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Online Shopping: Replacement or Supplement to In Store Shopping?

Leanne Vicente

Born Digital Final Research Paper

Introduction:

When we were assigned a research topic, my mind did not immediately go to any one particular topic. There were so many options that I could not decide on what would be the best for me to further study. So like any overwhelmed college student, I went home and talked to my roommates. When I pitched the research project to my one roommate, she instantly said that I should do something about online shopping. In our apartment, we are constantly looking at products online, receiving emails everyday about special deals and browsing the newest collections and imaging what sort of girls we would be if we could afford such clothes.

So when she suggested online shopping, a lightbulb went off in my head. Online shopping has become such an integral part of our lives that we sometimes do not even realize that we are doing it. At the beginning of each semester, I buy all my textbooks from online providers. Now a days all my Christmas shopping is done online, and shipped right to my house in New Jersey. And I constantly use online shopping for research. What colors does this shirt come in? What styles of shoe are going to be popular this summer? How much is this palate of makeup? When is the next major sale? These and so many more questions can be answered from just a few clicks of a mouse, and they can be done from anywhere. Shopping is no longer a big event, but now just a mundane task to be added to our never ending to do lists right in between emailing our bosses about vacation days, and reading the news about the latest Presidential primary results.

And when I began to analyze about how I use and utilize online shopping, I started to wonder if other people also used this service the same way I did. So I created this survey to look into how

people use online shopping, and if any the Internet's many shoppers think that online shopping has the potential to take over physical stores, and make them obsolete.

Materials and Methods (Procedures):

I made my survey on Survey Monkey. It is a 13 question survey that I distributed through my Facebook and through my parents Facebook friends. I wanted to have a bit of a difference in age ranges, so I asked my mom to post a link to my survey on her Facebook wall. By doing that, I was able to get a broader scope of people, not just the mostly college students that I know and am Facebook friends with.

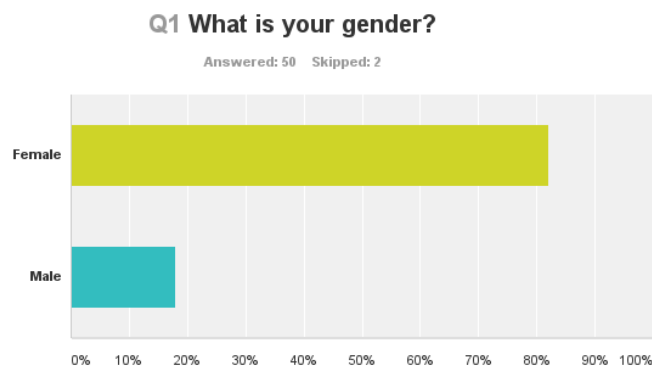
I collected 52 responses within a week and a half. I was very happy with the amount of results I got in my survey. Of course, it would always be nice to have more results, but by using Survey Monkey, the results are anonymous so I was unable to tell who had taken the survey and who had not. I like the Survey Monkey method of surveying people for a number of reasons. First, it is a fairly low commitment for me. If I was running this survey in person, I would have to set aside several hours a week in order to get more than fifty results. With this method, once I created the survey, all I had to do was copy and paste a link and I was done. However, no method is perfect for surveying, and an online survey is no exception. I noticed when going through the results that there were one or two people who had been confused by what the survey question was asking, and had answered a question that was different from what I had intended. If I was giving this survey in person, those sort of errors would have been made clearer, and hopefully those people would have been able to answer the question that I had wanted them to.

For one question, it was an open ended question, and I asked the respondents what their last online purchase was. After receiving all of my results, I read through all of these results and hand tallied them into the different categories I had identified. I also read through my other open ended questions, and tallied how many people had each possible answer. For some questions this was

simply counting up how many yeses and no's there were, but for others there were several different answers the respondents could have written about.

