WEB-BASED FINANCING BUSINESS - USERS' VIEW

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Abstract

The current study analysed success factors and obstacles perceived by young working aged customers that influence online purchase processes especially in financing business. Earlier literature lists several success factors such as time saving, time and place independence, trust, security and peer evaluations. However, online financing business has received only little attention so far. Therefore the current study offered significant new knowledge by verifying that some of earlier knowledge is valid also in the context of online financing business but that some factors are seen more important than the others in financing business. Especially the role of customer service was emphasised in the qualitative study that included seven semi-structured interviews and a content analysis that was based on earlier research.

Keywords: Web-based shopping, Financing business, Obstacles for purchasing.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to find out obstacles and success factors that influence the use of financing e-commerce. The obstacles and success factors were asked from the users and the focus was limited on the user interface and use experience that directly influence the behaviour.

The motivation for the study originated from the emerging use of web-based services. Nowadays, they include also financing services that earlier were implemented for example in banks and other financing institutions. Competition in financing business has brought online services for customers and user experience is among success factors especially in cases where the service or product per se does not differ from products offered by competitors.

From earlier studies we know that due to the development of the Internet the possibility of selling and buying goods has brought new business both for small and medium sized enterprises (Hidding 2001, Treutner & Ostermann 2011). Barua et al. (2004) reported that many traditional organisations have implemented great changes to adopt Internet-based activities. Barua et al. talk about net-enabled business transformation that happens when organisations implement Internet-enabled value chain activities. Chaffney et al. (2009) note the great transformation that has taken place in marketing due to the Internet. They formulate that customers have a much wider choice of products, services and prices from different providers and suppliers; and that customers now have more possibilities to select and purchase items. According to Chaffney et al., organisations have more possibilities to expand into new markets, offer new services, apply new online communication technologies and compete with other business. To be functional, an online shop requires an effective background system, versatile management for money transactions, logistics, personnel training, system support and maintenance (Meier & Stormer 2009). Several studies are carried out about identifying customers and their financial resources (Chiu 2001, Lee 2002, Girish 2012).

Online financial services has been studied already earlier (e.g. Pikkarainen et al. 2004, Chong et al. 2010, El Badrawy et al. 2012), but purchasing financial products such as bonus shares and stock online has received only minor attention so far. The study aimed to find out the factors that either impede or promote the purchase actions carried out through web-based financing services from young working aged customers’ point of view.
In the current study, financing services were services that were offered by financing business and branch. The following question was asked when contemplating the research problem: **What kinds of factors promote or interrupt a web-based purchasing process of financial products?**

The empirical research material was collected with semi-structured interviews that revealed reasons either to put into practice online shopping or to neglect to buy online. The informants were regular customers of a financial institution and they were used to online shopping.

The main contribution of the study was to point out the factors that influence the purchase action focusing on financial products that has not gained too much attention so far. Compared to the earlier knowledge, the study added ‘comparison’ and ‘customer service’ as important factors that either support or impede the purchase action, respectively.

Next, the main concepts of the study are described. After that, earlier knowledge about the research area is introduced. Then, the research method is reported, followed by the description of the empirical study. The paper ends with discussion and conclusive words.

2 **EARLIER KNOWLEDGE**

Laudon et al. define e-business as business that is implemented with the help on electronic means while e-commerce is e-business that deals with goods and services (cited by Treutner & Ostermann 2011). Already in 2002 Sirdeshmukh, Singh and Sabol (2002) studied factors that support e-satisfaction and they highlighted ease of use, well designed pages and economical safety. Likewise, Gefen et al. (2003) note that consumer trust, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are among the most important elements in online commerce. They continue that online trust is built through four assumptions: first, a belief that the vendor has nothing to gain by cheating; second, a belief that there are safety mechanisms built into the Web site; third, by having a typical interface; and forth, the system is easy to use.

