User experience of e-commerce platforms for women: Turkish Case[1]

Özgürol Öztürk

Research Assistant
Galatasaray University, Faculty of Communication
ozozturk@gsu.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1002-587X

Abstract

E-Commerce platforms are one of the rapid growing fields of human-computer interaction. With increasing numbers of platforms and interaction opportunities, E-commerce platforms has a major place in our daily life. As in traditional commerce, e-commerce platforms are also built up according to the needs of their target customers. There are various platforms for the mass but there are also specific platforms for diverse user groups. In Turkey, these kinds of platforms that are dedicated specific genders are quite popular but still the majority of the users prefer mass e-commerce platforms. In this project, the differences between; e-commerce usage of genders regardless of platforms were investigated in order to understand the different needs of genders during search process while purchasing an item.

Keywords: *E-Commerce, User experience, Gender in user experience,*

DOI: 10.16878/gsuilet.578312

Resumé

L'expérience d'utilisateur des plateformes de commerce électro-nique pour femmes : le cas de la Turquie

Les plateformes de commerce électronique sont parmi les domaines en croissance rapide de l'interaction homme-machine. Avec un nombre crois-sant de plateformes et d'opportunités d'interaction, les plates-formes de commerce électronique occupent une place majeure dans la vie quotidienne. Comme dans le commerce traditionnel, les plates-formes de commerce élec-tronique sont également conçues en fonction des besoins de leurs clients cibles. Il existe différentes plateformes pour la masse, mais il existe égale-ment des plateformes spécifiques pour des différents groupes d'utilisateurs. En Turquie, ces types de plateformes, qui sont des genres spécifiques, sont très populaires, mais la majorité des utilisateurs préfèrent les plates-formes de commerce électronique de masse. Dans ce projet, les différences entre l'utilisation des genres par le commerce électronique, indépendamment des plateformes, a été étudiée afin de comprendre les différents besoins des genres lors du processus de recherche lors de l'achat d'un article.

***Mot-Clés :** Commerce électronique, expérience utilisateur, genre dans l'expérience utilisateur*

Öz

Kadınlara yönelik e-ticaret platformlarında kullanıcı deneyimi: Türkiye örneği

E-Ticaret platformları, insan-bilgisayar etkileşiminin hızlı büyüyen alan-larından biridir. Artan sayıda platform ve etkileşim fırsatlarıyla E-ticaret plat-formları günlük yaşamımızda önemli bir yer tutuyor. Geleneksel ticarette olduğu gibi, e-ticaret platformları da hedef müşterilerinin ihtiyaçlarına göre oluşturulmaktadır. Kitlesel kullanım için faarklı platformlar var, ancak çeşit-li kullanıcı grupları için özel platformlar da var. Türkiye'de belirli cinsiyetlere adanmış bu tür platformlar oldukça popülerdir, ancak yine de kullanıcıların çoğu toplu e-ticaret platformlarını tercih etmektedir. Bu projede; Bir öğe satın alırken arama sürecinde cinsiyetlerin farklı ihtiyaçlarını anlamak için, platform-lardan bağımsız olarak cinsiyetlerin e-ticaret kullanımı araştırıldı.

***Anahtar Kelimeler:** E-ticaret, kullanıcı deneyimi, kullanıcı deneyiminde toplumsal cinsiyet*

Introduction

The competitive pressure of profitability on e-commerce platforms is getting higher every day. To overcome this problem e-commerce platforms, inherit various marketing strategies. From discounts to loyalty programs or special campaigns, they try to convince their users to purchase from them. Most try to give the lowest price for their price sensitive users but in the end, users are able to find the exact item and price on many e-commerce platforms. User Experience (UX), in this context has a key role in persuading the users and yet it has been valued by the e-commerce platforms in Turkey in the past five years. Some companies have in-house UX teams and some hire professional research companies for an overall assessment. But in both cases, most of the time diverse user groups are not taken in to consideration.

There are various types of e-commerce platforms ranging from mar-ketplaces to private shopping platforms or brand owned B2C sales sites. Tur-keys' population has reached 80 million 810 thousand by the end of 2017 and almost has an equal range between genders; %50.2 men, %49.8 women. The internet penetration in the country is also growing rapidly as in 2017 %80.7 of the households had internet access. Compared with 2016, in 2017, computer and internet usage among men aging 16-74 has increased from %65.7 to %75.1 whereas during the same period women's usage increased from %47.7 to %58.7. With a %37 annual growth from 30.8 billion Turkish Lira (TL) in 2016 to 42.2 billion TL in 2017 e-commerce is an emerging market in Turkey. Although the penetration and market size in terms of transaction increases, the number of e-commerce platforms have decreased from 844 sites in 2016 to 799 sites in 2017.

