

## Information Search and Shopping Intentions Through Internet for Apparel Products

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### **Abstract:**

This study was designed to identify variables related to Internet information search and shopping intentions for apparel products among computer users residing in major metropolitan cities across the nation. Stepwise multiple regression analysis, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were employed to analyze the national data (n = 684) collected through a mail survey. Internet information search intention was the most significant variable related to Internet shopping intention for apparel products. Certain attitudes toward Internet shopping were significantly related to computer users' information search intention for apparel information and shopping intention for apparel products through the Internet. Main effects and interaction effects of a limited number of demographic characteristics were also identified.

**Keywords:** Internet information | Internet shopping | MANCOVA | ANCOVA

### **Article:**

Revenue generated by E-commerce in the retail category of apparel products is expected to reach \$20 billion by the year 2003 and will become the fourth largest source of revenue of the e-commerce area (Setlow, 1999). These numbers suggest that Internet apparel shopping may be a major player in e-commerce. The purpose of this study was to identify variables related to Internet information search and shopping intentions for apparel products by integrating demographic characteristics and an attitude-behavioral intention model proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The Fishbein and Ajzen behavioral intention model indicates that an individual's attitude toward an object influences his or her behavioral intention, an approximate predictor of actual behavior. Thus, we were interested in examining how attitudes toward Internet shopping are related to Internet information search and shopping intentions. We were also interested in how demographic characteristics are related to attitudes toward Internet shopping, information search

intention, and shopping intention. Finally, we were interested in assessing the degree to which information search is related to shopping intention.

### **Research Q1. What consumer demographic characteristics are related to attitudes toward Internet shopping?**

Researchers have recognized effects, albeit inconsistent, of certain demographic characteristics on non-store shopping (e.g., Eastlick & Feinberg, 1994; Kwon, Paek, & Arzeni, 1991; Morganosky & Cude, 2000). One explanation for the inconsistent findings lies in the diffusion of innovation concept. That is, the acceptance of new types of direct marketing modes probably begins with a small number of adopters who tend to be young, better educated, and more socially mobile than their counterparts (e.g., Jasper & Lan, 1992; Shim & Drake, 1990). Their opinions eventually filter down through different subgroups, resulting in different demographic characteristics of non-store shoppers. Thus, it is useful to examine the effects of demographic characteristics at this point in time when Internet shopping is still in its infancy. In this study we were interested in assessing the main relationship of demographic characteristics and attitudes toward Internet shopping. Because sufficient evidence exists that consumers' prior shopping experience with direct marketing has a positive impact on their attitude toward 2Clothing and Textiles Research Journal© International Textile & Apparel Association, 2005direct marketing modes (i.e., home shopping, electronic shopping) (e.g., Akaah, Korgaonkar, & Lund, 1995; Shim & Drake, 1990), the number of prior Internet purchases was taken into consideration as a covariate in examining attitudes toward Internet apparel shopping.

### **Research Q2. What consumer demographic characteristics and attitudes toward Internet shopping are related to Internet information search and Internet shopping intentions?**

Attitudes are composed of multi-dimensions (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995). We were interested in assessing which dimensions of attitude toward Internet shopping were closely related to Internet information search and shopping intentions. Previous researchers have revealed relationships between certain demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, education levels) and behavioral intentions in the context of non-store shopping (i.e. catalog usage) (e.g. Eastlick & Feinberg, 1994; Jasper & Lan, 1992). In addition, various dimensions of attitudes have different effects on non-store shopping behaviors (e.g., Donthu & Garcia, 1999; Eastlick & Feinberg, 1994, Kim & Lennon, 2000). Thus, we were interested in examining the relationships between demographic characteristics and attitudes toward Internet shopping with two variables: Internet information search and shopping intentions.