On the other hand, Chaffey et al. (2009) point out main security risks related to e-commerce transactions: Customer details are accessed on user's computer; transaction or credit card details are stolen in transit; customer's credit card details are stolen from e-vendor's server; customer's details are accessed by company staff; and e-vendors or customers are not what they claim to be. Reichheld and Schefter (2000) emphasise the importance to retain existing customers rather than attracting customers. They highlight the importance especially in e-business because the Internet makes it easy for customers to find new service providers.

2.1 **Functionalities in online shopping**

User experience and usability become more important when web-based vendors are competing with each other for customers. It is no more enough to make a customer to open web-pages. Instead, it is important to make sure that the customer likes the e-shopping event and will return in the future. Therefore Jawosky and Rayport (2000) propose a list of seven elements (7C) that assist designers who build commercial and interesting websites. The 7C include Context, Content, Community, Customisation, Communication, Connection, and Commerce. The 7C need to be taken into account when online environments are planned and designed to ensure sufficient functionalities on the websites.

User interface displays the website built by the e-vendor who aims to express the brand and personal image of the company to the customers (Chaffey et al. 2009). On the other hand, also customers are seen as special individuals by trying to modify the website contents based on the needs, roles or pleasures of the customers. The process of personifying requires that the company is able to collect information about the customers and their purchasing behaviours; and that the information is analysed and only relevant website content is shown to the customers. (Chiu 2001.)

From the customer’s perspective, the characteristics due to personifying can fit in with his or her motivation to use the system, which leads to more efficient and more enjoyable use experience. Moreover, the personifying characteristics can promote the feelings that the customer can manage the
use of the system and thus they can lower the hurdle to adopt technology and further, give the
customer a feeling of ‘my own technology’. Oulasvirta and Blom (2008) continue by suggesting that
the functionalities may improve use experiences if the functionalities help the customers to achieve
their goals even if the outputs were not fully satisfying.

McKnight et al. (2000) assume that the fact that many web-based businesses, and even the electronic
medium itself, are not familiar to many consumers, and that it makes them particularly hesitant to
reveal personal information or to trust in the ability of the vendors to deliver on their commitments.
Karvonen and Parkkinen (2001) recommend that realistic photos are used instead of drawn pictures on
websites. They believe that high class and well-chosen pictures create trust in customers and it further
creates trust on other websites. Basso et al. (2001) add that e-vendors not only use eye-catchers to
raise customers’ attention but also to express their abilities and professional skills.

According to Flavian et al. (2006), two basic objectives should be achieved with the company
strategies - a higher level of usability and a higher level of customer satisfaction. To meet the
objectives, Flavian et al. note that a detailed analysis of the needs of website users should be done and
that the customer should be given an adequate system that would ease to get all needed knowledge. In
addition, a closer customer attention would increase the level of individual satisfaction. Flavian et al.
conclude that the designs and structures of the system should be simple and easy for the users to
understand.

Sikorski (2009) studied economic factors in online services from the viewpoint of customer
satisfaction. He identified customer needs that were critical, important, medium, less important or
marginal in nature. Furthermore, Sikorski reported that customer needs were related to price,
convenience, information demand, security, time and speed, and workload.

One of the most important features in online shops compared to legacy shops is the easiness to find
evaluations given by other customers. Lee et al. (2008) studied evaluations that were available in the
Internet and they focused on negative evaluations. Lee et al. reported about four clear findings in their
study: First, the customers favour a product the less the more the product receives negative comments.
Second, high class negative evaluations influence more the customers than low class negative
comments. Third, the quality of feedback is related to commitment to products. Fourth, there is a
relationship between negative feedback, quality of feedback and commitment to products. Lee et al.
(2008) continue that the share of negative feedback can act as a central hint for customers with high
commitment.

Besides enabling access into evaluations given by other customers, interactive information
management tools allow customers to compare available products. Gupta et al. (2009) describe how
customers can assess either characteristics or features of the products or build tables that contain
several products and their product information to simplify the comparisons. Gupta et al. highlight that
it is not enough only to list attributes and features of the products but also inform the customers about
the benefits and functionalities of the characteristics and features.

