

Consumer Pre-purchase Search in Online Shopping: Role of Offline and Online Information Sources

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Abstract

Pre-purchase information search is an integral part of consumer decision-making process and buying behavior. Understanding consumer information search behavior is vital for organizations in order to plan their communication strategy and reach consumers effectively. Though consumer information search behavior is extensively studied in traditional brick and mortar purchase situations, there is dearth of research in understanding consumer information search behavior in online shopping occasions. Given the rapid growth in electronic retail over the last few years, it is imperative to understand consumer information search behavior in online buying situations.

This study investigates the factors that influence the extent of usage of different information sources in pre-purchase information search by online shoppers through an empirical research among 1079 online shoppers. The analysis of data using multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) shows that consumers tend to use both traditional offline information sources and online information sources when they shop online. However, the preference for different online and offline information sources is likely to be different for hedonic and utilitarian products. Individual factors, such as Internet usage experience, need for cognition and age, also tend to influence consumer preference for different online and offline sources. This has important implications for e-marketers as they may need to use different communication channels depending on the nature of the product and the characteristics of their target consumers to effectively promote their offerings.

Keywords

Online shopping, pre-purchase information search, offline and online information sources, consumer behavior, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA)

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