E-Consumer Behaviour: Exploring the Drivers of E-Shopping

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Abstract
The study explores the behavioural aspect of e-consumers in terms of drivers in conducting e-shopping. The key objective is to identify the influences of e-shoppers purchase decision in e-shopping medium. Focus group discussions were conducted with consumers who were residing in the UK and have already had experience in shopping from the Internet. Focusing on the actual consumers’ shopping experience and not their shopping intention, this approach gives more advantages in identifying consumers’ drivers. The study found that most of the influences given by the respondents of using e-shopping are consistent with attributes suggested by Rogers’ (1995) Diffusion of Innovation Theory. E-shoppers are becoming more price sensitive, while trust and strong brand name are gaining more attention from e-shoppers. The results explicitly clarified several key contributions and implications to marketing theory and practice.

Keywords: Online Marketing, E-shopping, Consumer Behaviour, Diffusion of Innovation, Focus Group.

1. Introduction
The evolution and tremendous usage growth of the Internet, and its deregulation from a research tool into a free network that anyone may use, implies that marketers are now positive towards adopting the Internet as a marketing tool. This has radically affected the ways in which marketers apply their skills, and has forced them to acquire new skills altogether. This is only the case for marketers: these advances also affect consumers, who can do their banking, book flights, order products, or plan trips from home. The Internet and the Web have made all of these activities, and much more, possible.

This development has offered a new way of acquisition, which represents an innovation to consumers. An innovation is defined as an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual (Rogers, 1995). The five dimensions of relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, observability and trialability as proposed by Rogers (1995) are considered to be the main driving forces for consumers in adopting a new innovation. This research was undertaken to find out whether the proposed dimensions as suggested by Rogers are among the driving factors for consumers’ adoption of shopping in the Internet in the UK.

This study explores the dimensions that influence adoption and their relevance to the service industry; an industry that is highly driven by information and communication technology, where intangible or symbolic products could gain tangibility online. Its purpose is to explore drivers contributing to customers’ adoption of E-shopping. Moreover, the research purposes are to evaluate the varying degrees of importance of these drivers in affecting consumers’ adoption of e-shopping. The results will provide an indication what constitute a good shop on the Internet particularly the service provided by the shop, the website features and design that are most likely to attract and retain existing consumers.
2. Research Problem and Questions

In trying to understand the reason for non-completed transactions, many previous studies have used Fishbein’s intentional model (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) to study how an individual’s attitude toward e-shopping will influence his or her behavioural intention (Westland and Clark, 1999; Shim et al., 2001). In the model, attitude has been viewed as a predictor of intention and finally actual behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, there is only limited research focused on the actual behaviour of the shopper who actually completes an online transaction (Shim et al, 2001; Lee and Johnson, 2002).

The idea that intentional behaviour will predict actual behaviour is rather questionable, based on the large numbers of dropouts or those who note that they are only browsing while online (Lee and Johnson, 2002). There is also very limited information on how and why certain groups of consumers shop via the Internet while others still accept virtual shopping only reluctantly. Are they using the Internet only to acquire product information? This indicates that empirical evidence of the impact of the Internet on consumer shopping behaviour remains inconclusive (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1997). This paradox has resulted in mixed opinions regarding the future of Internet retailing and shopping. Some people are of the view that e-tailing is an over-hyped, transient fad (e.g. Holloway and Beatty, 2003), while others maintain that the impact of the Internet for retailing is still promising because it performs a supporting role for existing marketing activity (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Rowley, 2000; Shang et al., 2005).

Based on the research background presented above, the research questions that will be investigated in this study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the drivers to E-consumers’ adoption of E-shopping?

RQ2: Does the Innovation Characteristics Theory by Rogers’ could explain the adoption of E-shopping?

RQ3: How do the Innovation Characteristics affect the E-consumers’ purchase decision?

RQ4: What are the issues and concerns related to each innovation characteristic that affect E-consumers’ purchase decision?

Such understanding will aid e-tailers and web designers to develop an effective business environment that can increase the usage of e-shopping for current e-shoppers while influencing and attracting non-shoppers to buy.

