Motivators for Australian Consumers to Search and Shop Online

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Abstract: This paper investigates the factors that motivate Australian consumers to use the Internet to search and shop for products and services. A qualitative research method was used, utilizing a semi-structured, in-depth interview technique. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted, using a snowball sampling method. The study found that there were six motivating factors that drew consumers to search and shop online for products and services. These factors include: convenience, saving time, cheaper prices along with the ability to compare prices, good place to shop for specialty and hard-to-access products, higher level of consumer control, and the ease of comparing products and services.

Keywords: Motivating factors; Internet; consumer behaviour; search; shop; online

1. Growth of the Internet

Worldwide estimates of electronic commerce activity in the future vary but they are all uniformly staggering; for example, the OECD's studies suggest that sometime between 2003 and 2005 electronic commerce activities could grow and reach around $1 trillion (Prabhaker, 2000). Other studies indicate that approximately US$3.1 billion was spent online in 1999; this was estimated to reach $15 billion by 2003. Over its history, retail e-commerce revenues increased from $8 billion to $18.6 billion in 1999 and were predicted to reach $80 billion by 2003 (Joines, Scherer and Scheufele, 2003). Hence in this age where the Internet plays a major role in business activities, it is imperative for marketers to gain a thorough understanding of consumer behaviour in this online environment. In studies conducted by Forrester Research, online retailing in the USA reached $108 billion by the end of the year 2003. In the United Kingdom (UK) where online retailing has just 0.2% market share of all retailing in 2003, retailing forecasters have that this could multiply by as much as 15 times over the next three years (Karayanni, 2003). Park and Kim (2003) predict that between 2000 and 2005, the value of goods delivered to homes in the UK will rise by 83% from £18.9 billion pounds £34.5 billion, much of this growth fuelled by the steep increase in online shopping.

2. The Internet in Australia

The Internet is rapidly becoming a critical tool for marketers as consumers are being attracted to it as a place to search and shop for products and services. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian household's accessibility to the Internet at home grew from 16% in 1998 to 46% in 2002 (ABS, 2004). During the year 2003, the Internet was used by 23% of Australians to pay bills or transfer funds, an increase of 6% from 1998. The rate of shopping online in Australia increased too, with 15% percent of all adult Australians who shopped online in 2002, this was up from 11% in 2001 (ABS, 2004). Other studies conducted in Australia found that Internet access by the 18-24 year old group was as high as seventy percent. It has also been found that there seems to be a shift in the demographic make up of internet users, with 'baby-boomers' and senior citizens now using it more (Lunn, 2000). In a study conducted by the National Office of the Information Economy (NOIE) it was revealed that seventy five percent of Australians over the age of 16 years had access to the during the first quarter of 2003 (NOIE, 2003).

Lynch (2003) suggests that there may be a relationship between the types of products purchased online and consumer's gender and age. According to the author studies conducted in the past have indicated that younger Australians preferred to buy music, while people over the age of fifty purchased hobby collections such as die cast cars. It was also reported that women in the age of fifty and above used the internet to search and shop for travel and tourism related products online. In a recent study jointly conducted by AMR and Forrester Research as reported by Lynch (2003), it was found Australians differ in their internet usage patterns compared to other places. Fifty eight percent of respondents said they went online at least once a month, four percent of these have broadband access at home, and fourteen percent say they were likely to get broadband in a years time. It was also found that Australians were motivated and lured to the Internet to search and shop for gadgets and entertainment purposes. Hence, most respondents agreed that they could

be classified as "gadget grabbers" and "media junkies".