As in real life, shopping trolleys are used also in online shops and they are meant to collect the
products before the payment action. Even if the shopping trolleys are meant to ease the purchasing
process, customers often use them to do ‘window-shopping’ and comparing. (Close & Kukar-Kinney
2010.) Virtual shopping trolleys often show all costs related to the final prices, and therefore 44 % of
the customers abandon the products due to the handling and delivery costs. Therefore Wonham (2010)
recommends that handling and delivery costs should be included into the prices because customers
perceive them influential on their decisions to purchase.

Chaffey et al. (2009) describe how online shopping and offline shopping support each other when
implementing the purchase actions – both processes include evaluation, decision making, defining
decision, paying and receiving the product.

Lee and Benbasat (2003) contemplated usability of m-commerce with the help of the 7C introduced
for e-commerce (Jawosky & Rayport 2000); and they propose that the design elements of the 7C are
reasonable also for m-commerce.
2.2 Success factors in online shopping

In their study about e-satisfaction Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) found that ease of use, well designed sites and economic safety were the most important factors that influence e-satisfaction. Especially ease of use and site design were perceived important while economic safety was realised in the customers thought they could trust on web-safety of the e-vendor. Both usability and user interface are among the main success factors in online shopping as described by Frick (2010).

Confidence in the Internet requires both a trustor and a trustee: in web-based business trustor is usually a customer and the web site and its owner represent trustees’ side (Marcella 1999). Lack of confidence is one of the most significant obstacles for success on online business. E-vendors must build long and short term relationships with their customers with strengthening their beliefs that influence their attitudes and willingness to spend their money on web-services (Salam et al. 2005). Ang and Lee (2000) continue that if the website is not capable to make the customers to believe that it is worth confidence there will be no decision to purchase. Kim et al. (2012) point out that both potential and existing customers appreciate more confidence than price when they are making decisions to purchase online.

As well as confidence, safety is mentioned among the most important success factors in online shopping. Personal details, guarantees to money return or replacement of broken products influence decision to purchase. (Lee 2002.) Safety is experienced for example by alternative ways to pay, personal logins, and by encrypted information transfer (Ranganathan & Ganapathy 2002).

Claessens et al. (2002) define general requirements for safety that are applied also in electronic banking systems: Confidentiality ensures that only authorized entities have access to the content; Entity authentication means that users should be sure that they are communicating with the real bank; Data authentication verifies data origin authentication and data integrity; and Non-repudiation prevents an entity from denying previous commitments or actions.

Furthermore, usability belongs to the success factors in online shopping. Nielsen (2003) crystallises usability with five essential points: Learnability is about easiness to accomplish basic tasks the first time they are encountered; Efficiency is about the speed users can perform tasks after they have learned the design; Memorability is about easiness to re-establish proficiency after learnt it but a period of not using it; Errors is about number of errors and their enormity and recovering from them; Satisfaction is about pleasantness to use the design.

2.3 Web-based banking

Banking delivery channels have seen a fundamental change towards online services during last decades (Pikkarainen et al. 2004). Pikkarainen et al. studied consumer acceptance of online banking and their study suggests that information about online banking services and its benefits is a critical factor influencing the acceptance of online banking. Therefore the service providers should pay more attention to informative content of their website. Online banking was explored based on the portals and their quality in a study of Bauer et al. (2004) who listed three service categories (core services, additional services, and problem-solving services) as the main dimensions in the portals. They point out that the three dimensions form the major determinants that define the quality of online banking portals as perceived by the customers. They define that core services consist of security & trust and basic services quality; additional services consist of cross-buying services quality and added values; problem-solving services consist of transaction support and responsiveness.