3. Previous Research

Everett Rogers, in a widely cited work (1995), provides a synthesis of over 3000 previous studies of adoption and diffusion. The results of this synthesis include numerous generalizations about innovation diffusion, i.e., the process by which innovations spread through populations of potential adopters.

When a potential adopter has been introduced to an innovation, they will consider several characteristics before adopting the innovation. Rogers (1995) lists 5 characteristics of innovations, which can be described as follows:

Relative advantage describes the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than that which it supersedes. The greater the perceived relative advantage of an innovation, the more rapid its rate of adoption is likely to be. For example, relative advantages perceived by consumers in the use of travel e-shopping could be in terms of convenience, flexibility, economics, etc.

Compatibility is the degree to which an innovation is consistent with the existing values, past experience and needs of the potential adopter. Innovations that are more compatible with the prevalent values and norms of a social system will be adopted more rapidly than an innovation that is incompatible. Incompatibility is often a problem that marketers face when introducing an innovation.

Complexity is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use. In most cases, new ideas that are simpler to understand will be adopted more quickly. If the complexity of the innovation outweighs the benefit, the innovation is unlikely to be adopted. In the context of e-
shopping, people may use it if it does not require advanced computing skills or complicated transaction procedures.

**Trialability** is whether an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. New ideas that can be tried on a partial basis will generally be adopted more quickly than innovations that are not divisible. Through trialability, the potential adopter would be able to see the results or benefits of the innovation.

**Observability** is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. Observability is often difficult for online consumers because although the use of a new innovation can be observed, the benefits of the innovation are difficult to observe, especially in the short-run. Thus, word of mouth from surrounding people who have been using e-shopping is important to make it observable in one’s eyes. This makes the diffusion network (i.e. opinion leaders) extremely important in building the confidence of potential adopters.

Overall, innovations that are relatively simple in nature, divisible for trial and compatible with previous experience are usually adopted more quickly than innovations that lack these characteristics. Surry and Farquhar (1997) report on a number of studies that confirm the links between relative advantage, complexity and compatibility and the adoption of innovations in education. Tornatzky and Klein (1982) found that relative advantage, compatibility and complexity are the most significant factors in explaining relationships across a broad range of innovations. Based on this theory, this study will examine whether relative advantage, compatibility and complexity influence the adoption of e-shopping through qualitative research approach.

## 4. Research Methodology

As the study aims to gain an understanding of driving factors that affect consumers’ adoption of E-shopping, qualitative research methodology was employed. As suggested by Maignan and Lukas (1997), qualitative methodology is useful to gain a rich understanding of the Internet users themselves. The best way to find out about drivers is by inferring the causes of behaviour from people’s thoughts and actions (Silverman and Zukergood, 2000). This could involve getting them to talk, in an atmosphere of psychological safety, about what they do and why they do it—a and how they feel about what they do. The best laboratory for this is likely the focus group.

The focus group is the ideal method to obtain this kind of information. One of the hallmark of focus group is it uses group interaction to produce data and insights that cannot be obtained from other research method such as survey or interview. In a focus group, people interacting with each other with the help of a moderator to get more information and to share their own experience. In general, the usefulness and validity of focus group data are affected by the extent to which participants feel comfortable about openly communicating their ideas, views or opinions. In spite of the usefulness of the focus group as one of the research tools, there has been growing criticism of focus group research (Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook, 2006).

Two focus groups were conducted in the summer and autumn of 2010. In total, 24 respondents who were residing in the UK for at least one year were recruited equally across gender. All respondents have had an experience of purchasing on the Internet while residing in the UK. It means that all the respondents already have experience in E-shopping, as such there was similarity in terms of influences for adopting e-shopping. Therefore, in the effort to ensure that the respondents were qualified to the requirements of the study, a screening process was conducted prior to recruitment. The respondents had to be familiar with shopping on the Internet and had shopped on the Internet at least 5 times and completed these transactions on the Internet, with at least one year experience of e-shopping. The respondents were all married with children and their age ranged from 25 to 45 years old. These approaches were chosen so that the group members have common experience because homogeneous groups tend to promote more intense discussion and freer interaction (Cooper and Schindler, 1998).
Respondents were recruited on a voluntarily basis amongst postgraduate students from various Universities in Wales, United Kingdom. The target population of the sample was chosen due to their purchasing power where all of them were in employment either part-time or full-time. All of them hold credit cards and were computer literate. Eventually, the actual E-shoppers were selected as respondents. This in conjunction with the purpose of the study that is to study the actual experience of shopping on the Internet, and not their intention to purchase on the Internet. This was considered realistic approach, as it allowed the group discussion to focus on the adoption of E-shopping and their own experiences rather than the intention to adopt e-shopping.

