

Successful brands in E-commerce from a customer point of view

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ABSTRACT,

Customers perceive successful E-commerce brands in a positive manner, which results in high expectations: customers expect a quick and reliable delivery, a highly available customer service and products and service of high quality. These expectations should be met by the brand to avoid harm to their reputation. A strong and clear brand image which could be related to a certain attribute, is of high importance to the perception of the (potential) customer. This research focusses on the customer perception on the three largest webshops in the Netherlands, which are Bol.com, Coolblue and Zalando, based on the concepts of Brand knowledge, Product / service quality; Social media activities and Webshop appearance.

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E-commerce, Customer experience, Customer perception, Product quality, Website quality, Social media practices, Brand success, Brand Knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

Branding is used worldwide for its beneficial properties in various business niches. Branding comes along different practices that should be executed in order for it to be successful. These practices can lead to higher customer retention and acquisition. According to Stahl et al. (2012), increases of knowledge, relevance and esteem of a brand, are associated with positive changes in customer acquisition, customer retention and profit margins. Practices are e.g. delivering differentiating, qualitative and/or reliable products and services, creating a strong link between the brand and a certain product, or being highly active on social media etc.

This research focuses on brands within the E-commerce. Electronic sale channels and its significant growth rate, have made big impact in customer retail. "Internet plays an important role in the first phase of the transaction process, while physical channels are still the dominant media in the execution phase of the transaction and the after sales phases" (Bouwman-et al., 2003:983). This was said in 2003, and the importance of internet in the process of a customer making a transaction has only grown since. Worldwide e-commerce sales rose with more than \$1.5 billion in 4 years; from 2014 with \$1.336 billion, to 2018 with \$2,842 billion (Statista, 2019).

This research contributes to finer knowledge and understanding on the customer experience that customers have with successful brands within the E-commerce market. It will do this by exploring practices, executed by successful brands, from a customer point of view. This gives us the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the customer's view on successful E-commerce brands. Active companies in the E-commerce market could base decisions on this point of view.

1.1 Research Question

The research focusses on already successful brands. It will assess these brands from a customer point of view and thus the research question is:

What perception do (potential) customers have on successful E-commerce brands, based on their experiences with these brands?

Understanding how customers view these successful E-commerce brands and their activities, gives us customer based point of view on customer experience practices.

Sub questions that support the research question are:

- What effect does brand knowledge have on the perception of customers on successful brands within E-commerce?
- What effect does product / service quality and emotion have on the perception of customers on successful brands within E-commerce?
- What effect does social media activities have on the perception of customers on successful brands within E-commerce?
- What effect does webshop appearance have on the perception of customers on successful brands within E-commerce?

1.2 Case Introduction

To answer the research question of how successful brands in E-commerce and their practices on customer experience activities are perceived by customers, a case study on three webshops with the largest turnovers in the Dutch E-commerce market will be done. These three webshops are: Bol.com, Coolblue and

Zalando. Albert Heijn officially takes the place of the third biggest webshop turnover in 2018, but, number four (Zalando) is chosen, because Albert Heijn's main sales channel is not their webshop but their physical super markets. Thus, Albert Heijn is less relevant to this research question.

Bol.com was established in 1999 by the German company Bertelsmann. Bol.com started off with selling books, cd's and DVD's, but quickly has widened its product range to a large variety of niches. Bol.com works together with partners, which can sell their products on the platform. The website resembles the concept of Amazon in the USA. Bol.com has had a company takeover in 2012 by Ahold. In 2018, Bol.com turned over 1.64 billion, making it the webshop with biggest turnover in the Dutch e-commerce market (Twinkle100, 2019).

Coolblue started off in 2000 as a webshop called mp3man.nl. The company established more niche webshops in the following years. In 2005, Coolblue opened a physical shop in Rotterdam and more focus was put on the brand Coolblue from this moment. Coolblue currently sells Electronics, Fitness and more all under one name. In 2018, Coolblue turned over €1 billion, making it the webshop with the second biggest turnover in the Dutch e-commerce market (Twinkle100, 2019).

Zalando is a German webshop from origin, established in 2008 in Berlin, it started with selling shoes only. Over the years it expanded to 17 different countries and they also added clothing to their catalogue. Zalando came to the Netherlands in 2010. In 2018, Zalando turned over €550 million (Company's turnover solely in the Netherlands), making it the webshop with the fourth biggest turnover in the Dutch e-commerce market, and falling right behind the third: Albert Heijn's webshop, with a turnover of €565 million (Twinkle100, 2019).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research' purpose is the gain a higher understanding on the customer perception on successful E-commerce brands, based on their experiences with these brands. The topics of the sub questions (Brand knowledge, product quality and emotion, social media activities and webshop appearance) will be researched through a case study on the (based on turnover) three largest webshops (Twinkle100, 2019).

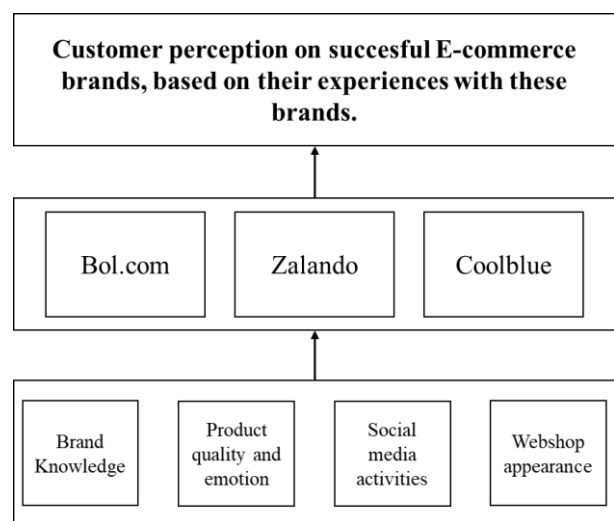


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is based on the sub questions that support the research question. Literature is reviewed in this section, that provides a better understanding on the topics of the sub-questions. The sub questions cover the following topics/concepts: (a) knowledge on the brand, (b) product quality and emotion, (c) social media activities and (d) webshop appearance.

Brand knowledge

This section of the literature review covers the sub question: 'How do (potential) customers perceive the brand, based on differential advantages, added value, and brand knowledge?' Literature on the concept of knowledge on the brand is reviewed in this section.

