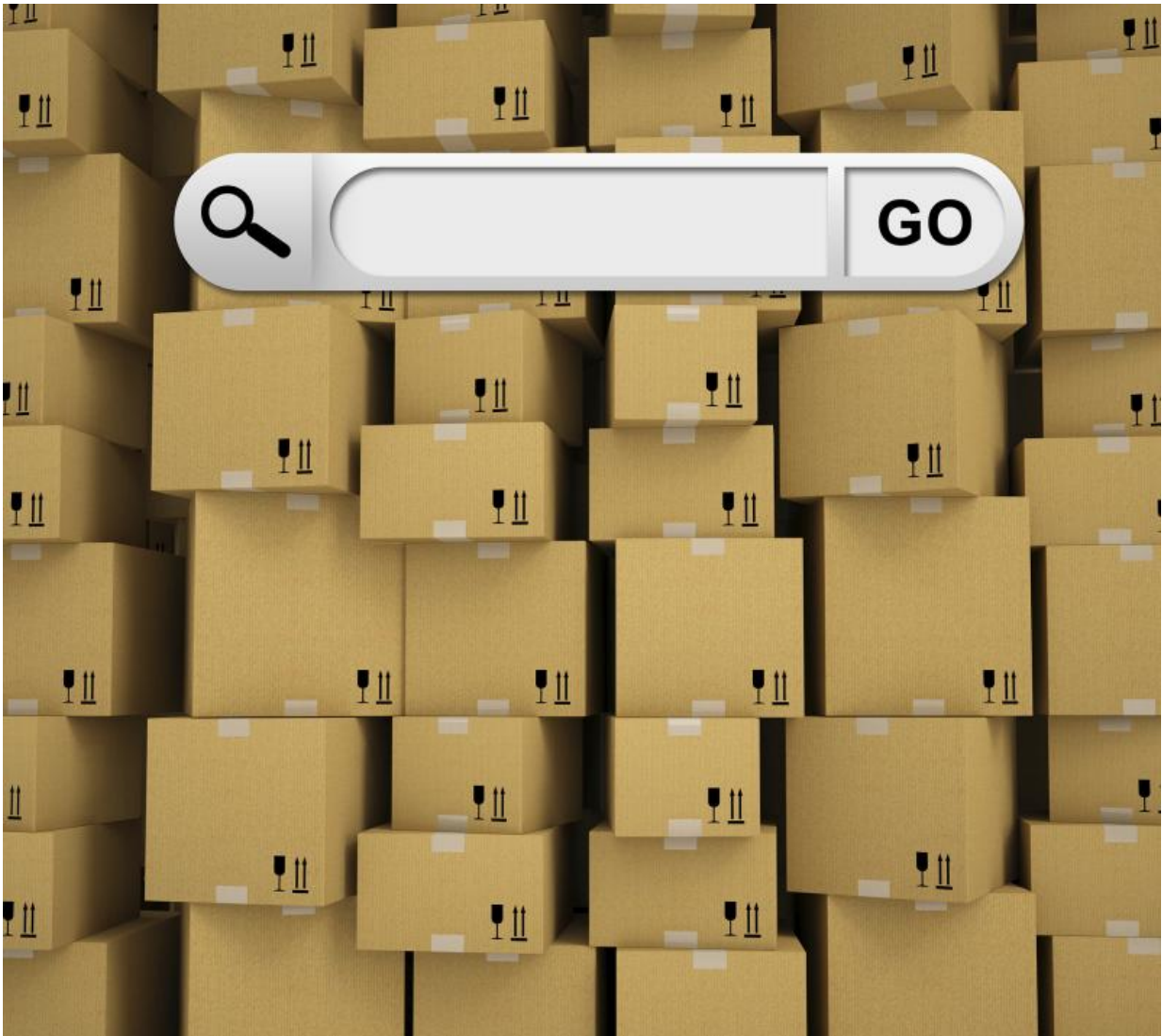![PHYS.ORG]

Researcher studies consumer behavior on mobile internet

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"Showrooming" has been a worry for brick-and-mortar retailers since the advent of the smartphone. That's when a customer looks at a product on the shelf, searches online for more information, sees a cheaper price, and buys online.

But new research by a University of Michigan Ross School of Business marketing professor shows that fear may be overblown. In one of the first studies to track how and when people search for product information, he's found that it's not all about price for consumers.

"It's popular wisdom that people use their mobile devices to showroom, but it looks like people are doing much more than that," said Puneet Manchanda, the Isadore and Leon Winkelman Professor of Marketing. "It seems like it might be an overblown concern. We were actually surprised by that, and other things we found."

He and his co-authors had access to user data of over 80 million searches on a popular product search app in Germany. The company wanted to know how people were using the app, and Germany provided a good setting for the study—retail hours are tightly regulated by law. That means the researchers could easily see if people were searching during store hours or not.

They found that people search for product information at all times of the day, not just when they were likely to be in the store. The average [product search](#) pattern on Sundays, when all stores are closed, doesn't look much different than weekdays.

What's more, people search for three main types of information—physical attributes of the product, price and user-generated content such as reviews.

Interestingly, people were less likely to do a price search on listings with

more content, such as professional reviews and user reviews. This is a valuable finding for retailers and app developers.

"People look at all three areas heavily, but what was surprising to us is that if you have rich, detailed reviews for people to read, there's a lower probability they would do a price search," Manchanda said. "More information lowers price sensitivity. That even applied to product categories where price is a major consideration, like groceries."

Their findings suggest that retailers and product information app developers should focus not only on in-store searches, but also on people who continue their searches away from the store. It also shows the importance of providing rich content for users.

  More information: "Consumer Search Behavior on the Mobile Internet: An Empirical Analysis." (May 5, 2015). Ross School of Business Paper No. 1275. Available at SSRN: ssrn.com/abstract=2603242 or dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2603242

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