Closed and open-ended questions were used in the discussion, to allow the collection of both standardised and unanticipated responses (Chisnall, 1997). Drinks and food were provided during the group discussion in order to make the ambience more relaxed and each respondent was paid GBP30 for an hour and a half of work. The group discussions were carried out in a lively and friendly manner. The discussion topics contained issues relating to the types of products, drivers for shopping, shopping experience, comparisons to real shopping, advantages and disadvantages of E-shopping, web features and relationship marketing. Respondents were asked to give feedback based on their previous experience of shopping from the Internet. To make the participants feel involved during the discussion, there were also questions that needed reflection, choices, rating scales and situational feedback, which were presented at the end of the discussion.

5. Results and Discussions

Generally, the research managed to obtain a very good and positive feedback on the advantages that the respondents gained in adopting E-shopping. While the findings cannot be generalised to all consumers, the findings reflect the perspective of 24 individuals who have experienced in the shopping from the Internet in the UK. The findings suggest drivers that influence consumers adopting E-shopping. This section identifies the major theme that emerged.

5.1. Relative Advantage

Relative advantage is positively related to adoption as compared to other perceived adoption characteristics. It represents the degree to which an innovation is being perceived as better than the idea it supersedes (Rogers, 1995). The relative advantages appear to be significant to the diffusion of E-shopping innovation. However, the drivers for adoption varied depending on the types and nature of products, time, price, promotions and needs during the course of the buying process. The followings are factors that have the relative advantages for shopping on the Internet.

5.1.1. Price

All respondents expected web retailers to offer lower prices. This is the main driver why they shopped via the Internet rather than engaging in actual shopping. Choudhury et al. (1998) mention that in some cases, the Internet helps buyers to find better prices as the dispersion of prices could be substantial. The price search behaviour of the E-shoppers was positively supported here:

‘I know I could find the best prices that are much cheaper than those offered in the high street shops …..that’s the beauty of Internet shopping and it’s really worth the effort’ (female)

‘I can assure you that the Internet quotation is lower than the walk-in rate for a hotel room…..you should look for an Internet Café for hotel booking …even when you have just arrived in front of the hotel…. ’ (female)

Some respondents revealed their motivation to search for price information, which indicates that they are becoming more sensitive to price.

‘After getting price information from the Internet …I will normally go to the nearest shop or supermarket to compare the price…I find that in most cases the Internet offers are better’ (male)
‘I’m lucky as I paid only £50 for a hotel room in London last week through Internet booking ….. the actual price at the hotel is £90 anyway….it’s really worth the effort’ (female)

However some respondents gave different opinions on the pricing issue.
‘Yes, I do, I’ve been so meticulous on the charges…. otherwise I won’t shop online’ (female)
‘I would rather buy from the shops if the online shop charges me the same…..’ (male)

The power of pricing and promotion was seen as a vital influence for E-shopping adoption. E-shoppers felt satisfied that they could get the best bargains for the amount of time that they spent on gathering information and making comparisons of products and prices. Internet markets can increase consumers’ motivation to search for price information and are becoming more sensitive to price. The view that motivation is required to process information is consistent with Bettman and Park’s (1980) theory that price searching depends on both one’s ability and one's motivation. Shankar et al. (2003) suggest that among online-related factors, the range of available product and price options are likely to impact on price sensitivity.

A better understanding is needed on the factors that influence online price searching. This is an important issue, as the ability to gather price information and make comparisons between sellers is viewed as one of the keys in defining and maintaining the competitive advantages of Internet marketing.

