

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION ON RESOLVING PRODUCT WARRANTIES ONLINE**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26758/13.1.15>**

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Abstract

Objective. The objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the intention to use a new warranty application and the ease of warranty management, on the one side, and work-life balance, on the other side on a sample of Romanian consumers.

Material and methods. Work-Life Balance Questionnaire (WLB) was used to assess the work-life balance concept. The intention to use a new warranty application and the ease of warranty management were tested using one single Likert question for each concept, assessing the degree of warranty management easiness and warranty application intention to use respectively. Consumer behavior was also assessed with self-developed descriptive items. In total, 448 respondents were included in this research. The data were statistically analyzed using Pearson correlation and descriptive statistics.

Results. Results have shown a positive correlation between the intention to use a new warranty application and ease of warranty management ($r = .24, p < .01$), and between the intention to use a new application for warranty and life-work balance ($r = .10, p < .05$). Behavioral drivers explain the obtained results.

Conclusions. This study contributes to the understanding of the relationship that the work-life balance presents in relation to the consumer's perception regarding the resolution of product guarantees in the online system.

Keywords: work-life balance, online applications, consumer psychology, digitization.

Introduction

Work-life balance

The balance between professional life and personal life is one of the concepts widely studied in the field of consumer psychology. Work-life balance can also be defined in terms of job satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with minimal conflict of role. Most often, this term correlates with a person's perception of achieving harmony between several areas, such as personal time, family, and work (Ungerson & Yeandle, 2005). The balance between work and family highlights a strong orientation of a person in multiple roles that he fulfills in life, a construction between several roles (Marks & MacDermid, 2006), construction which can be imbalance in certain aspects of life.

When it comes to achieving this balance in some companies, this is a key issue in many areas of activity, as these high requirements for long working hours have become normal. It has become a necessity to involve organizations in helping employees to strike a balance between the demands of their work and their personal lives. Developing a real balance is possible only when a person is aware of the fulfillment of all roles honestly and feels personal satisfaction. Greenhaus (2000) argues that the occurrence of a conflict between work and family has very negative consequences significantly affecting the quality of family life, health, and the achievement of professional performance. Consequences may include serious constraints on career choices, limited career advancement opportunities, and difficulties in choosing between children and a happy family and a successful career.

Work-life balance is an important variable for achieving employee well-being, considering workplace requirements and family responsibilities (Karkoulian Srouf, & Sinan, 2016). Research is growing in interest of analyzing the correlation between workplace demands and family pressures. The use of ever-changing technology makes achieving this balance a real challenge (McCloskey, 2018). Valcour (2007) highlights a strongly negative correlation between workplace requirements and work-family balance. In order to maintain a personal work-life balance, more and more organizations are already implementing organizational practices that give to employees' significant benefits, such as: efficient management of multiple responsibilities at home; a flexible way of working and earning an income that leads to the proper management of family life; programs of training for cultivating confidence in the potential of the individual, an organizational culture that puts the person in a central place.

Online applications

The use of online applications has become increasingly necessary in the practice of consumer behavior, being directly related to the development of computer-based technology applications in the context of marketing, for the individual with or without time. Specialized programs aim to meet the needs of consumers, offering a wide range of attractive and stimulating services as well as bonuses for the enrichment and development of a product (Warren, 2007). New technologies are an important signal for the progress and improvement of quality of life and play a key role in educating and developing consumer behavior. Building digital applications that meet the needs of acquisition but also those of solving a guaranteed return, by offering a wide range of attractive and stimulating services is a necessity in the current context dominated by strong shortcomings in the area of time management (Valkenburg & Taylor, 2018). Online applications in consumer psychology are examples of good practice in the field and highlight the

effective role of the use of technology in purchasing and product management activities. Digital marketing policies have been based on the development of hardware related to information and communications technology, software, internet access in the field of consumer psychology. The most significant aspect of online applications for consumer behavior is that at all levels it manages to dissolve the artificial wall between its profile and the "virtual store". Consumers can find original information and collect quality products themselves. The second strong point is the provision of an easy return mechanism for products. Online shopping requires a high level of independence and motivation from the individual, but also from the perspective of employees, their energy is balanced and aimed at a high quality of work (Warren, 2007). The accelerated evolution of technology determines its infiltration on all levels of society, from the political or cultural to the economic or inter-relational. As a result, technology makes its presence felt in a multitude of daily activities, such as communicating with loved ones, scheduling a medical visit or supplying the necessary goods in the home (Rawashdeh, 2015). Online shopping sometimes involves a reduced time to purchase the desired products, but this facility has favored, especially in recent years, the development of online shopping addiction, which presents the same risks as any digital addiction (Baciu, 2019).

