions are not included.

A total of 742 respondents commented on the open-ended questions. Respondents whose comments were unclear and respondents who did not depict their positive emotions were excluded. Thus, the final data of this study were collected from 581 respondents. Most of these respondents (n = 302) were young adults born in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of the respondents (88%) were female (n = 509). The respondents' descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Year of birth	Female	Male	Total	%
1940–1949	5	2	7	1.2
1950–1959	24	1	25	4.3
1960–1969	92	10	102	17.6
1970–1979	124	16	140	24.1
1980–1989	130	23	153	26.3
1990–1999	130	19	149	25.6
2000–2009	4	1	5	0.9
Total	509	72	581	100

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the respondents.

The written descriptions provided by the 581 respondents were analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software. The coding was data-driven. The comments were coded based on the respondents' explanations for their positive emotions. Many participants gave multiple explanations, such as "money savings" and "decreasing food waste" for their emotions. Such comments were split into separate units of analysis. The data were coded multiple times before the final counts and categorizations of the positive customer experience were tallied. In addition, although the main themes were identified based on the attribution counts, this study was based on an interpretive approach. The main purpose of the

analysis was to identify and understand the main positive contributors to the customer experience, rather than quantifying the significance of the identified contributors. The findings are discussed next.

4 Findings

The analysis revealed four main themes that contributed positively to the respondents' online customer experience. A positive customer experience was explained by factors related to 1) the shopping process and online store features, 2) shoppers' finds, 3) pricing, and 4) the shopping context (food waste). Under these themes, 17 subthemes were identified. The findings are summarized in Table 2 and discussed in more detail next.

Theme	Count
1. The shopping process and online store features	284
Ease, simplicity, smoothness of the overall process	111
Usability of the online store	52
Time savings	39
Delivery	34
Clarity of the online store	28
Trustworthiness of the retailer	20
2. Shoppers' finds	282
Interesting products	118
Something new to try	42
Joy of finding, treasure hunt	47
Product range	35
Found what was looking for	23
Exploration of a new store	17
3. Pricing	263
Low prices	172
Savings	52
Offers	39
4. The shopping context (food waste)	186
Ability to reduce food waste	138
Business idea of Fiksuruoka	48

Table 2. A summary of the findings.

4.1 Shopping process and online store features

Many participants referred to the overall shopping process and online store features as the causes of their positive emotions. The responses emphasized the ease, simplicity, smoothness of the process, usability of the online store, time savings, delivery, clarity of the online store, and trustworthiness of the retailer.

“Easy”, “simple”, and “smooth” were typical words used by the respondents when describing a successful shopping process. Many respondents did not specify what made the process positive for them but remarked that “everything went well”. Others gave more specific descriptions and referred to the usability of the store. These comments drew attention to a wide variety of store features during the visit, such as “products were easy to browse”, “store was working”, “ordering and browsing products was effortless”, and “payment was easy”. Many participants referred to the “clarity” of the online store when explaining their positive experiences.

The promptness of the process and time savings were also appreciated. Buying food was depicted as a mandatory chore by many; they would rather spend the time needed for grocery shopping on something else. The benefits of purchasing food from an online store were examined by comparing online shopping to brick-and-mortar stores. Online shopping was considered an easy option because one can stay at home and browse products in peace without physical effort, such as walking around in huge supermarkets, lining up, and looking for a parking space.

“Excited that food can be ordered cheaply and there is no need to be in the middle of countless options in the store. I hate grocery shopping. Big hypermarkets like Prisma and Citymarket are the worst” (R108).

“It’s nice that you don’t have to be among the people hoarding sale products for themselves and line up for 15–45 minutes at checkout” (R136).

As the quotation shows, the lack of human contact was also appreciated. Some noted that online shopping is of particular interest to families with children and shy people. When shopping at home, there is no need to worry about other people, and there are no salespeople trying to promote purchases:

“Online shopping is easy and does not require human contact” (R241).

“It’s a lot easier for a shy bogy like me to keep myself on track. In a real store, I just want to get out fast, and I might buy anything just to relieve the stress of shopping” (R33).

Free shipping was highlighted in the comments related to delivery. Many stated that they appreciated free delivery, and it was something that was “chased” during the online store visit. Researching free delivery caused happiness. However, it also appeared stressful:

“Shipping was 0 euros when the price of the products exceeded 29 euros. I felt joy when the ‘meter for free delivery’ exceeded that amount” (R44).

“The limit for free delivery is so high that it is difficult for a single person to reach it. But your frugal mind wants it, in which case a sense of guilt comes along when you also buy useless stuff to get the free shipping” (R155).

In addition to free shipping, the respondents noted that a delivery location that suited an individual’s preferences, fast delivery, and suitable packaging materials contributed to a positive experience. When ordering groceries, the delivery address plays a unique role, as multiple items are ordered, and the package can be difficult to pick up because of its size, for instance.