5.1.2. Convenience
Previous scholars have defined convenience in terms of saving time and effort, including physical and mental effort (Williams et al., 1978; Nickols and Fox 1983). Thus, these attributes of convenience, which have long been important to consumers, are now found in the new innovation of e-shopping. In particular, web-based purchasing is the ultimate in time saving, effort saving, availability and accessibility.

All respondents have no doubt agreed about the convenience of conducting transactions online. Convenience was also the influence why the respondents shopped on the Internet. They talked about various dimension of convenience. Most of the respondent value their time and effort:
‘Online shopping is just like one stop shop, everything is there ..... no travelling time, no parking required, no hassle…I really appreciate the technology’ (male)
‘I have more time with my family now.... I can shop anytime and anywhere I like’ (female)
‘I agree with you, in my case I could easily compare hotel rates or even vacancies without have to walk-in to every hotel...oh I can’t imagine that...what a hassle’ (female)

Saving time actually means reallocating time across activities to achieve greater efficiency (Feldman and Hornik 1981), while the term ‘effort’ has been viewed as a relevant and positive input to an exchange (Oliver and Swan 1989). Time and effort are actually non-monetary costs to consumers, and these aspects have been concerns when they moved to E-shopping.

The respondents’ expectations also highlighted the issue of availability in different aspects, such as the availability of information, products and choices.
‘Some products you couldn’t find in the shops...like sports items, technical equipment, large and advanced scale machineries....you have no choice but to go online’ (male)
‘Nowadays, you can get everything on the Internet...you just name it’ (female)
‘..If I were to name the models.....there are thousands of product lines and mixes available ...... we also could ask for customization of the order’ (male)
‘...prior to booking, don’t forget to check whether there are seats available at your departure and return flights...... which you could do on your computer’ (male)

These quotes show that the Internet is perceived to be a potential source of inventory and references when the local offline store is out of stock or has no information about a particular product. Importantly, the respondents consider the Internet as a place where they expect to find selection and flexibility, or even product customization. On the other hand, accessibility of the store in terms of location and hours of availability was also found to be significant to this study; these aspects have been
included in some conceptualizations of convenience, such as in the work of Corby (1994) and Yale and Venkatesh (1985). Some respondents are quite involved on this issue:

‘…..I’m even purchasing from sellers outside the UK …the website has really made it easy for me to purchase’ (female)

‘If I purchase products from the US... I really make use of the currency converter....anyway the prices are almost the same….’ (male)

‘I did try to send a bouquet of flowers to my mum last mothers’ day….I ordered from an online florist’s website in my home country…and it worked…my mum was so surprised…..’ (female)

The fact that the E-shoppers fully utilize and enjoy the convenience of E-shopping has been observed here. Another aspect of the importance of accessibility of information to customers involves the interactivity and features of retailers’ websites, which will be discussed in a later sub-topic.

When the respondents were asked to compare and contrast their experience between E-shopping and actual shopping, they responded positively preferred the E-shopping:

‘I can still survive without going out shopping’ (male)

‘I simply don’t like to go out shopping’ (male)

The entertainment (enjoyable) aspect of shopping, which refers to the physical process of going round looking at products with family and friends, may be very difficult to duplicate online (Molesworth and Suortti, 2002). Here is some of the respondents’ feedback:

‘I still get enjoyment through browsing and searching for information. For me, it could replace the enjoyment of offline shopping’ (female)

‘I don’t miss the enjoyment of real shopping as I still go shopping for other products like apparel products; I purchase only certain products online’ (female)

‘I still enjoy going down to a few shopping outlets, getting a close view of products that I intend to buy online…..’ (male)

‘Yeah, E-shopping is much fun….I enjoy the excitement of bidding on e-bay....I get hooked on the site’ (male)

As shopping is widely regarded as a major leisure-time activity, the respondents expressed that they still enjoyed their leisure-time shopping on the Internet in a similar way to conventional shopping. The males particularly enjoyed auction websites, hobby-type websites and bargain websites. As for the females, they seemed to enjoy a combination of online and offline shopping, checking out offline stores for certain product categories. Thus, they could touch or try on merchandise before buying online, or look for product information and pricing online before purchasing offline. The respondents’ experience supports Wolfinbarger and Gilly’s (2001) study where online shopping is associated with freedom, fun and control of individual needs.