Results:

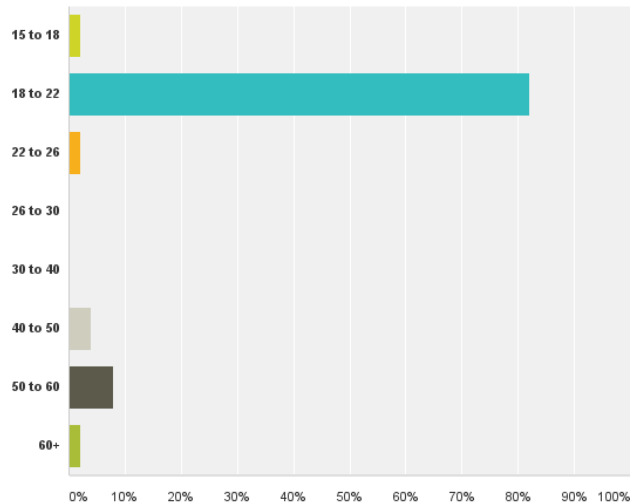
On the whole I found the results of my research to be very interesting. Before getting too in-depth of the qualitative data, I am going to go through a quick synopsis of the demographic breakdowns of my survey participants.



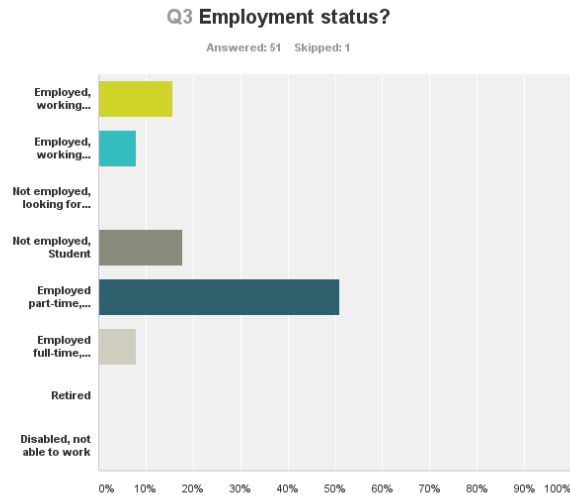
Not too surprisingly, I had way more females (80%) than males (20%). I was not too surprised by this, since shopping itself is a hobby that tends to appeal more to women. Also, taking into account the fact that we are at Arcadia, and I posted my survey in the Class of 2017 pages, I was expecting more females than males.

Q2 What is your age?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 2



I was also expecting the range in my age groups. I posted this on Facebook and most of my friends are unsurprisingly in my age group (82%). I was able to obtain some people in the higher age categories (14%) due to the fact that I am friends with several of my parents' friends on Facebook as well. I was really glad that I was able to use them in this survey because it gave my answers a bit more variety. If all of my participants had been in my age group, there is the worry that there would not be a lot of variety in the types of things people purchased on the internet, or within their ideas and opinions on online shopping. By having some people in the previous generation, I was able to compare and contrast their ideas to those of the younger generation.



The next question I asked was about employment status of the survey participants. I got a very strong spread of results with 51% people being employed part time, and a student. The next largest group was those who were employed, either full time or part time, and they accounted for 24% of the surveyors. With employment status, I really wanted to see if people with different types of income purchased different things. One can imagine that college students would be buying a lot of textbooks or other things for school. So I wanted to see if the current employment status would change the things that people purchased online. I found that mostly, there was no difference. Everyone bought expensive and inexpensive things with no difference in employment. While college students were the ones buying textbooks, every other product was fairly evenly distributed.

This was the end of the demographic questions, and the rest of the questions were pertaining to online shopping and the habits of those that shop online. I asked people what they bought online, and I asked them to check all that applied. There was a huge range of products that people chose. The highest rated category was clothing, with 80% of the participants checking that they have bought clothes from online stores. The next largest category was books, with 74%. These two had very high percentages, the rest of the categories were much lower, and almost all coming in around 30-40% of

those surveyed buying them online. These categories included, beauty supplies, games, and home décor. The smallest group was food products. This section only had 18% of the participants.

The next question that I asked was for the participants to tell me what their most recent internet purchase was. I then read through all of their answers, and sorted into the categories listed in the previous question. The results are as follows:

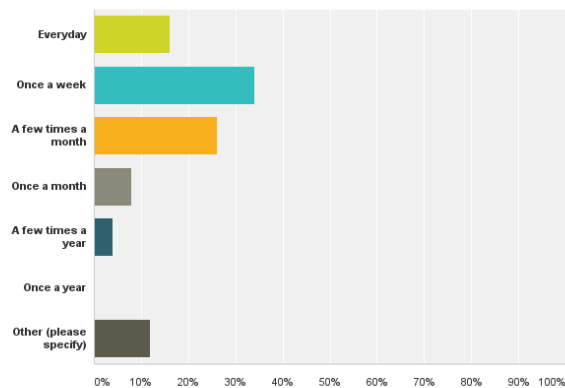
- Books: 13%
- Beauty supplies/products: 4%
- Clothing: 35%
- Food Products: 2%
- Games: 4%
- Home décor: 6%
- Electronics: 21%
- Tickets: 4%
- Other: 10%

I thought these results were interesting in the fact that they almost completely lined up with the previous questions results. Again, clothing and books were the two most popular category.

