Chapter VIII
Comparison Shopping Behaviour in Online Environments: The Case of Spanish E-Shoppers

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to analyse antecedents of search engines use as prepurchase information tools. Firstly, there is a literature review of the factors influencing search engines use in online purchases. Then, there is an empirical analysis of a sample of 650 Spanish E-shoppers. Logistical regression is used to analyse the influence of demographics, surfing behaviour and purchase motivations on willingness to use search engines for E-shopping. Data analysis shows that experience as Internet user and as Internet shopper are negative key drivers of search engine use. Most of the utilitarian shopping motivations analyzed predict comparison shopping behaviour. Demographics are not determinant variables in the use of search engines in online purchases. This research enables companies to know the factors that potentially affect search engine use in E-shopping decisions and the importance of using search engines in their communication campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet is becoming an increasingly popular medium to facilitate prepurchase information search, choice and purchase. It encourages comparison-shopping behaviour, providing tools that shoppers can use to identify and select products.
A search engine is a web application that gathers information from the web using different strategies (crawlers or spiders) and then performs the basic retrieval task, accepting a query, comparing a query with the records in a database, and producing a retrieval set as output (Rowley, 1998, pp. 186-7).

People who are looking for information on the Internet commonly query a search engine to locate the information they seek. Search engines allow users to browse through comprehensive lists of vendors arranged by product, price and service, or to search for a vendor by name or page content, all from the convenience of a home computer (Brynjolfsson, Dick & Smith, 2004; Rowley, 2000; Teo & Yeong, 2003). Among the different comparison-shopping tools, this paper focuses on pure search engines (such as Google), because most product searching is directly through such tools.

Search engine usage in Europe is highest in the UK at 85%, followed by France (83%) and Spain (83%) and ahead of the U.S. (77%) (Nielsen/Netratings, 2007). Search engine use grew dramatically during 2006 in France (27%) and Spain (21%), again ahead of the US (8%). Google is currently the most prominent source of traffic for shopping websites in Spain, and is growing more rapidly as a source of shopping traffic than the search engine category as a whole.

Despite the increasing importance of comparison-shopping services for companies and consumers, there has been little research on their influence in the online purchase decision. Thus, while more research is being done on the way search engines work and their design (Montgomery, Hosanagar, Krishnan & Clay, 2004), the products and brands searched for (Rowley, 2000), shopbots (Brynjolfsson et al., 2004; Brynjolfsson & Smith, 2000; Smith, 2002), advantages and disadvantages of search engines and their influence on markets (Maes et al., 1999; Smith, 2002), there is still very little literature on the profile of Internet users who buy products/services using search engines, their use motivations and the implications of online experience for search engines use as a pre-purchase information tool.

This chapter aims to present an in-depth study of the factors influencing search engines use in online purchases, and specifically to:

1. Provide a holistic view of factors influencing consumer behaviour when using search engines.
2. Analyse the perceived benefits that encourage consumers to use search engines.
3. Provide empirical research on the Spanish market that analyses the influence of demographics, online experience and shopping orientations in the use of search engine information in the online purchasing process.

The chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, there is a literature review of the factors influencing use of search engines in online purchases. Then, there is an empirical analysis of a sample of 650 Spanish E-shoppers. Logistical regression is used to analyse the influence of demographics, surfing behaviour and purchase motivations on willingness to use search engines for E-shopping. Finally we report the conclusions, limitations and future research lines.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ANTECEDENTS OF SEARCH ENGINE USE

In this section we present a conceptual model for analysing the antecedents of search engine use in online purchases.

Demographics

Men and women seem to differ in their shopping orientations and online behaviour. Sociocultural pressure has made men generally more indepen-
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