5.1.3. Control and Privacy

The primary relationship of e-shopping is not between the seller and buyer, but rather between the buyer and the mediated environment (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Internet buyers largely appreciate the lack of people while they are shopping; they do occasionally want help, but they want that help to be at their request and to be responsive to their individual needs. Most respondents were less satisfied with the role of sales people and the pressure received from them when they went shopping.

‘You know that when you go into the agent’s outlets, even if you are only looking, that the salesman will put pressure on......by asking you your budget, your vacation destination, while offers last. If you don't know what you are talking about you will be in a trap ...... (male)

‘I would rather search for the information that I need from websites than ask questions to salespeople....... they seem to be biased, and sometimes intimidating’ (male)

‘One of the reasons I go online is to avoid facing sales people...... I just could not refuse them.......that’s my problem’ (female)

In addition, some of the respondents focused on the freedom and privacy of shopping via the Internet.
‘...when I walk in to a travel agent ...I’ve got to project a better image from my appearance...otherwise they won’t entertain me....especially the big ones’ (male)

‘I feel free to shop as nobody will influence me’ (female)

‘I have more privacy in choosing products without being influenced by salesperson.’ (female)

Surprisingly, it seems that the E-shoppers largely like the absence of social interaction while buying online. Moreover, the ability to find what they need and to complete a transaction without having to go through a human being is associated by online buyers with increased freedom and control. According to Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001), the absence of retail workers is appreciated for two reasons, firstly salespeople are often perceived to be unhelpful or uninformed, and secondly they pressure or obligate buyers. Ellen et al. (1991) find that the behaviour of salesmen is a strong driver for dissatisfaction with existing processes (conventional shopping). This generated a motivation to avoid the traditional pressure-orientated sales situation.

In addition, there is a further advantage in terms of shoppers’ buying effort, as they do not need to conform to the social practices of grooming and acceptable behaviour. For instance, some of the respondents mentioned specifically that they could shop even in their underwear. Shopping online provides buyers with an environment that is comfortable and personalised for them. Importantly, the qualities of accessibility and convenience are often related to control and freedom; in fact, the focus group participants used the words ‘freedom’ and ‘privacy’ to describe the experience of shopping online.

5.1.4. Trust, Security and Risk

Trust and security are two vital elements that could reduce consumers’ perceived risk in E-shopping. According to Cheung and Matthew (1999), trust in E-shopping is affected by the trustworthiness of an Internet vendor and relevant external environmental factors impacting on E-shopping transactions. Security includes authenticating business transactors, controlling access to resources such as Web pages for registered or selected users, encrypting communications, and in general, ensuring the privacy and effectiveness of transactions.

All respondents anticipated the risk of purchasing online. The group of shoppers, however seems to have trust in selling and buying activities via the Internet.

‘Normally I just accept the terms and conditions without reading them...I know it is risky...but I trust them.’ (male)

‘I trust the payment system very well...even though I do not know what Pay Pal, E-wallet, SSL and other jargon are...I couldn’t be bothered...’ (male)

‘I check my credit card no. several times after keying it in....but I seldom read the terms and condition due to time constraints’ (female)

‘Before we complete the payment, there are always a few pages asking for password again and confirmation....this makes me feel secure’ (male)

Based on the responses, this could be considered as quite an important issue for E-shoppers. A study by Jarvenpaa and Todd (1997) indicates that in the context of e-business, consumers perceived personal risk (misuse of credit cards etc.) to be the most significant of overall risks. However, they conclude that security issues are not stopping people from conducting e-shopping. Furnell and Karweni (1999) support this, as their results also indicate that security issues were a significant concern among e-shoppers. Here, the barrier goes beyond security. Most of the focus group participants said they feel secure in dealing with websites that they had dealt with before, or with popular websites.