### **Research Q3. What is the relationship between Internet information search intention and Internet shopping intention for apparel?**

The search process is defined as “the motivated activation of knowledge in memory or acquisition of information from the environment” (Engel et al., 1995, p. 176). Pipkin (1981) noted “information and preference are inextricably linked” (p. 315). Therefore, understanding the consumer information search process is a key element in understanding consumer decision behavior. One of the significant factors affecting the search process is the nature of the product (i.e., search goods, experience goods, or credence goods) (Darby & Karni, 1973). With search

goods, consumers are able to assess the quality and value of products prior to purchase. The quality and value of experience goods, on the other hand, are difficult to assess until consumers have used the product. The quality and value of credence goods can-not be evaluated even after purchase and use. Specific to the context of apparel products, Ekelund, Mixon, and Ressler's(1995) study designated clothing as experience goods and reported that information intensities associated with advertisements for experience goods were greater than those as-sociated with advertisements for search goods. Mixon's(1999) study found that ads associated with experience goods contain more information (e.g. return policies) than ads as-sociated with search goods. Because the quality of experience goods cannot be determined prior to purchase, the in-formation intensity provided by such additional sources as advertising is likely to influence consumer search and purchase behavior. In the context of Internet shopping, The Consumer Electronics Association (CEMA), a trade organization, as cited in McQuitty & Peterson (2000), reports that many consumers use the Internet solely to research information on products while making actual purchases through brick-and-mortar stores. However, studies show that consumers' Internet browsing is likely to lead to information search (Rowley, 2000), and eventually lead to purchasing(Bonn, Furr, & Susskind, 1999). Also, specific to the con-text of television shopping, Kim and Lennon (2000) report that consumers' information search influenced their purchase intentions for apparel. Thus, in this study we were interested in examining the extent to which Internet information search intention is linked with Internet shopping intention for apparel products.

## **Method**

### **Data Collection and Respondent Characteristics**

A survey questionnaire was sent to 2,000 computer users whose names were purchased from a mailing list brokerage firm. The mailing brokerage firm was asked to select 2,000 names randomly in proportion to the population of each of the following 15 metropolitan cities: Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Orlando, New Orleans, New York, Phoenix, San Francisco, Seattle, and St. Paul. We focused on these metropolitan cities as generally representative of large cities in the United States. We believed that residents in metropolitan cities were likely to have access to computers as well as access to the Internet. A second mailing was sent two weeks later to non- respondents to increase the response rate. As a result, 706 questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 35.3%. To achieve our purpose of surveying computer users, 22 respondents who indicated no access to a computer either at home or at work were excluded from the final analysis, leaving a total of 684 usable questionnaires.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents were male and 47% were female. Almost two-thirds (76%) of the respondents were White. Respondents aged between 25 to 54 years old. Forty-eight percent of the respondents had earned a four-year college degree or higher, while almost 76% were employed in white collar or professional careers. The majority of the respondents indicated that their annual household income exceeded \$30,000.

### **Measurement**

*Attitudes toward Internet shopping.* The attitudes to-ward Internet shopping scale was comprised of 24 items that encompassed several attributes of shopping (i.e., merchandise variety, price,

security, social shopping, speed, time and money saving). These 24 items were adapted from studies on store choice (e.g., Kopp, Eng & Tigert, 1989; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986) and electronic nonstore retailing (Eastlick, 1996). Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each shopping attribute ( $e_i$ ) when selecting where to shop. They were to respond on a seven-point scale (1 = not at all important to 7 = extremely important). Next, strength of belief regarding Internet shopping attributes ( $b_i$ ) was measured on a seven-point scale (1 = very unlikely to 7 = very likely).  $A_{\text{Internet shopping}}$  ( $A_0$ ) was then computed based on the formula [ $A_0 = \sum(e_i b_i)/n_j$ ].

Factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on these 24 items. Items with factor loadings greater than .40 were retained, resulting in 22 items for five factors. The five factors accounted for 56.5% of the total variance, with factor loadings ranging from .45 to .79. Each of these five factors had an eigenvalue greater than one.

