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Do Switching Barriers Exist in the Online Travel Agencies?

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Abstract

The fast development of e-commerce has provoked cutthroat competition between tour wholesalers and retailers. This study explores and empirically examines the correlations among retailers' e-transaction satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, switching barriers, and repurchase intentions under the burgeoning e-commerce of Taiwan's travel agencies. To achieve the objectives of this study, we adopt a Delphi research design. This research is quite innovative in that no related studies in the literature have analyzed nor tried to explore these linking factors for travel agency e-commerce. We also propose an optimal B2B transaction model that matches the essential development needs of B2B commerce transactions.

Introduction

During the last decade online travel agencies have reshaped the channel management for retailer travel agencies and consumers, with some large wholesaler travel agencies now covering most of the total market share. Their accumulated e-commerce operating experience, know-how, and expertise have given them significant advantages over newcomers. On the contrary, small- and medium-sized retailer travel agencies not only face a scarcity of resources, but also lack key information technology when compared to large e-wholesaler travel agencies [1,2]. Retailer travel agencies have no choice, but to downsize transaction costs, upgrade marketing efficiency, and join wholesalers' B2B transaction mechanisms in order to effectively compete against travel suppliers and various new players. However, small independent travel agencies are arguing against the necessity of joining the B2B mechanism structures offered by tour wholesalers in order to combat the threats they are facing. At the same time, tour wholesalers are continuing to build up their B2B transaction mechanisms as a way to attract retailers, which help increase their profits and gain market share.

Most e-wholesaler travel agencies that do raise switching barriers within their core competences run the risk of facing cutthroat competition, because of undifferentiated products and services in the B2B transaction mechanism. Some studies in the literature have examined satisfaction and switching barriers as the antecedents of repurchase intentions only from the customers' perspective, failing to realize that interpersonal relationships play a very important role in the B2B model. Therefore, it is very important to explore the determinants of switching barriers and interpersonal relationships in the B2B model offered by e-wholesalers and to investigate their impacts on retailers' repurchase intentions. Some research has been conducted on the satisfaction, switching barriers, interpersonal relationships, and repurchase intentions of travel industry-related businesses [3-12]. This present research looks to fill the gap in the literature concerning e-transaction satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, switching barriers, and repurchase intentions of e-retailers on a B2B mechanism.

Theoretical background

Switching barriers are factors that lock-in customers or make it difficult for them to look for new suppliers such that low acquisition costs are repaid through repeat purchases. Switching barriers can also

include loyalty program benefits designed to dissuade customers from switching suppliers. Firms can offer hard and/or soft benefits in order to raise customers' switching barriers. Soft benefits lead to higher emotional attachment and deeper and more durable loyalty [13]. Therefore, e-wholesaler travel agencies should provide a combination of hard and soft benefits tailored to their e-retailers' needs and not just concentrate on hard benefits. Indeed, interpersonal relationships are widely recognized as a key successful element in the traditional transaction model of travel agencies.

Retailer travel agencies' E-transaction satisfaction on a wholesaler's B2B mechanism

The satisfaction of customers is the overall evaluation of a performance based on all prior experiences with a firm, such as the satisfaction towards a pricing plan, core service, and value-added services [14]. Conceptually, higher levels of core service satisfaction should reduce the perceived benefits of switching service providers, thus yielding higher repurchase intentions [15]. In fact, satisfaction can positively influence repurchase intention and is an antecedent of repurchase intention [16-24]. Retailer travel agencies' repurchase intentions should lead to increasing online sale volumes and greater economies of scale. Achieving high levels of retailer satisfaction has thus become a major goal for many wholesaler travel agencies providing B2B transaction mechanisms.

Interpersonal relationships between retailer and wholesaler travel agencies

Interpersonal relationships are one of the main reasons for dissatisfied customers to decide whether or not to remain with their current service provider [25,26]. Interpersonal relationships are especially important in B2B transaction mechanisms given the high

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degree of personal interactions with salespeople. Research in marketing demonstrates that interpersonal relationships bond customers with their retailers [27,28]. Conversely, close interpersonal relationships may motivate retailers to willingly give their service providers a second chance to redress any service failure [29].

