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A Survey of Current Consumer Technology Use for Apparel Shopping

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Over the last decade, as e-commerce has grown, researchers have found different shopper motivations for online clothing purchases. Watchravesringkan and Shim (2003) found that shoppers who intended to search the Internet for product information were also more likely to make an online purchase. Goldsmith and Flynn (2004) identified the level of a consumer's Internet innovativeness as a key motivator of online purchasing, followed by a consumer's experience with catalogue shopping. However, Kwon & Noh (2010) found that Internet experience was not a strong influence on online apparel purchase intent for mature consumers, but rather their perceived benefits from products and prices available online.

In addition to online shopping, or e-commerce, mobile commerce (m-commerce) is also emerging as growing numbers of Americans own mobile devices. M-commerce refers to the use of mobile devices like smartphones and tablets (instead of computers) for purchases. Kim, Ma, and Park (2009) found that positive consumer attitudes towards mobile technology also positively influenced consumer intent to use mobile technology for apparel shopping. Many consumers in the U.S. own smartphones – 46% in 2012 (pewinternet.org), which indicates a growing acceptance of mobile technology. However, it is not yet clear what percentage of consumers actually use mobile commerce for apparel purchases. Recent research by Google suggests that 20% of apparel shoppers use tablets or other mobile devices daily for apparel shopping (www.thinkwithgoogle.com).

This study is intended to provide a gauge of current consumer technology use in relation to apparel consumption. Shifts in consumer channel preference can impact apparel retailers, particularly those with brick-and mortar store locations, where the shift to digital channels may negatively impact in-store employment levels and/or require retailers to also upgrade their technology offerings to appeal to consumers' shopping channel preferences.

Methodology

Data were collected via a telephone survey from a national random sample of 1000 adults in the continental United States, age 18 and over. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) with a Random Digit Dial (RDD) list. Telephone data collection was carried out July through December of 2012. This national survey is conducted annually by the university and the researcher submitted three close-ended questions for inclusion on the survey, which also included additional items about general technology use and demographic variables. Questions submitted for the survey were:

- *Do you use a computer with Internet or any mobile device to make clothing purchases?*
- *How often would you say that you make clothing purchases using a computer with Internet or a mobile device?*
- *Given the choice between purchasing clothing using a computer with Internet, a mobile device, a mail/phone-order catalogue, or by going to a store, which would you prefer?*

Findings

Sample. The mean age of the sample was 48.1 and the mean household income was \$84,097. The sample consisted of both female (n= 512) and male (n= 488) participants. The majority of participants were White (83%), followed by Black/African-American (11%), Hispanic/Latino (7.4%, allowed to also identify as White or Black), Asian (3.9%), Native American (3.5%), and Other (2.1%). Most of the sample had also attended college (73.4%).

Consumer Technology Use. Clothing purchases made online using either a computer or mobile device were made by half (50.1%) of the participants. Consumer purchase frequency using a computer with Internet or a mobile device was mostly a few times a year (57.9%), followed by once a year or less (16%), once a month (14%), a few times a month (10%) and once a week or more (2.2%). Consumers' preferred channel for apparel purchases was the brick-and-mortar store (81.3%), followed by a computer with Internet (14.3%), mail/phone order catalogue (2.1%), and a mobile device (1%). Cross tabulations showed there were significant channel preference differences ($\chi^2 = 109.8$, $df=3$, $p<.01$) between consumers that had used the Internet/mobile device for apparel shopping and those that had not. The previous Internet/mobile users showed a preference for a computer with Internet and slightly less preference for going to the store. Additional analysis also showed that the purchase of clothing over the Internet or with a mobile device was higher for consumers that were very comfortable with using the Internet ($\chi^2 = 149.4$, $df=4$, $p<.01$); had a 4-year college degree or higher ($\chi^2 = 71.6$, $df=6$, $p<.01$); and female ($\chi^2=21.3$, $df=1$, $p<.01$).

Discussion/Implications/ Limitations

Even though half of the sample had purchased clothing online, the retail store was still preferred above all other channels for making apparel purchases. This study did not probe reasons as to why consumers preferred this channel, due to the limited number of questions allowed for inclusion. However, the findings suggest that e-commerce does not provide the same experience for the consumer as the retail store. The researcher plans to use data from the survey to further explore variables that impact consumer preference for the apparel retail store over online shopping. In addition to probing consumer preference for the store environment, the researcher also plans to resubmit the same set of questions for the university-sponsored national survey for the next few years in order to measure consumer technology use trends over time. This data may reveal significant shifts from current data based on technological developments.

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