An Empirical Investigation of Internet Users’ Perceptions towards National and International e-Shops

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the broad Internet utilization and the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have greatly changed the way goods and services are bought and sold. As a consequence, even more online users prefer not only to shop online, but also purchase abroad taking advantage of Internet’s limitless feature. Thus, technology’s success has stimulated the process of cross-border e-shopping, allowing fast, less costly communication, as well as access to a wider variety of goods and services. The purpose of this consumer-oriented approach paper is to examine the perceptions of Greek Internet users concerning e-shops. In specific, it aims to reveal if there are differences on users’ perceptions regarding Greek versus international e-shops, as even more individuals visit non-domestic online stores for their e-purchases. Hence, it provides tangible results to an under-explored area of online shopping and shed light on the difficulty of understanding important aspects of e-shopping behavior; presenting vital implications to both academia and practitioners.

Keywords: Cross-Country E-Commerce, E-Consumer Behavior, Online Shopping, Perceptions Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Online shopping, also known as online purchasing, Internet shopping, Internet buying or electronic shopping, is nowadays one of the most widely applied non-store formats. Its sharp usage increase, along with the systematic progress of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has greatly influenced every aspect of our daily lives. Characteristically, the number of Internet shoppers has globally increased from 53% to 58% in 2009-2011 in the European Union (Seybert, 2011) and about 29.5% in 2011-2014 worldwide (Statista, 2016). Additionally, not only does the number of adopters grow, but also the volume of their purchases is proportionally increased (Monsuwe et al., 2004). According to E-Commerce Europe (2015), European

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e-commerce sales are expected to reach €477 billion in 2015, €540 billion in 2016 and €609 billion in 2017. Consequently, online shopping, a term that used to be unknown; has become one of the most tremendous and exciting trends in all types of businesses (Diacon & Donici, 2011).

In Greece, online shopping has been emerged quite recently as a medium for transactions between consumers and firms. According to a recent national survey, 35% of Greek Internet users have purchased online and their population size is estimated to 2,200,000 people (Eltrun, 2014). It is estimated that Greeks spent 3850 million euros in B2C e-commerce in 2014 (E-Commerce Europe, 2015). However, despite the continuous, significant annual growth -25% between 2012 and 2013 & 20.4% between 2013 and 2014-, Greek B2C e-commerce is still lagging behind compared to the Europe’s average (E-Commerce Europe, 2015; Eltrun, 2014).

Online shopping offers various advantages to both customers and enterprises. Thus, various researchers have investigated numerous factors that influence its utilization. Ease of shopping comparison, lower prices, convenience, time saving, improved customer service and tax exempt status are some critical reasons that greatly influence consumers to shop online (Ahmad et al., 2010; E-Commerce Europe, 2015; Eltrun, 2015). However, one of its key characteristics is the limitless feature; that is every customer can theoretically purchase anything from anywhere and enterprises can attract buyers worldwide. Consequently, online shopping offers access to a global market that extends well beyond the traditional geographic markets serviced by brick-and-mortar stores (Ahmad et al., 2010). Therefore, it has stimulated the process of cross-border e-shopping, allowing fast, less costly communication, as well as access to a wider variety of goods and services (SEC 283, 2009).

Nowadays, numerous of new online stores start their e-business venture every day. It is estimated that the number of the active B2C websites is 715000 (E-Commerce Europe, 2015). Thus, the purpose of this consumer-oriented approach paper is to examine the perceptions of Greek Internet users concerning e-shops. In specific, it aims to reveal if there are differences on users’ perceptions regarding Greek versus international e-shops, as even more individuals visit non-domestic online stores for their e-purchases. Characteristically, recent studies revealed that Greek e-shoppers prefer to purchase abroad (Eltrun, 2014, 2015). Competitive price and a wider offer of products and services available are the two most popular reasons for e-shopping abroad (E-Commerce Europe, 2015). Characteristically, only 60% and 65% of them bought from Greek e-stores in 2013 and 2014 correspondingly, whereas in Europe the 80%-90% of e-adopters prefer to purchase from national e-stores (Eltrun, 2014, 2015). Hence, this article intends to provide tangible results to an under-explored area of online shopping and shed light on the difficulty of understanding important aspects of e-shopping behavior.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the first section, the literature review regarding consumers’ online buying behavior and the factors that encouraging or hindering online shopping is presented. This is followed by the methodology and the results of the research. The last section concludes with the implications of the study, its limitations and directions for future research.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The examination of e-consumer behavior is gaining in importance due to the proliferation of online shopping (Dennis et al., 2009). Hence, several researches have been conducted in e-commerce field from diverse perspectives trying to gain an improved insight into e-consumer behavior (Dennis et al., 2004). According to Dennis et al. (2009), there are two basic research streams that approach e-consumer behavior. The first investigates technical specifications of an e-store (Zhou et al., 2007); including interface, design and navigation (Zhang & Von Dran,
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