According to de Chematony et al. (1998), Brand Success can be separated into customer criteria and business criteria. These are two different viewpoints on brand success. The business criteria are less of a relevant factor in this research because these are the results of the business' performance, and are thus more relevant to businesses instead of to customers (and their perceptions on businesses). The customer based criteria are relevant for this research because these consider the customer's perception on successful brands.

A relevant customer based criterion is *brand associations*. Brand associations concerns the popularity of the brand. The popularity is based on the customer's brand awareness: According to Pitta and Katsanis (1995), familiarity with a brand may be enough to determine a purchase. Another important factor of brand associations is brand identity: Joachimsthaler and Aaker (1997) noted that there must be a clear communicated message from a brand, so that these messages do not conflict with each other. The customer's perception on a brand may not be confusing. Successful brands are those with a strong brand image, which is also an important factor of brand associations. Strong brand image means that customers can easily link different kind of attributes with the brand (Doyle, 1989). This creates the recognition for customers on the brand's products and activities.

Another relevant customer based criterion is *perceived differential advantage and added values*. The perceived differential advantage concerns the brand's differentiation of products and services and how this is observed by customer. According to Doyle (1989), the most important criterion of perceived differential advantage and added values is an outstanding reputation for quality, service and reliability. Through this, brands are able to set higher prices than less successful brands, while simultaneously gaining higher market shares and customer loyalty. De Chernatony and McDonald (1994) noted and stressed that it is the perceived, rather than the actual quality, that counted for the brand's success.

According to Stahl et al. (2012), knowledge on a brand and purchasing from this brand gives the customer the feeling that there is less risk that the product will not meet their needs. Less known brands have to pay off this risk feeling by lower prices. Stahl et al. (2012) also suggest that a brand with higher esteem (favored quality and reliability by the customer) have higher customer acquisition and retention.

Product quality and emotion

This section of the literature review covers the sub question: 'What effect does product / service quality and emotion have on

the perception of costumers on successful brands within E-commerce?' Literature on the concept of product quality and emotion is reviewed in this section.

Berry et al. (2012) explains that the first step a company should take towards managing customer experience is recognizing the clues it sends to customers. These clues can be divided into two categories: the first category includes the quality of the good or service. The second category concerns the emotions of the good or service and the environment it is offered in. Berry et al. (2012) puts focus on the second category and says the following: "Companies must manage the emotional component of experiences with the same rigor they bring to the management of product and service functionality" (p. add page number). These clues are for example the feel of wrapping of plastic of a new smartphone, or the shaking sound a box of Legos. These clues can be mechanic, which means the clues are given by a product, or these clues can be humanistic, which means these clues are given by a person. Customer value is composed of functionality and emotional benefits. Companies that have little to no consideration for customer experience and only focus on lowering costs and prices, may decrease the value of their offerings.

According to Park et al. (1984), products can provide utility through functional, experiential and symbolic benefits. "Functional needs are defined as those that motivate the search for products that solve consumption-related problems" (p. add page). For example, a car should be able to be driven from point A to B. "Symbolic needs are defined as desires for products that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification" (p. page). For example, a luxurious and expensive car can be bought to set a statement in society about your economic welfare. "Experiential needs are defined as desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/ or cognitive stimulation" (p. page); e.g. driving a fast car could release feelings of pleasure while accelerating. Companies could make use of these three benefits in their branding by choosing to focus on one benefit or by combining two or all of these benefits.

Social media activities

This section of the literature review covers the sub question: 'What effect does social media activities have on the perception of costumers on successful brands within E-commerce?'. Literature on the concept of social media activities is reviewed in this section.

Concepts on social media practices for branding are covered in Laroche et al. (2012). Laroche and colleagues talked about brand communities on social media and its advantages. These advantages are learning customer perceptions of new product offerings and competitive actions; maximizing opportunities to attract and collaborate closely with highly loyal customers of the brand. It also has low costs and high communication efficiency. Using social media platforms is practically interesting, because of the direct feedback companies get of their (potential) customers. It can be used to build a fan base around a brand, which over time could lead to high customer loyalty and higher sales. Laroche et al. (2012) suggests that a highly active brand on social media gives customer's the perception of a trustworthy and reliable brand.

According to Lipsman et al. (2012), the most dominant social-networking site is Facebook with approximately 160 million visitors in the U.S. only each month (in 2012). Advertising on Facebook can be interesting because these advertisements appear on the newsfeed which represents 4 percent of all time spent

online in the U.S.A. Companies participating in social media activities can positively influence the customer experience.

Webshop appearance

This part of the literature review covers the sub question: ‘What effect does webshop appearance have on the perception of costumers on successful brands within E-commerce?’. Literature on the concept of Webshop appearance is reviewed in this section.

An older study, which covers website quality, is: ‘Determinants of Successful Website Design: Relative Importance and Recommendations for Effectiveness’ (Gehrke, D. et al 1999). According to the authors (ibid.), the most important to least important categories of website design are: page loading, business content (highly informative pages) and navigation efficiency. A slow loading time could lead to a higher number of bouncers: people that enter and leave the website within a few seconds. Highly informative pages give the customer a higher feeling of trust and thus a better overall customer experience. The website should also be easy to navigate through. Having to click through many clicks to reach a certain page, will lead to a lot of customers losing interest and leaving the website.

According to Xiaojuan Ou (2010), website design can be divided into hygiene factors (technical functionality, situational normality and information quality), bivalent factors (structural assurance, ease of use and perceived usefulness), motivating factors (perceived enjoyment, perceived willingness to customize and knowledge / skills provided) and Insignificant factors (third party recognition and customer feedback mechanism). These factors give an overall functional and motivating perception which results into trust or distrust for the costumer. This will then lead to the outcome whether there is a buying intention or not.

4. METHODS

This research will be approached in the following two ways: Interviews, for primary data from (potential) customers. Desk research, for exploring customer reviews and ratings on the considered webshop brands. Combining these approaches, gives an opportunity which could be used to answer the research question of how customer experience practices of successful E-commerce brands, are perceived by (potential) costumers. The methods section explains the interviews and desk research. Detailed explanations are found in the following paragraphs. Paragraph 4.1 contains the format used for the interviews, the method of analyzing, interviewee demographics and the interview questions. Paragraph 4.2 contains the desk research technique which is used, and how the collected data will be implemented in this research.

4.1 Interviews

This research’s interviews are one-on-one interviews which are done face to face or via online media. The Interviews will be in a structured format, so that the collected data could more easily be compared or contrasted with each other. The collected data will be analyzed through thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the analysis patterns and themes will be identified in the interviewee’s answers. The identification of the patterns and themes will be done at a semantic level: ‘...the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond what

a participant has said or what has been written’’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006:14).