Consumer profile

The buyer is the person who offers, accepts, and pays a price for the purchase of a product / service that may or may not be used so the person named the consumer is the person who acquires, uses, or consumes various products or services. Consumers behave in a certain way when they are deeply involved in the buying process and aware of the significant differences between the products. Consumers are deeply involved if the product is expensive, not frequently purchased, and presents some risks (Perez, Puig, & Vicente, 2017). Usually, the consumer does not know much about the product category, needing more information about it. Customer satisfaction after purchasing the product and post-purchase behavior is influenced by the relationship between consumer expectations and actual product performance. Analyzing the positive impact on consumers requires an understanding of the nature of consumer knowledge about the effects that new technologies can have on consumer information and on how consumers can respond to certain information. The level of customer satisfaction is mainly determined by the optimal response to their requests and the speed of solving problems that arise in the process of purchasing goods. At the same time, the degree of employee satisfaction increases with the ease of performing duties and the existence of effective employee-customer communication (Prothero et al., 2011). Thus, a consumer's purchasing decisions are greatly influenced by several personal characteristics. On the other hand, when discussing such a purchase, the perception of consumers for a certain brand must also be considered, as studies show that people tend to equate their needs more with certain brands of products (Kim & Choi, 2005). This may be due to the fact that people prefer products that they perceive as having a personality and that are similar to theirs, this positive effect of personality-product congruence being different from the image-consumer effect congruence. Therefore, more than any other personality trait, the whole concept of personality impacts the buyer's behavior.

Material and methods

General objectives

The objective of this study was to examine if the ease of warranty management and work-life balance influence Romanian employees' decision to use a new warranty management application in the future.

Research questions

1. What is the correlation between ease of warranty management and the intention to use a new warranty application?
2. What is the correlation between work-life balance and the intention to use a new warranty application?
3. Which are the consumers' motivations regarding the usage of online applications?
4. What drive consumer behavior to the adoption of technology in their daily activities

Participants

The research data were obtained as part of a large-scale investigation of the Romanian consumers behavior regarding the online shopping applications usage, which is ongoing. The target population of the initial study was represented by students and employees living and working in Romania. The current study (November 2021 – March 2022) included a number of 448 respondents with ages between 18 and 55 years, with a higher percentage of women and more respondents with higher education (faculty, master studies or doctorate) than secondary education (high school or other supplementary studies) (frequencies are presented in Table 1). The questionnaires were built using Google Forms and were sent through Facebook or email to respondents. The study also included respondents chosen through the snowball technique. Participation in the present study was voluntary. All participants were informed about the objective, the procedure, and instructions of the study. They were also assured about the participation confidentiality and about the new data protection policy (GDPR) with the reminder that the participation in this research does not require their obligation to participate in another future stages. The included participants agreed with the informed consent before starting to complete the questionnaires.

Table 1*Sample structure used to analyse research data*

Demographic characteristics	N%
Gender	
Females	81%
Males	18%
Other	1%
Age category	
< 20 years	34%
1. years	25%
31-40 years	15%
41-50 years	15%
51-60 years	10%
> 60 years	1%
Education	
Higher education	77%
Lower education	23%

N = 448*Instruments*

The study focuses on two key dimensions - consumer perceptions and work-life balance. Based on an extensive analysis of the literature, the items for each dimension were self-developed or adapted from existing questionnaires.

Fourteen items from the Work-Life Balance Questionnaire (WLB) were used to measure work-life balance. The English version of the work-life balance scale was first translated into Romanian and then verified by professional translators to see if the meaning of the English questions has been preserved and will be correctly understood by respondents. A pilot study with 30 respondents was conducted to test the reliability characteristics and internal consistency. The

new data obtained on the sample presented also good reliability characteristics ($\alpha = .74$). Work-life balance was measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with examples of items such as: “Do you feel that you cannot reach personal and professional life balance?”, "How often do you think or worry about work?”.