E-communication has a positive favorable impact on a travel agent's commitment to its supplier. Indeed, many wholesalers employ incentives or commissions and prizes to induce travel agencies to contract a service via the Internet [30]. Interpersonal relationships not only can tie the retailers to their incumbent wholesalers, but also cause the retailers to refrain from switching to competing wholesalers [31]. Eventually, such interactions between wholesalers and retailers may lead to personal relationships that bind the retailers to wholesalers' B2B transaction mechanisms.

Retailer travel agencies' switching barriers on a wholesaler's B2B mechanism

Switching barriers represent any factor that makes it more difficult or costly for consumers to change providers. Perceived switching costs are consumers' perceptions of the time, money, and effort associated with changing service providers [32,33]. In other words, switching costs may come in the form of termination costs from the current service provider as well as the joining costs of the alternative service provider [5,13,34,35]. From a thematic content analysis of the literature, we see that a range of real and perceived switching barriers covers physical access, personal access, cost, time and timing, product, personal interest, understanding and socialization, and information [36]. Ping [37] examined the relationship between switching costs and repurchase intentions and discovered that customers tend to be "loyal" when they perceive the switching costs associated with leaving their current relationship and establishing an alternative one to be high. There is also an interaction effect between switching barriers and satisfaction and a consequential impact on repurchase intentions [38]. A crucial issue for e-wholesaler travel agencies is how to increase a retailer's switching barriers and repurchase intentions on a wholesaler's B2B transaction mechanism.

Retailer travel agencies' repurchase intentions on a wholesaler's B2B mechanism

Customer satisfaction is thought to be an immediate antecedent to repurchase intentions [19], but Gronhaug and Gilly [39] argued that a dissatisfied customer may still remain "loyal" due to high switching costs. Evidence shows that dissatisfied customers do not always switch to another supplier, because switching barriers make such a change difficult or costly [40]. Switching costs also relate to perceived risk, which is defined as the consumer's perception of uncertainty about a loss or gain in a particular transaction and the adverse consequences of buying a product or service [41,42]. Moreover, there are social and psychological benefits from interpersonal relationships with service personnel that go beyond just satisfaction with the core service [43]. Social benefits should mitigate the influence of satisfaction with the core service by encouraging customers to remain with their service provider even in situations where core-service satisfaction is less than complete [33,44-46]. These results suggest when interpersonal relationships between retailers and wholesalers become stronger that the switching barriers and repurchase intentions will eventually increase.

There appears to be no empirical or theoretical model of an effective evaluation system for developing switching barrier strategy models in B2B mechanisms that would allow practitioners to appropriately acquire

e-transaction satisfaction and enforce interpersonal relationships. Such models could help e-wholesalers make the right strategic decisions so as to seize upon retailers' repurchase intentions. Our present research looks to fill the gap in the above related literature.

Objectives

Though switching barriers and interpersonal relationships are crucial successful factors that influence B2B mechanisms and the profit of e-wholesaler travel agencies already in the market, no empirical research has examined the linkage among e-transaction satisfaction and repurchase intentions, nor investigated those between interpersonal relationships to repurchase intentions, nor studied how switching barriers impact repurchase intentions in the travel agency industry. This study addresses the following four major questions.

1. Which e-transaction satisfaction is the most important in deterring a B2B transaction mechanism in e-commerce travel markets?

2. What are the underlying determinants for interpersonal relationships so that e-wholesaler travel agencies can discover better practices in pursuit of higher retailer repurchase intentions on their B2B transaction mechanism?

3. Is there any difference in the importance of switching barriers between e-retailer and e-wholesaler travel agencies on a B2B transaction platform?

4. What meaningful implications are there to practitioners or marketers of e-wholesaler travel agencies to adopt e-commerce B2B transaction mechanisms, thereby increasing retailers' repurchase intentions.