‘I feel secure doing transaction with big companies like Amazon.com’ (male)

‘I have 100% trust in the E-bay system...I’ve never had problems either buying or selling’ (male)

‘The reputation of the company is important to build up my trust and security’ (male)

‘We trust the website because many people have purchased from those website’ (female)
‘I tend to put more trust in well-known brands compared to buying non-branded goods’

(female)

The findings seem to support the dimensions of trust in an Internet vendor proposed by Chen and Dhillon (2003). They are competence, integrity and benevolence. Competence refers to a company's ability to fulfil promises made to consumers. Integrity suggests that a company acts in a consistent, reliable and honest manner. Benevolence is the ability of a company to hold consumer interests ahead of its own self-interest and indicates sincere concern for the welfare of the customers. Apart from that, the respondents also highlighted the risk associated with delivery problems:

‘…undelivered items….is the most risky part…but it’s very rare case’ (male)
‘The delivery time is during office hours…..I’ve got to deliver by myself…’ (male)
‘I’ve received items which I didn’t order but I managed to return it.’ (female)
‘I’m not sure when the merchants will send me the product…had to call them to check.’ (female)

The respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the present delivery times and fulfilment when buying via the Internet. Organising the delivery of a product bought from the Internet, however, was perceived to be even more complex and therefore the relative advantage in this area was seen as difficult to achieve. According to Gupta and Chatterjee (1997) consumers decide whether to conduct acquisitions online or off-line on the basis of, among other things, the speed and cost of shipping and delivery.

5.2. Complexity

Complexity, defined by Rogers (1995) as the degree in which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use, is negatively related to adoption. Most of the respondents agreed that no additional skills were required for executing E-shopping, as it was not complicated at all. For them, basic computer knowledge should be sufficient for shopping. However, for the first- time user, familiarity with browsing and searching on the Internet is important. In consensus, the respondents agreed that shopping via the Internet was not difficult.

‘For e-bay customers, skills are needed for auction bidding’ (male)
‘Payment systems knowledge might be important….but you can still shop even though you don’t know the details’ (male)
‘you’ve got to have a debit or credit card to facilitate your e-shopping as 90% of websites will ask for the card numbers….even when you’re just booking’ (female)
‘Online shops’ website are purposely made simple for user-friendliness…otherwise they could not make profit’ (female)

In addition the following issues are found as factors that relates to the Complexity of e-shopping.

5.2.1. Website Features

Most respondents were not likely to make the effort to click or look for the colourful features on the Internet website. They were more interested in finding the information they want, executing the transaction easily, and have it delivered in time. Some of their points are:

‘Again... I install additional software to block the pop-up menus’ (male)
‘I don’t bother about the attractiveness of a website…the content is more important to me....’ (male)

‘A white background is better still..... look at the popular websites like e-bay....isn’t it clean and clear....?’ (male)

Some gave their comments on the features’ functions:
‘Some e-mail contact provided is not functioning at all...either they ignore it or you get an automated response’ (male)
‘Even the online chat is hardly available….by right there should be someone sitting there 24 hours for technical support especially…..’ (male)

For most respondents, information, content and interactivity of websites were able to replace the interpersonal contact, as has been discussed earlier.

‘ I can see….many websites are facilitating users by giving quality information, enough pictures and all the details that are important to customers before purchasing…..’ (male)

‘I can still get that information (from salespeople) on the websites. Some websites have even show reviews, testimonials by previous customers’ (male)

‘I feel entertained! Just like shopping at the mall…it’s a different experience but with equal satisfaction’ (female)

Many respondents expected the Internet website information to be detailed and attractive to facilitate their shopping. However, the web features do not influence the adoption of e-shopping. The increase in interactivity and intensity were associated with increased sense of presence, which have been shown to create more positive and more enduring attitudes toward web sites (Coyle and Thorson, 2001).

5.2.2. Personalisation

Personalisation is viewed as helpful to customers when it refers to features that increase the sense of user control and freedom, including order tracking, purchase histories, saving information for quicker transactions during future sessions, and opt-in e-mail notification of new products and special deals (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001). Generally, the respondents said they had customised experiences when they revisited sites where they had previously registered. They also received updated e-mails or newsletters, especially on the latest product offers. However, the ways in which they reacted to those personalisation features varied:

‘I always get the priority to grab new offers compared to non-registered users….. The promotional news is sent to the member in advance’ (male)

‘As a member of a website, every year I receive a free night at a hotel as a birthday gift from the leisure holiday company…..I appreciate that very much’ (female)

Many respondents highlighted the issue of junk e-mails.