Factor 1 was labeled secure transaction ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and included seven items related to payment security, safety, consumer information privacy, return policy, latest product information, minimal cost and time for product return, and product shopping guarantees. Factor 2 was labeled social shopping ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ) and included five items involving fun, being around with other people, seeing and experiencing new things, seeing and touching products, and personal sales assistance. Factor 3 was labeled speedy process ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) and included four items regarding time savings, 24-hour accessibility, freedom from hassles, and overall speed of shopping process. Factor 4 was labeled easy choice ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ) and included four items related to ease of shopping, being to pay with check or cash, instant ability to get products, and variety of products and brand choices. Finally, Factor 5 was labeled saving money ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ) and included two items regarding saving money and sales events.

*Internet information search intention for apparel products.* Respondents were asked to rate two separate items on how likely they felt they were to seek information about apparel and accessories; respectively, via the Internet rather than from stores, regardless of where they would eventually buy the apparel. These two items measured the extent of the information search intention on a seven-point semantic differential scale (1 = search entirely by store, 4 = equally search by store and the Internet, and 7 = search entirely by the Internet). The reliability of these two statements was 0.86. These two items were combined to determine Internet information search intention for apparel products.

*Internet shopping intention for apparel products.* Respondents were asked to rate two separate items on how likely they felt they were to choose either a store or the Internet to shop for apparel and accessories; respectively. Seven-point semantic differential scales were used (1 = shopping entirely by store, 4 = equally shop by store and the Internet, and 7 = shopping entirely by the Internet). The reliability of these two statements was 0.87. These two statements were combined to assess Internet shopping intention for apparel products.

*Number of prior Internet purchases.* Respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale the number of prior Internet purchases related to apparel and accessories they had made in the past 12 months (1 = 0, 2 = 1-2 times, ..., and 7 = > 11 times).

**Table 1.** MANCOVA and ANCOVA Results on Attitude Toward the Internet Shopping Among Demographic Information

Demographic variables	Mean					Multivariate <i>F</i>
	Secure transaction	Social shopping	Speed shopping	Easy choice	Saving money	
Gender (G)						
Male	21.24	11.93	27.12	23.16	23.31	1.19
Female	22.44	12.42	27.42	23.82	22.42	
<i>F</i> -value	3.15	0.76	2.23	2.81	0.02	
Ethnicity (E)						
White	21.20	11.39	26.79	22.75	22.16	6.57***
Non-White	23.85	14.76	28.81	25.88	25.36	
<i>F</i> -value	10.23**	29.55***	4.90*	14.74**	12.49**	
Education (Ed.)						
Non-4-year-degree	22.52	13.10	27.35	24.19	23.16	3.09**
4-year-college	21.04	11.15	27.16	22.69	22.60	
<i>F</i> -value	8.11**	11.57**	6.27*	10.32**	3.10	
G * E						
Male-White	20.63	11.09	26.99	22.60	22.86	1.09
Male-non-White	23.00	14.35	27.48	24.76	24.60	
Female-White	21.79	11.59	26.59	22.91	21.42	
Female-non-White	25.07	15.36	30.74	27.49	26.44	
<i>F</i> -value	0.37	0.31	3.18	2.07	3.50	
G * Ed						
Male-non-4-year-college	21.46	12.34	26.56	23.90	22.97	2.43*
Male-4-year-college	21.06	11.60	27.57	22.56	23.59	
Female-non-4-year college	23.40	13.72	28.01	24.44	23.31	
Female-4-year-college	21.02	10.46	26.53	22.89	21.09	
<i>F</i> -value	3.49	9.04**	4.88*	2.53	4.89*	