Methods

To achieve the objectives of this study, we adopt a Delphi research design. The research design focuses on primary e-travel agencies to obtain more in-depth information and to identify the critical variables. This approach is recommended when the theory is more tentative and the measures are less well developed, because the findings can be regarded as more indicative of a proper solution [47]. As there is no previous research on switching barriers to B2B issues for Taiwan's e-travel agencies, this study employs exploratory research, utilizing both primary and secondary data. Given the dynamic nature of the subject area, multiple primary research approaches have been adopted in the literature, including both qualitative and quantitative methods [48]. Bryman [49] explained that these two methods are complementary rather than competing, especially for exploratory research.

This study looks to discover what panel experts regard as the most important variables for identifying interpersonal relationships and e-transaction satisfactions. We further explore the switching barriers for acquiring the repurchase intentions of e-retailer travel agencies, which have not already established or developed various switching barriers, as this is more likely to result in sustainable B2B transaction performances. Thus, we use a three-round Delphi survey method to develop the conceptual framework (Figure 1).

Sampling

A Delphi study does not depend on a statistical sample aimed at being representative of any population; rather, it is a group decision mechanism that requires qualified experts who have a deep understanding of the issues [50]. The first-round Delphi survey conducted a set of follow-up interviews with 20 experts who are qualified
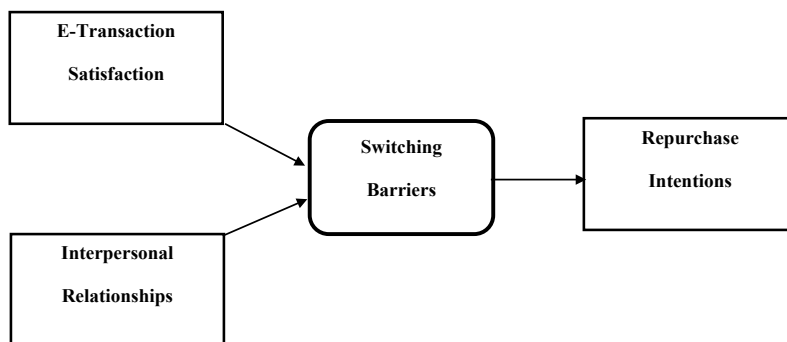
Figure 1: Framework of Exploring Switching Barriers in the B2B Model of E-Wholesaler Travel Agencies.

to participate in this study. We classify them into three categories: (1) chief executive officers (CEOs) of travel agencies, (2) the chairman or chief secretary of the Taipei, Kaohsiung, and Tainan Associations of Travel Agents, and (3) the chairman of the Certified Travel Counselors Association of the Republic of China. In total, 20 travel agency focus interviews of homogeneous participants were initiated. All participants are both traditional and e-commerce channel providers and include respondents from the top five travel agencies in Taiwan. The agencies in the survey are Lion Travel, Welcome Holiday, EzTravel, Visa Tour, Cola Tours, Martin Travel, Set Tour, Star Travel, Ezfly, Dragon Tours, Artisan Tour, Uno Tour, Castle Tours, CTS-Travel, Sunshine Tour, Life Tour, Spunk Tour, Phoenix Tours, RTS Tours, and Richmond Tours. All interviews were captured on tape, and all of the above respondents are important people who have valuable knowledge on practical travel agency management issues, thus helping us to obtain in-depth and valuable opinions and comments on the subject. The semi-structured interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes in length.

We recruited the panel of experts using a snowball technique, which is a judgment sampling technique that utilizes the researcher's ability to locate an initial set of respondents with the desired characteristics. These individuals are then used as informants to identify other potential respondents with the desired characteristics. This type of sampling technique is considered appropriate for exploratory research when searching for new ideas or insights [51]. In this manner, the initial respondents are identified through the researcher's personal networks and are then asked to recruit respondents on the researcher's behalf, and these respondents likewise execute the request for recruiting the next set of respondents [52]. The Delphi group size does not depend on statistical power, but rather on group dynamics, to arrive at a consensus among experts. Thus, the literature recommends 10 to 18 experts on a Delphi panel [50,53]. It has been reported that the validity and the reliability of the Delphi technique do not significantly improve with more than 30 participants [54]. Others report that exceeding 30 participants results in fewer new ideas, regardless of group size [55]. This study group hence consists of 14 final snowball sampling target experts, who are directly involved with travel agency management, as they are all CEOs of major local travel agencies.