Studies pertaining to consumer behaviour over the Internet have been a neglected area in Australia this far. In a couple of very broad and basic studies done in the country, it has been found that Australians were motivated by the entertainment benefits that websites offer. The Australian Internet user was found to align strongly with statements such as "technology is important to me", and "I like to impress people with my lifestyle". Another study suggested, that more people used the Internet in the country because of falling costs of high-speed connections, this significantly increase the appeal of transacting over the Internet (Henderson, 2003). It was also found that Australians consider the Internet to be a risky medium when it came to making payments. In comparison, British Internet buyers were less worried about online payments. In Australia, only 20.6%, the lowest among the nations surveyed say they had bought online but paid offline. Foreshew (2003) forecasts that consumer e-commerce will grow in Australia from $4.8 billion in 2002 to about $18 billion in 2006. Longer working hours, more expensive petrol, and the desire to spend more quality time with friends and family will act as the key drivers for this e-tailing growth. According to Henderson (2003), the most popular consumer purchases in Australia are LCD Notebooks and digital cameras, these products account for more than fifty percent of sales In their annual research report on e-commerce, the National Office of the Information Economy (NOIE) found that the most popular products purchased online in 2002 were as follows:

- Multi category computers and consumer electronics (33%)
- Special interest news (29%)
- Music (29%)
- Classified/Auctions (28%)
- Videos/Movies (25%)
- Shopping directories and guides (17%)
- Online gaming (15%), and
- Arts/graphics (14%)

(NOIE, 2003)

3. Consumer motivations and the Internet – studies from other countries

In the Internet shopping context, consumers expectations are rapidly changing, they expect better pricing, ease of use of websites, secure payments guarantees and a comprehensive customer service back up which they would normally receive from traditional channels of distribution. As the Internet is rapidly becoming a major source for the search and purchase of products and services, there is an urgent need from marketers to achieve the same levels of service that is provided in a traditional marketplace. There is a great demand for research to investigate consumers, and their buying behaviour over the Internet and other electronic channels.

It has been emphasised that research is yet to examine the underlying motivations of consumers when they using the Internet (Joines, Scherer, and Scheufele, 2003). This is certainly true in the case of specific consumer-related activities such as searching for information on products and services and shopping online. These authors also suggest that there appears to be a lack of published research identifying how motivations may vary across different website activities. It has been found that using the web for the consumption purposes is increasingly becoming a primary reason that is attracting people to the Internet (Lever, 2003). In this context there are numerous studies suggesting that not only is online shopping on the increase, but also that consumers are spending more time searching for information on products and services over the Internet (Lever, 2003). Hence investigating the underlying motivations and concerns of consumers' who use the Internet to seek product and service information is a topic worthy of investigation. There is a demand for answers pertaining to the possible underlying reasons as to why people use the Internet especially when they use it to gain product knowledge and/or to shop for products and services. The answers to these important matters can also enable the advertising function in marketing to target audiences and tailor web content more effectively.

With regards to the theory of motivation, this paper addresses a key question pertaining to understanding the main motivators for consumers to visit and search websites and why they shop online. Researchers and authors in the past have suggested that further empirical research needs to be carried out to investigate motivators based on variables such as different segments in a marketplace. This paper aims at understanding the key motivators for consumers to search and shop online. Consumer behaviour research into online search behaviour found that the people visited Internet sites only to gather information (Evans, Wedande, Ralston and Hul, 2001). Further research into this aspect by the authors found that information gathering fell into two broad categories, namely: personal and business.

Personal information collection included items such as sport, films, games, hobbies, and chat, whereas business information collection included technical information, academic research, and seeking information for the company (Evans et al., 2001).

In a study to ascertain differences between web shoppers and non-shoppers, Karyanni (2003) found that the most powerful discriminant variable between web shoppers and non-shoppers was shopping motives. This was especially so when it came to issues pertaining to time efficiency, availability of 24 hours shopping and queues avoidance. Web shoppers seemed to be less concerned with the enjoyment derived from traditional shopping. This might be due to the limited hours that they have because of long work hours. In a study on the teenage segment, Grant and Waite (2003) found them motivated to spend time online because of an interest in entertainment and educational type products available over the Internet. Other research focused on the impact of customer convenience, and product type on shopping behaviour over the Internet. For example, Pazgal and Sikka (2001) hypothesised that for information based products like software and digital music, the Internet is good to serve all stages of the marketing process. It can simultaneously serve as a communication, transaction, and distribution channel thus creating vertically integrated channels. The author's suggest that Dell used this philosophy to integrate most of its business processes via the Internet. They (Dell) have now pursued an integrated marketing strategy to bring their online business model more inline with its "direct model" business process. Furthermore, Pazgal and Sikka's (2001) study concludes that consumers purchased more software and digital products online because these products were easy to access online, and required no physical medium to transport them.

