

## Chapter 13

# Comparing Consumer Purchase Behavior on the Internet and in Brick-and-Mortar Stores: An Overview of Recent Research

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*A research area that has gained interest of marketing researchers in recent years is the comparison of consumer behavior on the Internet and traditional brick-and-mortar stores. We offer an overview of the recent developments in this research area and summarize the key findings along two dimensions: 1) factors that may cause behavioral differences in the two types of shopping environments; and 2) patterns of behavioral differences identified in the literature. We also outline our own recent work as an example to illustrate how this stream of research can help improve marketing strategies and tactics on the Internet. Directions for future research are discussed in the last section.*

## INTRODUCTION

In response to the dramatically expanding and evolving business activities on the Internet, academic research on electronic commerce is also growing rapidly. A broad spectrum of research topics has been explored by marketing researchers as well as scholars from many other disciplines. Topics contributed by marketing academics include, but are not limited to, conceptual works on consumer navigation behavior in the new hypermedia environment (e.g., Hoffman and Novak 1996) and the impact of the interactive shopping venue on consumers, retailers and manufacturers (e.g., Alba et al. 1997), strategic recommendations on how to build a new generation of electronic shopping infrastructures (e.g., Baty and Lee, 1995), analytical works examining the implications of the Internet as a new distribution channel (e.g., Zettelmeyer, 1998; Lal and Sarvary, 1999), and empirical studies that investigate various aspects of browsing and shopping behavior on the Internet (e.g., Dréze and Zufryden, 1998; Fader and Hardie, 1999; Bucklin and Sismeiro, 2000; Häubl and Popkowski Leszczyc, 2000).

One stream of research on electronic commerce is comparing consumers' purchase behavior on the Internet and in traditional brick-and-mortar shopping environments. Despite the explosive growth of Internet commerce and well recognized competitions between online and brick-and-mortar stores, there is a striking absence of empirical studies on behavioral differences across the two types of channels. The scarcity of empirical works is largely due to lack of usable data and is alleviated only very recently when high quality panel purchase data from online merchants become available to the academic community. Research topics in this newly developed area are mainly concerned with establishing systematic differences in consumers' decision-making processes and purchase behavior, identifying the moderating factors, and offering explanations to the observed behavioral differences (e.g., Alba et al. 1997; Degeratu et al. 2000; Zhang 1999; Zhang and Krishnamurthi, 2000; Nowlis and McCabe, 2000; Andrews and Currim, 2000; Danaher and Wilson, 2000).

In this chapter we would like to provide an overview of the recent developments in this important research area. We will summarize the key factors and findings identified in the literature first. We will then outline our own recent studies as an example to illustrate how this stream of research can help improve marketing strategies and tactics on the Internet. Directions for future research are discussed at the end of the chapter<sup>1</sup>.

## RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND KEY FINDINGS

One of the earliest works related to this topic is Burke and colleagues' (1992) study on comparing dynamic consumer choice in real and computer-simulated environments. They designed a laboratory simulation to mimic a real supermarket shopping environment and compared actual store purchases and choice decisions

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