Data analysis

The three-round Delphi survey employs experts in the field of e-travel agency industry management. To improve the indicators' validity, convergence, consensus, and concordance, four criteria are put into place: (1) the standard deviation value of each attribute should not be greater than 1; (2) the value of a mean score rounded down 0.4 or rounded up 0.5 in units should be equal to the value of the mode;

(3) the value of the quartile deviation should range from 0 to 0.6, with less than 0.6 indicating strong consensus and 0 indicating a perfect consensus; and from 0.6 to 1, with 1 indicating no consensus [56]; and (4) Kendall's W coefficient of concordance should have a value of W ranging from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating no consensus and 1 indicating perfect consensus between lists [57]. If any attribute does not match two of the four criteria, then we begin the next survey round. Under this situation, the ranking questionnaire must be resent to the members of that panel.

To increase convergence in round two from round three, a few statements are rewritten and restated. The third-round Delphi survey shows a satisfaction level of convergence. In the end, this study took a three-round Delphi survey on these 14 experts to develop, validate, and prioritize a baseline list of potential evaluation criteria of the B2B model dimension in the e-travel agency industry. We now analyze the experts' data with the results shown in Tables 1-4.

Findings

The results of the Delphi analysis yield several insights that confirm previous findings and shed light on the future of e-wholesaler travel agencies seeking better performance in their B2B business model.

The model and propositions

Founded on the theories of barrier strategy and based on findings in the literature, we propose switching barriers in the B2B model for the e-travel agency industry as shown in Figure 1. Below we discuss propositions associated with the model.

Proposition I. Upgrading e-transaction satisfaction on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism may increase retailers' switching barriers

How to upgrade retailers' e-transaction satisfaction on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism is vulnerable to an increase in their switching barriers to competing e-wholesalers. E-wholesalers often face difficulty in finding the right details about all aspects of e-transaction satisfaction. If they are successful in discovering these aspects, then it will be difficult for competitors to overcome those advantages by establishing any new B2B commerce platform.

Many major e-wholesalers nowadays offer comfortable after-sale service (m_1) and promise transaction security (m_2), and the transaction-return procedures of the wholesaler are hassle-free (m_9). If incumbent e-wholesalers can also offer wide product selections (m_3) and sufficient product information (m_6), then such a circumstance would make it

Dimension	Factor	N=14 (Response Rate)=70%				
		Mean	Mode	S.D.	Q.D.	Kendall's W
E-Transaction Satisfaction	1. The wholesaler offers comfortable after-sales service (m_1)	4.86	5.00	0.36	0.00	0.47
	2. The wholesaler promises transaction security (m_2)	4.36	4.00	0.50	0.50	
	3. The wholesaler offers wide product selections (m_3)	4.29	4.00	0.61	0.50	
	4. The wholesaler offers incentive programs (m_4)	4.21	4.00	0.43	0.13	
	5. The wholesaler offers a well-designed website (m_5)	4.14	4.00	0.36	0.00	
	6. The wholesaler offers sufficient product information (m_6)	4.07	4.00	0.47	0.00	
	7. The wholesaler accepts most payment methods (m_7)	4.00	4.00	0.55	0.00	
	8. The wholesaler offers clear directions that make it easy for the retailer (m_8)	3.93	4.00	0.27	0.00	
	9. The transaction-return procedures of the wholesaler are hassle-free (m_9)	3.86	4.00	0.36	0.00	
	10. The wholesaler offers predatory pricing (m_{10})	3.79	4.00	0.43	0.13	
	11. The wholesaler offers convenient operations (m_{11})	3.71	4.00	0.47	0.50	
	12. The wholesaler offers high-speed e-service (m_{12})	3.64	4.00	0.50	0.50	

Table 1: Delphi Result of E-Satisfaction B2B Model Dimensions.