By identifying patterns in the answers, labelling parts of answers becomes possible. Parts of the answers that point out positive/negative perceptions on the customer experience of a brand, will then be labeled. This grants the opportunity to, again, compare the answers with each other, but also with the collected data from the desk research. This also divides the broad concept of customer perception on a brand into clear experienced perceptions.

The research’s interviews are done on a sample of 8 interviewees. The interviewees are selected by gender and age, in order to increase the reliability of the collected data (see figure 2). The interviewee’s only criterium is that he/she participates in online shopping (potential customer), so that his/her answers are relevant.

Gender/Age	18-29	30-49	50-65
Male	2	1	1
Female	2	1	1

Figure 2. Interviewee demographics

The interview questions rose from the knowledge gained from the literature review. The literature review divided customer experience by the following concepts; Brand knowledge, product quality and emotion, social media activities and appearance. The interview is structured to cover the perception of these (potential) costumers on these four concepts on each of the three largest Dutch E-commerce brands (see Appendix A).

4.2 Desk Research

The desk research will focus on obtaining data from a larger section of comments on the concerning webshop brands. To understand the viewpoints of customers on the successful e-commerce brands’ costumer experience practice, a focus shall be put on the ratings and reviews coming directly from the customers. The technique used for the desk research is an external online desk research. The data collection will find place at review websites outside the organizational boundaries.

A website that provides a large and reliable number of reviews, is trustpilot.com. Trustpilot is a Google Review Partner and is used by 270,000 businesses (trustpilot.com, 2019). Trustpilot is an international review company. On trustpilot.com, ratings on the three webshops this research is based on, can be found which were given by costumers. The website gives the ability for costumers to grant companies the following ratings: excellent, great, average, poor and bad.

Next to these ratings, customers are able to leave a written review on these websites. During the desk research, the explanation of the (by costumers given) scores/ratings on the three webshops, will be found in the written reviews that come with these scores.

The reviews that were used (Appendix C) consist out of data which met the following criteria: There is a clear opinion on the experience the customer had with the company; This opinion is structured with arguments. For each webshop, 3 high ratings (Excellent / Great) and 3 low ratings (Poor / Bad) are analyzed.

Through this desk research, an opportunity is created to find a pattern of experiences, which occurs throughout the reviews given by costumers. This pattern could then lead to a better view on the perspectives costumers have on these three webshops.

5. RESULTS

This section contains the results and the analyses of the interviews (see Appendix B) and desk research. Based on the answers of the interviews, a description could be made of the perspectives from (potential) customers on the three largest webshops (Bol.com, Zalando and CoolBlue) in the Netherlands. The results are compared with the theories and concepts from the literature review.

5.1 Interview analysis

Results concerning brand knowledge

From the three webshops, Bol.com is considered the most popular webshop, by 6 of the 7 interviewees. Specific reasons are mentioned. Bol.com offers a large variety of products in a lot of different product categories. This creates a higher chance for a customer to visit the website again, which gives the customer a higher sense of popularity of the webshop. The Advertisements bol.com uses are also effective. The interviewees mentioned that their message sticks for a longer time because they find the advertisements pleasant and because of the amount the advertisements are shown to them on TV and social media. One interviewee mentioned that bol.com is more popular than the other two because she thinks the website exists a longer time than the other two websites. These interview results fit the customer based criterion brand associations (de Chematony, L. et al. 1998): It is high brand awareness that the interviewees have with bol.com, which gives them a higher perceived popularity. This could be a direct result of Bol.com's strong brand identity and brand image. Joachimsthaler and Aaker (1997) state that that a brand must have a clear communicated message. Bol.com does this by broadcasting memorable advertisement. According to Doyle (1989), a strong brand image means that customers can easily link different kind of attributes with the brand. The attributes that are linked with Bol.com is the wide variety of products.

According to (potential) customers, these webshops deliver value with different properties. First of all: product quality. Products are perceived as high quality when these products are from popular brands. Second, a fast delivery is considered an important value bringer: having your order at home, a day after buying. Third, customer service should be easily available for customers to contact, by phone or e-mail. And last, a wide range of products is also valued by customers. This makes the webshop "handy". These results align the statement that the most important criterion of perceived different advantage and added values, is an outstanding reputation for quality, service and reliability (Doyle 1989).

The three webshops participate in activities and have certain qualities, that give customers a higher feeling of having made a good decision by purchasing on that webshop. One interviewee mentioned that he has the highest sense of having made a good decision on the webshop of bol.com. This is because he finds that the user experience looks and feels the most mature. He finds that website takes its customers and activities seriously. Another interviewee has this feeling at Coolblue. This is because she thinks Coolblue is a specialist in electronics, and that the company critically access products before offering them on their website. This is mentioned by other interviewees as well. Being a specialist in the products you sell gives a sense of having made a good decision after purchase. Coolblue also offers the possibility to compare different products so that you could select the product that fits you best. This overview creates more

clearness to the customer. Another interviewee stated that it is not the webshop but the product that gives her the feeling of having made a good decision. According to Stahl et al. (YEAR), brand with higher esteem (favored quality and reliability by the customer) have higher customer retention. This aligns with the results of the interview. The interviewees prefer a reliable brand; Coolblue is perceived as an electronic specialist which selects the highest quality products for the customer. Bol.com is perceived as a brand that treats its customers accordingly, by treating their customers in an adult manner.

The willingness of paying higher amounts on a website, according to the interviewees, is mostly based on the products the webshops sells. For instance, Coolblue offers mostly more expensive electronic products, while Bol.com mostly offers less expensive items. The interviewees mostly bought items with lower values from Bol.com and products with higher values from Coolblue. At Zalando the prices differ a lot because of the different clothing brands. The interviewees that feel more attachment with clothing are more willing to pay larger amounts on Zalando than the interviewees that feel less attachment with clothing. The willingness of paying larger amounts thus depends mostly on the price range of the webshops products and the interest of the customer.

Results concerning product/service quality and emotion

Customers are having a safe and trustful feeling while surfing on all three of the webshop. Bol.com gives the customer a satisfied feeling because of their product variety and availability. There is downside to this because some of the same products are offered many times on the website, which could reduce the feeling of trust. It appears that consistency in the online offered products positively influences the feeling of trust with customers. Coolblue gives a safe feeling because of the perspective of capability high knowledge on their products. Zalando is perceived as easy to use and professional.

