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THE IMPACT OF E-COMMERCE USABILITY  
ON INTERNATIONAL CONSUMERS' PUR-  
CHASE DECISIONS

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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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Opinnäytetyön nimi	Verkkokaupan käytettävyyden vaikutukset kansainvälisten kuluttajien ostopäätöksiin
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Tämä opinnäytetyö tutki, miten verkkokaupan eri käytettävyystekijät vaikuttavat kansainvälisten kuluttajien ostopäätöksiin. Tavoitteena oli tunnistaa, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat käyttäjätyytyväisyyteen eniten, ja mitkä puolestaan saattaisivat johtaa ostoskorin hylkäämiseen. Lisäksi pyrittiin koostamaan konkreettisia suosituksia yrityksille, joiden avulla ne voisivat kehittää verkkokauppojaan käyttäjäystävällisemmäksi myös kansainvälisille kuluttajille.

Opinnäytetyön teoreettinen viitekehys rakentui kolmen pääteeman: käytettävyyden, käyttäjäkokemuksen ja lokalisoinnin ympärille. Empiirinen tutkimus toteutettiin kvantitatiivisena verkkokyselyinä, jota jaettiin 18–35-vuotiaille eri maiden kansalaisille.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että kansainvälisten kuluttajien positiivista käyttäjäkokemusta edistävät eniten tuttuuden maksutapojen saatavuus, sekä sivuston koettu luotettavuus ja turvallisuus yhdessä ammattimaisen ulkoasun kanssa. Tuloksista ilmeni, että kuluttajat luottavat yleisesti kotimaisiin verkkokauppoihin enemmän kuin ulkomaisiin. Tarjoamalla hyvitys- ja palautuskäytäntöjä sekä kohdemarkkinoiden suosimia maksu- ja toimitusvaihtoehtoja, yritykset voivat parantaa kansainvälisten kuluttajien luottamusta verkkokauppaansa kohtaan.

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examined how different usability factors in online stores affect the purchasing decisions of international consumers. The goal was to identify which factors most contribute to user experience and which factors in turn could lead to purchase abandonment. In addition, the aim was to put together concrete recommendations for companies to develop their online stores more user friendly for international consumers as well.

The theoretical framework of the thesis was built around three main themes: usability, user experience and localization. The empirical study was conducted as a quantitative online questionnaire, distributed to 18–35-year-old citizens of different countries.

The results of the study showed that international consumers' positive user experience is most promoted by the availability of familiar payment methods, as well as the website's perceived reliability and security together with a professional appearance. The results revealed that consumers generally trust domestic online stores more than foreign ones. By offering refund and return policies, as well as payment and delivery options favored by the target market, businesses can improve international consumers' trust in their online stores.

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Keywords                      usability, online store, user experience

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Several factors have contributed to the recent years' significant growth of online shopping, including an unlimited range of options, the ability to compare prices and read customer reviews, and advancements in technology (Finne 2022, 6). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2019, drove consumers from physical stores to digital platforms for their shopping needs, significantly increasing the demand of online stores. Because of the sudden spike in demand, online retailer's stocks were unable to meet the increased demand. (Finne 2022, 32). The pandemic altered the buying behavior of consumers and attracted new customers to online stores, due to factors such as increased caution among people and limited opening hours of brick and mortar. These among many other factors have increased the popularity of online shopping, making it a more appealing alternative to traditional forms of shopping.

### 1.1 Subject and Scope of the Study

This thesis examines the impact of e-commerce usability on the purchasing decisions of international consumers. The term e-commerce will be used solely when referring to online stores operating on the World Wide Web. Additionally, an international consumer refers to a person who has made, intends to make, or has intended to make online purchases from a foreign website. To ensure the survey is manageable, the target group is limited to 18 to 35-year-olds, who are among the most active online buyers (Statistics Finland 2021). The standard assumption used in this study is that the consumer would be willing to buy a particular product or service, and the usability of the online store determines whether or not the purchase transaction will be completed. Using this approach is a conscious decision to exclude other factors influencing the buying interest, such as price and quality, from the survey. The framework aims to concentrate specifically on the effects of different usability factors, both positive and negative.

As a researcher, I am interested in the consumer's perspective on how a company could improve the functionality of its online store by considering different aspects of usability, and on the other hand, what factors might make it less functional or less likely to attract an international consumer to make the final purchase. My interest in the subject was sparked by my own experiences during my exchange studies. I faced situations where I had willingness to buy, but the unclear website, limited language options, and unanswered questions made the process too difficult, resulting in an abandoned purchase.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

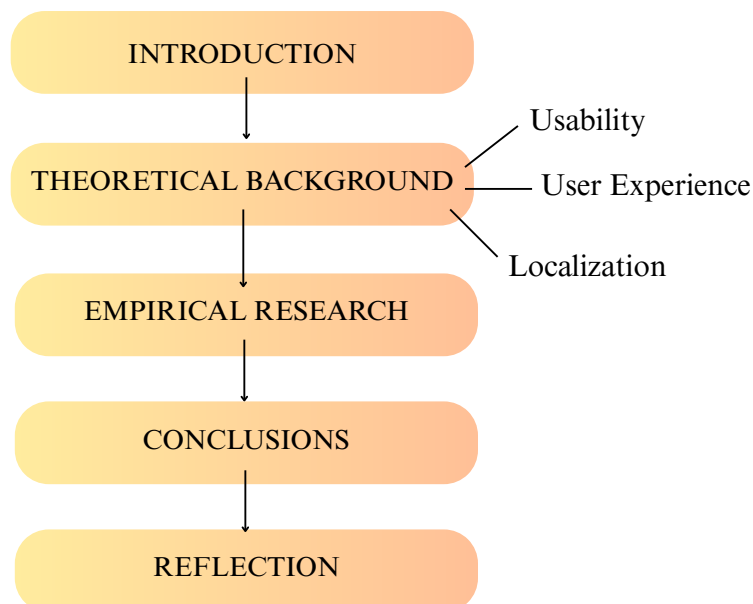
The primary research problem of the study is to identify how different factors of e-commerce usability influence the purchase decisions of international consumers. The goal is to go deeper into the topic by conducting a theoretical background and an empirical survey to determine which usability factors are crucial and directly influence the completion or abandonment of an international consumer's purchase transaction. In conclusion, the goal of the study is to answer the following research questions:

1. Which e-commerce usability factors have the biggest impact on the user experience of international consumers?
2. What factors of usability lead customers to abandon the ordering process even after the purchase decision has been made?
3. How could companies improve the usability of their online stores for international customers?

The work-life context of the study is based on the benefits it offers to companies that are operating in cross-border e-commerce or are planning to internationalize their e-commerce. Chapter 6, Conclusions, will provide practical recommendations for businesses to improve the usability of an online store based on the study's findings. This will allow companies to respond more effectively to the expectations and needs of international customers.

### 1.3 Structure of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the structure of this thesis. This thesis consists of introduction, theoretical background, empirical research, conclusions and reflection. The first chapter, Introduction, introduces the reader to the research topic and objectives, defines the research problem, and presents the research questions. The theoretical section of the study is divided by themes into three main chapters (2–4), Usability in Online Stores, User Experience and Localization. It defines the central terms used in the study. Additionally, based on a literature review, it presents the main theories and results of previous research in the field. Chapter 5, The Empirical Research, presents the online questionnaire that will be conducted by using a quantitative research method. Furthermore, this chapter includes presenting the questionnaire form along with the results. In the sixth chapter, Conclusions, the results are further analyzed and compared to the theory. The final chapter of this thesis, Reflection, will focus on the researchers' reflections on the study and how it played out.



**Figure 1.** Structure of the thesis.

## **2 USABILITY IN ONLINE STORES**

The first chapter of the theoretical part introduces the reader to the context of the study and begins by defining the major terms used in the study. This is followed by an overview of Jakob Nielsen's five qualitative measures of usability. Furthermore, this chapter presents the usability factors selected for this study based on their significance to e-commerce usability. The chapter ends with explaining the reasons behind the research topic's importance for the success of an online business. This chapter approaches usability objectively, focusing on the technical and functional elements of usability.