In their study on mobile banking Kim et al. (2009) focused on trust and usage intentions. They noticed that people have relatively low degree of trust in mobile banking that was similar to earlier studies - however, the authors expect increasing popularity of advanced mobile banking. While Chong et al. (2010) delivered their survey to all bank customers regardless their status as users or non-users of online banking, El Badrawy et al. (2012) focus especially on users of mobile banking. Chong et al. (2010) report that out of 156 customers 103 were eligible for their study about online banking adoption in Vietnam; and 18 of them had at least masters’ degree of education. Unfortunately, their study did not reveal the number of users. El Badrawy et al. (2012) report that 34 respondents out of
229 intended to adopt mobile banking but only after some time. According to their study in Egypt, most of web-based banking is used by business owners of high-post employees.

The guidelines defined by the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council delineates that the level of authentication used by the financial institution should be appropriate to the risks associated with the products and services it offers. Furthermore, financial institutions engaging in any form of Internet banking should have effective and reliable methods to authenticate customers; and generally effective authentication methodologies involve three basic means: something the user knows, something the user has, and something the user is. In other words, for example a password, an ATM card, and a biometric characteristic, respectively. (FFIEC 2011.)

2.4 Framework for the study

Figure 1 represents the framework of the study. The framework consists of the main concepts that earlier knowledge revealed to influence use of online shops instead of traditional basement shops. In addition, also obstacles that were reported to hinder or decrease willingness to use net-based shopping places were included. It was notable that net-based financial business does not only compete with other financial business but also with their face-to-face offices and basement sites.

![Figure 1. Framework based on success factors and obstacles.](image)

The emphasis in the framework was in the interaction between the customers and the online shop. Especially the customers’ view was to be studied and the experiences the customers had based on the contents the online shop offered to them. Earlier knowledge shows that personified user interface, perceived safety in shopping, trustful webpages, informative demonstrations, peer evaluations, time saving, and time and place independence are strong supporters for online shopping. On the other hand, negative peer evaluations, too extensive product information or mistrust are seen as hindrances for online shopping (see Frick 2010, Karvonen & Parkkinen 2001, Kim et al. 2009, Lee et al. 2008, Nielsen 2012, Salam et al. 2005).

3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The empirical study material was gathered in early spring in 2012 with seven interviews that were semi-structured in nature and the total length of the interviews was 3 hours 48 minutes. Besides demographic questions, the questionnaire included questions about earlier online business and online banking tasks managed by the informants. In addition, the customers were asked if and how they would like to purchase financing services online. At the time of the study, all of the seven informants were regular customers of a financial institution. All of the interviewees had high school education or higher and the youngest was 26 years and the oldest was 48 years old. All of them lived in urban areas and they used the Internet regularly. In addition, all of them had experience in online shopping.

The empirical material was analysed with an inductive content analysis. The interviews were transcribed and the texts were read several times to identify themes and topics related to earlier knowledge. The interviews were coded to ease later analysis. The analysis was based on a framework
built on the earlier knowledge presented in this paper. The framework consisted of actors ‘online shop’ and ‘customer’; and success factors like ‘user interface’, ‘personalisation’, ‘safety’, ‘trustful’, ‘good demonstrations’, ‘peer evaluations and recommendations’, ‘time saving’, ‘time and place independence’, ‘personality’. In addition, the framework included obstacles like ‘mistrust on oneself’, ‘mistrust on online shopping’, ‘obscure or excessive information’, ‘negative peer evaluation’, ‘favour of desk affair’. The coded concepts were categorised either positive or negative factors.

In the analysis, single words were not emphasised but the relevance and meaning of the words were noted whenever the words were similar to the concepts listed in the framework. In case the framework did not include relevant concepts, new concepts were built.

4 FINDINGS

The interviews revealed that a significant advantage perceived in online shopping was ‘time and place independence’. The informants had experienced problems with opening hours and their consolidation with working hours. In addition, they felt that financing products required more time to get familiarised and therefore they were rather contemplated at home. Also in general some informants felt that it was more pleasant to familiarise the products at home than at the office:

Yes it is nice to do the shopping at home whenever one likes, no need to go to the bank or have it open. I usually do things late.

On financing business time and place independence may be functional also on the other direction because the customers can be contacted at almost any time and anywhere as was described by one informant:

Sometimes the portfolio manager calls and gives hints and sells services and the offers can come into email. But it can be difficult if the call comes when you are at groceries and then you cannot hear the hints and they could be even significant.

