

Online Shopping Habits Studied

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Millions of holiday shoppers are bypassing traditional brick and mortar stores by instead purchasing the newest gadgets, big ticket items and toys with simple clicks of the mouse. Earlier this year, academic researchers published a study aimed at finding out what makes shoppers, well ... click.

What they discovered could lead to improved marketing strategies for online retailers and the development of better Web sites featuring navigational tools, menus and questionnaires that appeal to specific types of Internet users.

A University of Missouri-Columbia faculty member, along with other researchers from the Ivey Business School at the University of Western Ontario (Canada) and Quinnipiac University, investigated numerous characteristics of Internet users and how they ultimately manage their time while online. The researchers found that online shopping is a common reason for Internet usage - irrespective of the time planning habits of users.

In addition to electronic shopping, researchers June Cotte, who is the George and Mary Turnbull faculty fellow in marketing and assistant professor at Western Ontario; Tilottama G. Chowdhury, assistant professor of marketing at Quinnipiac; and S. (Ratti) Ratneshwar, who is Bailey K. Howard World Book Chair of marketing and professor in the College of Business at MU, examined other user functions - such as exploratory, entertainment and information search uses of the Web. They focused on the time planning element by placing users in two

categories: "hedonic," representing those who access the Internet for pleasure or leisurely purposes, and "utilitarian," representing those who browse for specific reasons or tasks.

"This study is about individual differences," Ratneshwar said. "Some people are just more conscious and more structured in how they use their time. Others are more spontaneous."

The findings concluded that hedonic users benefit primarily through exploratory, entertainment and shopping purposes. Utilitarian users benefit more through information search and shopping purposes. Despite time management differences, online shopping was the common characteristic and "that was a surprise," Ratneshwar said. However, the motivations differ. Ratneshwar said utilitarian users shop online to save money and maximize time - such as avoiding those long holiday lines. Hedonic users are quite the opposite, he said.

"Shopping to them isn't about saving money," Ratneshwar said. "If they were in a mall, they would lose their sense of timing. They buy on impulse. They aren't focused on savings or time and are shopping for the sheer fun of it."

The study, "Pleasure or Utility? Time Planning Style and Web Usage Behaviors," was published in the *Journal of Interactive Marketing*.

Source: University of Missouri

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