Next, I asked which webshop gave them the best overall feeling while surfing on it. The received answers were diverse. The reasons interviewees chose for Bol.com are again the big variety of products the webshop offers, but also the easy use of website. Bol.com is thus perceived as the webshop that offers every product needed. Coolblue is perceived as a professional in electronic dealer and this gives a high feeling of trust. Zalando is chosen because of the webshops user friendliness from the moment of login to ordering a product and even returning products.

The emotions that people get when ordering a product, mostly comes from the product itself, rather than from the webshop brand it is bought from. The only emotions these webshops brands give are a trustful feeling while purchasing and after purchasing.

Results concerning social media activities

The next interview questions were considering the social media presence of the three webshops. These were also experienced very differently among the interviewees. Almost all interviewees agreed that Zalando has the biggest presence on social media of the three webshops through advertisements. Some interviewees found these advertisements just annoying, while others explained that webshops become more trustworthy because of their active social media presence. They explained that advertising is something expensive and a company which actively advertises their products, is probably a company bigger in size, which gives a feeling of trust. One interviewee told that because the webshop

is seen a lot on social media, he also automatically assumes that it is a popular webshop. This aligns with Laroche et al. (2012) who state that a highly active brand on social media gives customers the perception of a trustworthy and reliable brand.

Based on the answers of the interviewees, there are some positive effects for the brand by advertising on social media: some consider advertising brands more trustworthy because they perceive only bigger companies can advertise at this scale. Others automatically assume that a brand is popular because it is advertised on social media. There are also (potential) customers that find advertisements on social media just annoying.

Results concerning webshop appearance

The last two questions were regarding the webshop appearance. The question of which webshop is the easiest to use and why, gave a lot of different answers. Zalando was chosen for two reasons: It has an easy to use app, and it is easy to find a certain product you are looking for. Bol.com, had other reasons: Bol.com has menu's through which surfing is made very easy. This way it is easy to navigate through the whole webshop. Coolblue was chosen by one interviewee, because of its simplicity and informative product pages. According to Gherke D. et al (1999), important categories of website design are: page loading, business content (highly informative pages) and navigation efficiency. All three webshops were found easy to navigate through. Zalando and Bol.com both score high on navigation efficiency. Coolblue scores high on business content because of the broad explanation on their product pages about the product of interest and the availability of comparing products.

The three webshops all have a completely different design in structure and color. The answer on which design the interviewee preferred also differs a lot per interviewee. The liking of the look of the webshop differs because of different tastes in colors etc., This was also not very important for the interviewees, because they all agreed that the functionality of the webshop is more important. It should just be easy to use.

5.2 Desk research analysis

The website of Trustpilot gives the ability for costumers to rate companies by the following: excellent, great, average, poor and bad. The results (2019) of Bol.com, Coolblue and Zalando are seen in figure 3.

Rating	Bol.com		Coolblue.nl		Zalando.nl	
<i>Excellent</i>	61%	15899	80%	15810	25%	360
<i>Great</i>	19%	4952	10%	1976	9%	130
<i>Average</i>	4%	1043	2%	395	8%	115
<i>Poor</i>	4%	1043	2%	395	11%	158
<i>Bad</i>	12%	3128	6%	1186	47%	677
<i>Total</i>	100%	26064	100%	19762	100%	1440

Figure 3. Customer reviews (Trustpilot.com 2019)

We can see a difference in the total amount of reviews given. Bol.com received 26064 reviews, Coolblue.nl 19762 and Zalando.nl 1440 (Trustpilot.com 2019). The numbers of the total reviews are hard to compare because these webshops differ in operation internationally. Bol.com is one website for both the Netherlands and Belgium. Coolblue.nl only operates in the Netherlands, but Coolblue has a different website (Coolblue.be)

for Belgium. Zalando.nl also only operates in the Netherlands, but Zalando has different websites for each country.

What could be compared, is the ratings the Dutch webshops (in the case of Bol.com it is Dutch and Belgian) received from their customers. 80% of the received ratings of Coolblue is "excellent" (Which is the highest a customer can rate a company on trustpilot), which makes Coolblue the highest rated webshop compared to Bol.com and Zalando.nl. 47% of the received ratings of Zalando.nl is "bad" (Which is the lowest a customer can rate a company on trustpilot), which makes Zalando the lowest rated webshop out of the three. The analysis on the written reviews explains why a certain rating was given by a customer. This is explained further in this paragraph.

An important positive perception on Bol.com is their customer service and after sales support. Customers that have problems with their ordered product have experienced quick, supportive and solution based reactions from Bol.com. These customers perceive Bol.com as a company that could solve all problems that can occur during and after an order. This creates a higher trust feeling for the customer. Also, Bol.com is positively rated for their fast and on time delivery. Another positive perception on Bol.com is their easy to use website/ app. It has a clear overview of the placed orders and all packages can be tracked.

The negative ratings of Bol.com were based on the following negative perceptions: Customers find that Bol.com place unnecessary responsibility on the customer. E.g. a package was delivered to a wrong address, and the customer had to pick it up himself from this address which he did not agree on. Customers find that such problems should be solved by the company. Others find that there is little no customer service, that questions are evaded and that customers are delegated from department to department. These were the subjects that appeared most in the complaints. Whether such complaints occur little or often with all customers is not clear.

For Bol.com the aspects that makes the webshop receive high ratings, is the same reason that makes the webshop receive low ratings. These reviews are all based on the experience with the customer service, which also depends on how supportive the person was the customer was talking to. Based on the percentages of the ratings from Bol.com: 61% Excellent, 19% Great, against 4% Poor and 12% Bad, an assumption could be made, that there are more cases of positive than negative experiences with Bol's customer service.

Coolblue is rated high for its informative pages. The webshop allows customers to compare certain products in detail. This gives customers a trusting feeling and professional perception towards Coolblue. Also, Coolblue offers an installation service for larger or more complicated products. These aspects of Coolblue were mentioned mostly for the higher ratings.

Just as Bol.com, Coolblue's negative ratings are all based on late deliveries or non-supportive customer service experiences. Based on the percentages of the ratings Coolblue received: 80% Excellent, 10% Great, against 2% Poor and 6% Bad, an assumption would be that there are more cases of positive than negative experiences with Coolblue's customer service.