The trustworthiness of the retailer was noted by some respondents. Fiksuruoka was perceived as a reliable online store, which makes it convenient to buy:

“I can be sure everything goes well and if something doesn’t, I also know who to contact” (R288).

The reliability was explained by previous shopping experiences and the domesticity of the company.

4.2 Shoppers’ finds

Shoppers’ finds and discoveries were also strongly highlighted in the responses. Finding interesting products, finding some new products to try, the joy of finding products and a treasure hunt, apprecia-

tion for the product range, finding items that were looked after, and exploring a new online store were common descriptions in the responses.

Fiksuruoka sells surplus and waste products, and its range is constantly changing. Therefore, while buying groceries in a supermarket can often be habitual and uninspiring (the same routines are followed time after time), browsing products in the Fiksuruoka online store was pictured as exciting and interesting. Some respondents stated that they enjoyed browsing the store and hunting for good offers. A visit to the store is like a treasure hunt, where one never knows what will be found. Succeeding in the pursuit appeared to be a critical source of happiness for many:

“In an online store like this, you experience a little excitement because you do not know what’s on offer. You are hopeful if you happen to find something nice or necessary at a good discount” (R233).

However, as the product range changes, it also brings uncertainty to the buying process. Finding something suitable is not guaranteed. Therefore, finding something worth purchasing aroused positive emotions. Many described the product range as “good” and stated that it enhanced positive emotions while visiting the store:

“A good selection of vegan products surprised me positively” (R18).

“The range of this online store is varied, so I had a positive feeling that this time I found products that were very suitable for myself (vegan diet)” (R257).

Some noted that it was their first visit to the store. Thus, it was inspiring to visit the store and to test a new way of purchasing groceries. It was also concluded that because of the low prices, Fiksuruoka offers a good opportunity to try new products that would not otherwise be tried because of their high prices, for instance:

“It is exciting to order a brand new product, then be surprised if it is better than what you expected. I have tried products that I would never normally buy from a store” (R444).

Fun-related treasure hunt aspects were present, and rational and goal-oriented purchasing was also apparent. Many stressed the necessity of grocery shopping and that they were looking for specific products for a particular purpose:

“I feel like I am making good purchases that are necessary to feed the family. I buy products that come into use and make everyday life easier” (R340).

As the quotation shows, the purchase was experienced positively because it provided justified benefits.

4.3 Pricing

Fiksuruoka’s business concept is based on selling affordable groceries that are in danger of ending up in the trash. The respondents seemed to appreciate the idea, as prices were identified as one of the main contributors to a positive customer experience. Low prices, savings, and offers were highlighted in the participants’ responses:

“Familiar products at affordable prices; positivity, joy, satisfaction” (R437).

Low prices and savings were appreciated because purchasing food was seen as a necessity on which one does not want to spend too much money. However, low prices were also welcomed if one’s financial situation was tight:

“Saving money makes me feel good” (R68).

“As a student, my income is low. So I am very grateful, satisfied, and happy that food is sold cheaply online” (R23).

However, buying food waste also caused conflicting feelings because it was experienced as embarrassing. Respondents also concluded that cheap prices could cause greed and lead to buying products that aren't needed or shouldn't be purchased:

“Embarrassed about having to buy food waste because of a bad financial situation. However, happy and relieved that there is an opportunity for it. It's a contradictory situation” (R29).

It's nice to reduce food waste. [...] You feel more embarrassed when you pick up the package: it includes the name of the company and people can think of it negatively. I but on the other hand, I don't care. I buy what I want with my own money” (R410).

“The opportunity to find a super offer. As a stingy person: the joy of finding a cheap product. My greed was a bit shameful, especially when adding treats to the cart” (R414).

Some participants described the store's prices as exceptionally cheap, which caused strong emotions, enthusiasm, and a strong desire to buy. A positive experience was also shared with others by spreading the word about good deals:

“When I found health products super cheap, I burst into a delighted laugh and passed on the information about the products to others as well” (R190).

Whereas some participants referred to the low prices on a general level, others referred to the savings that the online store allowed. It was concluded that it is particularly lovely to see how much money one had managed to save or how much food one had managed to purchase by making wise shopping decisions:

“I got a lot of food waste very cheap. The savings delighted me and evoked very positive emotions. When I went to check out, I saw the amount I saved (because the food was at a big discount), which was the best moment of shopping” (R104).

“I was excited about the offers. There was information in the shopping cart about how much money I had saved by buying discount products, which added to the enthusiasm” (R33).

Prices were also compared to those of traditional offline grocery stores, as well as savings. Fiksuroka's prices were considered more affordable, and supermarkets do not offer such good savings opportunities:

“I was happy when I got usable products cheaper than in the store. Browsing the products is nice and comforting. You'll feel similar to being a kid before Christmas: something nice is coming, but for very little money (I'm pretty frugal)” (R305).

