

# Why Purchase Online? An Empirical Study of Australian Internet Shoppers

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## ABSTRACT

*The reach of the Internet as a shopping medium has provided shoppers with significant benefits over traditional storefront shopping in terms of time saving, cheaper products, and product selection. This creates a need for a greater understanding of online shoppers and their purchasing behaviour, which could improve marketing strategy formulation. This study suggests the motivational factors of convenience, price, and product selection leading to online purchase are affected by the demographic characteristics of Internet shoppers (in terms of gender, age, income, and location) and shopping behaviour (in terms of shopping frequency, expenditure patterns and product types purchased).*

## INTRODUCTION

Many changes have occurred in the area of retailing, and these include changing retail structures, improving technological developments, changing market conditions, and the emergence of more affluent, mobile and time-scarce consumers (Shim and Eastlick 1998). According to Cheeseman and Breddin (1995), the emergence of electronics retailing for online purchasing is a part of the ongoing dynamism in the retail sector; it has been another step in the availability of innovative formats since the emergence of self-service in the 1950s, the rapid expansion of the modern supermarket format, and technological changes such as electronic scanning and EFTPOS (Electronic Funds

Transfer Points Of Sale). Since the development of the World Wide Web and the opening up of the Internet to private enterprise by the U.S. government in 1991 (Fox 1995), the Internet now offers a new and powerful format of retail. Millions of people are immersing themselves in a massive experiment in Internet commerce (Castronova 2005).

The acceptance of online shopping has been growing strongly amongst Australian consumers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics report 'Use of Internet by Householders' (2001) indicates that in the 12 months to November 2000, more than 1.33 million Australian adults (one in every ten adults) purchased or ordered goods and

services for their own private use over the Internet. This was an increase of 66 percent from the 803,000 adults that did so in the previous year. According to MacDermott (2000), the share of online shopping in retail sales is forecast to increase to 2.1 percent by 2005 and 5.3 percent by 2010, to reach a total value of \$10.3 billion.

However, the growth of online shopping needs to be kept in perspective. While online shopping grows rapidly, this is from a small base, and its potential could be overstated. According to MacDermott (2000), online shopping accounted for less than 1 percent of retail sales in Australia by the year 2000 as against 7 percent in the United States, giving evidence that online shopping in the United States is much more widely adopted than in Australia.

With the development of a rapidly growing of online shopping market, it would be useful to have information on how motivational benefits influence the different demographic types and online purchasing behaviour. Such information would be of relevance for marketing strategy formulation, particularly in regard to market segmentation, price and product strategy for Internet retailers. Accordingly, the broad objective of this study is to analyse the relationships between motivational benefits to online shoppers and their demographic characteristics, as well as shopping behaviour. The specific objectives are to examine the relationships among the motivational factors of (a) convenience, (b) price savings, and (c) product selection and the demographic factors of (d) gender, (e) age, (f) income and (g) location, as well as the behavioural factors of (h) purchase frequency, (i) purchase expenditure, and (j) product types purchased.

## Theoretical Issues Concerning the Benefits of Online Shopping

### Richness and Reach

Shoppers traditionally and mainly go to retail stores to do their shopping. Going to the shop involves the concept of 'reach'. Because there are practical limits to the number of shops that a consumer could visit in order to look at the alternative products available for selection, there are limitations to 'reach' (Evans and Wurster 1999). 'Richness' refers to the quality of the information available to shoppers (as defined by accuracy, relevance, adequacy etc.), while 'reach' refers to the number of shops that they visit to compare product quality and prices. Within a certain period of time allocated for shopping, the larger the number of shops a shopper visits, the smaller the amount of information the shopper can elicit from any individual store and vice-versa. Evans and Wurster (1999 p.23) state: "To the extent that information is embedded in physical modes of delivery, a basic law governs its economics; there is a universal trade-off between richness and reach."

The Internet allows non-store shoppers to obtain both richness and reach without the tyranny of the trade-off. This weakening or elimination of the "richness/reach" trade-off enables shoppers to browse through a large number of stores (a high level of 'reach') to gain a high level of product information (a high level of 'richness'). Consequently, online shoppers are able to reap benefits such as the ability to access a wide selection of

products without bearing the pecuniary and time costs of travel, and the ability to obtain rich product information for the purpose of more effective decision-making.

