

Searching, browsing and buying: exploring the devices preferred by South African consumers for online shopping

Y HUNG-JOUBERT

Department of Marketing and Retail Management, University of South Africa
hungy@unisa.ac.za

N VAN HUYSSTEEN *

Department of Business Management, University of South Africa
marxn@unisa.ac.za * *corresponding author*

Abstract

The Internet has significantly changed the way in which consumers shop for products and services. Consumers are able not only to buy online, but also to easily search and browse for different offerings in order to make an informed decision.

The purpose of this study was to explore the devices preferred by consumers for online shopping. The results of the study could assist retailers to better target online consumers by improving understanding of their preferences and their reasons for making use of the different digital device types for online shopping.

Primary data was collected by means of self-administered online surveys. Respondent demographics and online shopping activities were first identified, followed by consumers' preferred devices and their reasons for using these devices.

The research found that desktops, followed by laptops, were the most preferred devices for searching, browsing and buying. Mobile phones were preferred over tablets for searching and browsing, however phones were the least preferred device for buying online. Furthermore, the main reason identified for using any of the preferred devices was convenience. By having a thorough understanding of the preferred devices for each online shopping activity, retailers can ensure that consumers can conveniently search for, browse for and buy products and services online.

Key phrases

online activities; online retailers; online shopping; preferred devices; retailers; South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet plays a significant role in society and has changed various aspects of consumers' daily lives – such as the ways in which they communicate, gather information, purchase a product or render a service, just to name a few (Katawetawaraks & Wang 2011:66; Shanthi & Kannaiah 2015:14). E-commerce refers to organisations transacting or facilitating business over the web; it has various facets, such as online shopping, electronic payments and online banking (Khurana 2015:Internet). Nowadays, consumers are more connected than ever and they expect their shopping experiences to be similarly connected (CIT 2015:1).

Shopping online, the most popular aspect of E-commerce, has grown significantly and is now an accepted form of purchasing products and services (Bourlakis, Papagiannidis & Fox 2008:64). Online shopping is comprised of three main activities, namely searching, browsing and buying. Online searching refers to looking for specific products or services which a consumer wishes to purchase online or in-store (Jeng 2013:772); online browsing refers to casually looking at products or services which the consumer may or may not want to purchase (Elkhatib, Killick, Mu & Race 2014:964); and online buying refers to actually buying products and services over the web (Masoud 2013:78).

Online shopping ensures that consumers have a choice not only in what they purchase, but also in how they purchase (PwC 2012:4). According to Lobaugh, Simpson and Ohri (2015:11), consumers make use of different digital devices in the shopping process, such as desktop computers (“desktops”), laptop computers (“laptops”), tablet computers (“tablets”) and smartphones (“mobile phones”). These devices are significantly influencing both the way in which consumers shop and their purchasing decisions. With regard to the technological world, it is evident that consumers switch between different shopping channels and devices in order to suit their shopping needs (comScore 2014:3).

In the subsequent sections of this paper, the problem statement, purpose of the research and the literature review are discussed. This is followed information on by the research methodology that was used for this study. The research results are then discussed and recommendations and concluding remarks made to conclude the study.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Internet has significantly transformed the way in which retailers market and sell their products and services, and this has led to an increase in online shopping which, in turn, has changed the way that consumers shop. Due to the fact that consumers have busy lifestyles, they have less time to go to physical stores to do their shopping; this is why online shopping is convenient (Warayuanty & Suyanto 2015:74). Furthermore, consumers are becoming increasingly more comfortable with shopping online (Allisat 2014:Internet).

As previously mentioned, consumers perform three main activities while shopping online: searching, browsing and buying. Different devices can be used by consumers during each of these online shopping activities. Moreover, consumers have preferred devices for each of these activities, and it is for this reason that the preferred devices for each of the online shopping activities are explored in this study.

Extensive research has been conducted on the online shopping behaviour of consumers (Donoghue, Van Oordt & Strydom 2016:385; Hernández, Jiménez & Martín 2009:113; Holmes, Byrne & Rowley 2012:25; Richa 2012:43; Zendejdel, Paim, Delafrooz & Wright 2016:1) and consumers' intention to shop online (Ahmad, Omar & Ramayah 2010; Lian & Yen 2014:113; Thamizhvanan & Xavier 2013:17).

However, limited research has been conducted on the different devices consumers make use of to shop online. This study therefore explores the preferred devices used for online shopping activities in South Africa.

3. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The main purpose of the study was to explore the preferred devices used for online shopping in South Africa. The objectives of this article aim to identify:

- the preferred devices for online shopping activities (searching, browsing and buying);
- the reasons why certain devices were preferred for online searching;
- the reasons why certain devices were preferred for online browsing; and
- the reasons why certain devices were preferred for online buying.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Overview of online shopping

Research has found that 41% of global Internet users have purchased products or services over the web. However, the online shopping penetration rate varies from country to country (Statista nd.:Internet). The varying penetration rate of online shopping may be attributed to increased numbers of users having access to the Internet (Lawrence & Tar 2010:23). Meeker in Smartling (2012:Internet) states that, even though developed countries were the first to make use of the Internet, developing countries are currently driving growth worldwide.

Furthermore, in developing countries, such as South Africa, online shopping is still in its infancy and is expected to grow at a fast pace (Alam, Malik, Hadi & Gaadar 2009:1). The increase in online shopping may be attributed to the fact that it offers a number of benefits to both retailers and consumers (Cheema, Rizwan, Jalal, Durrani & Sohail 2013:131). For retailers, it enables them to reach more consumers from virtually all over the world and offer a much wider variety of products (Biswas 2011:2, Saha 2015:75).

On the other hand, for consumers, Kasriel-Alexander (2012:6) is of the opinion that the continual increase in online shopping is due to the fact that it saves consumers time. Consumers are now able to easily obtain and compare information regarding products and services and their availability and price – all at their leisure and without having to travel to different physical stores (Riaz & Raman 2015:2). This is further supported by Jiang, Yang and Jun (2013:207), who indicate that convenience is the main reason why consumers shop online, specifically in terms of how convenience is perceived during the searching, transaction and post-purchase phases.

4.2 Devices used for online shopping

Personal devices, such as desktops, laptops, tablets and mobile phones connected to the Internet, has changed online shopping behaviour (comScore 2014:6). Consumers need Internet connectivity in order to shop online for a product or service and can get connected to the Internet easily and almost anywhere (Schmidt 2014:Internet). As online shopping

continues to evolve, the use of personal devices in the shopping process increases (Stine & Sethi 2014).

According to Criteo (2016:4), around half of E-commerce transactions are made via multiple devices; this means that retailers need to redesign their online shopping experience to reflect the fact that most users are likely to visit them via multiple devices. This is further supported by De Canio, Leva and Ziliani (2015:5), who indicate that using multiple devices for E-commerce is becoming the norm.

Studies conducted by Nielsen (2014:Internet) and Sakaria (2012:10) reveal that, globally, the majority of shoppers prefer to shop online and go through the check-out process using a computer (where the term “computer” includes both desktops and laptops), mainly for the screen size. Tablets and mobile phones, on the other hand, have the benefit of being portable (Kawsar & Brush 2013:631).

Research has found that up to 24% of consumers worldwide use mobile devices for online shopping (Pitney Bowes 2015:6). Tablet ownership has increased and online shopping is a popular activity performed on tablets. More specifically, tablets are used for the browsing and purchasing of products and services, the creation of shopping lists and the reviewing of other consumers’ ratings (Müller, Gove & Webb 2012:1–9; Sakaria 2012:10).

Mobile phones, on the other hand, are becoming a necessity in consumers’ daily lives and their powerful functions make these devices convenient tools for shopping online (Liu, Qin & Xu 2013:107). According to Nilforoushan, Ben-Shabat and Moriarty (2013:4) and Sakaria (2012:10), mobile phones are increasingly being used to research products, compare prices, gather input from other consumers via social media websites and to look up stores.

It has also been found that consumers even prefer to make use of their mobile phones to gather more information in-store, rather than asking an employee for assistance (Lobaugh *et al.* 2015:9). Furthermore, mobile phone shoppers are 14% more likely than non-mobile phone shoppers to purchase something in-store, and frequent mobile phone shoppers spend up to 25% more in-store than those who use such devices only occasionally (Brinker, Lobaugh & Paul 2012:13; Google Shopper Marketing Agency Council 2012:4).

4.3 Online shopping in South Africa

The number of South Africans who have access to the Internet is 26.8 million – or 49% of the population (Shezi 2016:Internet). Even though online shopping and the E-commerce industry in South Africa are small by global standards, and even though they are considered as a niche part of the retail segment, these industries have grown rapidly since 2012 and will continue to do so as the market is far from mature (Mochiko 2013:Internet; PwC 2012:10).