For Zalando, the same results appeared again. The reasons for which high ratings were given were the same reasons for which low ratings were given, which were customer service and after sales support. There is a difference between Zalando and Coolblue and Bol.com. Coolblue and Bol.com have a higher percentage of positive ratings rather than negative, while Zalando is vice versa.

When customer service is executed correctly (according to a customer), and the experience with the customer service is

perceived correctly, the customer will leave a positive review. All three of these webshop practice activities in customer service, but there is a difference of the amount it is perceived as executed correctly by the customer. This may not even mean that it the customer service of one company is better than the other (an assumption could be made). It rather signifies that the customer had a better experience with the customer service. The same customer service could be perceived as excellent by one customer, but as poor by another. This is mainly because there are different expectations of what a webshop from which is ordered should grant as extra customer service.

6. DISCUSSION

Based on research on the three cases (Bol.com, Coolblue and Zalando), We have a better view on how customers perceive popular and successful E-commerce brands. From this new customer point of view, companies active within E-commerce could make decisions or change strategies. Also, this research functions as a base for further validating research and may also branch out to deeper analysis on certain findings.

Bol.com is considered a very popular brand with a strong brand image. Bol.com gives people a feeling of trust and this is due to their effective advertising and clear message. Bol.com is perceived as a company with the largest variety of products. This is also a reason customers return to Bol.com when there is a need of ordering a product. There is a high chance bol.com offers this product. This gives the customer a reliable feeling about Bol.com. From this, an assumption could be made that customers favor a webshop that offers a high variety of products. The large variety of products bol.com offers, also has its downside. The large variety of products is attained by allowing companies to sell their products on the bol.com platform. This leads to the exact same product being advertised many times under different brands and with different prices. This gives the customer a harder time to find a preferred product and also a confused feeling of distrust. One interviewee mentioned that because of seeing the same product under different brand names multiple times when searching for a product, he uses bol.com only when buying product of a more widely known brand and avoids lesser known brands. A large variety of product should thus be consistent without repetitive products to create a positive customer perception. Companies offering a large variety of products should avoid repetition and inconsistency in their assortment.

Coolblue creates a high sense of trust for customers. The brand does this by presenting themselves as specialists in electronics. This factor plays a great role for customers ordering at Coolblue. Coolblue allows the customer to easily compare products from the same or different brands, based on their personal preferences. Bringing such an overview of your assortment also adds to the feeling of trust customers get while browsing the webshop. A brand representing itself as specialist in its niche to raise a higher feeling of trust is a subject where further research could be done on. Companies desiring to reach being perceived as specialists should focus on a single product sector, such as Coolblue focusses on electronics. The company should assist the customer in helping to make a purchasing decision.

Zalando is liked and preferred by customers interested in clothing and shoes. Zalando has a user-friendly webshop from the moment of login to ordering a product and even returning products. Through this user friendliness, Zalando is able to create a high feeling of trust for their customers. Thus, the ease of browsing, finding products and purchasing products all contribute to higher sense of trust. Companies could achieve this by building an app such as Zalando or investing in their webshop for it to have a smoother customer journey.

All three brands have their appearances on social media through brand pages and advertisements. The following can be stated based on the interviews: Zalando has the biggest presence on social media through advertisements. Advertisements can be seen as annoying by customers, but on the other hand, could also give a feeling of trust. This is due to the perception of advertisements being expensive, and thus is only done by companies bigger in size. Next, when a brand is seen a lot on social media, it is automatically assumed this is a popular and successful brand. Thus, the research suggest that advertisements on social media has a positive influence on the perception the customer has on the company. This is true as long the advertisements do not become irritating for the customer. How this could be avoided could be accessed further in future research.

What was considered as at a high level for all thee webshops, is the product quality and delivery reliability. It seems that customers perceive these webshops as companies that set high standards for these aspects. Whether this is actually based on their experience with these webshops or the popularity of the webshops is unclear and could be accessed further in future research. On the other hand delivery unreliability was the biggest subject in the customers complaints from Trustpilot. Other complaints mostly concerned customers perceiving not being helped by the customer service when having problems / questions.

7. CONCLUSION

This research is based on the question: "How do potential customers perceive successful E-commerce brands, based on their experience with these brands?" To answer this question, the term "Successful E-commerce brands" from the research question, is represented by the cases of three webshops with the largest turnovers in the Netherlands. These are Bol.com, Coolblue and Zalando. (Twinkle100, 2019). To fully answer the research question, different sub-questions are answered through Literature review and interviews. These sub questions cover the following items; Brand knowledge; Product / service quality; Social media activities and Webshop appearance. Besides, a desk research is done on customer reviews to better understand the positive and negative perceptions on these three web brands. Although all three of these webshops are very successful, they differ a lot in how customers perceive these brands, and for what reason they choose to purchase an item at their webshop.

Findings are based on interviews on 7 and a desk research on the review website Trustpilot.

Customers perceive successful E-commerce brands in a positive manner, which results in high expectations: customers expect a quick and reliable delivery, a highly available customer service and products and service of high quality. These expectations should be met by the brand to avoid harm to their reputation. A strong and clear brand image which could be related to a certain attribute, is of high importance to the perception of the (potential) customer. This attribute can lay in brand knowledge, product/service quality and emotion, social media activities, webshop appearance, but may also lay in specialization within a certain niche. The last may lead to further research.

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APPENDIX A

Interview questions concerning brand knowledge

Which of the three webshops do you consider most popular in the Netherlands? For what reasons do you find this webshop more popular?
Which of the webshops deliver, according to you, the highest value with their products / services? For what reasons do you find that this webshop delivers more value than the others with their products/services?
At which of the webshops, do you get the highest feeling of having made a good decision when purchasing something? Why more at this webshop than the other two?
At which of the webshops are you more willing to pay larger amounts? Why?

Interview questions concerning product/service quality and emotion

Which of the webshops deliver the highest quality of products according to you? Why do you think that?
What feeling do you get at each of the three webshops when surfing on it for a desired product?
Which webshop gives you the best feeling? Can you describe this feeling?
What is it that gave you this feeling? (eg. the packaging, the service, the product quality, the trust etc.)

Interview questions concerning social media activities

Which of do three webshops appear mostly on social media according to your experience? (eg. advertisements / Instagram posts / Facebook posts)
What do you think of the activities of each of the webshops executed on social media? Please explain for each webshop.
Do you think their social media presence have made the brand more known with you. Did this give you a more trusted feeling when purchasing something on the website? Please explain for each webshop.