### **Convenience Benefits**

Traditional shopping in a physical storefront requires the spending of time for travel and time in a store. Changing consumer lifestyles and lack of time may make it more difficult for consumers to shop at physical locations such as stores and shopping malls (Cheeseman and Breddin 1995). Because there are practical limits to the number of shops that a consumer could visit in order to look at the alternative products available for selection, the number of products the customer can access is limited. Additionally, the time and travel costs for customers to access products not available in their geographic location would be high. The Internet enables shoppers to conveniently access and purchase goods that are unavailable at their geographic locations by enabling shoppers to visit and make purchases from vendor websites in the comfort of their homes. Davies (1995) addressed the paradigm of 'taking retail to where there are people, either at home or in crowds'.

### **Price Benefits**

Savings in the marketing channel could get reflected in lower product prices, depending on the competitive pressures within it (Porter 1980). Moynagh and Worsley (2002) state that online shopping could transform consumer behaviour, driven by cost saving and convenience and spurred on by competition. The international reach of the Internet renders many supply intermediaries redundant; shoppers are now able to buy

direct from a manufacturer's or wholesaler's overseas website using the Internet. As more manufacturers and wholesalers cut off retail intermediaries to sell direct to consumers via the Internet, costs are lowered, and consequently lower prices can be offered. Additionally, the Internet encourages online vendors to compete amongst one another in an international capacity by lowering prices. Sharma and Krishnan (2002) state that in the last three years, the threat of the Internet has increased the competitive pressure that retailers face. According to Evans and Wurster (2000), the wider informational reach of consumers on the Internet leads to low levels of pricing secrecy; consequently, online vendors have to focus on low prices to gain competitive advantage. Edgecliffe-Johnson et. al. (2002) report that online shoppers are more concerned about price than about new features or convenience – the advantage which e-tailers once thought would allow them to charge more than offline stores.

### **Product Benefits**

The product benefits of online shopping are in the form of a wider selection compared to the offline alternative. According to Sharma and Krishnan (2002), the Internet store can provide a larger inventory of products and sizes, and can virtually guarantee the availability of any type and size of merchandise. According to the 'Global Online Retailing' (2000) survey, the two most popular shopping websites in Australia are Amazon.com (books) and CDnow.com (music and videos), both U.S. based retailers. The shopper is able to search over 3 million titles in Amazon.com (which links up with book suppliers internationally) from the computer screen at home, as compared to going physically to the bookstore, which

carries an average of 80,000 titles (Evans and Wurster 2000). According to Ernst and Young's 'Global Online Retailing' survey (2000), 56 percent of consumers surveyed cited the Internet's good selection of items, 14 percent of which were not available in stores, and 40 percent cited its competitive prices as helping to simplify their shopping experiences.

## THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

### Data and Methodology

The data used for this study were obtained from the 'Global Mindset Online Survey', undertaken in 2001 by Sydney-based Internet research company, APT Strategies. The survey was conducted online with advertisements including web banners and buttons being placed on each of the participating 57 Australia-based websites (Appendix A). Participation in this survey was voluntary; participants would choose to respond by clicking on the web banners or buttons to be directed to the survey website. The respondent sample was made up of random Australian Internet users who visited one or more of the participating websites. A total of 4752 usable responses were recorded and stored in SPSS format within the survey period of July and August 2001. The

questionnaire consists of 54 multiple-choice questions. Only data from selected questions in this questionnaire will be relevant for use in this study. Row and column totals between tables vary slightly due to missing responses in some variables.

The particular aspects to be examined are the relationships among the motivational factors of (a) convenience, (b) price savings, and (c) product selection and the demographic factors of (d) gender, (e) age, (f) income and (g) location, as well as the behavioural factors of (h) purchase frequency, (i) purchase expenditure, and (j) product types purchased.

It is hypothesised that shoppers who are motivated to purchase online for different reasons will vary in demographic characteristics and shopping behaviour. Pearson's Chi-square analysis will be employed to test for statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

## RESULTS

### Motivation and Gender

The analysis in Table I suggests that male shoppers tend to have a preference to purchase online for the reasons of price and product selection rather than the reason of convenience. However, female shoppers tend to have a preference to purchase online for

**Table I**  
**Respondents Classified by Gender and Reason for Purchase**  
 (measured by frequency and column %)\*

Gender	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Male	701(47.9%)	499(60.3%)	395(58.7%)	414(46.1%)	2009(52.0%)
Female	761(52.1%)	329(39.7%)	278(41.3%)	484(53.9%)	1852(48.0%)
Column Total	1462(100%)	828(100%)	673(100%)	898(100%)	3861(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 56.87 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. A similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 40.55 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

the reason of convenience rather than the reasons of price and product selection. By implication, price and product selection appear to be the main motivating factors for males to purchase online while convenience appears to be the main motivating factor for females to purchase online.