### **2.1 Definition of Usability**

Usability can be conceptualized in many ways. It can be defined as a product or service's capacity to enable the user to achieve their goal as easily, effortlessly and successfully as possible. For effective usability, it is necessary to make sure that the product or service is understandable, meets user expectations and works as intended. (The Helsinki Term Bank for the Arts and Sciences 2023). For an online store, this means providing the customer with an effortless and seamless buying experience. This includes clear navigation, informative content, and a simple ordering process to ensure a positive user experience.

The usability of an online store depends primarily on how the user interface is designed. The user interface is the point at which the user interacts with a system, device, or program and uses commands to control how it operates. For instance, websites and mobile applications have interfaces that can be controlled by the user with touch commands. In this study, the term user interface refers to the interactive elements of e-commerce platforms. Several different elements allow communication between the user and the system. Each element in an interface, such as a link, button, or icon, is designed to perform its own function and serve

its own purpose. There is much more to user interface design than simply aesthetic appearance, and a more effective approach is to apply recognized design principles based on science, psychology, and physiology. (Barnard n.d.).

## 2.2 Jakob Nielsen's Five Characteristics of Usability

According to an article written by Jakob Nielsen (2012), usability is first and foremost a measure of quality, which evaluates how easy a system is to use. Figure 2 illustrates Nielsen's definition of usability formed by the five following quality characteristics:



**Figure 2.** Own illustration of Quality Attributes. (Nielsen 2012).

- **Learnability** refers to how quickly and easily new users can become familiar with the main features of the interface and perform simple tasks.

- **Efficiency** is measured by the amount of time it takes the user to complete tasks after becoming familiar with the functions and structure of the interface.
- **Memorability** is measured by how quickly the user can recall how to use the system after a break. Following a logical structure improves the memorability of the interface, which is particularly important for systems visited less frequently.
- **Errors** evaluates the number of errors made by the user, their severity, and the time spent to recover from them.
- **Satisfaction** indicates how satisfied users are with their user experience. Although subjective for users, this is a significant feature, because it directly affects whether they want to revisit the site or recommend it to others. (Nielsen 2012).

The quality criteria mentioned above are an essential part of evaluating the user experience and developing the user interface.

### 2.3 Usability Elements

Information architecture is an element of usability that aims to improve access to information and to present information in an understandable language. The information and visual content should be logically structured along with the website's layout, allowing the user to easily and intuitively locate the information they are looking for. Additionally, using clear and user-friendly terminology helps users in comprehending the meaning of information, while the site's navigation menus, categories, icons and search functions help them access information more easily. (Rosenfeld, Morville & Arango 2015, chapters 1–2).

Navigation is a technical feature that allows the user to move between different parts of a website and is intended to guide the user to the information or product they are searching for. This goal can be achieved by browsing the site or using the search tool. (Krug 2005, chapter 6). The navigation of a website is considered to

be the most successful when the users expectations and intuition lead them to the intended location. Predictable navigation helps the user to understand their location, the content of the site, and how to navigate and easily return to the previous page. The structure of the elements, such as category menus, should remain unified and consistent across the website's pages. This allows the user to focus on the essential task instead of having to relearn how to navigate. (Nielsen & Loranger 2006, chapter 6).

When customers encounter problems, the role of customer service is highlighted in terms of usability. In the era of digitalization and the development of artificial intelligence (AI), companies are interested in using it in their customer service. Automation offers benefits regarding cost savings and an improved, more competent client experience. However, while AI customer support might provide answers more quickly, some cases might require emotional intelligence that AI does not have. (Enreach 2025).

#### **2.4 The Impact of Usability on an Online Store's Performance**

It takes time and effort for a consumer in a brick-and-mortar store to move to a competitor's store, which may be located far away. In contrast, for an online customer, it is fast and easy to navigate to a competitor's website, which is only a few clicks away. (Lahtinen 2013, 113). If users find a website impractical, they will quickly abandon it. The homepage should provide the visitors with a clear first impression of the services the company offers and what can be done on the website. If navigating the site is difficult, the pages load slowly, and relevant information is hard to find, users are likely to leave and seek an alternative shopping path elsewhere. It is unlikely that people would spend extra time learning how to use a website. (Nielsen 2012).

The e-commerce sector has countless competitors, but it also opens up the potential for companies to enter larger markets. Optimizing the usability of the ordering

process is essential for the completion of the purchase, as the customer has already made the purchase decision by the time it starts. The complexity of the process and challenges experienced during it can lead to interrupted purchases, which have a negative impact on the company's profit. To minimize the risk of the customer's purchase being interrupted, the ordering process must proceed consistently and predictably. It should only include the necessary steps and clearly communicate to the customer where they are in the process and the next steps to be taken. (Lahtinen 2013, 139).

### **3 USER EXPERIENCE**

The second main chapter of the theoretical part examines usability and its attributes subjectively, from the user's perspective. The chapter begins by defining the term user experience and continues to examining the design of a user interface with a user-centered approach. Furthermore, the chapter discusses two well-known usability theories by Nielsen and Hick, which directly influence the user experience and the degree of cognitive load that users experience. Finally, consumers' trust towards online stores is examined, as it is an essential part of user experience and can affect the decision to proceed or abandon the purchase process.

#### **3.1 Definition of User Experience (UX)**

User experience (UX) is different for everyone, as it revolves around each user's individual experiences, circumstances and interpretations. User experience can be defined as the feelings and reactions of a user, arising from the use or expected use of a product, service, or system. It is influenced by all of the psychological and emotional responses caused by interacting with the system. (de Voil 2020, chapter 2). Furthermore, UX can differ with the same system as it is always dependent on the situation and circumstances (The Helsinki Term Bank for the Arts and Sciences 2023). As described, UX is a broad concept influenced by more than just usability, and while strong usability can improve the experience, it alone cannot guarantee a positive one (Kaplan 2024).

#### **3.2 User-Centered Approach to Usability**

To achieve optimal usability, the design must start with the user itself. The key is to understand who the user is and what they hope to achieve. The user's needs and goals are the driving force behind user-centered design. (TIEKE 2015, 100).

Steve Krug, a usability and UX expert from the United States, states that the functionality of a website is primarily determined by how self-explanatory it is. Users do not have to spend extra time finding information on a self-explanatory website

because navigating is easy and logical. In contrast, distractions are elements that users do not immediately understand or require thinking before acting. Distractions can include text written in a difficult language or placing a familiar button in an unusual place. Even a first-time visitor should be able to immediately understand the purpose of the website and how to navigate it. (Krug 2005, chapter 1).

The importance of simplicity and clarity on a website is based on the fact that most users do not read or even pay attention to everything they see on the site. There is often a reason why people visit a website, and they typically look for information that is relevant or interesting to them. Therefore, users tend to browse pages quickly, searching for information and links that are relevant to them, while disregarding content irrelevant to them. (Krug 2005, chapter 2).

### **3.3 Law of Internet User Experience**

Jakob Nielsen's Law of Internet User Experience, often referred to as Jakob's Law of Familiarity, refers to users' expectations that all websites follow the same usability standards. The key principle of this law is that people spend a lot of time on different websites, and the experiences shape their understanding of how websites should work. As a result, users form certain expectations about the structure and functions of websites, which then guide their interaction with new websites. When a website that is new to the user follows these same established practices, the user does not have to spend time and effort learning how the website works. Instead, the user can proceed directly to their original task, such as browsing products. (Nielsen 2017).

In other words, a company that operates a website can benefit from following best practices, as it will make the user interface more intuitive, user-friendly and easy to use. The more familiar a website is to the user, the less cognitive load it imposes. Jakob's law is closely related to the theory of website localization presented in chapter 4, which aims to provide a more familiar and confident user experience for international consumers. If a website is not localized to satisfy the linguistic

and cultural expectations of users in the target market, they may find its practices and functions strange and unfamiliar. As a result, the learning of new practices can increase the user's cognitive load, making the process of purchasing too challenging.