On the issue of convenience as, Lee and Marlowe (2003) stressed the need for marketers to understand the true meaning of 'convenience' when it comes to consumers using the Internet. They state that although most consumers value convenience as one of the most important decision-making criteria, their definitions of convenience vary across consumers. Though it was hard to generalise the findings from the various focus groups that the researchers used in their study, they found that "convenience" is defined differently depending on consumers' age, life-style, and comfort level with electronic technology. Grant and Waite's (2003) study on Internet usage among the youth market, found them to use the medium as a route to escape from boredom. It was also found that this segment used the Internet to establish and maintain communication with friends and family in order to maintain these social networks, and for academic purposes. Their study concluded that around 88% of those aged 16-24 has accessed the Internet at some time; this represented a significantly higher level than of any other age group. The authors highlighted the lack of empirical research into the adolescent and young adults' segment.

In a study conducted to ascertain why consumers visit luxury product websites it was found that the most important reasons were: "to look for information" (40%), "leisure" (19%), and "to shop" (18%), other reasons were "to chat" and "email" (Riley and Lacroix, 2003). Jiang, Hsu, Klien and Lin (2000) found that longevity was an important driving factor for people's utilisation of the Internet. It was noticed that the longer an individual has adopted the Internet the more likely he or she would continue to be there. Donthu and Garcia (1999) found that Internet shoppers were more convenience seekers, innovators, and less risk averse than non – Internet shoppers. Zhang (2001) suggested that online consumers have less discretionary time and were "time starved," they were also found to be exhibiting a higher level of inertia in online stores in comparison to bricks-and-mortar stores. Rettie (2001) hypothesised that a key motivating factor for people to visit, search, and shop online was the consumer's view that the Internet was a good place to provide information, access to explore and purchase "hard to find" goods.

Pazgal and Sikka (2001) are of the view that knowledge and a sense of power could be key motivating factors for consumers to constantly stay in touch with the Internet. According to them, consumers are aware that the more information they have, the more they can shift the balance of bargaining power. In their study, consumers stated that more information made them confident and sophisticated. The authors find this attainment of power to be a viable motivating force. As the Internet grows, consumers are becoming powerful in two ways: firstly by bonding together online as virtual communities and leverage their numbers to bargain, and secondly consumers find it easier to search for information about product attribute, prices, and possible substitutes. Hence the future marketplace will be a "pull based" one, in that demand for new products will be fuelled by consumer's needs rather than manufacturers suggestions (Pazgal and Sikka, 2001). In her research, Modhal (2000) found people used the Internet for varied purposes. One stated that he was a tin soldier collector and made use of the Internet to broaden his collection, another needed to learn about

household chemicals that helped with his job, and a third was organising her local senior centre social schedule online. The respondents highlighted three motivating factors for them to go online: career, family, and entertainment.

Teo (2001) found that a key extrinsic variable for usage was perceived usefulness; this played a greater role than perceived enjoyment in computer usage. It was also found that perceived usefulness affects intention to purchase while perceived ease of use does not. Earlier research has suggested that one motivating factor for consumers' to search and shop for products online was consumers felt that the Internet offered lower prices. Rettie (2001) and Trochia and Janda (2003) disagreed with this finding by Teo (2001). These two authors found that online consumers were less concerned with lower prices, and more with favourable outcomes, and a satisfying shopping process. They concluded that low prices and quick delivery might not be enough to attract and retain customers. Sathye (1999) and Pazgal and Sikka (2001) suggest that as the Internet is a cheaper medium to transact and communicate consumers would flock to it. In one study it was found that Internet banking have significantly lower costs structures than traditional delivery channels, and could operate at an expense ratio of 15-20% compared to 50-60% for the average bank (Sathye, 1999). This proposition was reinforced by the Booz Allen and Hamilton's study which found the following variable costs exist for banks at their transaction level: Teller $1.07, Telephone $0.52, ATM $0.27, PC Banking $0.015, Internet $0.01 (Pazgal and Sikka, 2001).