Interview questions concerning webshop appearance

Which of the webshops is the easiest to use? Why do you think so? (eg. Functionality, page loading, page information, easy menus etc.)
Which of the webshops has the best design? Why do you think so?
What is most important for you when surfing on a webshop? (What are you looking for on a webshop when buying something?)

APPENDIX B

Naam	Geslacht	Leeftijd	Which of the three webshops do you consider most popular in the Netherlands? For what reasons do you find this webshop more popular?	Which of the webshops deliver, according to you, the highest value with their products / services? For what reasons do you find that this webshop delivers more value than the others with their products/services?	At which of the webshops, do you get the highest feeling of having made a good decision when purchasing something? Why more at this webshop than the other two?	At which of the webshops are you more willing to pay larger amounts? Why?	Which of the webshops deliver the highest quality of products according to you? Why do you think that?	What feeling do you get at each of the three webshops when surfing on it for a desired product?	Which webshop gives you the best feeling? Can you describe this feeling?
Arsham	Man	30	I really can't say which webshop is the most popular of the Netherlands. For me, it is Bol.com, because their delivery is fast, and that is important for me.	I often get good quality and delivery is also top	Bol.com often the quality is good and the other two are not really	Bol.com, you have lots of choice and supply is already on the next day	Cool Blue	Good feeling on all three of them because these sites give me a feeling of trust.	Zalando get my order always neat inside, bol.com unfortunately often went wrong and got 2nd hand stuff, cool blue is not really often ordered
Jack	Man	23	Hard to say; All three offer a variety of products. Zalando Clothing addressed coolblue more towards electronics and bol.com everything. I would choose bol.com	Cool Blue. Hard to say why, but the brand looks professional	Cool Blue, because it involves expensive products and a customer.	Cool Blue, for having expensive products. Bol.com when you get all those people who dropship 1000% profit trying to address	all three	Bol.com; dropship people. Cool Blue: good and safe feeling. Zalando: good and safe feeling	Cool Blue; euphoric
Frank	Man	23	Bol.com, media message stays longer stick for effective expression USPs	Bol.com, faster delivery compared with Zalando, good customer service, easy returns	Bol.com, user experience looks and feels the most mature	Bol.com I usually use on smaller purchases and zalando and upon purchase of clothing; clothing is a bit higher priced hence at zalando	I see no difference in the quality, all three carry to my knowledge no own product but use brands that guarantee the quality of their products	Bol.com: good experience, zalando: many search	Bol.com, convenience, simplicity, comfort, speed, good service
Tanya	Vrouw	26	Zalando, since this is a clothing shop and the other two websites I use less	Bol.com, because I think their range is the widest	With all that, I just get a good feeling when it is right for you and get this feeling based on the webshop	Cool Blue, thinking computers etc. These are products which are more expensive than a sweater or a book	Bol.com, cool blues and zalando all do actually. These are shops that provide all Grade	A neutral sense, the webshops are easily accessible and have a good search engine	Bol.com, since this website is best equipped because you look very easy and quickly to surf
Isaak	Man	55	Bol.com, because over the years I have used it a lot, and I have seen a lot of advertisements.	Bol.com because you can buy just about anything on this website. Very handy!	Although I make more use of bol.com and zalando, I think cool blue day still gives a more familiar feel because they really seem like enough specialists in electronics.	Coolblue. Mainly because their products are more expensive: electronic products	Cool Blue, again because it happened to me as true specialists	Bol.com offers heaps of the same, often exactly the same product. That reduced reliability for me. That's why I often buy only products bol.com of a famous brand. Zalando gives a very pleasant feeling, easy to use, very personal. Cool Blue gives a nice feeling because they are able but also contemporary. The marketing of cool blue appealing.	That's still zalando because it is extremely user friendly, from the moment of login, to search, order and even returns.
Mehmet	Man	21	Bol.com, because I see a lot of advertisements from this website	Bol.com	cool blue because've always guarantee a good product	Bol.com. I just trust that the webshop has high quality products and good after sales.	Cool Blue because they sell products with high quality	Bol.com because there is plenty of variety	Globe because I find everything I could want
Suzy	Vrouw	51	Bol.com because these longer exists, at least as a mainstream shop. It has had more time to spread his name	Zalando, I've had bad experiences with bol.com and cool blue (receiving defective products) and with Zalando I have not.	Cool Blue, because you can tune so after my feeling here is always very clear products together made the best decision to hebbem	Cool Blue, it's great value for money and defect you can return the product to always charge	Cool Blue, experience	Satisfaction	Cool Blue, the sense of confidence because I have long been making use of cool blue and have always been satisfied

Naam	Geslacht	Leeftijd	What is it that gave you this feeling? (eg. the packaging, the service, the product quality, the trust etc.)	Which of do three webshops appear mostly on social media according to your experience? (eg. advertisements / Instagram posts / Facebook posts)	What do you think of the activities of each of the webshops executed on social media? Please explain for each webshop.	Do you think their social media presence have made the brand more known with you. Did this give you a more trusted feeling when purchasing something on the website? Please explain for each webshop.	Which of the webshops is the easiest to use? Why do you think so? (eg. Functionality, page loading, page information, easy menus etc.)	Which of the webshops has the best design? Why do you think so?	What is most important for you when surfing on a webshop? (What are you looking for on a webshop when buying something?)
Arsham	Man	30	Not in good condition receive	Zalando	Irritating	No not really, commercials are annoying	Bol.com	Bol.com	Everything is easy to find and it's easy to buy too similar to basket from the store
Jack	Man	23	Product quality, service and trust	None of them	nA	No, I know them to mouth by mouth	Zalando: very easy to the specific product	Zalando and cool blue: easy browsing	Easy and good reviews on products
Frank	Man	23	Online channels decor, service <	No idea, I'm not there to	See previous answer	See previous answer	Bol.com, good nav structure, fast charging, unified comms style	Bol.com, see previous answer	Search, clear categories, price display, discounts, clipped journeys
Tanya	Vrouw	26	The website of bol.com and final service	Zalando, I guess that's because I often order something from here	Strong and convenient	It certainly gives more prominence to me, as it will come back every week to me. So you're more likely to take another look at the website	Bol.com, page loading and simple Kenu's make sure you're here easily can surf	Bol.com, as previously indicated, the simple menus	The engine and the simple menus
Isaak	Man	55	The service is pleasant, easy to return. Although she sometimes difficult to reach by phone. In addition, I always assume that the product quality is good, because I always had good experiences with it.	Zalando and cool blue	Bol.com not fall me very much. According mik they have a lot of advertising commercials on TV, especially during the holidays but I almost never watch TV so reaching loaf was not. Zalando, I see a lot of passing by, many via instagram. Often items not 'pushed'. The way they do that is inspiring. Therefore, it is nice. Cool Blue see I get a little less over, but also via instagram sometimes they push it more 'normal' products.	Because they often are seen in social media, I go there are from the well-known online shops, thereby increasing confidence.	Zalando, the app is very orettig to use. Although pages may not load because of the Internet	Zalando, convenient categories. Easy to search.	Clarity about shipments, returns, conditions etc.
Mehmet	Man	21	Good feeling full of confidence	Zalando	For each same.	To make purchases at any of these sites has improved my confidence course. Especially in cool blue and aftersales they often instructions on how a product works	Bol.com. Good and easy to drive and easy to navigate	Cool Blue because it is beautiful	clearness
Suzy	Vrouw	51	See question 7	Zalando	I think it's a good move, since a large part of their audience using social media	I agree with this. The advertising in general is not cheap. The fact that these online shops as much use of it tells something about the size of the company. This large gives a feeling of confidence	Cool Blue, simple and functional web	Cool Blue, beautiful modern design and brand	Inexpensive, convenient and reviews website