According to Novotny (2013:Internet), online shopping is becoming more prevalent in South Africa, growing at a rate of 30% per annum, and 57% of South African Internet users shop online. It is estimated that online shopping contributes almost 1% to the South African retail market (Mahlaka 2016:Internet). The growth may be attributed to the fact that South African consumers are realising the benefits of shopping online, such as the ability to compare prices, products and services online and in real time (Knoesen 2016:Internet; PwC 2012:vi).

Regardless of whether they are buying online or offline, a total of 66% of South Africans search online for information about a specific product or service before they make a decision to buy it (Meier 2016:Internet). A crucial driving force in online shopping in South Africa and other developing countries is the number of people with mobile devices. There are 85.53 million mobile connections in South Africa, which indicates that there is a large number of individuals who have more than one connected SIM card (Shezi 2016:Internet). It is important to note that shopping online via mobile devices is far more popular in developing countries than it is in developed countries (Marceux 2016:Internet).

The research objectives and methods used in the research process are discussed below.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study was to explore the preferred devices used for online shopping activities in South Africa and the reasons for the preferences expressed. A quantitative approach was followed to gather primary data from South African consumers in order to sufficiently address the research objectives. In order to measure the preferred devices used for each online shopping activity, data collected from closed-ended-type questions was quantified and analysed through mean percentages.

Content analysis was used to measure the reasons why the preferred devices were used for each online shopping activity. Both quantitative and qualitative content analysis follows the same process of identifying key categories and themes through coding (Boréus & Bergström 2017:24).

The first step was to analyse the qualitative data collected from open-ended questions (Flick 2013:173) and to develop themes by grouping similar textual data together. This enabled the researchers to clearly describe each theme (Morse 2008:727). Thereafter, each theme was quantitatively analysed based on which occurred most frequently (Bhattacharjee 2012:116).

As the goal was to demonstrate the frequency of occurrence of the key themes, the data presented is quantitative in nature and a quantitative content analysis approach was used (Neuendorf 2017:22).

The researchers established reliability by ensuring the accuracy and precision of the measurement procedure (Cooper & Schindler 2014:257). One coder was used to identify the key themes and group the data accordingly. Intrarater reliability refers to the consistency of one coder coding the same data at different points in time (Picardi and Masick 2014:48).

In order to determine intrarater reliability, the coder coded all of the data in preparation for the statistical analysis and coded a small sample of the data again a few months later. A Cohen's Kappa value of 0.722 was recorded, which indicates a substantial strength of agreement. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field and content validity was therefore ensured (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin 2013:304–305).

Criterion-related validity cannot be reflected in this research as no measures were used for prediction or estimations (Cooper & Schindler 2014b:258). Construct validation occurs when researchers believe that the instrument reflects a particular construct and the proposed interpretation produces a specific hypothesis that can be tested (Cronbach & Meehl 1955:290). No constructs were tested in the questionnaire and, therefore, construct validity is not applicable to this study.

The sampling methodology made use of non-probability, convenience sampling, which allowed the researcher to gather the data efficiently. An Internet-based questionnaire was administered to consumers via social media platforms and a total of 123 usable responses were used for the analysis. Due to the small number of useable responses, the results can

provide only a general indication of the devices preferred by South African consumers when shopping online.

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

In the subsequent sections, the demographic profile of the sample is provided, followed by descriptions of their online shopping activities and discussions on the preferred devices for shopping online.

6.1 Demographic profile

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the respondent group.

TABLE 1: Demographic profile (N=123)

		% of total
Gender	Female	67.5
	Male	32.5
Age group	18–25	26.8
	26–35	57.7
	36–45	7.3
	46–65	8.2
	Older than 65	0.0
Highest qualification	Other	0.8
	Doctoral degree	0.8
	Master's degree	15.5
	Honours degree	32.5
	Postgrad diploma	1.6

	Bachelor's degree	26.0
	Diploma or advanced certificate	12.2
	Higher certificate	0.8
	Matric	9.8
Employment status	Other	4.9
	Unemployed and not looking for work	0.8
	Unemployed and looking for work	4.9
	Employed part time	3.3
	Permanently employed	70.7
	Self-employed	15.4

It was dominated by female respondents (67.5%) and more than half (57.7%) of the respondents ranged in age from 26–35 years. Roughly a third (32.5%) of the respondents had an Honours degree, and a large proportion (70.7%) of the respondents was permanently employed.

6.2 Online shopping activity

Table 2 summarises the online shopping activity of the respondent group.

It is evident from the results that participants are accustomed to all three online shopping activities. Almost all of the respondent group search (99.2%), browse (97.6%) and buy (90.2%) online.