### **3.4 Hick's Law**

In 1952, William Edmund Hick proposed a significant theory for cognitive psychology, stating that reaction time increases logarithmically with the number of choices. According to Hick's law, the more choices a user is presented with, the longer the decision takes, as more choices increase the cognitive processing required to make a decision. This theory is strongly related to the information theory of Shannon and Weaver in 1949, according to which an increased number of alternatives increases uncertainty and requires more information to be managed. Hick confirmed with experiments that the information a person receives and its impact on human performance can be measured. Hick's Law is still considered as a fundamental principle in user interface design, especially for human-computer interaction. (Proctor & Schneider, 2018).

While interacting with online store interfaces, users encounter various situations for decision making. For instance, choices are made for product categories, products, payment methods, and navigation menus. When the user has to choose between several options, the decision-making process can become overwhelming, increasing the user's cognitive load. By applying Hick's Law, online stores can improve the user experience by simplifying and eliminating unnecessary choices. This is particularly important for international consumers, as a foreign website can in itself create uncertainty due to unfamiliar practices. An ordering process (discussed in chapter 2.4) optimized according to Hick's law would be simple and straightforward, with no irrelevant selections or unnecessary stages such as registration requirements.

### 3.5 Trust in Online Stores

Trust plays a significant role in international e-commerce, especially when consumers interact with websites that are not familiar to them. When it comes to online shopping, consumers' fears are often related to security and reliability. The main concerns include the possibility of personal data and payment information being misused or passed to third parties, the risk of financial loss, and lack of customer service in the event of problems. Research shows that in addition to high usability, consumers' are more likely to trust an online store when customer service is provided, trust marks and guarantees are displayed, and people close to them have had positive experiences with the website. (Haapala & Lehtipuu 2021, 112).

Yoon's (2002, 54–61) study indicates that customer satisfaction and trust in an online store are greatly influenced by the safety of financial transactions. Furthermore, the safety of payments has been found to correspond with the severity of risk experienced by the customer, which in turn influences the intentions to buy. Perceived trust can be enhanced by offering return and refund options and displaying guarantees of payment security. Other significant findings of the study were that consumers' trust in online businesses was positively impacted by prior online shopping experience and successful orders. In his comprehensive study, Yoon discovered a positive correlation between e-commerce trust and satisfaction with consumers' willingness to buy. In summary, it can be stated that consumers' trust towards an online store reduces their perceived risk and uncertainty, increasing the probability of purchase.

In contrast to traditional brick-and-mortar, trust plays a greater role in e-commerce, where purchases are made remotely with no direct interaction with the vendor, or the opportunity to inspect the product. (Jadil, Rana & Dwivedi 2022, 1–2; Yoon 2002, 51). It is even more crucial factor in customers' decisions to buy from companies that only do business online (Yoon 2002, 51). E-commerce trust differs

from traditional, as it centers on the internet, website, or technology used (Quintus, Mayr & Hofer 2024, 2).

Stanford University conducted an extensive study in 2002 that identified the following five factors influencing an online store's reliability: design, structure, reputation, information, and customer service. Of these five, the most highlighted was design, which gives the visitor their first impression of the website. Users are likely to abandon a website if the design fails to establish trust in its professionalism. A clear site structure, supported by the use of universally accepted practices, makes navigation more logical and builds the users trust. Users also evaluate the trustworthiness of a website based on its reputation and the information it provides. Previous experience with the company, its brick-and-mortar stores, or even knowing the name beforehand are associated with trust, and the idea that the company exists. Incomplete or unclear information may cause the user to have doubts. For this reason, it is essential to provide enough clear information about products, payment methods, company practices and customer reviews to establish trust. Information and photographs about the company and the people behind it are additionally an effective way to build trust, especially for first-time visitors. (Lahtinen 2013, 62–65).

## 4 ONLINE STORE LOCALIZATION

The third main chapter of the study's theoretical section focuses on the localization of online stores. When examining online store usability from an international perspective, localization is an essential variable in optimizing usability for international users. The chapter first defines the term localization, provides examples of its use and outlines the potential of it. It then presents five different levels of localization options and examines its role in improving accessibility for a wider international audience and ends with a summary discussing the impact of localization on the user experience of international consumers.

### 4.1 Definition of Localization

Localization of a website refers to the process of adjusting the website to the language, culture, and customs of the target country. For instance, prices should be expressed in local currency, and delivery and payment choices should be in line with national consumer preferences. (Delingua, 2021). *The Localisation Industry Standards Association* defines localization as the customization of a product or service to meet the needs of another market for it to be sold and used there. As an addition to this, Schäler's definition of localization covers all digital content to be adjusted as well, both linguistically and culturally to the requirements and norms of the target market. Such content includes video, photos, sound, visual effects, and software. The visual content and elements may change when adapted to align with the cultural norms of a different audience. Localization aims to ensure that the content is appropriate and easy to understand for the intended audience while also considering their cultural needs and preferences. (Anastasiou & Schäler 2010).

To provide a deeper understanding of localization, let's present a few real-life examples, as discussed in the article by Schäler and Anastasiou. While most of the world places the steering wheel on the left, cars sold to the United Kingdom are

required to have it on the right side of the car. Even language can have some variations of spelling, as the United States version of localization, is “localisation” in the United Kingdom. (Anastasiou & Schäler 2010).

A 2020 survey by CSA Research found that 65% of consumers would rather shop on websites that provide content in their native language. In contrast, 40 % of the respondents never buy from websites in other languages. Data was collected for the study through a questionnaire from 8709 consumers in 29 countries. (CSA Research 2020). The study’s findings emphasize the value of providing services in the consumer’s preferred language and illustrate the lost potential for international retailers who fail to localize their language options.

#### **4.2 The Five Degrees of Website Localization**

This section will go into detail about the many dimensions of localization and how it can take place at different levels. In their book, *The Culturally Customized Website*, Singh and Pereira (2005) proposed a framework that allows websites to be classified into five categories based on how successfully they adapt their content to an international or local audience to meet their distinct needs. These categories progress from standardized websites that are the same for all users to fully culturally tailored websites.

1. Standardized Web Sites
2. Semi-Localized Web Sites
3. Localized Web Sites
4. Highly Localized Web sites
5. Culturally Customized Web Sites. (Singh & Pereira 2005).

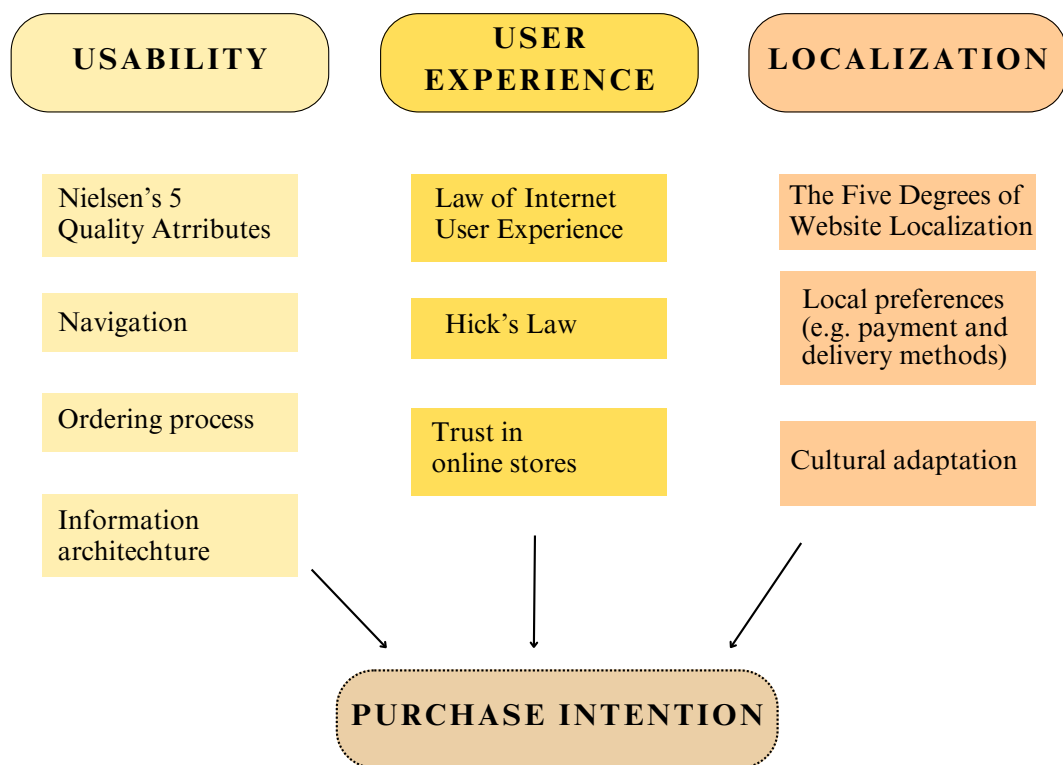
The first and most simplified category of websites in standardized websites. A standardized website serves users from every country, with identical content regardless of location or culture. These websites therefore disregard the different native languages and cultural backgrounds of their global user base. Semi-localized websites fall into the second category. They might contain a section or a site for