### Motivation and Age

The analysis in Table II suggests that young (below 24) shoppers tend to have a preference to purchase online for the reason of price rather than the reasons of convenience and product selection. Middle-aged (24 to 44) shoppers tend to have a preference to

purchase online for the reason of convenience rather than the reasons of price and product selection. By implication, price appears to be the main motivating factor for young shoppers to purchase online while convenience appears to be the main motivating factor for middle-aged shoppers to purchase online.

### Motivation and Income

The analysis in Table III suggests that low-income (up to Aus\$39,999) shoppers tend to have a preference to purchase online for the reason of price rather than the reasons of

**Table II**  
**Respondents Classified by Age and Reason for Purchase**  
**(measured by frequency and column %)\***

Age	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Young(Below 24)	308(20.7%)	261(31.0%)	175(25.6%)	255(27.7%)	999(25.4%)
Middle(24 to 44)	957(64.4%)	447(53.2%)	387(56.6%)	463(50.3%)	2254(57.3%)
Elderly(45 and over)	221(14.9%)	133(15.8%)	122(17.8%)	203(22.0%)	679(17.3%)
Column Total	1486(100%)	841(100%)	684(100%)	921(100%)	3932(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 67.03 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. A similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 38.65 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table III**  
**Respondents Classified by Personal Annual Income and Reason for Purchase**  
**(measured by frequency and column %)\***

Personal Annual Income (Aus \$)	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Low(Up to 39,999)	718(49.2%)	471(56.8%)	356(52.9%)	579(64.9%)	2124(55.1%)
Middle (40,000 to 69,999)	509(34.9%)	254(30.6%)	202(30.0%)	210(23.5%)	1175(30.5%)
High (70,000 and over)	232(15.9%)	104(12.5%)	115(17.1%)	103(11.5%)	554(14.4%)
Column Total	1459(100%)	829(100%)	673(100%)	892(100%)	3853(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 61.91 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. A similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 16.52 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

convenience and product selection. Middle-income (Aus\$40,000 to \$69,999) shoppers tend to have a preference to purchase online for the reason of convenience rather than the reasons of price and product selection. By implication, price appears to be the main motivating factor for low-income shoppers to purchase online while convenience appears to be the main motivating factor for middle-income shoppers to purchase online.

### Motivation and Location

The analysis in Table IV shows negligible differences among the main motivating factors of convenience, price and product selection in relation to locational factors. This suggests that there is no significant relationship between online shopper location

and motivating factors to purchase online.

### Motivation and Frequency of Purchase

The analysis in Table V indicates that the respondents who made the fewest (1 to 4) online purchases a year account for more than half of all the respondents, implying that a larger percentage of online shoppers examined tend to shop infrequently. The evidence also suggests that shoppers who purchase online less frequently (1 to 4 times a year) do so more for reasons of 'price' than for reasons of convenience or product selection, as compared to more frequent purchasers. By implication, those who shop more frequently tend to do so relatively more

**Table IV**  
**Respondents Classified by Location and Reason for Purchase**  
**(measured by frequency and column %)\***

Location	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Metropolitan City	1017(69.5%)	577(70.6%)	476(71.5%)	532(60.3%)	2602(68.0%)
Regional City	297(20.3%)	159(19.5%)	130(19.5%)	211(23.9%)	797(20.8%)
Rural Area	149(10.2%)	81(9.9%)	60(9.0%)	139(15.8%)	429(11.2%)
Column Total	1463(100%)	817(100%)	666(100%)	882(100%)	3828(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 37.46 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. However, a similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 1.16 ( $p = 0.88$ ), which does not indicate statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table V**  
**Respondents Classified by Frequency of Purchase and Reason for Purchase**  
**(measured by frequency and column %)\***

Frequency of Purchase (per year)	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
1 – 4 Times	616(44.7%)	362(52.4%)	296(47.4%)	382(67.3%)	1656(50.8%)
5 – 9 Times	327(23.7%)	144(20.8%)	131(21.0%)	85(15.0%)	687(21.1%)
10 Times or More	434(31.5%)	185(26.8%)	197(31.6%)	101(17.8%)	917(28.1%)
Column Total	1377(100%)	691(100%)	624(100%)	568(100%)	3260(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 88.13 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. A similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 11.96 ( $p = 0.018$ ), also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

for reasons of convenience and product selection rather than price.

### Motivation and Average Amount Spent

The analysis in Table VI indicates that only 27.3 percent of the respondents spent Aus\$100 or more per online transaction, implying that most online shoppers in Australia tend to spend less than Aus\$100 per online transaction. The further evidence is

that shoppers who spend less than Aus\$50 per transaction are primarily motivated to purchase online for the reason of price rather than convenience or product selection.