Electronics was also a pretty high percentage, which I had not included as a choice in the previous question. And then the remaining categories were of lower percentages, and all fairly similar in popularity. This question really reconfirmed what people had said in the prior question, and that made me feel much more confident in my research and collection of data.

Q7 How often do you browse online stores?

Answered: 50 Skipped: 2



For this set of questions, I wanted to see how often people browse online sites versus how often people actually purchase things. So I started with how often do you browse online stores. There was an error in the answers because there is no option for several times a week. Six people chose “Other” for their answer, and every single one of them wrote a few times a week. So then putting that in-between every day and once a week, the data has a really nice bell shape to it. The most popular choice was “Once a Week” and 34% of participants chose this option.

The next question that I asked was how often people bought things online. I am under no impression that every time someone looks at a product online, they purchase it, and so I wanted to know how often an actual purchase was made. This question was formulated on a scale from 1 to 5. One being that the online browser rarely purchased something online, they only browsed the merchandise. Five was the other end of the spectrum. Five meant that every time they looked online, they bought something. The weighted average for all the results was 2.44 with 78% of those surveyed rated themselves as either a 2 or 3. So this means that they purchase something about half the time or almost half the time they browse online.

The next set of questions that I proposed were to see if people had a preference for what type of online store they shopped at. I gave the options as stores that have physical in store

locations as well as online shopping, exclusively online stores that are completely operated online, or if they had no preference and used both equally. I was a bit surprised by the results that I got for this question. I was expecting that most people would say that they had no preference between online stores and actual stores with online options. And while 47% of people said that they had no preference, 45% of people said that they were more likely to purchase things online from exclusively online sites.

I then asked that for those who have purchased things from actual stores with online sites why they chose to purchase something online as opposed to going to the actual store. The results were pretty interesting, but for the most part they were what I expected. The most popular responses were that it was more convenient to shop online and that there was a fuller selection online. Several people also said that there were better sale opportunities online. A few people said that since they are away at school, they do not have a car, and so they cannot drive to a store to buy something in person.

I then asked if the participants preferred to shop online or instore. This was a fairly even split between those who preferred shopping instore and those who preferred shopping online. A number of people said that it depended on what they were buying. However, when one compares this data to the data to my last question, not everything lines up. My final question was whether or not people thought that online shopping could potentially replace instore shopping. Even though about 20 people had stated that they preferred shopping online, only one person said that they thought online shopping had the potential to replace in store shopping. The young woman that answered “Yes”, was in the 18-22 year old age group and she is an employed part time, student. This woman runs her own clothing line—she mentioned this in one of the open ended responses—and she said that online shopping will replace instore shopping because it is so convenient and people do not have as much time to go to stores.

The other fifty-one of my participants all said that they did not think online shopping would ever fully replace instore shopping. Most people said that while online shopping is more convenient, nothing can replace the experience of actually going to the store, and trying clothes or looking at the product in person before making a purchase. I found this difference in answers to be really interesting, and it added a level of complexity to the analysis of my results.

Discussion:

For the most part, I was not too surprised by my results. Online shopping has really taken off in the past five years or so and pretty much anyone with access to the internet has at least thought about buying something online at some point. If I were to do this survey again, I would reword the original question in order to encourage those who do not shop online to also take the survey. 100% of the people that took the survey answered “Yes” that they have shopped online before, but I do not believe that this statistic is accurate for all my Facebook friends, students at Arcadia, and people with access to the Internet. If given the chance to, I would like to talk to some people who do not shop online and see why they choose to avoid this activity.

While I was not surprised that more girls than boys filled out my survey, in the future, I would try harder to encourage males to participate as well. I think that the word “shopping” has a connotation of something feminine. Because of this, I feel that males sometimes shy away from saying that they shop. Also when conversing with other students in the class, I found that they also had the issue where more females than males took their surveys. Some cited the gender breakdown at Arcadia to the cause of this problem, but other said that men in general, and specifically males who are in our peer group, could not be bothered to take a quiz. We found that females were way more willing to participate in a survey than their male counterparts. I think this can also relate to online shopping, and why it is an activity that seems to be so heavily dominated by the female side of our

population. Men just may not have the time to scroll through pages and pages of online stores, looking for just what they want.