non-local customers, with the content otherwise being identical and in the same language for all users. An example of this is providing contact information for consumers from different countries. The third category is localized websites, which provide content and language-adapted websites for users in different countries. However, these types of websites concentrate mainly on linguistic adaptation, with less attention to cultural variations. The fourth category includes highly localized websites, which present information in a localized manner while taking into consideration the target country's language, practices, and culture. Websites that are highly localized typically offer useful and relevant information to their intended audience and have unique URLs for each country. The final and most advanced category is culturally customized websites, where the content, layout, and functionality of the website are fully adapted to the culture and values of the target market. These websites are designed considering the local perspective, symbolism, and behavior. (Singh & Pereira 2005, 10–15).

Based on localization theory, one of the fundamental reasons why international consumers abandon their purchases could be that websites are not localized enough to meet their needs. As Singh and Pereira's 5-category classification system shows, only in three of the more advanced categories websites are translated into the target country's language. Aside from the foreign language, other difficulties may include a lack of familiar payment and delivery methods, as well as unclear interface navigation from a foreigner's perspective. The goal of localizing is to provide the target audience with a user experience that is both familiar and reliable.

## 5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The theoretical framework of the thesis is demonstrated in figure 3. It summarizes the main themes and sub-themes of the study and serves as a basis for designing the survey questions. The goal is to ask questions that provide answers for the research questions, and a solution for the research problem. The questions are also used to test whether the answers support the perspectives outlined in the theoretical section and if they can validate previous research results. This chapter discusses the planning and conduct of the survey. It begins by defining relevant terms regarding research and describing the chosen research and data collection methods. Furthermore, this chapter includes a presentation of the questionnaire form and a summary of the results.



**Figure 3.** Theoretical framework of the thesis.

## 5.1 Research Method and Data Collection

When selecting a research method, the first step is to decide what kind of information the study intends to produce and what questions it wishes to answer. Research can be conducted by using either quantitative or qualitative research methods for collecting data. Quantitative methods are often based on modern social research which states that people's behavior is guided by general rules. Behavior is therefore predictable regardless of context, such as age or culture. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are associated with a postmodern view of research, which emphasizes that behavior depends on context and is not always predictable. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2022, 19).

Qualitative research methods aim to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings behind people's actions. They are more subjective and emphasize individual perspectives and interpretations, which is why deviations in the data can provide new significant insights about the phenomenon being studied. (Vilkka 2021, 56).

This study uses a quantitative research method in the form of an online questionnaire to collect measurable data that can be presented in numerical form. This approach allows the collection of data from a large and geographically dispersed sample (Vilkka 2021, 76). Quantitative method aims to identify statistical relationships and analyze cause-and-effect connections in the research data. It serves the purposes of this study, which aims to determine how highly respondents rate different usability factors and their causal relationship with the final purchase decision. The quantitative research method is ideal for studies aiming to identify general patterns and statistical averages from the data. Therefore, the deviations in the data are often excluded from the study and the focus is on measurable facts. (Vilkka 2021, 55). The goal is to obtain universal data from a large population, rather than focusing on the subjective experiences of individual respondents, therefore the quantitative method is better suited for this study.

A questionnaire is a method of gathering information in which respondents are asked a series of predefined questions to answer independently. The questions are standardized, meaning that all participants are provided with the same questions in the same format and order. (Vilkka 2007, 28). The researcher uses a form to collect information about, for example, social phenomena, people's opinions or behavior (Vehkalahti 2019, 11). The virtual methods in research refer to data collection via the Internet without the need for physical presence, as opposed to face-to-face interviews. Virtual data collection allows respondents to remain anonymous, which increases the likelihood of honest answers. (Ovaska, Aula & Majaranta 2005, 56). The anonymity and lack of interaction help avoid the potential impact of the interviewer's presence on the study results, which can sometimes occur in face-to-face interviews. (Heikkilä 2014, 18).

The empirical research will be carried out using a quantitative research method in the form of a virtual online questionnaire targeted at 18 to 35-year-old people from any country. The use of an online questionnaire allows respondents to be reached effectively from all over the world, regardless of their location. The sample is internationally diverse, as the aim of the research is to examine the experiences and preferences of international consumers regarding e-commerce usability. For the purpose of the study, it is essential to collect data from participants representing different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The use of an online questionnaire offers the benefit of collecting large amount of data in a short period of time.

## **5.2 The Questionnaire Form and Conduct of the Study**

As the respondents do not have the assistance of an interviewer, the questionnaire must be independently functioning (Vehkalahti 2019, 11). To avoid the chance of misinterpretation in an online questionnaire, the questions should be presented clearly and precisely, as it is not possible to elaborate on them afterward.

The questionnaire form (appendix) was created using Microsoft forms. It contains multiple-choice and Likert scale questions and consists of 14 questions. The survey starts with three background questions, asking the respondent's age, gender and country of origin. These questions are used to profile the respondents. By asking the country of origin, the study is not attempting to dive into the differences between different cultures, but rather to determine whether the sample is enough international. Question 4 assesses the respondents' experience by asking whether they have ever bought or considered buying from a foreign online store. It is a foundational question for the research and helps evaluate how suitable the respondents are for the survey. Questions 5-14 are the actual theory-based questions. They relate to usability, user experience, localization, willingness to buy and trust in e-commerce. Based on these themes, the questions attempt to determine respondents' preferences and expectations for the online store's usability.

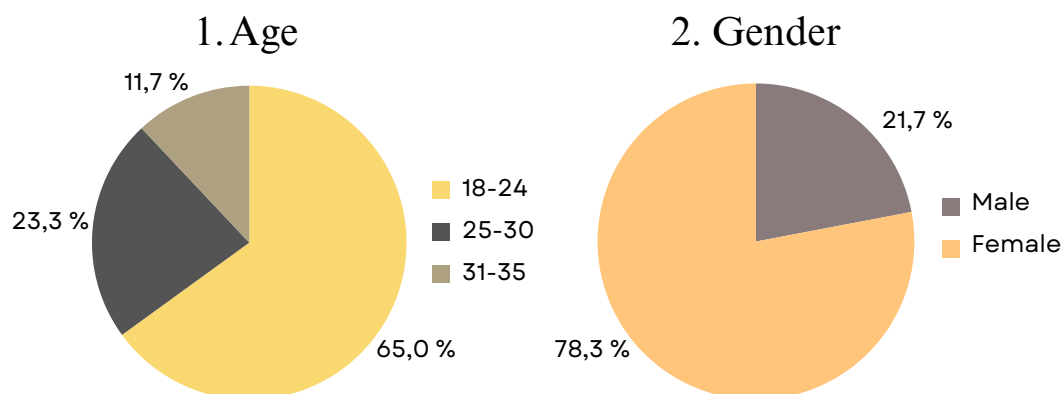
The link to the online questionnaire was shared in multiple international Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and the response time was from 30.3.2025 to 5.4.2025. This approach aimed to reach as broad a sample as possible from the target population to collect responses. All the respondents remain anonymous. The goal was to collect responses from 80 individuals, between the ages of 18 to 35, from as many different countries as possible. All questions other than question 11 were compulsory to answer.