In a study on consumer behaviour over the Internet, Jarvenpaa and Todd (1997) found that consumers were motivated to use the Internet because it was a time saving device in shopping along, with reducing one's shopping effort. Swaminathan, Lepkowska-White and Rao (1999) found that consumers who were motivated by convenience, they further stressed that people who value social interaction were less interested in using the Internet for shopping. These consumers shopped less over the Internet and generally spent less money on e-commerce.

In an evaluation of electronic service quality (e-SQ), it was found that perceived control over the shopping environment and perceived convenience were critical factors that drew people to the Internet (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra, 2000). In a study pertaining to enquire how to convert searchers to shoppers online, Van den Poel and Leunis (1999) found that money-back guarantees, well-known brand names and price reduction techniques usually convert searchers

into buyers. Furthermore it was found that a web's reliability and fulfilment ratings had a positive effect on consumers' intentions to purchase (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2002). It is imperative for Australian marketers to understand what motivates consumers to search the Internet and websites for product information, and then what makes them shop online. Understanding this will lead to better-constructed websites with the objective of attracting consumers attention.

As discussed above, studies have indicated that convenience is a key driving factor to search and shop for products online. Others suggest that the act of gathering information for the purpose of making informed choices, and feeling more in control of the purchase decision is another key factor. Price and variety have also been suggested as reasons for people to go online to shop. However as Grant and Waite (2003) have suggested more empirical research needs to be carried out to investigate motivators. Consumer segmentation variables such as demographics, that include age, gender and occupation, need to be taken into consideration when researching motivating factors and the usage of the Internet.

4. Research method

This paper investigates key themes in online consumer behaviour. Its aims are to:

- Understand what motivates Australian consumers to search and shop for products and services over the Internet

This research incorporated for the study was a qualitative approach. This research approach is more intrusive and less structured than quantitative research techniques. It has been suggested that qualitative methods are appropriate when the research is exploratory in nature, and when the area for examination is unfamiliar to the researcher; this is the case with online consumer behaviour in Australia. The primary aim of the research was to gain an insight into what motivated Australian consumers to search and shop for products and services over the Internet.

According to (Ruyter and Scholl, 1998), qualitative research provides an in-depth insight; it is flexible, small-scale and exploratory, the results obtained are concrete, real-life like and full of ideas. The above two author's further highlight the value this type of research, suggesting it can prove to be very useful for market research purposes especially in practice. They found it widely used by management consultants and public policy makers, where answers to questions in consumer decision-making such as why do consumers buy this product and not the other are important.

Ueltzhöffer and Ascheberg (1999) suggest that the principal aim behind qualitative methods in sociological and psychological market research is to elucidate the individual's subjective interpretative patterns, his/her personal experiences, viewpoints, motives- and thus his/her creative potential as well. Ruyter and Scholl (1998) stress the need to use qualitative methods especially to explore substantive areas about which little is known. This is the case in Australia, regarding the knowledge we have to date about motivations and consumer behaviour in an online environment. In addition, qualitative methods are extremely useful in obtaining the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

After investigating various models and approaches to qualitative research methods, in this study it was decided to take a research stand largely based on Patton's (2002) "reality testing" a positivist and realist type approach. Tesch's (1990) method that propagates "the discovery of regularities approach" using an interpretive approach was also utilised. The final outcome of this study is to find out what is really happening in terms of the motivating factors that draw Australian consumers to the Internet. Patton (2002) described the tradition of "reality testing" as being slanted towards the positivist end of qualitative methods, and requiring a realist type approach. As part of reality testing, a researcher needs to have a thorough understanding of the past theoretical issues through the literature. Reid (1995) suggests that in order to propose theory creation, the researcher needs to have a grasp of the relevant theory as well as knowledge of contemporary issues. Being a qualitative study, this research is particularly oriented towards exploration, discovery, and inductive logic. The themes, categories or dimensions of analysis emerge from open-ended interviews. The study utilised an inductive analysis; patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being decided prior to data collection and analysis.