‘..for me it’s not big deal…just unsubscribe them…’ (male)

‘I get so annoyed when receiving spam and unsolicited e-mail…they bring in viruses sometimes…..’ (female)

‘I’m not interested in reading junk mails…I just delete them ‘ (female)

This result is not surprising, given the earlier responses about junk mail and other unsolicited mails received by the respondents. However, their anxiety appears to be offset by the advantages they gain from E-shopping.

On the other hand, personalisation would not make the respondents stick to a particular website. The following quotes show their response to the acceptance of personalisation.

‘I feel happy as every time I log on, my name is there’ (male)

‘I would probably shift to other websites for purchasing if their offers were more worthwhile, regardless of the customization that I received from the registered website’ (male)

‘I’m still comparing the price even I’m a registered member of the website’ (female)

Overall, the online buyers participating in the focus groups appreciated the online customization service that they received. This confirms the findings of Gallagher et al. (2001), where the Internet users value the enhanced communication capabilities of the Internet and websites that live up to expectation than the ones that do not.

5.3. Compatibility

Compatibility, which is positively related to adoption, refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters
An example of compatibility with previously introduced ideas is evident in an investigation by Balabanis and Vassileiou (1999) that indicates that consumers with experience from other modes of home shopping are more likely candidates for e-shopping.

Many respondents faced no problems in adapting to the new way of shopping, with regard to their either culture or social life. It is very compatible with their beliefs, values and practice.

‘Why should we reject the innovation…it’s good to the society’ (male)

‘As long as a computer can access the Internet…It’s compatible for Internet shopping’ (female)

With regard to lifestyle and status, most participants disagreed that E-shopping had affected their lifestyle but admitted that E-shopping had improved their time management.

‘It is supposed to save my time if everybody in the house adopts E-shopping….otherwise I’ve still got to take them to shops’ (male)

‘…..I still have to go out shopping for other products…it would change if everything could be purchase online, especially groceries’ (male)

‘It doesn’t mean that you are better off if you shop online’ (female)

Some respondents felt better than others who do not use Internet.

‘I feel much better than my friend who has to queue up to pay bills every month’ (male)

‘It is just like ‘doing things right’ versus ‘do the right things’ - am I right?’ (female)

In consensus, they agreed that they were not bothered to find out who had adopted e-shopping, as it did not confer any status.

‘No, we could not identify internet shoppers; nobody knows who Internet shoppers are unless they tell us’ (female)

‘Anybody can be an Internet shopper…how do I know?’ (male)

‘It is not like those new things where we could see the results’ (female)

Although the respondents’ lifestyle and status were not greatly affected by the adoption of E-shopping, they become more price-oriented in their buying process. They might be in a ‘wired lifestyle’, as mentioned by Bellman et al. (1999). Consumers with wired lifestyles use the Internet extensively for most of their activities (such as reading news and communicating) either at home or at work. They naturally turn to the Internet to search for product information and buy products and services.

5.4. Triability

Trialability is positively related to adoption and represents the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis Rogers (1995). He has recognised that trial is one of the ways of reducing uncertainty related to innovations. According to Phau and Poon (2000), the ability to trial online acquisitions is an important factor affecting whether a product or service is suitable to be sold online. For example, demonstration versions of software, trial periods of online newspapers or video/music subscriptions reduce the uncertainty in purchase decision and thus stimulate purchases. In respect of E-shopping, this represents a usage barrier, in the form of the failure of online services to allow test shopping. Ram and Sheth (1989) argue that to some extent, all innovations represent uncertainty, which can lead to consumers postponing the adoption of the innovation until they can learn more about it. This uncertainty can create perceived risk, defined as the extent to which the consumer is uncertain about the consequences of an action (Hoyer and MacInnis, 1997).

Many respondents were aware that e-shopping is a real time transaction, which could not be cancelled once it has been completed:

‘No, there is no trial session for the shopping activity: once confirmed, it’s done. I have to be certain before purchasing’ (male)

‘When something is physically important, like a dress, you have to try it on and feel how it is ... if it’s comfortable enough. It doesn’t work on the Internet as far as I can see ... ’ (male)

‘The trial of products is fine, as many companies provide money back guarantees, return policies etc’ (female)
Most respondent agreed that the ability to try the products purchased on the Internet was an important factor. Furthermore, the respondents agreed that the strong enforcement of consumers right in the UK influenced them to purchase from the Internet.