### **5.3 Results of the Survey**

This section summarizes the results of each question in the questionnaire. The questionnaire received a total of 60 responses, which represents 75 % of the targeted 80 participants. Although the survey did not reach the desired number of participants, I am glad that it received responses from participants coming from 23 different countries.

Figure 4 shows statistics on the responses to questions 1 and 2. Majority of the respondents were young adults aged from 18 to 24, representing 65 % of the total.

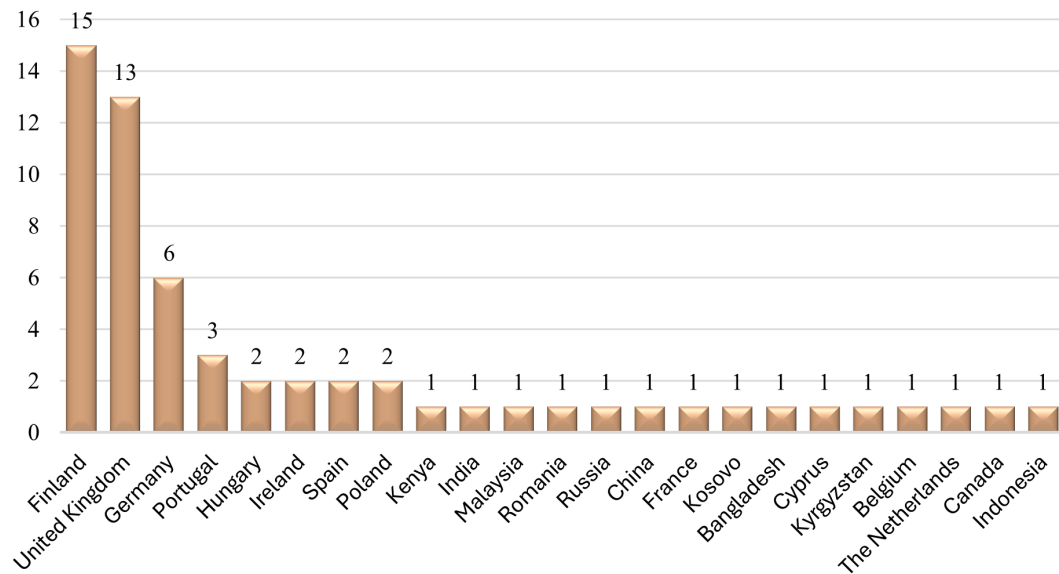
The lowest number of participants was among 31–35 year olds with 11,7 % of the total. In terms of gender distribution, 78,3 % of the respondents were female, while only 21,7 % were male. As a result, the findings are more influenced by women’s perspectives.



**Figure 4.** Age and gender. (n=60)

Question 3 was the last background question, which asked where the respondents were from. Results were received from 23 different countries in total. The chart (figure 5) shows the country distribution of responses. What stands out in this chart is the dominance of Finland and the United Kingdom in their response rates. 25 % of the respondents came from Finland, making it the most represented country of the survey. Furthermore, just over half (53,3 %) of the Finnish participants were men, indicating that the majority (61,5 %) of all male participants were Finnish. The United Kingdom had the second highest amount of respondents among all countries, at just over 20 %. As shown in the chart, there were fifteen countries represented by one respondent only, each accounting for 1,67 % of the total.

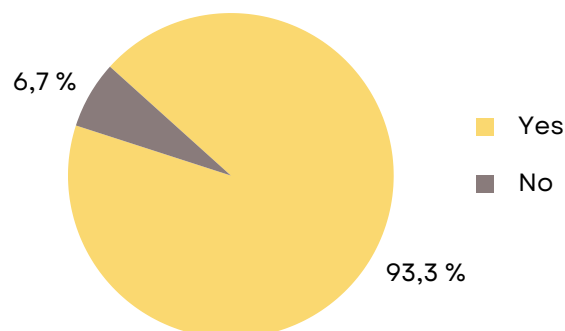
### 3. Country of origin



**Figure 5.** Country of origin. (n=60)

Question 4 was asked to find out whether the respondents have experience of buying from foreign online stores, or if they had considered doing so. The results show (figure 6) that well over 90 % answered positively. Among male respondents, all answered “yes” to this question. This was an important question for the validity of this study, and it indicates that the respondents were appropriate for the study. Out of all, only 6,7 % stated that they have no experience in this matter.

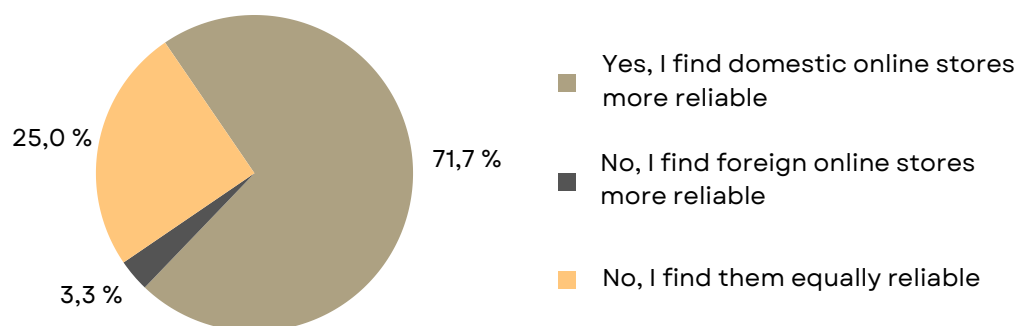
#### 4. Have you ever purchased or considered purchasing a product or service from a foreign online store?



**Figure 6.** Have you ever purchased or considered purchasing a product or service from a foreign online store? (n=60)

The fifth question asked if the respondents consider themselves more careful while shopping in a foreign online store compared to a domestic one. This question relates to the theory of trust, discussed in section 3.5. It measured whether the respondents initially trust domestic online stores more than foreign ones. As figure 7 shows, majority (71,7 %) of the respondents indicated that they find domestic online stores more reliable. This was the opinion of 74,5 % of female and 61,5 % of male respondents. The results show that only two individuals consider foreign online stores to be more reliable, accounting for 3,3 % of the total. 25 % of respondents consider both equally reliable.

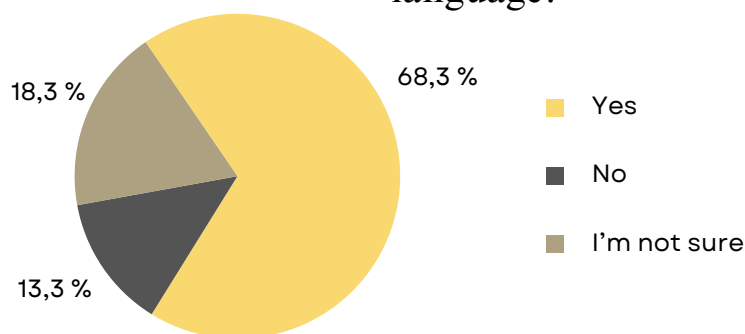
### 5. Would you consider yourself more cautious when shopping in a foreign online store compared to a domestic one?



**Figure 7.** Would you consider yourself more cautious when shopping in a foreign online store compared to a domestic one? (n=60)

Figure 8 demonstrates the distribution of answers on whether respondents would purchase from a website that is not in their native language. 41 of the 60 respondents would make the purchase, which is just under 70 %. Eight (13,3 %) of the respondents would not purchase from a website in a language other than their own. Although, it is notable that of these eight, five came from the United Kingdom where the official language is English, one of the universal languages. Overall, only three out of the 13 UK participants were sure that they would buy from a website in a different language. Of male participants, 84,6% would buy from an online store that is not in their language, while the equivalent for women was 63,8 %. This question relates to the concept of localization explained in chapter 4.