APPENDIX C

Bol.com reviews

Positive reviews

Dzenis Crljenkovic	Excellent	<p>Want good service order at bol.com!</p> <p>I actually order 90% of my stuff on bol.com Over the years i have been ordering here they never ceize to amaze me of how good the service is at bol.com I have had some issues with some of my orders and never was it not fixable by bol.com and their amazing customer service!</p>
Diana Katherine	Excellent	<p>Bol.com is amazing</p> <p>Bol.com is amazing. Everything that you get from there you may be sure it's going to be delivered on time. I was a bit delayed with Chrismast presents and guess what, after 2 hours my order was at my desk. Super efficient. Great website, super easy to use. You can track all your packages, see your shopping history. Amazing. Love it.</p>
Ana	Excellent	<p><u>8.1 I have been always scared to buy online and then I found BOL. GREAT COSTUMER SERVICE!!!</u></p> <p>I got a terrible misunderstanding with a partner Bol had and because I was really dissapointed they have called me immediatly to solve my problem. they knew my historial as a costumer and have treated me great, caring about any single problem I had and giving me a really good solution to my problem. I never buy online since I cannot trust that the Costumer Service will care if there is any problem. But my life has just changed since I have Bol in my life. Thanks for caring that much for all your costumers no matter how small or big we are in our shoppings... Other companies should learn! Thanks a lot BOL!!</p>
Margot	Excellent	<p><u>8.2 Great experiance from A to Z.</u></p> <p>Great mobile app, insanely fast and efficient once you are logged in. The offers are interesting and they have almost everything you can think of! The customer service is comprehensive in case of mishaps with external sellers.</p>

Negative reviews

FX	Bad	<p><u>8.3 FRAUDSTER - ITEM NOT DELIVERED AND REFUSAL TO REIMBURSE</u></p> <p>In November, I ordered an item on bol.com. They delivered the item at a wrong address. I contacted them and they told me that it's deliver and it's my responsibility to get the item back. I haven't signed anything and I'm supposed to be responsible. On top, they told me that they have the right to deliver it to another address according to their terms and conditions. So, be aware, Bol.com has the right to do anything.....</p>
Zhou Zheng	Poor	<p><u>8.4 Bol sent a wrong item and requires the...</u></p> <p>Bol sent a wrong item and requires the customer to carry it all the way to the post office to return it. The most problematic part is, since the item is too big to fit in the box, after it delivered, the box is basically damaged. Now after communicate with the customer service, I have to buy a bigger box to make the item fit in, so I can return it back. I understand that operating such a big website is difficult, but they should at least improve their management style. If you made a mistake, which already created a trouble for the customer, just try to not create more troubles further.</p>
Laurie Fitzpatrick	Poor	<p><u>8.5 No customer service</u></p> <p>As is so often the case, megastore with enormous choice; great, but wait till something goes wrong. No customer service whatsoever, questions are evaded or delegated from department to department and as a customer you are powerless. Add to that the absurd (international) shipping fees and it is clear why I don't deal with them any longer</p>
Mette	Bad	<p><u>8.6 I have used bol.com regularly and been...</u></p> <p>I have used bol.com regularly and been happy with it. However, I have never had to deliver anything back - or had to be in contact with them after the portage until now. The way they are not taking responsibility at all, when the product specifications is not the same as the goods they send, is just second to non. I cannot recommend anyone to shop at a place, that totally ignore their legal responsibility in that way - so stay away from Bol.com - there are so many other services out there to use, who does put costumers first!</p>

Coolblue.nl reviews

Positive reviews

V Westeneng	Excellent	8.7 <u>Your wishes all possible and kind delivery men</u> Bought a Samsung refrigerator with Coolblue. Even though the model was available in more retailers, Coolblue offered a service to choose whether we would like for the refrigerator door to be turned around. It was an easy option available upon adding to cart. We could choose our own delivery date which was so helpful for making sure it fit within our renovation schedule. Delivery was smooth, they called before coming and the delivery guys were extremely friendly and kind. They are great ambassadors of an online store!
Dorena B	Excellent	8.8 <u>Excellent service and the best price!</u> I purchased recently a TV and a scanner from CoolBlue and the service was great. Both items are as described on the website and the delivery service was excellent. I received real-time updates about the status of my order. And last but not least, the price was better than any other online retailer in the Netherlands.
Tiina Nikkola	Great	8.9 <u>Easy and informative webshop</u> Very happy with the purchase. The website is easy to navigate and the information is very clear. Also payment was quick and easy. The delivery did arrive in 2 days instead of the next day as promised but that was probably due to Black Friday madness at PostNL
Grace Yano	Excellent	8.10 <u>Good products, good prices, good service: 5 stars</u> I ordered a washing machine from coolblue and had a great experience. The machine was delivered on time, brought upstairs to my second floor apartment and they installed it for me within 10 minutes. The website is also helpful at explaining the differences between products.