Web-based shopping was seen as only one option among several channels that are available. One interviewee told that a selling agent had recently visited him and he had bought insurances. The interviewee commented:

Sure it had been easier to do it via phone or web. I don’t know if it is possible at the company. It would be easier by phone or by net.

Time saving was perceived as a benefit because one needs not queue when shopping online. One interviewee commented: One must always queue too much at offices.

One informant also told that in general he can find the products more easily and quicker online than at the physical shops:

The shops are so mixed up and full of products that I often can’t dig those racks. From the net you can find easier what you need.

An explicit and easy-to-use website gives a positive picture about the firm and also motivates the user to continue her shopping, described by one interviewee:

If it looks like information is awfully mixed and dispersed one does not want to go and see but moves on to other websites. But if it looks like logical and that information seems to be found reasonably and it is clear and understandable also for such who doesn’t know anything it is nice to go and browse the website.

Usability was described also by the speed of the website. Slow loadings can interrupt the shopping process: I cannot stand those webpages where one must wait and where nothing is found.

Outlook and general image created trust and based on that several interviewees made their conceptions over the online shop up: If the website looks cheap out one gets a feeling that what is the company about ...
Security was mentioned in the interviews in related to several other categories. Some of the interviewees were worried due to recently reported security breach and they hesitated to give their credit card details into online systems:

> Of course these information security problems are one challenge. Every now and then one hears about cases where information has been stolen.

Security was seen as an issue related to information systems by one informant who noted: ...

> ... when you press ENTER is it possible that you lose a million into the space of bits?

Trustfulness was also seen in several answers. If other people trusted on the online shop or if the company had a trusted brand or if the website appeared trustful, it increased trustfulness. Furthermore, if the company was not earlier known, the outlook of the website was seen important.

The interviewees emphasised good demonstrations. They described that their interests are waken by good demonstrations and that they are convinced that the product fits them: I think product information are nowadays good and they are also awfully important.

Interestingly, in financing shopping online shopping was perceived mainly as a channel to acquire information instead of seeing it as a shopping channel. This conception was visible on comments of all interviewees as was stated by one:

> Somehow I think that when you are online you need to do the decision totally by your own. If you do it with an official, the official might give you new viewpoints that don’t come automatically online. The officials have such experience that they can bring out new viewpoints that one might otherwise overlook.

Experiences reported by other customers were trusted and they usually had more value than the company information and communication. Own recommendations were forwarded by email and online and recommendations were asked and sought online, too. However, not all recommendations received from other customers were perceived trustful. Financing services were often seen difficult to understand and therefore trust on peer recommendation was not axiomatic. Two informants highlighted the role of trust:

> I trust more the expert from the bank than for example a guy who has had luck with an investment ... On the other hand, one may write whatever into the discussion board ...

Some interviewees were satisfied with personifying that enabled the system to offer them new services. It hastened the purchase process and personal details were not asked every time. In addition, personifying enabled the system to choose products that suit the customer better than other products:

> ... and it could propose me which package would fit with me.

Personality was seen important and it was valued by several interviewees:

> Because if I’m going to compare the services I have a few other banks where to go and if a bank can separate itself from others it is a nice image about the bank.

Comparing seemed to be a natural share in purchase process. The aim of comparing was to find a most suitable option from all available products as one interview noted: Totally normal competition situation. Another confessed: I invited several banks to tender when I was looking for the best option.

The interviewees had compared both products and companies and they wanted it be easy:

> If you go and buy insurance you want to compare them with others. However, a good website might offer easy comparison but its product was not bought on the same website.

It was important to find out the final costs of the purchase already in the early phases of the purchase process. Some companies inserted additional costs (including postal and management costs) on top of the price and it was perceived negative by the informants:

> ... and what influences the price of the insurance. You could easily count the annual costs if you know the extra payments ...