Warranty management ease of use was measured by using a single self-developed Likert question: “How easy is it to manage the warranty of the purchased items?”. The intention to use a new warranty application was also measured through a single Likert item: “How interested are you in using an application to manage the warranty of your purchased products instead of the papers you receive from the store?”.

The research also included the consumer profile analysis to gain evidence about the consumers perceptions on the online shopping and the criteria they consider while shopping.

Consumer profile was measured directly by descriptive self-developed items referring at the way respondents gather information in general and the time spent to gather information about products, the most used way to purchase products, time spent at shopping, their motivation to shop online, the reasons employees choose the brand of the products they buy, the importance of the products to be well organized in a shop and the consumers ‘attitude towards the usage of online applications. All these aspects regarding the consumer behavior and motivations were considered in the interpretation of the results.

Results

Pearson correlation was used to analyse the relationship between the adoption of a warranty management application and the ease of warranty management and work-life balance. To test the consumers’ perceptions and motivations regarding the use of online environment, frequencies of responses were calculated per each consumer profile item included in the study.

From Table 2 it can be observed a positive and significant correlation in terms of the intention to use a new warranty app and ease of warranty management ($r = .24, p < .01$), which means that H1 is confirmed. This translates into the fact that those who want to use a warranty app find it easier to manage the warranty of purchased products online instead of on paper. This offers a number of benefits that stand out for their high efficiency in managing possible problems with the warranty of purchased products that have the potential to enhance the credibility of the brand from which the user bought (Alnawas & Aburub, 2016).

Table 2

Pearson correlation between the intention to use a warranty app and the warranty management easiness

Variables	Coefficients	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Intention to use an app for warranty & Ease of warranty management	$r=.242^{**}$	<.01

Note: $**p<.01$

N=448

Also, from Table 3, a positive correlation between the intention to use a new application for warranty and life-work balance ($r = .10$, $p < .05$) can be observed, which means that H2 is also confirmed.

Table 3

Pearson correlation between intention to use and app for warranty and life-work balance

Variables	Coefficients	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Work-life balance & Intention to use an app for warranty	$r=.108^*$	$<.05$

Note: * $p < .05$

N=448

Additionally, the consumer behavior analysis has also shown that a big percentage of the respondents (51%) prefer to gather information from specialized sources (specialty articles or videos with specialists from the domains of interest), with 32% respondents that choose social media or mass media as important sources of information. That means consumers search for (1) specialized sources to gain evidence-based information and (2) shortcuts to obtain information in a fast manner (videos, social media, or mass media). In this regard, this research’s results also shows that consumers allocate the minimum of time to gather information about the products they want to buy (45% - less than 10 minutes and 35% - between 10 and 30 minutes) that strengthens the previous argument.

Most of the respondents prefer to use both online and offline shopping (30%) or to go directly in the physical stores (52%) to purchase their preferred products, with 70% of them spending less than 2 hours at shopping. However, the attitude towards online applications is positive, with 77% of the respondents being totally open to use them in their daily activities. The motivation behind the online usage is predominantly related to time management (19%), comfort (19%), the diversity of products in the online environments (18%) or the easiness and rapidity of buying online (18%). More than that, most of respondents (88%) consider that if the products are well organized in a shop, that will help them save time while shopping.

In this regard, the current research results on the level of the work-life balance, shows that this equilibrium is not well satisfied ($m = 3.60$, $SD = .47$), explaining the consumers desires to have control over their daily activities in terms of time.

Regarding the reasons consumers choose the brands, the positive experience with brands’ products is important for 29% of the respondents, the positive experience with the brand for 18% and the choice of the products that satisfy the immediate needs without taking the brand into consideration for 18% of them. In other words, the customer experience is an important factor in modeling purchasing behavior.

Discussions

The results highlighted above provoke a series of discussions on the subject of the consumer profile and on the implications that digital applications have on the personal-work life balance.