Dimension	Factor	N=14 (Response Rate)=70%				
		Mean	Mode	S.D.	Q.D.	Kendall's W
Interpersonal Relationships	1. I feel I need to fulfill customer wishes (n_1)	4.43	4.00	0.51	0.50	0.69
	2. I have developed social rapport with the wholesaler's salesperson (n_2)	4.36	4.00	0.50	0.50	
	3. I feel like there is a 'bond' between at least one employee at the wholesaler and myself (n_3)	4.29	4.00	0.47	0.50	
	4. I feel I like the wholesaler's salesperson very much (n_4)	4.14	4.00	0.53	0.13	
	5. I know the wholesaler's salesperson whom I am used to dealing with businesses (n_5)	4.07	4.00	0.62	0.13	
	6. I am friends with at least one employee at the wholesaler (n_6)	3.86	4.00	0.53	0.13	
	7. I have developed psychological rapport with the wholesaler's salesperson (n_7)	3.14	3.00	0.36	0.00	
	8. I think I must follow my superior's orders (n_8)	3.07	3.00	0.27	0.00	
	9. I think the wholesaler's salesperson is trustworthy (n_9)	3.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	

Table 2: Delphi Result of Interpersonal Relationship B2B Model Dimensions.

Dimension	Factor	N=14 (Response Rate)=70%				
		Mean	Mode	S.D.	Q.D.	Kendall's W
Switching Barriers	1. It would bring about an operating burden to change wholesalers (S_1)	4.86	5.00	0.36	0.00	0.64
	2. There would be a loss of special treatments to change wholesalers (S_2)	4.43	4.00	0.51	0.50	
	3. It would be troublesomeness to change wholesalers (S_3)	4.29	4.00	0.47	0.50	
	4. It would take lots of time to change wholesalers (S_4)	4.21	4.00	0.43	0.13	
	5. I would have to get re-familiarized with new products to change wholesalers (S_5)	4.14	4.00	0.36	0.00	
	6. There would be risks to change wholesalers (S_6)	4.07	4.00	0.27	0.00	
	7. There would be economic losses to change wholesalers (S_7)	4.00	4.00	0.39	0.00	
	8. I would have to develop new relationships to change wholesalers (S_8)	3.71	4.00	0.47	0.50	
	9. There would be a decrease in clients to change wholesalers (S_9)	3.64	4.00	0.50	0.50	
	10. Incentives would be lost to change wholesalers (S_{10})	3.14	3.00	0.36	0.00	
	11. Market information would be lost to change wholesalers (S_{11})	3.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	

Table 3: Delphi Result of Switching Barrier B2B Model Dimensions.

Dimension	Factor	N=14 Response Rate)=70%				
		Mean	Mode	S.D.	Q.D.	Kendall's W
Repurchase Intention	1. I would like to share transaction experience with others (P_1)	4.71	5.00	0.47	0.50	0.54
	2. I would like to recommend this wholesaler to others (P_2)	4.21	4.00	0.43	0.13	
	3. I will choose this wholesaler as the first priority provider in the next transaction (P_3)	4.07	4.00	0.62	0.13	
	4. I would like to transact with this wholesaler again (P_4)	4.00	4.00	0.55	0.00	
	5. I would like to post positive comments about this wholesaler on any website (P_5)	3.86	4.00	0.53	0.13	
	6. If there is partial product failure, I would give the wholesaler a second chance to remedy the situation (P_6)	3.86	4.00	0.77	0.13	
	7. If there is partial service failure, I would give the wholesaler a second chance to redress the situation (P_7)	3.71	4.00	0.73	0.50	
	8. I will order much more in the next transaction (P_8)	3.21	3.00	0.43	0.13	
	9. Even if a competing wholesaler offers special prices, I will still transact with the incumbent wholesaler (P_9)	3.07	3.00	0.27	0.00	

Table 4: Delphi Result of Repurchase Intention B2B Model Dimensions.

even more difficult for new wholesalers to enter the market, because the incumbents would have a strong and sufficient understanding to be able to set up barriers to imitation. Offering incentive programs (m_4), predatory pricing (m_{10}), and accepting most payment methods

(m_7) can also maintain sustainability of repurchase intentions for less competitive rivals. Therefore, keeping an e-wholesaler's advantage requires a well-designed website (m_5), convenient operations (m_{11}), and clear directions that make it easy for retailers (m_8) to conduct transactions. Indeed, e-wholesaler travel agencies with high-speed e-service (m_{12}) have the potential for achieving both higher switching barriers and higher ratios of repurchase intentions versus competitors with low-speed e-service.

