Past Purchasing Behavior in E-Commerce: The Impact on Intentions to Shop Online

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Abstract

As e-commerce becomes more competitive, it is increasingly important for Web vendors to understand why people choose to—or choose not to—buy online. Ajzen (1985, 1991) developed the Theory of Planned Behavior to predict and explain human behavior. The current study tests a modified form of the theory in an online shopping context. It is hypothesized that past online purchasing behavior will contribute toward explaining intentions to purchase online in the future, independent of the theory’s original antecedents—attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Two-hundred-forty students from two universities completed a Web survey developed from an open-ended elicitation questionnaire. Results indicate
that in addition to attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control, past purchasing behavior is directly related to intentions to shop online in the future. Adding past purchasing behavior also significantly improves the explanatory effect of the model. Unexpectedly, past behavior was independent of attitude and subjective norm, but interacted with perceived behavioral control. These results suggest that the challenge to Web vendors is to entice potential customers to try online shopping, as experienced shoppers quickly gain control and confidence in the online shopping process.

Introduction

Online shopping is attracting more consumers—Internet sales increased 46% during the year 2000. Nevertheless, during the same time period, more than 200 Internet firms ceased operations (Scott, 2001). As competition edges out inefficient firms, it becomes increasingly important for Web vendors to understand why people choose to—or choose not to—buy over the Internet.

For years, psychologists have recognized that understanding behavior is the first step toward influencing it (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The Theory of Planned Behavior was designed to predict and explain human behavior in specific applied contexts (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). Recent research has indicated that the theory may provide a foundation for predicting future Web purchasing behavior (Pavlou & Chai, 2002; Limayem, Khalifa, & Frini, 2000). However, it remains unclear whether the theory’s antecedents—attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control—are sufficient to fully understand behavior in an online purchasing context. As shoppers gain experience, the time, effort, and uncertainty associated with online shopping is reduced; thus, it is hypothesized that prior online purchasing behavior will directly influence intentions to shop online in the future, independent of attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control.

Marketing research has already established a link between past and future shopping behavior in traditional retail settings (Bellman, Lohse, & Johnson, 1999; Lilien, 1974) and industrial markets (Soderlund, Vilgon, & Gunnarsson, 2001). However, the effect of past behavior on consumers’ intentions to purchase online has not been examined. In the current study, past online purchasing behavior was added as a fourth antecedent variable to the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine its impact on future online purchasing intentions. The addition of past purchasing behavior significantly improves the explanatory effect of the model. Furthermore, past purchasing behavior is directly related to intentions to shop online, independent of attitude and subjective norm. However,
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