**Table 1. (continued)**

Demographic variables	Mean					
	Secure transaction	Social shopping	Speed shopping	Easy choice	Saving money	Multivariate <i>F</i>
E * Ed						
White-non-4-college	21.81	12.47	26.39	23.30	22.37	1.99
White-4-year-college	20.52	10.18	27.25	22.14	21.92	
Non-White-non-4-year-college	25.03	15.33	30.78	27.37	25.94	
Non-White-4-year-college	22.68	14.21	26.88	24.40	24.78	
<i>F</i> -value	0.65	0.36	6.82**	1.75	0.14	
G * E * Ed						
Male-White-non-4-year-college	21.06	11.96	26.25	23.69	22.82	1.61
Male-White-4-year-college	20.29	10.40	27.59	21.73	22.90	
Male-non-White-non-4-year-college	22.62	13.42	27.45	24.48	23.39	
Male-non-White-4-year-college	23.31	15.13	27.51	24.99	25.62	
Female-White-non-4-year-college	22.38	12.85	26.49	23.00	22.04	
Female-White-4-year-college	20.86	9.87	26.75	22.76	20.47	
Female-non-White-non-4-year-college	27.86	17.57	34.69	30.77	28.94	
Female-non-White-4-year-college	21.57	12.57	25.76	23.35	23.30	
<i>F</i> -value	2.99	3.70	3.10	7.44**	1.94	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Results

*Relationships between demographic characteristics and attitudes toward Internet shopping.* To examine the relationships of demographics to the five attitudinal dimensions, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was employed, using the number of prior Internet purchases as a covariate. Ethnicity ( $F = 6.57, p < .001$ ) had the most significant relationships with the five attitudinal dimensions (secure transaction, social shopping, speedy process, easy choice, and saving money). Education ( $F = 3.09, p < .01$ ) had significant relationship with four attitudinal dimensions (secure transaction, social shopping, speedy process, and easy choice). Further univariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on ethnicity indicated that non-White respondents had a more positive attitude toward all five aspects of Internet shopping than White respondents (F-values ranging from 4.90 to 29.55, all significant at a  $p < .05$  or greater level). ANCOVA analysis on the education factor also revealed that those who did not have a four-year college degree had a slightly more positive attitude toward all four aspects of Internet shopping than those with a four-year college degree or higher (F-values ranging from 6.27 to 11.57, all significant at a  $p < .05$  or greater level). No main effects were found for gender. Two-way interaction effects (gender  $\times$  education) ( $F = 2.43, p < .05$ ) were found for three attitudinal dimensions: social shopping, speedy process, and saving money (F-values ranging from 4.88 to 9.04, all significant at a  $p < .05$  or greater level). Female respondents without a four-year college degree had a more positive attitude toward several aspects of Internet shopping than females and males who had at least a four-year college degree and males who did not have a four-year college degree. No other significant interaction effects were found. (See Table 1).

*Demographic characteristics and attitudes toward Internet shopping and their relationships with Internet information search and shopping intentions.* The results of stepwise multiple regression analyses indicate that gender ( $\beta = 0.24, p < 0.01$ ) was significantly related to Internet information search intention (see Table 2). Female respondents were more likely to search for apparel information online than were male respondents. No other demographic variables were significantly related to Internet shopping intention for apparel products.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that two attitudinal dimensions – speedy process ( $\beta = 0.16, p < 0.01$ ) and secure transaction ( $\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ) – were significantly related to Internet information search intention (see Table 2). Respondents with a positive attitude toward the speedy process and secure transaction factors used the Internet to search for apparel information.