### Motivation and Types of Products Purchased

The analysis in Table VII indicates that the most common product type purchased online in Australia is interstate air tickets, followed by CDs/videotapes/DVDs, concert/event

**Table VI: Respondents Classified by Average Amount Spent and Reason for Purchase (measured by frequency and column %)\***

Average Amount Spent (Aus\$ per transaction)	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Less than \$50	424(30.5%)	273(37.1%)	189(31.5%)	236(41.0%)	1122(34.0%)
\$50 - \$99	585(42.1%)	250(34.0%)	248(41.3%)	194(33.7%)	1277(38.7%)
\$100 - \$299	306(22.0%)	152(20.7%)	127(21.2%)	100(17.4%)	685(20.8%)
\$300 or more	74(5.3%)	61(8.3%)	36(6.0%)	45(7.8%)	216(6.5%)
Column Total	1389(100%)	736(100%)	600(100%)	575(100%)	3300(100%)

\*A chi square test carried out on this table produced a value of 42.23 ( $p < 0.0005$ ), indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level. A similar test, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', produced a chi square value of 22.42 ( $p = 0.001$ ), also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

**Table VII**

**The Number of Respondent's Purchases Classified by Product Type and Reason for Purchase<sup>(a)</sup>**

Types of Products Purchased	Convenience	Price	Product Selection	Other Reasons	Row Total
Interstate air tickets	649(48.4%)	282(43.1%)	246(42.9%)	198(39.7%)	1375(44.8%)
CDs, videotapes, DVDs	550(41.0%)	281(43.0%)	294(51.3%)	120(24.0%)	1245(40.6%)
Concert, event tickets	599(44.6%)	221(33.8%)	208(36.3%)	174(34.9%)	1202(39.2%)
Books	491(36.6%)	179(27.4%)	243(42.4%)	121(24.2%)	1034(33.7%)
Computer hardware/software	422(31.4%)	250(38.2%)	218(38.0%)	105(21.0%)	995(32.4%)
Groceries	450(33.5%)	94(14.4%)	100(17.5%)	114(22.8%)	758(24.7%)
Fashion	300(22.4%)	64(9.8%)	90(15.7%)	74(14.8%)	528(17.2%)
Home ware	263(19.3%)	57(8.7%)	67(11.7%)	70(14.0%)	457(14.9%)
Overseas air tickets	185(13.8%)	79(12.1%)	71(12.4%)	39(7.8%)	374(12.2%)
Other products	773(57.6%)	276(42.2%)	256(44.7%)	211(42.3%)	1516(49.4%)
Number of Purchasers <sup>(b)</sup>	1342	654	573	499	3068

(a) An analysis, which took into account the repeated measures of the data, was carried out. Based on statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level, the result ( $p < 0.0005$ ) indicated that the relationship between the product types and reasons for purchase was statistically significant. A similar analysis, which excluded the column 'Other Reasons', was also carried out, with the result ( $p < 0.0005$ ) also indicating statistical significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level.

(b) Due to the multiple response nature of the data, the percentages in this table are calculated by using the number of purchasers as the base value.

**Table VIII**  
**Respondent Online Shoppers Classified by Motivation to Purchase Online**

Convenience	Price Selection	Product	Other Reasons	Row Total
1616 (37.8%)	912 (21.3%)	741 (17.3%)	1008 (23.6%)	4277 (100%)

tickets, books, computer hardware/software and groceries. Shoppers who are primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of convenience tend to purchase more air tickets (interstate and overseas), concert/event tickets, groceries, fashion and home ware (but less computer hardware/software) as compared to shoppers who purchase online for the reasons of price and product selection. Shoppers who are primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of product selection tend to purchase more CDs/ videotapes/DVDs and books as compared to shoppers who purchase online for the reasons of convenience and price.

### Overview on Motivation

The evidence in Table VIII indicates that among the respondents who shop online, 'convenience' is the dominant motivator for online shopping (37.8 percent), followed by 'price' (21.3 percent) and 'product selection' (17.3 percent).

### Conclusions and Implications

The findings indicate that Internet shopping behaviour (in terms of purchase frequency and expenditure) is explained by the motivational factors of convenience, price, and product selection, and that Internet shoppers who are motivated to purchase online for these reasons vary in gender, age, and income, but not location.