## 6. Would you buy from a website that is not in your native language?

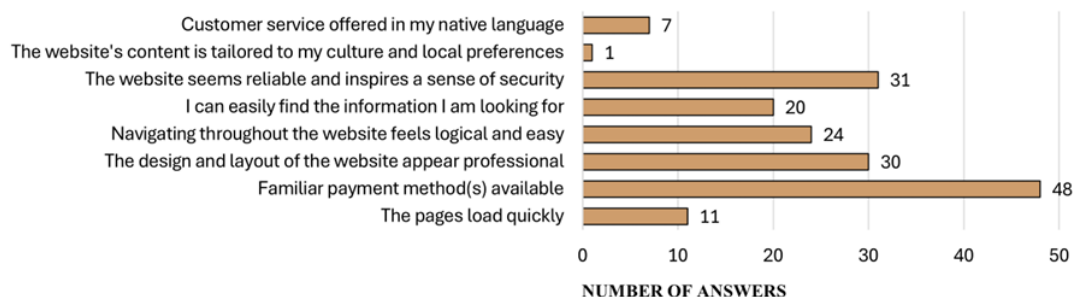


**Figure 8.** Would you buy from a website that is not in your native language? (n=60)

The respondents were then asked to choose one to three factors that contribute to their positive user experience in foreign online stores. As seen in the chart (figure 9), the availability of familiar payment methods was chosen by 48 of the 60 respondents, making it the most popular option. Websites that appear reliable and inspire a sense of security, as well as those with a professional appearance, were also significant contributors to the respondents' positive user experiences. The least contributing factor was the cultural adaptation of website content, with only one response.

In terms of positive user experience, 61,5 % of male participants valued easy and logical navigation, and just under 70 % valued the professional appearance of a website. In contrast, majority (85,1 %) of female participants valued having the choice of familiar payment method. Other factors that stood out in the women's responses were the website's reliability and security (53,2 %), and its professional design (44,7 %).

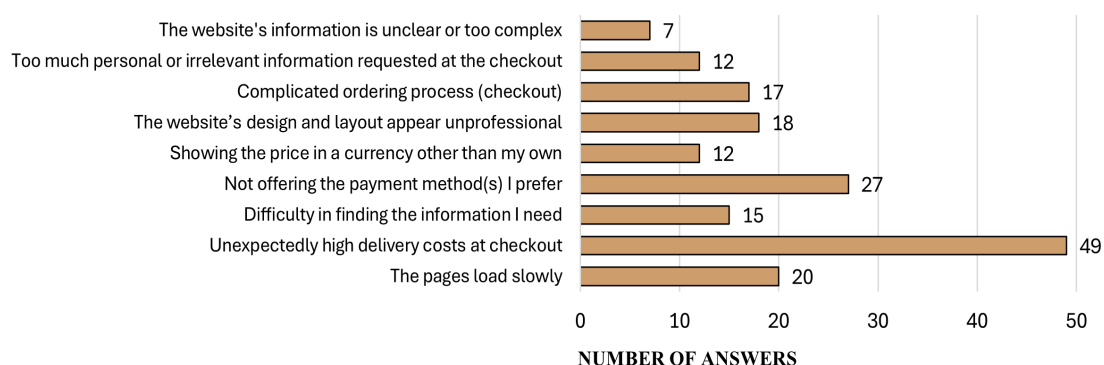
7. What are the most important factors influencing you to have a positive experience when shopping in a foreign online store? (Choose 1-3)



**Figure 9.** What are the most important factors influencing you to have a positive experience when shopping in a foreign online store? (Choose 1-3) (n=60)

Question 8 examined which usability issues would cause respondents to abandon their purchase. Again, respondents were asked to choose between one and three choices. Figure 10 reveals that with 49 votes, the biggest obstacle to completing purchases was unexpectedly high delivery costs at checkout. This was the main issue for both female (85,1 %) and male (69,2 %) respondents. Lack of preferred payment methods was the second biggest obstacle, accounting for 44,7 % of women's and 46,2 % of men's responses. Unclear or complex information on the website was not considered a very likely reason for abandoning the purchase, as only 11,7 % mentioned it.

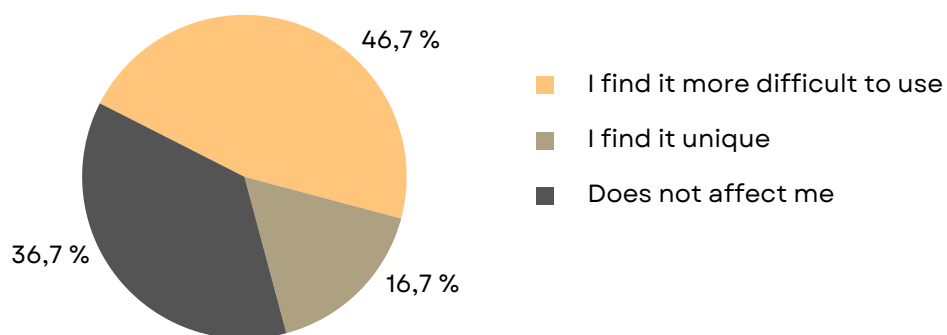
8. What would most likely be the reason you become frustrated and abandon your purchase even when you are willing to buy? (Choose 1-3)



**Figure 10.** What would most likely be the reason you become frustrated and abandon your purchase even when you are willing to buy? (Choose 1-3) (n=60)

Next, the respondents were asked how they would feel if a website looked and worked differently from what they were used to. This question relates to subjects of the theoretical part, navigation (section 2.3) and Law of Internet User Experience (section 3.3). The figure (11) shows that nearly half (46,7 %) of the respondents would find this kind of website more difficult to use, while just over a third (36,7 %) would consider it unique. 22 of the 60 respondents stated that it would not affect them.

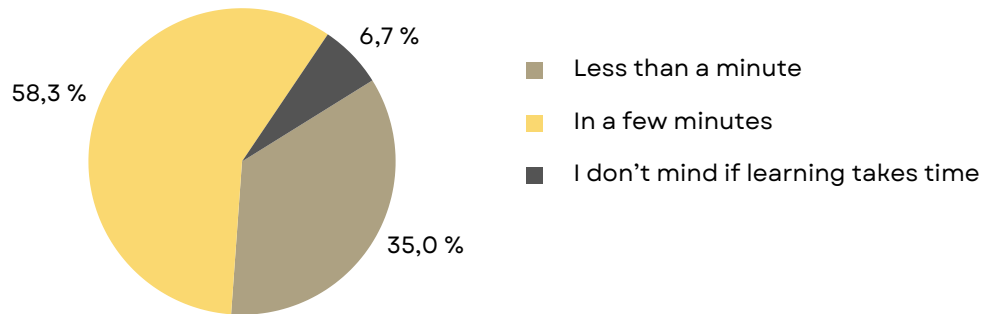
### 9. How do you feel if an online store looks and functions differently from other online stores you have used?



**Figure 11.** How do you feel if an online store looks and functions differently from other online stores you have used? (n=60)

Question 10 was designed to find out how quickly respondents expect to learn to navigate an online store they haven't used before. The findings (figure 12) indicate that 35 respondents, which corresponds to almost 60 % of the total, expect to learn how to navigate a new online store in a few minutes. 35 % of those surveyed would expect to learn the navigation in under a minute. Only four (6,7 %) respondents do not mind if it takes time to learn.

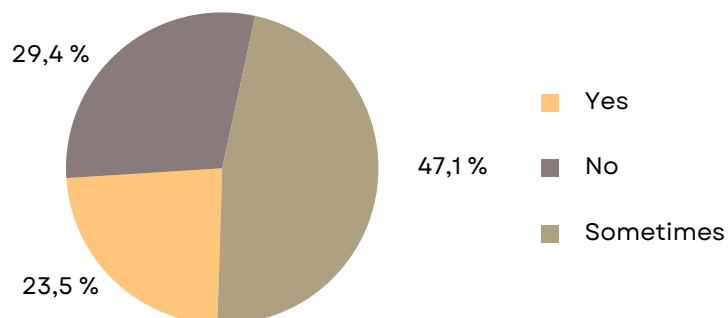
10. How quickly do you expect to understand how to navigate a new online store?