The relationship between e-transaction satisfaction and switching barrier is therefore treated as a research paradigm, and several studies have found empirical support for this model [4,22]. This study demonstrates that these 12 types of e-transaction satisfaction do exist in the B2B mechanism of an e-wholesaler travel agency, when retailers perceive greater e-transaction satisfaction and exhibit higher switching barriers. Comprehensively, if retailer travel agencies are aware of either acceptable e-transaction satisfaction on an incumbent e-wholesaler's B2B mechanism or simply do not perceive the mechanism as being any more attractive than other wholesaler rivals' e-services, then they are not likely to use it (Table 1).

Proposition II. Raising interpersonal relationships on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism may enforce retailers' switching barriers

E-wholesaler travel agencies face many questions that impinge upon how to strengthen interpersonal relationships in order to enforce retailers' switching barriers. There are many types of interpersonal relationships, among which the major ones are fulfilling customer wishes (n_1) and following superior orders (n_8). In addition, retailers have developed social (n_2) and psychological (n_7) rapport with the wholesaler's salespeople, through a bond forged with at least one employee at the wholesaler (n_3). For example, a retailer knows the wholesaler's salesperson, is used to dealing with businesses (n_5), and furthermore likes the wholesaler's salesperson very much (n_4). When switching barriers are not substantial or the switching costs are low, retailers will perceive that the interpersonal relationships are redundant. If the retailer is a friend of a worker at the wholesaler (n_6), then even if the retailer is not satisfied with the incumbent wholesaler's B2B transaction mechanism, the retailer will still keep the relationship with the incumbent e-wholesaler. The findings indicate that stable interpersonal relationships between e-retailers and e-wholesalers can quickly create switching barriers in the B2B travel market and are the key to acquiring retailers' repurchase intentions. Eventually, the retailer will believe the wholesaler's salesperson to be trustworthy (n_9), thus potentially raising switching barriers. These interpersonal relationships have been identified in other studies such as Priluck [29] and Chao, Fu and Lu [31] (Table 2).

Proposition III. Enforcing switching barriers on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism may stimulate retailers' repurchase intentions

In the competitive environment of e-commerce, achieving high levels of switching barriers on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism has become one of the essential strategies to stimulate retailers' repurchase intentions. When switching barriers are low and interpersonal relationships are weak, then the advantages of a firm may be easily and quickly challenged. It is thus especially important for retailers to know whether changing over to another e-wholesaler will bring about an operating burden (S_1), troublesomeness (S_3), or economic loss (S_7) to a retailer. Even if retailers are not absolutely satisfied with the current e-wholesaler's B2B service, retailers may still remain with the e-wholesaler, because of potential special treatments (S_2), time (S_4), incentives (S_{10}), and market information loss (S_{11}). Furthermore, if retailers leave a B2B platform, then they have to re-familiarize themselves with new products (S_5), suffer risks (S_6), and need to develop new relationships when changing wholesalers (S_8).

E-wholesalers acquiring advanced switching barriers can hence be regarded as owning business advantages that make them unlikely to experience a decrease in clients (S_9) or make it costly for retailers to leave their B2B mechanism. More specifically, e-wholesaler travel agencies are required to build new switching barriers and establish close interpersonal relationships. Therefore, some e-wholesalers find that higher switching barriers lead to stronger retailer repurchase intentions among all e-travel agencies. Raising switching barriers is thus a crucial strategy to prevent retailers' defection, but e-wholesalers may not regard this as the sole strategy to retain retailers. These findings on raising switching barriers to stimulate retailers' repurchase intentions support the findings of previous studies on other industries such as Han, Back, and Barrett [4] and Liu, Guo, and Lee [58] (Table 3).