> First you see the price of the product and then the price is loaded with all kind of different additional costs.
In certain cases the interviewees preferred desk services to online services. Some of the interviewees thought that they had to visit the office when they were looking for financing services. Especially in cases when great sums of money were involved or when the money was tied for a long period, offices were visited more often. In addition, desk affairs were perceived more convenient because the bank had all necessary information about its customer:

But what is irritating is that you need to dig out all papers and it is easier to go to the bank because they can see online my files.

According to the interviews, customer service is applied by phone, online or at desk but communication face-to-face was seen as a part of the purchasing process. The interviewees told that the officers were able to influence the customers and build positive image about the company. On the other hand, not all customers like that banking officials influence their conception of the decision: If the official is nice or not it does not influence the decision if you are online. Face-to-face service received also negative comments: The officer in the bank was not accommodating, it was truly unprofessional and we changed the bank.

Financing services could highlight perceived mistrust on oneself, decision making and competence:

It is truly difficult to think if nobody is telling. If one has no own capabilities and knowledge.

If you are online you do the decisions totally on your own.

Mistrust was seen also when favouring desk service:

If you start reading the coverage and conditions you should read a book. Then you should assimilate and understand it quickly.

... I wouldn’t like to do anything at random if I am not definitely sure about the issue.

Mistrust on online shopping was seen also when evaluating the nationality of the e-vendor. A foreign vendor was not felt safe. In addition, inappropriate information gave impression that the e-vendor tried to sell products with highest profit instead of products that would suit the customers.

As a summary one could list that the interviewees highlighted customer service as an important factor that favoured face-to-face service and thus impeded online shopping (see Fig. 2). On the other hand, the interviewees were satisfied with comparing products online that acted as a supportive factor for online shopping.

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Figure 2. Pros and cons of net-enabled financial business perceived by customers.

Figure 2 lists the elements that the interviews revealed in the study. In addition to the earlier knowledge (see Fig. 1), the informants pointed out that web-based shopping had made it possible to compare products (framed by red in Fig. 2) offered by different service providers. Due to their experience in online shopping, they were able to compare also financial products. Interestingly, the informants revealed ‘customer service’ (framed by red in Fig. 2) as an obstacle to using web-based shopping.
5 DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to find out success factors and obstacles in online shopping in the context of financial products. The research problem was relevant as despite the widespread acceptance of web-based shopping, web-based financial shopping has not become common so far. The empirical research material was acquired by semi-structured interviews that were carried out in early spring of 2012. All of the seven informants were regular customers of a financial institution and all of them had experience in online shopping. All of them represented young working age as they were 26-48 years old. In addition, all of them had high school education or higher.

The research problem was: Which factors promote or interrupt a web-based purchasing action when buying financial products?

Earlier knowledge includes studies about online shopping but research concentrating on financial products has been scarce so far. Online banking has been reported earlier (see Chong et al. 2010, El Badrawy et al. 2012) and it seems that the informants belong rather into the younger working class that is also highly educated. The current study focused on financial products that are offered by specialised enterprises such as banks or other financial institutions. In this sense, it added to the earlier knowledge that has been published based on studies on web-based banking (see Ch. 2.3).

The literature review emphasised several promoting factors such as trust on e-vendor, safety to do web-based shopping, usability of the online shop and personality aspects (Chiu 2001, Lee 2002, Lee et al. 2008, Chaffney et al. 2009, Meier & Stormer 2009). The empirical study highlighted user interface and usability in the purchasing process. An explicit and easy user interface was interpreted as a success factor because the customers had no difficulties to learn it. Likewise, Flavian et al. (2006) point out that information systems with their user interfaces should be designed and structured in such a way that users have no difficulties to understand the procedures. Financing services necessitate important decisions that are tied with time and funding and even small mistrust or wild cards can break the purchasing process.

Based on earlier knowledge, a framework was built (see Fig. 1). The empirical material could be fitted in several categories (see Fig. 2) and some of them could have been interpreted to be either promoting factors or impeding factors. For example; a well implemented user interface might promote shopping actions while a worse user interface raises mistrust on the e-vendor. Office services and customer services were difficult to separate in the empirical material because they were tied with each other. Office services and customer services were seen as obstacles (see Fig. 2).