Stepwise regression analysis indicated that three aspects of attitude toward Internet shopping were significantly related to Internet shopping intention for apparel. Attitude toward speedy process ( $\beta = .14, p < .001$ ) had the strongest beta coefficient, followed by attitude toward secure transaction ( $\beta = .12, p < .01$ ) and attitude toward social shopping ( $\beta = -.08, p < .05$ ). Respondents who indicated a positive attitude toward the speedy process and secure transaction factors of the Internet shopping were likely to purchase apparel online. However, a negative relationship between Internet shopping intention and attitude toward social shopping indicated that the more likely respondents were to view Internet shopping as an opportunity to see and experience new things, the less likely they were to shop via the Internet. Relationship between Internet information search and shopping intentions. Among all examined variables of Internet shopping intention for apparel products, Internet information search intention had the highest beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.60, p < .001$ ). Internet information search intention was positively and closely related to Internet shopping intention for apparel products. In other words, the stronger their

intentions to search for apparel information online, the more likely respondents were to purchase apparel online.

**Table 2.** Stepwise Multiple Regression Results of Attitude Toward the Internet and Demographic Information on Internet Search Information and Purchase Intentions

	Beta ( $\beta$ ) Coefficient <sup>a</sup>	
	Search information	Purchase intention
<b>Search Information</b>	N/A	<b>0.60***</b>
<b>Attitude toward the Internet</b>		
Secure transaction	0.13*	0.12**
Social shopping	0.06	-0.08*
Speed process	0.16**	0.14***
Easy choice	-0.08	-0.06
Saving money	0.04	0.07
<b>Demographic information</b>		
Gender (G)	0.24**	-0.02
Ethnicity (E)	0.01	0.04
Education (Ed)	0.16	0.05
G * E	-0.14	0.02
G * Ed	-0.04	0.05
E * Ed	-0.05	-0.04
	Adjust- $R^2$ = 0.09	Adjust- $R^2$ = 0.48
	$R^2$ = 0.11	$R^2$ = 0.49
	$F_{(11,636)} = 6.92***$	$F_{(12,635)} = 49.89***$

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

<sup>a</sup> Standardized estimate

N/A: Not applicable

## Discussions, Conclusion, and Implications

Our study was designed to provide a better understanding of computer users' Internet information search and shop-ping intentions for apparel. We focused on computer users because the use of a computer is among the most fundamental prerequisites for Internet shopping, and therefore, findings from our study should present an approximate target market for use of the Internet to market products.

The Internet could be used as an efficient and effective means for both information search and acquisition of apparel. Perhaps one of the most significant findings of our study was that Internet information search intention was the most important variable related to the Internet shopping intention for apparel products. This finding supports a re-cent study conducted in the context of television shopping(Kim & Lennon, 2000). One challenge for Internet retailers is to convert those who search for information on the Inter-net into buyers. Converting information searchers into ultimate buyers is challenging not only for Internet retailers but also for traditional brick-and-mortar stores. Our findings regarding the relationships between certain attitudes toward



Internet shopping, Internet information search, and shopping intentions may help determine potential solutions for practitioners.

Our respondents' attitudes toward several aspects of Internet shopping were significantly related to Internet shop-ping intention. Specifically, respondents' attitudes toward the speedy process and secure transaction factors were positively related to Internet shopping intention. The speedy process factor in this study included time saving, 24-hour accessibility, freedom from hassles, and overall speed of shopping process. Our findings support those of previous researchers in that time saving and convenience were the most important reasons to purchase apparel through catalogs, electronic shopping modes (e.g., Eastlick & Feinberg, 1994; Shim & Drake, 1990), or television shopping (Kim & Lennon, 2000). Attitude toward secure transaction was also related to Internet shopping intention. This finding is consistent with a study by Ernest & Young (1999) that showed factors such as privacy and securities are important to Internet shoppers. Findings regarding speedy process and secure transaction suggest that Internet retailers need to make Internet users' search and purchase processes more efficient and secure by incorporating an effective search engine and clearly posting security and privacy policies. These strategies can enhance Internet users' efficiency and their confidence in using the Internet as a way of gathering information and making purchases. As a result, Internet retailers' sales may increase. In addition, conventional retailers may use the Internet as a promotional medium to create consumer awareness regarding their new product lines, to enhance a company's image, and to attract newcomers. To remain competitive in the marketplace, Internet apparel retailers and conventional retailers may also utilize the benefits offered by the Internet as an informational source, a transactional channel, or a mix of both features. Today's consumers have a high demand for and greater access to information about products. Thus, Internet and conventional retailers must find cost-effective ways to acquire new customers as well as to maintain existing ones by taking advantage of the Internet.

