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Internet Purchasing Attitudes: Does It All Come Down to Cost?

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Being able to shop and make purchases via the Internet is a relatively recent choice, one which people have either embraced or avoided. Studies have been done to determine factors contributing to either position. Research suggests that convenience is largely the reason why consumers choose to make Internet purchases (Bellman, Lohse, & Johnson, 1999). Conversely, research indicates that security, technical understanding, and their resulting comfort levels, are major reasons why consumers choose not to make Internet purchases (Bhatnagar, Misra, & Rao, 2000). With the increasing competition for consumer business within e-commerce (as well as other shopping methods), it is important to consider the attitudes of consumers about important considerations in making purchases online.

Procedure

Data regarding attitudes towards purchasing products on the Internet was collected as a segment of a larger survey looking at Internet shopping behaviors with regards to personality and locus of control characteristics. Participants were asked to indicate their "top three most important features" when considering purchasing products on the Internet. There were thirteen predetermined options and "other," a write-in option, from which respondents could choose. Participants were also asked to indicate their "top three reasons that result in NOT purchasing products on the Internet"; which consisted of sixteen predetermined options and "other," a write-in option. The predetermined options were derived from other studies regarding Internet purchasing attitudes and behaviors as well as informal surveys before the data-collecting survey.

Research participants included four hundred eighty-nine undergraduate and graduate students in psychology and business classes, all of whom had access to the Internet. Psychology undergraduates were given extra credit points for survey participation. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 51; however, 90% fell in the range of 18 to 29. The division of the participants by gender was relatively equivalent with 43% females and 54% males. The race of the participants included: 68% Caucasian; 5% African American; 5% Hispanic; 13% Asian/Pacific Islander; 2% Native Americans; and 5% other.

Results

Preliminary results (see Table 1) indicate that while security issues and concern towards transmission of sensitive information on the Internet were important considerations for the population sampled, it was not the most important. "Price", specifically "Lowest price" was the most important feature as selected by 25% of the respondents, when considering purchasing products on the Internet. This was nearly double the two subsequent chosen features, "Security of sensitive information", (14%), and "Variety of choices" (14%). The next most important feature, "Getting orders/services in a timely manner", was chosen by 12% of the participants.

When respondents were asked to select their top three reasons for not making Internet purchases, 21%

chose "Giving out credit card information online" as the most important reason. The economic reason, "Excessive shipping/handling charges" was selected second by 17% of the participants. The third reason chosen to avoid Internet purchasing was a tie between "Giving out personal information online" (15%) and the inability to examine the merchandise prior to purchase, "Can't examine the quality of the item" (15%).

Table 1. Top reasons for purchasing and NOT purchasing on the Internet.

Most important features when purchasing on the Internet	Top reasons for NOT purchasing on the Internet
Lowest price Security of sensitive info Variety of choices Getting orders/services in timely manner	Giving out credit card info Excessive shipping/handling charges Giving out personal info Can't examine quality of item

CONCLUSION

While security issues are important to the active and potential Internet consumers, our survey results suggest that cost issues are just as, if not more important. Internet retailers that want to entice consumers to purchase online may want to take the "price" and extra "charges" factors into consideration. Traditional retailers may also want to emphasize "lower prices" and "no shipping charges" as a way to lure consumer dollars.

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