Both time saving and time and place independence were highlighted in the interviews. It seemed that the fact that the informants were all from the urban areas and living rather near the offices did not favour face-to-face business.

Ranganathan and Ganapathy (2002) highlighted safety when buying online. The interviewees questioned safety due to security breach but safety was not emphasised as it was in earlier studies (Lee 2002, Ranganathan & Ganapathy 2002). Instead, user interface and its outlook were mentioned several times in the interviews. The outlook was tied with mistrust on the e-vendor and a shifty outlook could break the purchase process immediately. This is in line with Frick (2010) who states that a bad-looking website pushes customers away in a few seconds. The role of user interface was emphasised also by Flavian et al. (2006) who confirm that perceived usability derived from well-designed user interface has a strong relationship on the degree of consumer trust and satisfaction.

Moreover, the role of user interface was hidden in several comments that referred to concepts such as convenience, price, information demand, time and speed (see also Sikorski 2009). A well designed user interface allowed quick comparison and especially it revealed the total price of the product already early in the purchasing process. Also, all desired information was visible and understandable on the screen instead of being hidden in an extensive amount of text.

The physical bank was perceived as a representative of experience and especially when selling immaterial services experience was emphasised. Other customers were asked about personnel and services while the suitability of the products for them was not asked. In the interviews it was not
possible to compare the peer evaluation and their managements (see Lee et al. 2008) but the interviewees revealed that the reliability of the financing services was explored elsewhere instead of in online financing business. Therefore by managing negative peer evaluations one could improve the progress of the purchasing process. However, it was not capable to amend those issues that had led to negative evaluations of products, services or companies. The companies benefit from peer evaluations only if they can improve their service quality and get their customers satisfied.

Even if the empirical research offered descriptive and realistic comments one could say that the results were not generalizable because the interviewees represented urban people and all of them had also high school education or higher. Thus older age groups and lower educated informants were lacking. On the other hand, the interviewees revealed how they thought about financing services and revealed both positive and negative experiences.

6 CONCLUSION

The current study analysed success factors and impeding obstacles that influenced online purchases to be finished in the context of investment activities. The approach was that of the users. In so doing, seven customers were interviewed and after that, the empirical material was analysed with content analysis. The findings revealed that several factors connected with online shopping reported in earlier studies are valid also when focusing on financing business. However, not all factors were introduced in earlier research. The interviews highlighted customer service and possibility to compare products as important factors that influence online financing business. The reason might be that financing business is always dealing with money – either smaller or larger amount of it – and because the products and services are versatile in nature with several conditions and prerequisites they necessitate relatively more information before decision making.

Contrary to earlier studies, the interviewees perceived lack of knowledge or understanding when more expensive products were in sight. The informants preferred face-to-face service to web-based service. In the current study the financing products were special and required discreet processing and management differing from general banking affairs when paying bills or opening accounts. In addition, in important business they preferred face-to-face service because they did not trust on peer evaluations given online.

The findings, however, provided important knowledge to website designers and professionals who build financing products and services. Figure 2 sums the distinguished success factors and obstacles regarding online shopping especially in financial business. If potential customers value customer service more than for example trust or safety issues it is reasonable to pay attention on training employees to serve customers and sell the special products. On the other hand, online service given by financing professionals should be highlighted if the financial institution was planning to offer more financing business to be transferred online.

The current study had some limitations that prohibit wider generalisation for the findings. The group of interviewees was limited to seven persons who were educated and urban people. Also their age referred to active working people instead of being socially excluded or representing international cultures. On the other hand, the object of the purchase revealed challenges to collect interviewees. Therefore it might be interesting to widen the study focus on larger environments, greater amounts of interviewees with versatile age groups, social groups and professionals.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank those people who gave their time in-between their daily work to tell about their conceptions based on their private experiences on web-based financing business.
References