5.5. Observability

The last driving factors for consumers to adopt an innovation is observability. Rogers (1995) defines observability as the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. In other words, peer observation is the key driving factor in the adoption and diffusion of technology. Observability is also positively related with the rate of adoption of innovation. However, it has also been noted by Liz and Almeida (1997) that e-commerce services suffer from social distance. It means that consumers who are shopping from the Internet are not able to see others using the service and/or are not able to take part in the social act of using the service. Furthermore, most respondent agreed that they were not aware who have had experience in purchasing from the Internet and their status were not affected by shopping from the Internet. Therefore, the observability factor is not supported or considered important in motivating consumers to shop on the Internet.

6. Conclusions

This research reveals driving factors for consumers who were residing in the UK to shop from the Internet based on the model of adoption of innovation proposed by Rogers (1995). Using the focus groups approach, the study finds that four out of five driving factors are consistent with the theory as suggested by Rogers. Consumers shop from the Internet because there are relative advantages that could be gained from E-shopping such as better pricing, convenience, security, privacy, personalisation and friendly website features. Consumers are also able to evaluate the quality of the service given and the information received. On the other hand, they also expressed their concerns regarding delivery issues, junk mail, website features and information privacy, which might effect their inclination to adopt e-shopping. If the behaviour of these E-shoppers is typical, then the research findings could help marketers to manage their online customers effectively. Other driving factors for consumers to shop on the Internet are complexity, compatibility and trialability. However, the observability factor is not supported.

Amongst the benefits that make up the relative advantage of E-shopping adoption, the findings show that pricing, which offers value for money, is the main pulling factor for consumers to shop on the Internet. E-shoppers are very sensitive to prices and receptive to ‘offers’ and therefore their decision to purchase a product is very often associated with price. Apparently, personalisation through web presentation does not have much influence on shoppers’ decision-making, but it does facilitate repeat purchasing.

This research also found that most respondents find E-shopping as enjoyable as the ‘real’ shopping experience. They feel they are undergoing a similar process as when they are purchasing from the physical outlets. The respondents also find that shopping from the Internet is compatible with their past experience of shopping. The less complexity of shopping from the Internet is another motivating factor to attract consumers as the respondents find that shopping via the Internet was not difficult. The respondents find that the rights to return the products they bought from the Internet is an important factor. However, peer observation or status is not related to shopping on the Internet. This is because the respondents are not able to identify or observe who has or has not shopped from the Internet.

7. Implications

In this study, the predicted factors are all relevant and can help marketers and advertisers to develop more efficient ways to attract consumers to shop on the Internet. E-shoppers’ expectations are very
much different than those of conventional shoppers. As the E-shoppers are sensitive to pricing, the online pricing tactics should be flexible, with continuous price change throughout the year, which could attract web users to keep monitoring the offers. A website marketer should be ready to sacrifice some profit margin by adopting a price penetration strategy (low price, high visit and high volume of sale).

As E-shoppers are continuously looking for bargains, website marketers need to fine-tune their offerings and provide specific promotions to specific target segments at the individual level in order to stimulate the adoption of E-shopping. They might need to generate plans to reduce website-switching by investing some effort in initiating an effective implementation of ‘relationship marketing’ via website facilities. Based on the finding that consumers do not see current personalisation via web sites as cultivating ‘relationships’, we feel that this raises serious concerns. Perhaps web marketers should move beyond developing a basic web page with an address and e-mail contact in providing information to the consumer. While E-shoppers have a significantly high level of control in their online purchase, web marketers should offer opportunities for consumers to interact with the website through value added features and the provision of on-line customer support.

Since the focus groups reveal that there is a relationship between strong brand name and trust as well as the role of consumer rights enforcement, further understanding of inter-play between driving factor, brand name, trust and law enforcement is left for future research. In summary, the results from the focus groups approach are consistent with other research methods, and therefore it is evidence that the group is a reliable approach if appropriately used.

References