This can be attributed to the fact that the use of apps has several advantages that can help in better managing tasks in everyday life, with implications for the work-life balance. The guarantee offers the certainty that the products will last longer, which could imply that there will be no need for additional financial efforts to purchase a new product in a short time, which contributes to less pressure for extra work, affecting the time spent with family, for example. It is well known that a work-life balance involves experiencing multiple roles and depends on how efficiently time and effort are distributed between these roles (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Thus, an app used for the management of warranty can decrease the time spent in handling situations that would involve returning to the store and filling out paperwork. These results can be explained by the past research considering the attention span an important factor in how information is perceived by consumers in the online and offline environment through advertisements or multimedia. Since today the information overload is present in individuals' lives through the quantity and the speed it gets in their hands, the attention limitation tends to be increasing (Carstens, Doss, & Kies, 2018). Therefore, it is more than evident that people want to find the information they need in a faster and easier way.

The consumers motivation to choose online environment because of its easiness and rapidity strengths this research results that the ease of use is an important factor in the adoption of the online application in general and warranty applications in particular. Time management seems also to be an important factor in the buying process and shopping experience. With the challenges that arise in the modern context, the difficulties to keep an equilibrium between profession, family, and other domains of life (Khateeb, 2021), it is clear why time management is an important factor that drive consumer behaviors. More than that, past research shows that time management is one of the key strategies for keeping the balance between work and personal life (Uddin, 2021). Also, it shows the need to develop an app that offers a convenient and handy approach for every buyer, and which also incorporates aspects of warranty management. Moreover, having a branded app has a positive persuasive impact which increases the user interest in the brand (Bellman, Potter, Treleaven-Hassard, Robinson, & Varan, 2011)

Conclusions

The use of online applications has become a necessary condition in the context of how everyday life is conducted. The need for better time management also has implications for how warranties are managed, where the use of technology to develop digital applications for easier management would prove very useful. Applications can thus provide the necessary work-life balance.

Making consumers' lives easier will help brands enhance the consumers' relationship with the brand that will lead to a more positive experience for the first ones. As studies found, ease of use has a positive influence on repurchase intention (Febriani & Ardani, 2021), so the importance of studying this concept and considering it an important factor in the brand-customer relationship is more than evident. Regarding the current research, if customers perceive the warranty's management process as being easy, they will continue using the application and their

perception on the brand will be positively changed. As customer effort is negatively associated to customer happiness (Sugathan, Rossmann, & Ranjan, 2018) brands need to consider the consumers' perception of the time and effort spent in managing their products and services to increase the customers' satisfaction.

More than that, the increased number of applications and online services are mint to be important elements in the peoples' lives. With more and more people shopping or paying online, now it is clear that extending the online services in different life areas will help consumers to better manage their daily activities. Online services help them save time, make their life easier and have a significant impact on their work-life balance. In the case of the present research, upgrading to a new form of warranty management as part of the online behavior will contribute to this equilibrium.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study refers to the utility of an app for the management of warranties which is of interest in the context of work-life balance. The current results are in accordance with the past research that shows a positive relationship between the perceived ease of use and the intention to use online services. Similar studies were conducted and showed a positive relationship between the ease of use and the adoption of different online services as e-government systems (Almahamid, Mcadams, Al Kalaldehy, & Mo'Taz, 2010), e-commerce (Gefen & Straub, 2000) or online mapping service applications (Marzuki et al., 2016). Regarding the importance of technology on work-life balance, both positive and negative consequences have been researched. In this regard, past studies showed that Internet and mobile technologies influences the dimensions (flexibility and permeability), types (integration, autonomy, interference, and segmentation), and consequences (job satisfaction, job stress, and overwork) of work-life balance with technology use shaping the people perception of flexibility and permeability regarding the balance between work and life spheres (Nam, 2014). Other research also showed that technology was more related with the increase of productivity (Sarker, Sarker, Xiao, & Ahuja, 2012) and work efficiencies due to the flexibility (Fleck, Cox, & Robison, 2015) that comes in the technology usage process. Therefore, technology is considered as being an important resource in the work environment for employees.

These findings are also consistent with research showing that mobile applications are of interest among marketers but also consumers because of their positive impact and practicality (Alnawas & Aburub, 2016; Bellman et al., 2011; Sirgy & Lee, 2018).

Future research must be conducted to verify the relationship between technology and work-life balance on a longitudinal level or to examine the impact of other prominent factors in the relationship between the use of technology or electronic warranties and work-life balance. Also, further research can also concentrate on the customers' work-life balance and the brand loyalty or the continuous usage of the brands' online products.

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