**Figure 12.** How quickly do you expect to understand how to navigate a new online store? (n=60)

Question 11 was asked to find out whether respondents' had found AI-generated chat customer service helpful in solving their problems. This was the questionnaire's only optional question, and the respondents were instructed to only answer if they had prior experience in this matter. The question received 51 responses. It can be seen from the results (figure 13) that 12 respondents had found AI customer support chat helpful, while 15 had not. Almost half (47,1 %) of those who responded, had sometimes found it helpful. As a conclusion, the responses are rather evenly divided in terms of whether or not AI customer service chat was considered as useful.

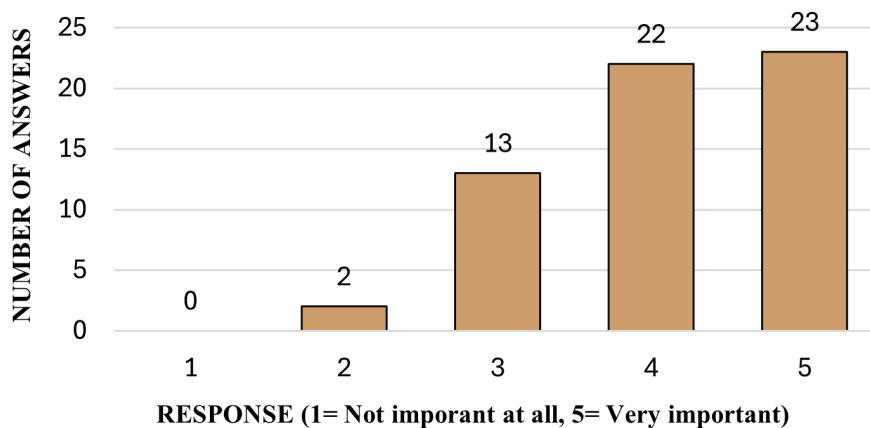
11. If you have used AI (Artificial Intelligence) customer support chat, have you found it helpful in solving your problem?



**Figure 13.** If you have used AI (Artificial Intelligence) customer support chat, have you found it helpful in solving your problem? (n=51)

The respondents were then asked (question 12) how important they considered the website's filtering functions to be. On a scale of 1–5, value 1 equals not important at all, while 5 equals very important. The findings (figure 14) indicate that nearly all of the respondents rated the filtering options from 3 to 5, ranging from somewhat important to very important. Value 1 received no responses, while value 2 received two answers, accounting for only 3,3 % of the total. In conclusion, all respondents considered filtering options to be at least moderately important.

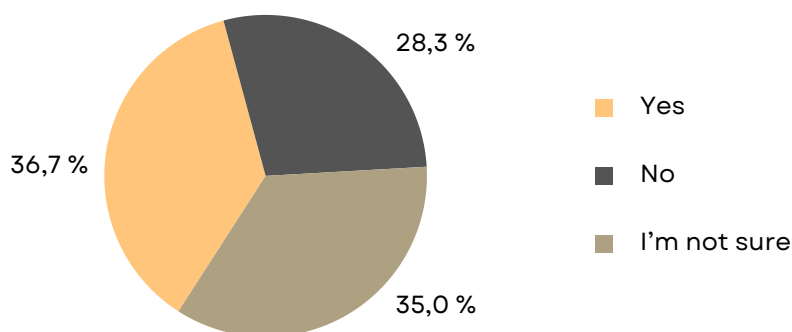
12. How important is it to you that an online store has filtering options to narrow down products/services?



**Figure 14.** How important is it to you that an online store has filtering options to narrow down products/services? (e.g. size, color, price range, categories) (n=60)

The second last question (13) of the questionnaire was related to the theory of trust (section 3.5), with the goal of finding out if the respondents would buy from a website they had never heard of before. It is evident from the results (figure 15) that the responses are more or less evenly distributed. 22 (36,7 %) out of the 60 respondents would purchase from an online store new to them, while 17 (28,3 %) would not. Just over half, at 53,8 % of male respondents, would buy from such foreign website, while the equivalent for women was only 31,9 %. 35 % were unsure whether they would make a purchase.

### 13. Would you purchase from a foreign website you have never heard of before?



**Figure 15.** Would you purchase from a foreign website you have never heard of before? (n=60)

In the final question, respondents rated factors based on their influence on website trust. There was a total of eight factors to rate, on a scale of 1–5. Value one equals no effect on trust, whereas 5 equals affects trust a lot. The table 1 presents the mean values of the results. As shown in the table, almost all factors had a mean value of 4 or above, indicating that all factors were considered to have a moderately high impact on trust.

Offering refund and return possibilities, as well as familiar payment methods, stand out in the table with slightly higher average values (4,47 of 5) than the other factors. The least influential factor in terms of trust was the information page about the company and its employees, with the average of 3,32 out of 5. However, an average of more than three indicates that this is still somewhat relevant factor influencing trust to some of the respondents'. Availability of customer service was also seen as a less important factor affecting trust than the others, although it scored almost 4 on average (3,95).

**Table 1.** How much do these factors affect your trust in a foreign online store?  
(n=60)

14. How much do these factors affect your trust in a foreign  
online store?

(1=No effect on trust, and 5= Affects trust a lot)

FACTOR	MEAN
Offering refund/ return option for the order	4,47
Offering familiar payment options	4,47
Someone you know has experience with the website	4,35
Offering familiar delivery options	4,2
Visible customer reviews	4,15
Professional website design	4,13
The website offers customer service	3,95
Information page about the company & employees	3,32

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Next, the results of the empirical research are analyzed and compared with the literature review and the research questions of the thesis. All three research questions will be answered separately, based on the data gathered from the survey. This chapter also evaluates the validity and reliability of the study, and the challenges of the research methodology used. The results from the third research question conclude this chapter with recommendations for businesses on how to improve the usability of their online stores, from international consumers' perspective.

**Research question 1.** Which e-commerce usability factors have the biggest impact on the user experience of international consumers?

The purpose of this question was to discover which e-commerce usability factors have the most influence on user experience. This is a significant topic for the research, because as Yoon's (2002) study revealed, user experience influences perceived satisfaction, which in turn correlates with purchase intention. The findings of this thesis study indicate that the most significant factors leading to a positive user experience among young adults and adults are the availability of familiar payment methods, the perceived security and reliability of the online store, and a professional website design. As with the Stanford University's 2002 study (Lahtinen 2013), the results of this study support the revelation that a professional website design is strongly associated with trust, further highlighting the importance of trust in user experience.

The customization of website content to fit one's culture was not considered important for user experience. This may indicate that young adults value the functional features and security of the website more than the visibility of cultural values. Among the functional features of usability, ease of navigation and ease of information searching are also perceived as important. Moreover, three out of four considered the availability of filtering options to narrow down choices to be

important or very important. The revealed importance of filtering options supports Hick's theory, which suggests that as the number of options increases, so does the cognitive burden. (Proctor & Schneider, 2018). And, as the cognitive burden increases, the user experience naturally weakens.

**Research question 2.** What factors of usability lead customers to abandon the ordering process even after the purchase decision has been made?

According to the results, majority (81,7 %) of the respondents express frustration toward unexpectedly high delivery costs at checkout. While shipping expenses might be high when purchasing from foreign online stores, this could present an opportunity for the companies to display the estimated shipping costs early on while consumers are still browsing. Wasted effort until the checkout will cause most individuals to abandon their purchase. Offering free delivery for purchases above a certain amount might help leading consumers to make the purchase.

The data reveals that the second most probable reason for rejecting the purchase would be if a company doesn't offer the consumer's preferred payment method as an option. This finding is strongly related to the theory of localization (chapter 4), which suggests that payment and delivery methods among other factors should be tailored to the target market's consumer preferences. Another localization related cause for not making the purchase, that stood out from the results, is the website's language. Just under a third of the respondents would not buy or are unsure if they would buy from a website that is not in their native language. Previous research by CSA (2020) reported that 40 % of consumers would never buy from website's that are not available in their language. This highlights the importance of translations and how they affect purchase intentions. Moreover, for one out of every five respondents it was critical that prices are displayed in their local currency.