Proposition IV. There are clear retailer repurchase intentions on an incumbent wholesaler's B2B mechanism

If a new e-wholesaler attempts to enter the B2B market with aggressive pricing, then the incumbent e-wholesalers are likely to remain in the e-market through their strategic advantages and will raise switching barriers and enforce interpersonal relationships so as to induce retailers to keep transacting via their B2B mechanism. Consistent monitoring of retailers allows e-wholesalers to quickly respond to critical competition in the travel market. The channels to attract retailers include the sharing of transaction experience (P_1), recommending a wholesaler to others (P_2), posting positive comments on any website (P_5), and transacting with this wholesaler again (P_4). Such feedback helps an e-wholesaler evaluate its own performance and compare its strategy with those of its competitors, so that retailers will still choose this wholesaler as the first priority provider in their next transaction (P_3). Even under a partial product (P_6) or service (P_7) failure, retailers are given a second chance by the wholesaler to remedy and redress the situation.

Faced with some entrants that may be more inclined toward a price war, incumbent e-wholesalers should seek to attract more orders from retailers in their next transactions (P_8), so that even when a competing e-wholesaler offers special deals, the retailers will still transact with the incumbent wholesaler (P_9). The above findings are consistent with the previous research study of Homburg and Giering [19]. Close interpersonal relationships and high switching barriers not only can tie retailers to their incumbent e-wholesalers, but also cause retailers to refrain from switching to competing e-wholesalers. It is thus essential for e-wholesaler travel agency practitioners to evaluate the performance of their B2B mechanism from the viewpoint of their strategic management practices and to determine how to benefit from such findings (Table 4).

Conclusions

This study offers a conceptual overview of an e-wholesaler travel agency practitioner that focuses on upgrading e-transaction satisfaction, enforcing interpersonal relationships, and raising switching barriers in order to increase customers' repurchase intentions. The results are based on a three-round Delphi survey among major Taiwan e-travel agencies. We are not only able to develop a reliable and valid

model on the correlations among retailers' e-transaction satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, switching barriers, and repurchase intention scale in the e-travel market, but also can identify the portable switching barrier strategic B2B model in the travel agency industry, which is the most important for travel agency management. Future research needs to address the profitability of this portable switching barrier strategic B2B model.

This study offers four main contributions to the academic and travel industry fields. First, it presents an approximation of the switching barriers in this specific industry, which is rather significant given the lack of literature available in this field. Second, it identifies some types of measurable e-transaction satisfaction, interpersonal relationships, and repurchase intentions on B2B transaction mechanisms for e-travel agencies. Third, we show that the success of these new switching barriers and interpersonal relationship strategies to e-travel agency practitioners is greatly important for their B2B business models. Fourth, we are able to demonstrate that firms in this industry have to re-examine their understanding of how to increase retailer repurchase intentions by raising switching barriers and enforcing interpersonal relationships.

Limitations of the Study

This is the first study in the literature to investigate the switching barrier and interpersonal relationship strategic B2B model. As with any case study, the findings cannot easily be generalized to other travel-related industries. Additional studies in other industries may strengthen the generalization of the proposed constructs and framework. Clearly, there are limitations to the research approach followed in this study. First, the Delphi method was based on respondents from 14 major e-travel agencies or experts with e-travel agency management experience in Taiwan. Hence, random data collection sampling techniques could not be used, prompting several limitations in the results. Second, snowball sampling is a non-probability approach that may lead to sampling bias, hence restricting the general applicability of the findings. Such limitations, however, do not diminish the significant contributions this study makes to the research literature. A future study may provide a longitudinal overview of the development of switching-barrier and interpersonal-relationship strategies in the travel agency industry. It is also our hope that this study stimulates more interest in switching barriers and that other researchers will build upon and extend the findings herein.

Acknowledgements

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