Due to this growth in population, internet penetration and online trans-action the competitive pressure is rising and convincing the users to shop on-line from a specific platform is getting more difficult. There are various meth-ods to be ahead in this competition. Platforms try to improve their search engine optimization (SEO) or work on attractive marketing/sales strategies. Some try to convince the price sensitive users with special discounts or lim-ited campaigns. But non the less a poor usability detaches users from engag-ing with these platforms.

This study, analyzed the critical issues confronting user experience for e-commerce platforms for different genders in terms of search process. The search and decision-making strategies of women and men were investigated in pre-purchase phase. For this purpose, a qualitative usability test, based on a multi-method approach, was carried out with a sample of 16 Turkish women

aging 20 to 35, who were experienced internet and e-commerce users.

Theoretical Background

Although there are various studies on the gender differences in online shopping, it is observed that most of them conducted surveys, to find out; the attitudinal effects of gender or among others the moderating effects of gender based on the sociolinguistic literature. Regardless of the method all these studies revealed that there is a difference between the perceptive and behavioral experience of genders in e-commerce.

Trust has a key role in any kind of transaction. In e-commerce both buyers and sellers try to establish trust at a certain level. Platforms gather any type of information they need in order to maintain trust to their customers. However, it is a much more complex process for the users to trust an e-commerce platform especially if they are searching personal items. Within this context, trust is defined as the dimension of a business relationship that determines the level to which each party feels they can rely on the integrity of the promise offered by the other.

Methodology

This study, analyzed the critical issues confronting user experience for e-commerce platforms dedicated to women. The search and decision-making strategies of women were investigated. Below is the research question of the study:

Research Question: How do different genders decide while purchasing online?

This qualitative study was based on a multi-method approach, which consisted of a background questionnaire, task observation and a semi-structured debriefing interview. The background questionnaire provided information on demographics, internet usage and e-commerce experience of the participants. The study also employed observation methods of data collection in order to gain better insight in e-commerce platforms. The tests were conducted with a MacBook and Mozilla Firefox browser. The female participants were asked to buy a "polka-dotted tights" and male participants were asked to buy a "polka-dotted tie" of their choice in any of the online platforms.

In this context, a sample of 16 Turkish users, 8 women and 8 men, aging 24 to 34, who had a university degree and working as white-collar in various fields were involved in the study. The participants had a monthly income between 2500 TL - 6500 TL and all were experienced internet and e-commerce users. All users purchased a product online within the last 3

months prior to the study. The product categories they purchased ranged as cloths and shoes (n=12), supermarket goods (n=6), electronics (n=3) and personal care (n=2).

Guerilla usability testing methods were conducted at a busy café in Beşiktaş, Istanbul and participants were chosen randomly. The navigation was directly observed and recorded on a structured observation sheet. Besides the observation, additional data was collected through screen recording and mouse tracking software. Final structured debriefing interview provided complementary findings.

The analysis framework was derived from the study of Usability Sciences and Bustos. These were integrated with the fundamental principles of interaction design that are completely independent of technology. The analysis framework that was derived from these two studies includes the following parameters: Search, Filtering, Product Page.

The web pages visited by the participants during the tests are as follows;
https://www.google.com.tr
https://www.penti.com
https://tr.calzedonia.com
https://www.n11.com
https://www2.hm.com/tr_tr/index.html
https://www.corapsepeti.com
https://www.oysho.com/tr
https://www.trendyol.com
https://www.gittigidiyor.com
https://www.hepsiburada.com
https://www.sadekravat.com
https://www.kravatkolik.com
https://www.kigili.com
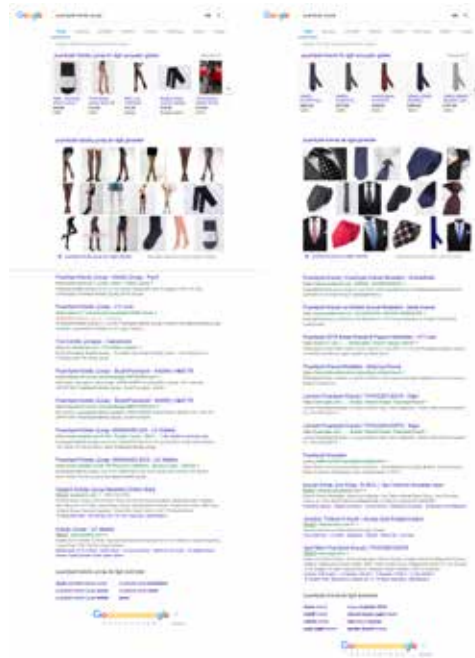https://www.boyner.com.tr
https://shop.vakko.com/tr

Findings and Discussions

In pre-purchase phase of the customer journey in an e-commerce sites, the principal step is search experience. This process not only involves a keyword search but also involves the browsing process. Therefor the participants were asked to find the items for the study however they wanted.

