

Chapter 1

E–Consumer Behaviour: Past, Present and Future Trajectories of an Evolving Retail Revolution

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ABSTRACT

Shopping online has emerged as one of the most popular Internet applications, providing a plethora of purchasing opportunities for consumers and sales challenges for retailers. The aim of this paper is to shed further light on the past and present status of the e-consumer phenomenon, by looking into online shopping behaviour and by examining the major reasons for being motivated or being de-motivated from buying online, focusing on the trust element. Building on that analysis, the possible future status of e-consumer behaviour is presented via an examination of ubiquitous retailing, which denotes the next stage of that retail revolution.

INTRODUCTION

Shopping online has emerged as one of the most popular Internet applications. Initially, the selling focus was on durable, non-food items such as books, but nowadays almost any product can be traded on-line. It is not surprising then that

the major retailers have capitalised on that selling format. For example, in the U.K., Tesco was the first grocery retailer to launch this facility in 1996.

The paper examines the past, present and future status of e-consumer behaviour and aims to shed further light on that phenomenon. The next

section analyses the past status of the e-consumer behaviour concept by discussing findings from the literature followed by a subsequent discussion on the present status of the phenomenon. The last sections provide our views on the future state of e-consumer behaviour, by presenting ubiquitous retailing as a possible evolution of retailing, before drawing relevant conclusions.

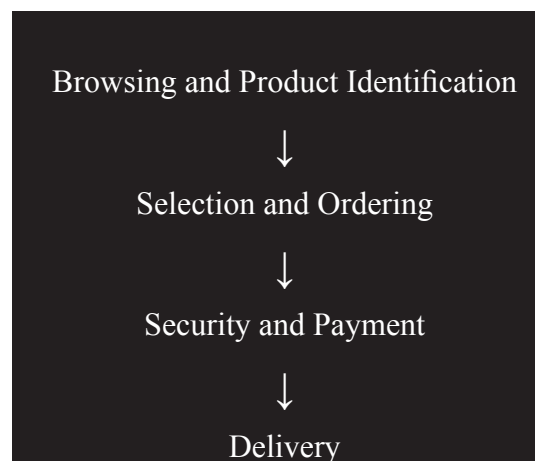
INTERNET CONSUMER SHOPPING: PAST STATUS

Rowley (1998) states that the Internet shopping experience has become a challenge for Internet retailers that need to ensure success at each stage (Figure 1).

For the first two stages, the website can be adapted for each different consumer, allowing them to have their own home page for specific needs and wants. Their shopping habits can be recorded, which helps in making the selection and ordering a quicker experience. For the Internet medium to be attractive to retailers, there are a number of issues associated with delivery, distribution, and relationships in the supply chain that will need to be pre-considered.

Focusing on the demographic element of the E-consumer, Mintel (2000, 2003) reports that the UK Internet user is predominately male, aged 20 – 30 and has an AB socio-economic background. Gender is believed to influence the extent and pattern of participation in web activities and Rodger and Harris (2003) found that women were less emotionally satisfied with Internet shopping than men. Specifically, females expressed lower emotional gratification with Internet shopping and are more sceptical of online shopping than males, perhaps because that emotional bond with the retailer is not evident in a virtual environment (Rodger and Harris, 2003). Men reported greater trust in Internet shopping, and perceived the Internet as a more convenient shopping outlet than did women. Overall, emotion and trust are the two critical determinants of consumer shopping attitudes and behaviour. In a similar vein, Girard *et al.* (2003) illustrated how shopping orientation and demographics have differential roles to play, based on the type of product purchased on the Internet. They also believe that gender, education, and household income revealed strong influences on preferences for shopping online whilst convenience is another key reason for purchasing online (Mayer, 2002;

Figure 1. The stages of the Internet shopping experience (Source: Rowley 1998)



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