The background literature that was collected on motivating factors in other parts of the world played a key role in creating the constructs for this study. Pole and Burgess (2002) highlight the role of substantive literature and its usefulness in elaborating the analytic framework. According to the authors the analyst needs a wider perspective on the topic. At the start of the study the formulated problem statement needs to be created on the basis of a rough overview of the field under study. As the framework for the study, this research utilised prior theory as its foundation.

5. Sampling technique

The study used the 'snowballing' or 'referral' or 'chain' sampling technique, where participants were requested to provide the researcher with at least one other person who could be contacted as a participant for this study. It was made clear that the person being referred would also need to be a searcher or shopper for products and services online. After speaking to them, the participant usually phoned back the researcher after a few days with a contact name, or would give these details during the interview, or in some instances was contacted for this information by the researcher. In a few instances some participants were not helpful citing reasons such as they did not know anyone who could be of value to the study. However, some interviewees introduced the researcher to more than one other person who was then contacted. It has been argued by Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) that in order to maximise sample variability and the theoretical utility of snowballing sampling, researchers need to make conscious efforts to pace and monitor the referral chains that they generate. Their viewpoint of snowball sampling is best seen as proceeding through a number of phases. Hence as part of the selection process, every referred person was communicated to in order to gauge their level of Internet usage for searching and purchasing products, before proceeding with organising an appointment for the interview. In at least three cases it was found that the referred person did not meet these criteria and hence was not included for an interview, the person was thanked for their time and co-operation.

Snowballing sampling technique is appropriate when research is concerned with a small, specialised population of people who are knowledgeable about the topics (Aaker and Day 1990; Patton 2002). A key issue in the snowball sampling technique is to be careful in the selection process of the first interviewee as the first snowball. In this study extreme care was taken to recruit the first interviewee who was one of the heaviest surfer and shopper amongst the twenty participants. Patton (1987; 2002) cites seminal work conducted by various business "gurus" that utilised the snowball sampling technique. Accordingly the best-known ones were The Peters and Waterman (1982) study *In Search of Excellence,* which used a snowball sampling technique, where the researchers asked a broad group of knowledgeable people to identify well-run companies. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1983) study of innovation reported in *The Change Masters*

focused on 10 core case studies of the "most innovative" companies. She began by asking corporate experts for candidate companies to study. These nominations then snowballed as she broadened her inquiry and then converged into a small number of different expert informants. Semi-structured in depth interviews were used to gather data relating to how people behave while using the Internet and websites, during the search and shopping activities online. The in-depth interviews were conducted over a period of three months, and lasted between one to two hours. They were audio taped, and the tape recordings were transcribed verbatim by the author, in doing so the contents of the interviews were reviewed several times.

Direct tape recordings of field events must be either transcribed fully, if the aim is to have a full record of the speech and other audible events, or processed in some way like the field worker listening to the recordings makes notes, selects excerpts, makes judgements or ratings and so on (Miles and Huberman, 1984). In this way, not only was the memory refreshed, but in-depth contextual understanding of the issues was also achieved. It was then synthesized into a word-processed database that was cross-referenced to the context of the interview. The transcription of these interviews took between four to six hours.

6. Discussion of the results – Motivators for consumers to search and shop for products online

The main motivating factors that drew respondents to the Internet to search and shop for products and services are as follows:
- Convenience
- Saving time
- Cheaper prices and also the ability to compare prices
- Good place to shop for specialty and hard to access products
- Level of control
- Ease of comparing products and services

6.1 Motivator - Convenience

The 'convenience' factor was cited as the main reason by all twenty interviewees, for using the Internet to search and shop for products. Some of their comments are as follows: **Interviewee comments on motivator convenience:**

"Convenience is the prime reason. Get it, Got it, Good I just get it and I am out of there. Convenience, more than anything, also, simply because I some time buy speciality type items and the Internet is

convenient place for me to do my searching".

"Very much convenience I should say so that I can shop when I want to shop which is very much after hours that is after normal trading hours so that is definitely the biggest motivator and feature for me".

Though convenience was the top most motivating factor for people shopping online, the delivery timings adopted by Australia's two major supermarkets i.e. Coles and Safeway were considered as major barriers to shop for grocery online. Most respondents mentioned that these supermarkets home delivered their produce between 9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday, which was not convenient for families especially if both partners worked.