Searching for the product

When participants were asked to find a "polka-dotted tights" or a "polka-dotted tie" most of them (n=11) preferred a google search as their starting point. Only two women and three man preferred to search for the product at a website where they used frequently for online shopping (n11.com n=3, trendyol.com n=1, kigili.com n=1). All users typed in the key word as they have been given. (polka-dotted …).
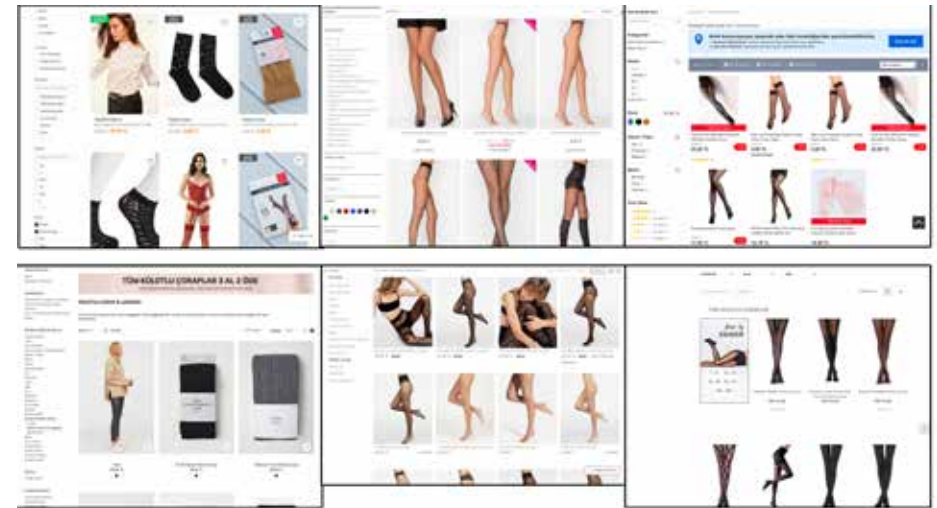
Figure 1. Google search result page for "polka-dotted tights" (left) and "polka-dotted tie" (right)

All users (n=12) scanned through the search result page (SERP) of google thoroughly and clicked at least one link presented but none of them clicked for the next page of results (n=0). The maximum number of links opened in a new window was 3 and the average number of sites visited was 2. The SERP included mass e-commerce platforms, manufacturer owned e-commerce and product/gender specific e-commerce platforms links listed randomly. It is observed that women were less hesitant to click on various links where as men preferred to stick on the brands of their prior knowledge. When asked during the post-test interviews both parties stated that the product, they were purchasing was not an important product and didn't cost much so they made their choices accordingly (n=10).

On clicking the google links, mass e-commerce platforms presented a product listing page (PLP) with the prefiltered results and manufacturer owned e-commerce platforms presented a product detail page (PDP) with the relevant product. Although users scanned the presented pages by the websites, both PLPs and PDPs, they made their own in-site search by clicking the category link and filtering down to their own results. Participants stated that they don't trust the search algorithms of most of the websites so they double-check it by using the category structured navigation. (n=7)

Figure 2. Product Listing Pages (PLP) for tights

Figure 3. Product Listing Pages (PLP) for ties

Filtering and refining

All platforms observed during the tests had a filtering tool but none of which included the term "polka-dotted". The basic browsing path of both genders were similar; category name, sub category name, product specific filter (if presented). Since the exact filter did not existed users began scan-

ning throughout the PLPs. Some sites offered an infinite scroll based PLP and some benefitted from pagination.

Figure 4. "Pagination" vs "lazy load"