“I am happy with the discoveries I have made to save money. By touring the stores, I could hardly find the best discounts” (R141).

Offers and discounts were addressed as typical sources of positive emotions. Many were pleased to find a good offer but also wondered if they got too excited about the offers and made mistakes, such as buying unnecessary products:

“The strongest positive feelings came from saving when I got to buy at good discounts. On the other hand, it also caused negative feelings when I got excited to buy more than I needed” (R87).

“Browsing the online store seemed to arouse a frighteningly strong shopping craving, during which I hoarded the stuff in an unprecedented way. The food seemed to be bought almost for free” (R9).

4.4 Shopping context: Food waste

The shopping context—food waste—was also a dominant theme in the respondents' explanations of positive emotions. Many respondents noted that they experienced positive emotions because they were able to help reduce food waste. Reducing food waste was described as “inspiring”, “interesting”, and “important”. Purchasing from Fiksuruoka was perceived as meaningful: Shoppers' choices can have a positive effect on, for example, ecological problems:

“Knowing that shopping is done for a good cause evokes a positive feeling that makes me happy to shop. It makes me feel good that the products I buy now won't end up in the trash” (R67).

“Nowadays, I try to reflect everything I buy from an ecological perspective. When I buy from Fiksuruoka, I feel like I am making the right choices for nature, and I feel pleasure” (R139).

The findings show that it is essential for customers to feel that they have succeeded and have made excellent and acceptable purchase decisions. Responsible purchase choices and decisions—saving food that would otherwise end up in the trash—caused self-satisfaction and made the respondents feel good about themselves. Purchasing food waste was reported to cause pride, a good conscience, and positive thoughts:

“I felt proud and pleased to be able to reduce food waste” (R63).

“You feel like a benefactor when you think you are reducing food waste” (R376).

“The joy of being able to ‘save’ food” (R250).

“I feel that I'm doing the right thing, so I'm pleased” (R501).

Shopping at Fiksuruoka was described as a win-win situation. The customer gets food cheaply and can act responsibly simultaneously:

“I feel like I'm saving money and nature. The products and values represented by the online store evoked positive emotions” (R393).

“Fighting for a good cause at a cheap price, you can't help but get excited :)” (R428).

In addition to emphasizing their own role as benefactors, many referred to the business idea of Fiksuruoka. The business idea was considered purpose-built and valuable. The idea that consumers are offered an opportunity to buy food that would otherwise end up in the trash was appreciated:

“The idea of the store raised positive emotions” (R20).

“I'm happy that they are trying this kind of business. I wish them luck and success” (R362).

“Ingenious concept—the consumer can feel that she is doing good when buying products cheaply” (R502).

“The ideology of the store corresponds to mine, which is why I order from there over and over again” (R519).

As the quotations demonstrate, the business idea was perceived as timely and brilliant. In addition, many experienced a feeling of togetherness as the company promoted sustainability issues that were important to them.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of the positive customer experience formation in online shopping by examining customer experience formation from the customer perspective. The study contributes to the existing literature by addressing the calls for understanding the cus-

tomers' viewpoint alongside the holistic customer experience (Klaus and Kuppelwieser, 2021; Singh, 2019; Singh and Söderlund, 2020), particularly in the context of online shopping. The findings show that the online store and its implementation play a significant role in the formation of the experience, but factors related to customers and the purchase context are also vital in the formation of the experience.

First, the findings demonstrate that the smoothness of the shopping process and pleasant online store features are essential contributors to a positive online customer experience. The ease and simplicity of the process, the usability and clarity of the online store, and the trustworthiness of the retailer were highlighted in the findings. The online shopping process is expected to proceed smoothly and according to the customer's preferences while at the store. These findings are consistent with previous studies on the online customer experience that highlight the role of the company (Cho and Park, 2001; Constantinides, 2004) and the online store features in customer experience formation. When evaluating the shopping process, the broader buying-related entity is also considered, in addition to the features of the online store. Comparing online shopping to buying in a supermarket is essential in the formation of the customer experience in the context of grocery shopping. Perceived time savings and comfort of shopping contribute positively to the customer experience. Buying groceries online is perceived as a stress-free option because of transportation and social issues. One does not have to spend time traveling to the grocery store and looking for products in the supermarket among other people during busy periods. In the best case, the grocery order is delivered to one's door, which means that one does not have to spend time or effort picking up the package. Convenience and time savings were also identified in previous research as major motivations for shopping for food online (Anesbury et al., 2016; Haridasan and Fernando, 2018).