The main motivation for online shopping was found to be convenience, which accounted for 37.8 percent of respondents, followed by price (21.3 percent), and product selection (17.3 percent). Shoppers who are female, middle-aged (24-44), and with middle-incomes (Aus\$40,000 to \$69,999) tend to be primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of 'convenience' relative to 'price' and 'product selection'. Shoppers who are primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of 'convenience' tend to purchase more air tickets (interstate and overseas), concert/event tickets, groceries, fashion, and home ware (but less computer hardware/software) relative to shoppers who purchase online for 'price' and 'product selection' reasons.

Shoppers who are male, young (below 24), and with low-incomes (up to Aus\$39,999) tend to be primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of

'price' relative to 'convenience' and 'product selection'. This is consistent with the fact that young shoppers with correspondingly limited earning power tend to place an emphasis on price savings. Shoppers who shop online infrequently (1-4 times a year) and spend small amounts (less than Aus\$50) per transaction tend to be primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of obtaining lower prices when compared to

the alternative reasons of 'product selection' and 'convenience'. This implies that infrequent shoppers who spend small amounts tend to be bargain hunters.

Shoppers who are older in age (45 and over) and earning higher incomes (Aus\$70,000 and over) tend to be primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of 'product selection' relative to 'convenience' and 'price'. A reason for this could be that older shoppers are less mobile and are hence motivated to shop online to obtain the benefit of a wider reach of products, as compared to traditional retail stores. Shoppers who are primarily influenced to purchase online for the reason of 'product selection' tend to purchase more CDs/videotapes/DVDs and books as compared to shoppers who purchase online for the reasons of 'convenience' and 'price'. This may be attributed to the much larger selection of CDs/videotapes/DVD and book titles that exist for these products compared to most others, which range of selection would be difficult to access via shopping in traditional retail stores. This may also be attributed by the availability of reviews and recommendations for such products in online shops (as opposed to offline shops).

The most popular products purchased by Australian Internet shoppers in general are shown to be interstate air tickets, followed by CDs/videotapes/DVDs, concert/event tickets, books, computer hardware/software and groceries. This suggests that online shopping benefits created by the richness-reach trade-off tend to be manifested in such products types.

The foregoing results indicate certain prominent behaviours of online shoppers that may be useful to online retailers in the formulation of marketing strategy, particularly in relation to benefit segmentation and targeting. Online retailers are recommended to formulate marketing strategy based on targeting the benefit of convenience, being the most popular motivation for online shopping, followed by price. Online retailers, according to the findings of the study, are recommended to focus on selling the more popular products purchased by Australian Internet shoppers, which are interstate air tickets, followed by CDs/videotapes/DVDs, concert/event tickets, books, and computer hardware/software.

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### A Short Bio of Dr Joshua Chang

Dr Joshua Chang is currently an E-Marketing lecturer at Charles Sturt University. Joshua has previously taught for the University of Canberra, the University of London and Monash University. He has presented papers at several international marketing conferences, and has industrial experience in Internet business.

### A Short Bio of Dr Nicholas Samuel

Dr Nicholas Samuel was formerly Chair Professor of Agribusiness and Marketing at the University of Adelaide, and is currently in charge of Marketing Management and International Marketing in the University of Canberra. Nicholas is the author of over 70 publications and has won awards for publication and research in marketing. He has undertaken extensive fieldwork in several Asian countries, including the largest ever market survey in China in collaboration with a Chinese University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

## APPENDIX A

The following websites participated and sponsored the Global Mindset Online Survey by running the banner and button advertisements during the course of the survey:

Goconnect.com.au	Telstra.com	Shesaid
JobNet.com.au	ASX.com	Winepool
Looksmart.com.au	Business Centre	Equity Cafe
mp3.com.au	astroimage.com.au	www.961.com.au
Seek.com.au	Business Daily	familyhealth.com.au
Shopfree.com.au	Floatnews	dvdplaze.com.au
Sofcom.com.au	Egoli.com.au	virtueoz.com.au
start.com.au	stuff.com.au	B Magazine Online
Ticketmaster7.com.au	Weather Channel	i7sport.com.au
Trading Post Online	WinNet	i7entertainment.com.au
VTown.com.au	writtenbyme.com	i7 lifestyle.com.au
Web Wombat.com.au	FreeSMS.com.au	womenzone.com.au
yourbroker.com.au	MichaelDVD.com.au	Yellowpages.com.au
yourmortgage.com.au	UrbanCineFile.com.au	Whitepages.com.au
yourmovies.com.au	Invest 888.com.au	Goeureka.com.au
yourtv.com.au	MCNews.com.au	Ticketek.com.au
AltaVista.com.au	Haoyah.com.au	Chaosmusic
it-net.com.au	AutoTrader.com.au	Hotdockets
employment.com.au	anzwers.com.au	Floatnews.com.au