6.2 Motivator - Saving time

The second most important reason for people to shop online was because it saved them time. Closely linked to convenience is the notion that the Internet is a "mouse click" away, and can actually save consumers a lot of time in their shopping or physical browsing. All of the respondents interviewed had fulltime office jobs and two of them also studied during the evenings after work. All were of the opinion that life generally was getting a bit hectic with work, study, and family responsibilities. The Internet has now become an extremely convenient gadget and made life less hectic. It is a time saving piece of equipment when it comes to most of their personal commercial chores. Interviewee comments on motivator time-saver:

"I find it a lot easier (Internet) instead of just browsing and doing window-shopping, which is wasting a lot of my time and then I could be doing something else out there. I would rather spend that extra dollar or two to get online find exactly what I want.

"Well with Coles online I did shop with them because I was running out of time and it was schools, studies, and tending to family".

6.3 Motivator - Cheaper prices and also the ability to compare prices

The people interviewed had mixed feelings when it came to getting cheaper prices over the Internet. Some found that they were motivated because of cheaper prices, but at least half of the respondents felt that cheaper prices was not a motivating factor and in fact the Internet did not provide cheaper prices for products and services. However most agreed that the Internet was a useful place to make comparisons between prices of products and this was one of the reasons that

they searched and shopped online. Interviewee comments on motivator cheaper prices and comparison of prices:

"Definitely price. The whole idea over here is I can get better deals in airline travel".

"With hotels and what I do because they are quite a few websites now that offer similar services. I would actually look at say three or four and have a look at their prices compare them. I have noticed that they (hotels) tend to be cheaper online".

6.4 Motivator - Good place to shop for specialty and hard to access products

Another key motivating factor cited by interviewees, was to get information on speciality type products and services. This included products that are unavailable in Australia, but available in overseas markets. With the global reach of the Internet, consumers are now able to source these products via the Internet. Interviewee comments on speciality and hard to get type of products and services:

"If it isn't readily available in Australia or outrageously expensive I will buy it online from overseas".

"I am motivated to go online to buy speciality items so things like China, I bought this dinner set and I am looking always online for specific pieces. I will search interstate and overseas for a particular piece and that type of thing".

"I recently bought a CD for my sister and it was an independent American artist, being such a unique and special artist the Internet was the only place I was able to get it being in Australia".

6.5 Motivator - Level of control

The ease with which shoppers could obtain information was cited as an important reason for them to go online. This coupled with a feeling of consumers being more in control of information for purchase decision-making was given as key motivating factors to be online. The emotions with which consumers spoke about being in control of information to enhance purchase decision-making, is a point that should be noted with care and interest by marketers in designing communications through the company website.

Interviewee comments on motivator consumer control:

"Yes with more information at my finger tips I feel more in control. I find that I do better deals because there have been deals offered online which travel and tour operators cannot refuse and deny. As an example I recently drove a very good bargain with a Sydney hotelier with information I accessed online".

"Probably the motivating factor is the ability to get fairly wide range of prices and information quickly. The speed and the breadth of information available online is incredible. Imagine trying to get the same amount of information from a Myer or a David Jones where it could take you a half or a full day to get the same amount of information".

6.6 Motivator - Ease of comparing products and services

Consumers investigate and compare information between competing and substitute type of products and services online. This was also a key motivating factor for consumers to be drawn to the Internet. Interviewee comments on comparison products and services

"I found in the USA when I compared products online, I was able to get more features when I bought my computer. I was able to get a zip drive as part of the package from another wholesaler".

"Basically I just browse around just to look and see what are the products that are available online and how businesses like Kmart, Myer, and Coles go about their sites.

7. Conclusion

This study found that 'convenience' was a key motivating factor for consumers in Australia to search and shop for products and services over the Internet. It was also found that searching and shopping for products over the Internet, saved consumers time, some suggested it saved them from the task of mundane shopping. Cheaper prices and a greater variety of products and services which were available from around the world online was another key motivating factor. Another key motivating factor included the ability for consumers to search and shop for hard-to-find products, most of these unavailable in Australia.

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