When asked during the posttests women participants stated that they preferred infinite scroll (lazy load) because they found it more practical and enjoyable (n=4). On the other hand, men's' choice was pagination while they found it more controlled and practical (n=5). Both genders stated that they would like to see the number of items after each filtering parameter and the total amount of relevant products on a PLP (n=8).
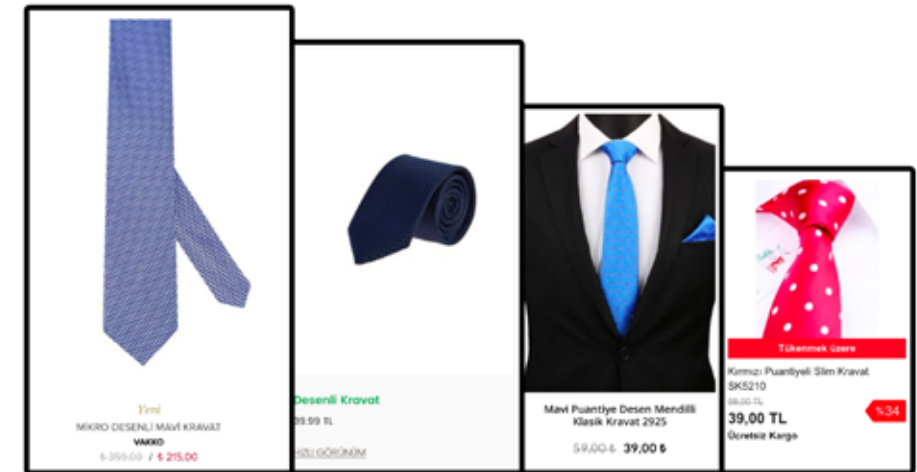
The lack of product specific filters was a main issue for all of the participants. The platforms offered filters like color, size, etc. but there were no filters for pattern, material, transparency, season, etc. which considered to be product specific by users. The only way for the participants to choose an object of their need was by analyzing the product listing page product boxes (PLP-PB)

Figure 5. Product Listing Page Product Boxes for tights

None of the users were satisfied with the information presented on the PLP-PB of the platforms. Some platforms offered "quick preview" features where a detailed PB was loaded as a light box but only two users engaged with this feature and when asked during the interviews participants stated that opening the PDP in a new tab was easier for them and helped to recognize the product for elimination (n=8).

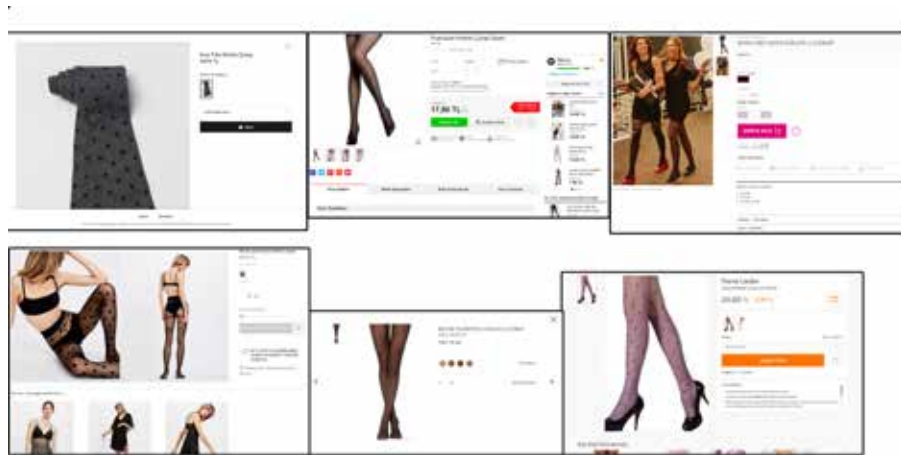**Figure 6.** Product Listing Page Product Boxes for ties

Product Details and decision making

In order to decide on the product, they want to purchase users opened multiple tabs on browser for PDPs and try to compare the items in detail. However even these pages didn't reveal enough information about the products which the users were looking for. Especially women (n=5) were keener on the specific attributes such as material which was not presented on these pages. Men had other needs such as the length and the width values of the product (n=2). Only one website delivered this information on the product detail page.

Figure 7. Product Detail Page for ties

Figure 8. Product Detail Page for tights

The product pictures presented on the PDPs were found sufficient by all of the users but it was observed that women spend more time on viewing the photographs from different angels then men. As it was difficult for users to determine the texture of the products, zooming options or detailed photos were favorited by all participants.

Conclusion

The findings of the research to understand the online purchasing process of different genders in Turkey revealed that the needs of the genders resemble each other. Whereas in the search behavior there were slight behavioral differences. Major problems were observed as the lack of support for the product search, such as product specific filtering and sorting. This paper provided the following implications for the improvement of online product search in e-commerce sites in Turkey for different genders;

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Although websites present an in-site search engine, they don't fulfill the customers' needs as users tend to make searches in various ways so a well-structured category and sub category structure should be implemented.

· Product Listing process, which provides a fast and error-free experience based on category specific needs and solutions should be implemented.

· Sufficient number of product specs should be presented on product listing page product boxes.

· Reasonable amount of product photos could be shown on listing pages, so that a quick overview is enabled.

· Product comparison tools are inevitable for e-commerce regardless of the product. The tool should be able to compare products for the user's flexible needs.

· It is observed that women tend to analyze the product more detailed than men.

· Product detail pages should present more specs in grouped format.

This study revealed that although the needs of different genders seem to be almost same there are slight differences in searching and decision-making processes of men and women. The implementation of the features presented in this paper will help building a more user-friendly environment in e-commerce.

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