Respondents' attitude toward the social aspect of Internet shopping was negatively related to their Internet shop-ping intention. Those who might view Internet shopping as free of the social aspect of traditional shopping were less likely to purchase apparel over the Internet. The primary goals of potential Internet apparel shoppers might be utilitarian rather than hedonic. Contrary to the previous findings related to catalog shopping (Eastlick & Feinberg, 1994), our study found no relationship between attitudes toward easy choice (e.g., a variety of product and brand choice, ease of shopping) and respondents' Internet shopping intention for apparel. It is possible that some respondents did not view Internet shopping as a means for providing various products and brand choices for apparel goods. In addition, respondents in our study may have found Internet shopping more difficult than other modes of non-store shopping (i.e. catalog shopping).

Internet information search intention was related to gender; females were more likely than males to search the Internet for information regarding apparel products. Although Bonn et al. (1999) found that education was positively related to Internet information search for travel, education did not play a significant role for Internet apparel information search in our study. This discrepancy might indicate that Internet information search behavior is product-specific. Internet information search investigated in Bonn's et al. (1999) study was service-oriented regarding travel information, but our study concerned product-based Internet information search intention; therefore, the motivation to search the Internet for information in relation to education levels of online consumers may be different.

Education and gender were found to have a significant interaction effect with attitudes toward Internet shopping. Specifically, female respondents without a four-year degree were more likely than those with a four-year degree to have a positive attitude toward Internet apparel shopping. This finding contradicts some of the earlier studies on shopping, which claimed that education was positively related to Internet apparel shopping (e.g., Shim & Drake, 1990). However, our finding might be an indication that Internet shopping is becoming increasingly prevalent among the general population. This argument is supported by several recent reports indicating that an increasing number of less educated females (1) are entering the mainstream of Internet activities (the Boston Consulting Group, 1999); (2) will account for \$15 billion of Internet revenue by the year 2002 (Tambini, 1999); and (3) present an opportunity for Internet retailers to launch new lines of clothing (Stern, 2001). Our findings endorse the recent efforts of FingerHut (originally a catalog retailer), whose primary target market represents a relatively lower education and income level, to convert its catalog customers into Internet shoppers.

Finally, although a limited number of demographic characteristics were related to attitudes toward Internet shopping and Internet information search intention, no demographic characteristics were directly related to Internet shopping intention for apparel. Attitudes and information search components may mediate the influence of demographics on Internet shopping intention for apparel. Future studies could be conducted using causal analysis to determine the potential mediating effects of attitudes and information search on behavioral intention.

Apparel was the product category selected in our study. Researchers need to expand the examination to different product categories such as search goods and credence goods. Respondents in our study were computer users who reside in metropolitan cities. Non-computer users or computer users residing in small towns may provide interesting findings that may differ from our study. Our study focused primarily on two modes of information search (store search versus Internet search), excluding other information search modes such as catalogs, magazines, family members, or friends. Researchers could investigate the effects of information search through other sources on Internet shopping to better understand the influence of these sources and their potential impact on Internet shopping intention. Studies may also be conducted to examine effects of other internal factors (e.g., mood) and external factors (e.g., situational effects) on Internet shopping behavior. We found a close relationship between Internet information search and shopping intentions. Future researchers may want to investigate how to convert Internet apparel-information seekers to Internet apparel-purchasers. Finally, a longitudinal technique may be needed in profiling Internet users, given the rapid pace of technological development. It would also be enlightening to compare consumers' behavioral intention and their actual behavior, and to determine factors that influence consistencies and discrepancies between the two variables.

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