Second, the findings also highlight the importance of pricing on a positive customer experience. Low prices, savings, and good offers were essential to the respondents' positive emotions. The importance of pricing is most likely explained by the study context. First, grocery shopping is mandatory. One typically needs to spend money to get groceries, whether one wants to or not. Thus, savings and cheap prices for groceries are emphasized, especially if the customer has money worries or problems. Low pricing provides some essential benefits to the customer. Due to low prices, more food can be bought, and it also allows new and different products to be tried, which adds to the pleasure of one's everyday life. Second, as the case company sells groceries that are about to become waste, it seems to be expected that the pricing will be very low. Even if there is nothing wrong with the products, there is a stigma to them as inferior products that are expected to be sold cheaply. It has been shown that customers spend more money per online grocery order than in physical grocery shops, presumably to make delivery charges worthwhile or to obtain free delivery (Saunders, 2018). The findings of this study support these notions. An important aspect regarding prices and a positive customer experience was the ability to obtain free delivery.

Third, in addition to practical and price-related matters, the findings show the importance of fun and enjoyment in a positive online customer experience. The findings indicate that online shopping can arouse positive emotions if the online store is perceived as entertaining and fun. The case company was found to be interesting because of its atypical and ever-changing product range. Furthermore, browsing the available groceries was found to be exciting. Finds, the joy of discovery, and a treasure hunt produced positive emotions for many. In turn, a standardized product range seems to offer value to buyers who are looking for specific, familiar products. Previous researchers have also shown that assortment is an important factor affecting grocery store choice (Briesch et al., 2009) and purchase intentions and loyalty in the online shopping context (Koo and Ju, 2010; Verhagen and van Dolen, 2009). Interestingly, it has also been suggested that online grocery shoppers tend to be more habitual and less adventurous than those who shop in traditional supermarkets (Saunders, 2018). However, the present study results imply that a changing and unpredictable product range can bring elements of excitement and novelty to the online customer experience. Although grocery shopping has been described as a low-involvement activity (Hillen, 2021), at its best, grocery shopping can become a game-like event for the customer, where the best deals and "treasures" are being hunted. Winning the game

and feelings of success contribute to a positive customer experience. The findings suggest that when designing online stores online retailers should consider those who value familiarity and those who value novelty. However, paying particular attention to novelty and excitement seekers might be more profitable, as it engages customers on a deeper emotional level. A treasure hunt can appear as an addictive “you’ll never know what you will find” activity and make the customer return to the store. Rational goal-oriented purchases, in turn, may be more easily replaced with purchases from other shops containing similar product ranges and offering similar, easy shopping processes.

Finally, the findings indicate that in an ideal situation, online retailers should be able to offer their customers positive meanings that are relevant and important to them in order to promote a positive customer experience. This means that there should be a reason and justification for customers’ purchases other than to satisfy their own needs. In this study, customers experienced great joy and satisfaction as they felt they were making meaningful purchases. Reducing food waste was a real concern for many, and their own contribution to solving the problem produced positive feelings and happiness for them. Purchases from the Fiksuruoka online store were seen as beneficial not only for the customers but also for other people, and from an ecological perspective. Because of this and the low prices, the Fiksuruoka online store had a clear competitive advantage compared to traditional brick-and-mortar supermarkets and online retailers that sell groceries.

To sum up, the findings of this study demonstrate that a positive customer experience in the online shopping context can include many contributors, including the online store, the shopping context and the phenomena related to it, and the feelings of success and excitement associated with the purchase process. The online store should foster feelings of success, enjoyment, and self-satisfaction among its customers. The joy of discovery and the ability to act for a good cause are essential contributors to a positive online customer experience. These contributors and customers’ reasoning regarding them need further investigation in future research. In particular, the before and after online store visit phases of the customer journey, and customers’ sensemaking during them, require more research, as the in-store phase and online store features have been comprehensively investigated. The findings of this study are based on short explanations written by customers. Thus, examining the formation of the customer experience using more in-depth material, such as customer interviews, would be a good avenue for future research.

When evaluating the findings of this study, it should also be noted that the case online store is special in terms of what it offers, and it differs from mainstream online stores because of its business idea. In addition, the online food market is fundamentally different from, for example, the clothing or electronics market. Consequently, the findings of this study are strongly context-bound. A limitation of this study is that the data were collected in 2018. Several years have passed between the data collection period and the final research article. However, the subject of this investigation is not obsolete. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of e-commerce has grown even more over the last several years. This is especially true for online food purchases, which many consumers became familiar with during the pandemic. In addition, food waste is, and will continue to be, a substantial problem, which means that new business ideas and solutions related to the topic and aimed at solving the problem will also be needed in the future. In addition, how to add sustainable elements to online stores that do not have such easy-to-support, “conscious” business ideas as Fiksuruoka is a good question. To produce new ideas and to succeed with the concepts, customer and user experience understanding will remain essential topics for researchers and practitioners.

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