Retail and e-commerce industry

The e-commerce industry involves the buying and selling of goods over the internet, facilitated by platforms such as websites, mobile applications, and online marketplaces. It is a rapidly evolving sector, shaped by trends like the growth of social commerce, personalized shopping experiences, and the increasing use of technologies such as artificial intelligence and price comparison tools.

In South Africa, the most purchased items online include apparel, jewellery, grooming products, technological devices, and pet accessories. [1] Globally, clothing and footwear dominate online sales, purchased by 57% of users, while electronics closely follow, with 40% of users engaging with those categories. [2] A quote that captures the importance of user experience (UX) in digital platforms is attributed to Elon Musk: “Any product that needs a manual is broken” [3]. This underscores the necessity for intuitive, seamless design in e-commerce websites. Studies show that over one-third of shoppers will not return after a single negative experience. It is therefore important that the e-commerce website has great functional design and readability, in order to get the most possible user satisfaction. [4] Well-crafted user experience can more than double conversion rates by making sites intuitive, accessible, and easy to navigate.

Price comparison technology helps users to find the best value for money by comparing prices across many retailers. This not only saves consumers time and effort but also makes shopping more efficient and informed. These tools are especially useful because the prices of even identical items can vary significantly across vendors. Some examples of price comparison platforms include ShopSavvy, BuyVia, Google Shopping, and Pricecheck. [5] These tools extract complete pricing data-which includes base prices, discounts, additional fees, and taxes- from different retailers, then compare these final costs to determine which offer the best value. One of the advantages of such technology is that it is relatively low-cost to implement, making it accessible even to smaller developers and retailers. In fact, it is estimated that approximately 85% of consumers have used a price comparison site, often discovering new, more competitive retailers in the process. [6]

In a marketplace where consumers face an overwhelming number of choices and only minor price differences, the combination of effective price comparison tools and strong user experience is crucial. By aggregating real-time data from a variety of retailers and presenting it through fast, user-friendly interfaces, these platforms empower shoppers to make informed decisions quickly and confidently. Ultimately, the future of e-commerce will be defined by platforms that successfully integrate transparent pricing with intuitive human-centred design.

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