When I created a lot of these questions, I considered how I would answer each of these questions, and then came up with other possible answers. And while this worked out in a lot of cases, in question 5, there were lots of answers in the comments section of other that I had not considered. Two examples of these are electronics and concert tickets. Both of these were things that multiple people entered in the other section, and they were things that I had not considered. The reason I did not consider them was because I have personally never bought either of these things online, so when I was making my answer options I did not even consider them. I would like to know if more people would have answered with these options if they had been given as some of the original answers.

A question that I wish I had asked in retrospect was the question of if the respondents had accounts or reward systems set up with different stores. For instance, Amazon Prime is a service that you have to pay for, but then you have guaranteed 2 day shipping and you also have access to different Amazon Prime exclusive TV shows and movies. If someone had this subscription to Amazon Prime, or something similar, they would obviously be more likely to shop on these than in other places or instore. So if I was to redo this survey that would be a question that I would add.

Conclusion: *These are the key findings gained from this research.*

This survey was definitely a learning experience, but it was also very interesting collecting data, and reading the different thoughts and ideas people had given the same set of questions. I learned a lot about people and their online shopping habits. According to my results, people enjoy browsing online stores, but do not always buy thing there; like a virtual version of window shopping.

I also determined, that age and employment status do not really have too big of a difference on what people will or will not buy online. Even though that was one of my initial points of interest, I determined that there really is no correlation. 18 year old women are just as likely to buy electronics

and clothes online as 45 year old men. So while it was interesting to look at the information and what each individual chose to buy or not buy online, it did not really prove useful in the analysis of online shopping and how it is used.

However, the biggest takeaway that I got out of my survey was that while online shopping is the current big thing, no one really thinks that it has the potential to replace instore shopping. Like going to the movies or visiting museums, going to the mall to go shopping is more about the experience than the actual purchases. While it may be easier to shop online and more convenient, nothing could replace the feeling of going shopping with your friends, trying on tons of different outfits in the changing room, and sitting in the food court at the end of the day with sodas and bags strewn everywhere. So while online shopping is here to stay, and is definitely filled with positive attributes, it just does not have the real life experience that will ever lead to a revolution of how the everyday person shops, or spends time with friends.

Appendix: *Survey Questions*

- 1) What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other

- 2) What is your age?
 - a. 15 to 18
 - b. 18 to 22
 - c. 22 to 26
 - d. 26 to 30
 - e. 30 to 40
 - f. 40 to 50
 - g. 50 to 60
 - h. 60+

- 3) Employment status?
 - a. Employed, working full-time
 - b. Employed, working part-time
 - c. Not employed, looking for work
 - d. Not employed, Student
 - e. Employed part-time, Student
 - f. Employed full-time, Student
 - g. Retired
 - h. Disabled, not able to work

- 4) Have you ever shopped online?

a. Yes

b. No

5) What do you typically buy online? (check all that apply)

a. books

b. beauty supplies and/or products

c. clothing

d. food products

e. games

f. home decor

g. Other (please specify)

6) What was your last online purchase?

a. Open ended response

7) How often do you browse online stores?

a. Everyday

b. Once a week

c. A few times a month

d. Once a month

e. A few times a year

f. Once a year

g. Other (please specify)

8) How often do you purchase something online?

a. The answer was a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means that you rarely purchase something online when you visit a site and 5 means that every time you visit an online shopping site you purchase something

- 9) Are you more likely to purchase items from a store that has an online site (Target, Kohl's, Shop Rite, etc.) or from an exclusively online business (Amazon, Overstock, etc.)?
- a. A store with an online site (Target, Kohl's, ShopRite)
 - b. An exclusively online business (Amazon, Overstock)
 - c. I shop from both equally
 - d. Other (please specify)
- 10) Only for actual stores with online sites, why did you choose to buy online instead of in the store?
- a. Open ended response
- 11) Do you prefer to shop online or in the store? Explain your answer.
- a. Open ended response
- 12) Where are you when you shop online?
- a. At home
 - b. While riding public transport
 - c. At work/school
 - d. Other (please specify)
- 13) Do you feel that online shopping has the potential to replace in store shopping? Why or why not?
- a. Open ended response