Negative reviews

Erika	Bad	8.11 <u>Disappointing delivery, even worse customer service</u> I bought a product that was delivered 7 days later than advertised. Because the package was lost twice, the customer service advised me to cancel the order and place a new order twice. After cancelling the order again, the customer service denied me of any compensation for failing to give good service, precisely because I had cancelled the order (under their instructions). All that while being in constant touch with the customer service from the beginning to identify why the package was delayed. The experience proved there is lack of coordination from the delivery department and the customer service, as I received information from Bpost before Coolblue was aware of any issues with the package. Finally, the customer service did not recognise any issues in their treatment of my order and overall case, proving no feedback loop to improve their service.
Eliran Natan	Bad	BE AWARE! We started a subscription with coolblue a month ago and its a disaster. The dryer stopped working properly after one usage and coolblue refuses to replace it, despite everything that is written in the contract. When we call the customer service, they ask us to hold on the line, and after a while just hang up. At other times, they say that an appointment is booked, but they never actually arrive. They do anything possible not to swap the machine, suggesting it's our false. They will never tell you that they won't swap the machine, but they will do anything possible to avoid it. They also refuse to cancel our subscription. Therefore, we had no choice but to start a legal procedure against coolblue.
Arthur Umugisha	Bad	8.12 <u>Really Bad customer service</u> Really Bad customer service. Ordered a computer with same day delivery option, they made me wait until midnight before a notification that the delivery was postponed, and now I have to wait all the day while I needed it before taking m'y plane at 3pm. Will Never order there again
Piray Atsak	Poor	8.13 <u>My experience with the delivery was terrible</u> My experience with the delivery was terrible. I warned them that the entrance door was small and perhaps the machine would not pass, instead taking time to measure, they took off the cartoon and push the machine through the door. It didn't pass, moreover one side is completely scratched. This was a new Bosch machine. I took off the door while they were complaining being delayed. They did not even have to pick up an old machine but it seemed the only thing that mattered to them was to be on time. The person who was connecting the machine did not see the opening at first and said that the hose would not pass the opening. They called me to say that there was a problem and they could not connect the machine, I had to show them where the opening is and how they can pass through. So it was ridiculous experience, never again. I'm only giving them 2 because there us no leak now as the machine is working but that is kind of my low expectation.

Zalando.nl reviews

Positive reviews

Wendy Boiler	Excellent	<p>8.14 <u>Excellent service</u></p> <p>I have been ordering my clothes from Zalando for some years now and I love them. Never had any problems with orders or returns. This week I had to contact the customer service for the very first time because of a small issue, and they immediately resolved it and even gave me more than I asked for.</p>
Dirk	Excellent	<p>8.15 <u>Alright customer service.</u></p> <p>Great company with good customer service. Have ordered from Zalando many times and I've always been very satisfied. I have had two instances where the order lead to minor trouble. The first one was when the order was delayed by just under a week. In this case you can always choose to cancel or to just wait it out. once I ordered a box of 3 boxers but one of them was missing. It was a bit of a struggle to find their phone number but after I found it they gave me two options. A refund of one third of the price, for which I opted, or I could send back the order completely for a full refund. Its a good and fair company with alright customer service.</p>
V. Boor	Excellent	<p>8.16 <u>Zalando delivers. Very satisfied with their service</u></p> <p>Have ordered a lot of items from Zalando and from Zalando-Lounge in the Netherlands.. and returned quite a few items, because I'm quite picky. I'm happy with the service, haven't had any problems with the delivery. I think Zalando does a lot to ensure that you know what to expect and can track delivery. I have some experience in dealing with their support desk due to a defective item from Zalando- Lounge and other unrelated questions about specific ordering and return issues, and do feel that in all cases the matter was resolved adequately or even surpassed my expectations. E.g. combing items from various orders in one return package has always been processed in a timely fashion and correctly. Even when I combine Zalando and Zalando- Lounge items in one return package. Even when my printer had problems and i added a mostly hand written return form. I think that's impressive and shows the resilience of their processes. Would recommend Zalando to everyone.</p>
Fagito2000	Great	<p>8.17 <u>Delivery time</u></p> <p>I buy often from Zalando and have to say in general I am very satisfied of their service. Through the years I have noticed though that their delivery time gets longer. In the past they were my number 1 choice because they did deliver in 24 hours. Now a delivery can take up to 5 working days and I am talking about many placed orders!!! So for me they have lost this competitive advantage against other webshops. I will keep on using them as besides that their service, return & refund process and products are very good and their customer support have always been supportive and helpful.</p>

Negative reviews

Alex	Bad	<p>8.18 <u>ZALANDO? NEVER AGAIN</u></p> <p>This company must be smart on selling fake products or products with defect (most of the time you only notice after some time). I bought branded stuff only to find out the quality sucked... hence must be fake stuff. Like BOSS ORANGE belt, who broke on the buckle after a couple usages (unbelievable)... I contacted Zalando several times to get an explanation on this. they did not even replied!! for several weeks.. and until today. they must be laughing at my complaint. But I realized this can only happen to fake stuff. Never buying again from them.</p>
Olga E	Bad	<p>8.19 <u>No refund payments for weeks now!</u></p> <p>Hi, normally I like buying on Zalando, but recently it's became a constant fight to get the refund and cancellation payments back. Instead of stated 5 working days to process the payments back, I am now waiting for multiple refunds for more than 2-3 weeks now! And these are lomg ago confirmed to be paid back! So it now takes a lot of emails and conversations with promises to redirect my queastions to the financial department and yet... nothing! They "kindly ask to have some patience and thank me for the understanding", but I am not willing to agree with this misleading policies and poor service! Very disappointed!</p>
Sana	Poor	<p>8.20 <u>Guarantee is fake</u></p> <p>Always order from Zalando, always satisfied until now. I ordered a small Tommy Hilfiger bag specifically for holidays. I only use the bag to carry my passport, phone and money. Went to vacation 3 times with this bag and the zipper came off completely and the grip broke. I had to walk my entire holiday with these important stuff tucked under my arm. Zalando asked me to sent pictures and the ordernumber several times before the finally came to conclusion that I've used this bag too much and too long. Excuses me? And where is the 2 years guarantee they promise?</p>
Jess	Bad	<p>8.21 <u>Terrible service</u></p> <p>One busy Sunday has lead to the system failure and took same payment twice from my account. I informed customer care immediately but instead of refunding they are sending two identical orders to my address and I have to handle return myself and wait for refund for few more weeks. Customer care specialist on email was rude and unprofessional. Nobody even apologised or offered any compensation.</p>