The research also examined international customers' attitudes toward navigation. The results revealed that a clear majority with 93,3 % expected to learn how to

use a new e-commerce website in less than a minute or at most a couple of minutes. This measured the acceptable time frame for Nielsen's first quality attribute, learnability, presented in section 2.2. Also nearly half agreed that it is more difficult to use an online store if it looks and functions differently from other's they have used, which can potentially lead to frustration and abandonment of the purchase. It can be concluded that it would be wise for businesses to design their online store's user interfaces using universally accepted usability principles to make the websites more user-friendly.

**Research question 3.** How could companies improve the usability of their online stores for international customers?

The purpose of this research question is to provide benefits for companies operating an international online business, by making recommendations based on the studied international consumers' expectations and preferences. The findings of the study revealed that nearly 70 % of respondents thought that domestic online stores are generally more reliable than foreign ones. Trust was also shown to be connected to user experience, which in turn influences purchase intentions. Therefore, gaining the trust of international consumers should be a high priority for companies running an international online business.

Based on the results, companies are recommended to offer refund and return policies for orders, as well as local payment and delivery methods for international customers. These were the factors shown to most build consumer trust toward an online store. In addition, companies are advised to market their websites internationally, and to try to increase visibility. This is because most of the respondents would not buy or would not be sure whether they would buy from an unknown foreign website. Even if consumers recognize the company's name, or if someone they know has experience with the company, will raise their awareness of it. Furthermore, other customers' reviews were also found to increase trust toward an online store, which is why companies are recommended to show customer reviews transparently on their websites.

Responses on whether AI customer support chat was perceived as useful were evenly divided. The use of AI in customer service can be beneficial for businesses, but the results suggest that consumers face a number of problems where AI cannot help. Therefore, human customer service should not be completely replaced by robotics.

The results suggest that young adults and adults do not require a website to be localized to the highest levels of the classification system of Singh and Pereira (section 4.2). However, companies are recommended to localize the payment and delivery methods, along with the currency and language of the website, to meet the target population's needs. Customers may see familiar options as a safer alternative, that require less thinking. This is also shown with navigation, which respondents expect to learn in a few minutes at the latest on a website new to them. On this notion, companies are recommended to follow the universally accepted best practices for enhancing their websites' usability. To conclude, building the target populations trust toward the website and offering familiar practices will likely enhance the customer experience and decrease the perceived risk of international customers.

Validity is determined by how well the research outcomes answer the research questions and how realistic conclusions can be drawn from the research findings. Strong validity means that the research method, population being studied, and questions are aligned with the study's objectives. (Pöyhönen 2023, 108). Based on these criteria, the validity of this study is moderately good. The target population was appropriate for the international nature of the study, which enabled data to be collected from as many as 23 different countries. Furthermore, the quantitative online questionnaire allowed the efficient collection of data from around the world and provided comprehensive answers to the research questions. Although, the results apply more to women, as the proportion of men is significantly lower. The country distribution of respondents was also uneven, which may affect the generalizability of the study.

Reliability on the other hand measures the credibility of a study, and its ability to replicate the results with the research methods used (Pöyhönen 2023, 109). The study's reliability is high because the target group was international and had prior experience of foreign online stores. Additionally, the outcomes of this study support the perspectives presented in the theoretical section and confirm the conclusions of previous studies. Furthermore, the questions in the survey were formed clearly and precisely. However, virtual research methods come with some restrictions and difficulties as well. The gathering and analysis of the data rely on text-based responses and predefined answer options only, which may cause challenges in assessing the reliability of the data, as non-verbal communication is excluded from the process. (Ovaska, Aula & Majaranta, 2005, 56).

## 7 REFLECTION

Conducting an empirical study on this scale was new to me, and I was curious to see the results it provided. As a researcher, I was particularly interested in the role of trust and localization in e-commerce usability and how they affect purchase intentions. In the end, I gained a lot of new insights into the different elements of usability, and how important it is to consider the expectations and preferences of the target market. The process also developed my ability to think critically and to stay within the limits of the topic.

My goal for this thesis was to identify how different factors of e-commerce usability influence the purchasing decisions of international consumers. Furthermore, I wished to find out which factors most influence their user experience, and which factors would make them abandon their purchase even if they had already made the decision to buy. My goal was to collect responses from several different countries, so that the survey would produce universally applicable data. I succeeded in these goals because the research results were able to answer the previously set research problem and questions comprehensively and concisely. I consider the results to be reliable because they support and reinforce the viewpoints presented in the theoretical section. However, to make the results more generalizable, I would have hoped for a more even gender and country distribution in my study. Although, achieving a more even country distribution would have required many times more respondents, as there were now 23 countries represented out of only 60 respondents.

An idea for further research could be to examine different cultures different preferences and expectations of usability, as this study examined the subject from a universal perspective. The topic could also be studied from a more modern perspective, by exploring consumers' experiences and opinions on AI-assisted e-commerce usability factors. These could include product recommendations and other personalized solutions.

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## APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

How Does Online Store Usability Affect International Consumers' Purchase Decisions?

Hello all,  
This questionnaire is part of my thesis, titled *The Impact of E-Commerce Usability on International Consumers' Purchase Decisions*. The survey is for 18-35 year-olds who have purchased or considered purchasing from a foreign online store.  
I kindly request you to fill out this form so that I can get valuable information for my research. Answering takes 5-10 minutes. All responses are fully confidential and solely used for academic purposes. Thank you for your time!

\* Required

1. What is your age? \*

18-24

25-30

31-35

2. What is your gender? \*

Female

Male

Other

Prefer not to say

3. Which country are you from? (Answer in English) \*

Enter your answer

4. Have you ever purchased or considered purchasing a product or service from a foreign online store? \*

Yes

No

5. Would you consider yourself more cautious when shopping in a foreign online store compared to a domestic one?  
\*

Yes, I find domestic online stores more reliable

No, I find foreign online stores more reliable

No, I find them equally reliable

6. Would you buy from a website that is not in your native language?

\*

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

7. What are the most important factors influencing you to have a positive experience when shopping in a foreign online store? (Choose 1-3)

\*

Please select at most 3 options.

- The pages load quickly
- Familiar payment method(s) available
- The design and layout of the website appear professional
- Navigating throughout the website feels logical and easy
- I can easily find the information I am looking for
- The website seems reliable and inspires a sense of security
- The website's content is tailored to my culture and local preferences
- Customer service offered in my native language

8. What would most likely be the reason you become frustrated and abandon your purchase even when you are willing to buy? (Choose 1-3)

\*

Please select at most 3 options.

- The pages load slowly
- Unexpectedly high delivery costs at checkout
- Difficulty in finding the information I need
- Not offering the payment method(s) I prefer
- Showing the price in a currency other than my own
- The website's design and layout appear unprofessional
- Complicated ordering process (checkout)
- Too much personal or irrelevant information requested at the checkout
- The website's information is unclear or too complex

9. How do you feel if an online store looks and functions differently from other online stores you have used? \*

I find it more difficult to use

I find it unique

Does not affect me

10. How quickly do you expect to understand how to navigate a new online store?

\*

Less than a minute

In a few minutes

I don't mind if learning takes time

11. If you have used AI (Artificial Intelligence) customer support chat, have you found it helpful in solving your problem?

Only answer if you have experience using AI customer support chat

Yes

No

Sometimes

12. How important is it to you that an online store has filtering options to narrow down products/services? (e.g. size, color, price range, categories) \*

1

2

3

4

5

1= Not important at all,  
5= Very important

13. Would you purchase from a foreign website you have never heard of before?

\*

Yes

No

I'm not sure

14. How much do these factors affect your **trust** in a foreign online store?

\* 

Please rate each of the following statements on a scale of 1-5 (1=No effect on trust, and 5= Affects trust a lot)

	1	2	3	4	5
The website offers customer service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional website design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information page about the company & employees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Someone you know has experience with the website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Visible customer reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering familiar payment options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering refund/ return option for the order	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offering familiar delivery options	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>