TABLE 2: Online shopping activity (N=123)

		% of total
Searching (n=122)	Yes	99.2
	No	0.8

Browsing (n=120)	Yes	97.6
	No	2.4
Buying (n=110)	Yes	90.2
	No	9.8

The preferred devices of each online shopping activities will be discussed next.

6.3 Preferred devices for online shopping activities

Respondents who indicated that they participated in any of the three online shopping activities were required to specify in percentages which device they made use of for each activity. The responses are illustrated in Figure 1.

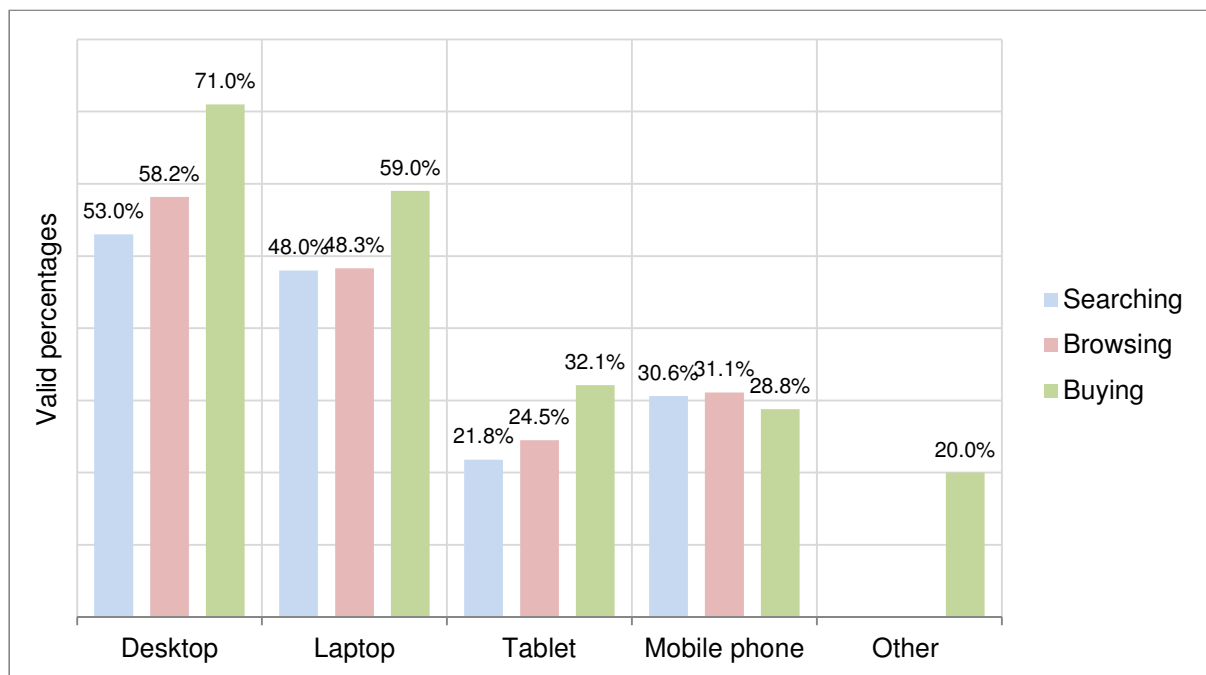


FIGURE 1: Preferred devices for searching (n=122), browsing (n=120) and buying (n=111)*

* The mean percentage of each device used was calculated; therefore the total may not equal 100%.

As presented in Figure 1, it can be seen that a desktop is the most preferred device for searching (53.0%), browsing (58.1%) and buying (71.0%). A laptop was identified as the second most preferred device for all three activities: searching (48.0%), browsing (48.2%) and buying (59.0%).

Interestingly, a mobile phone is preferred over a tablet for searching (30.6%) and browsing (31.0%) but is the least preferred device for buying online (28.8%). Most consumers carry their mobile phones with them everywhere they go, and this could possibly be a reason why they prefer to use them to search and browse online as these devices are readily available. The smaller screen size of a mobile phone could possibly make it more difficult for consumers to go through the check-out process for online buying. Tablets could have yielded lower preference rates because fewer respondents own or have access to such devices compared to other devices. Respondents were given the option to list 'other' devices which they preferred to make use of for any of the three activities. Respondents indicated 'other' for buying online; however they did not specify the device.

6.4 Key themes identified for the usage of preferred devices

Having indicated which devices they made use of for each online shopping activity, the respondents were then asked, in an open-ended question, to provide reasons for why these were their devices of their choice. The main themes identified are briefly explained below:

- *App* refers to statements regarding the applications available for the device.
- *Connectivity* refers to statements regarding the Internet connection speed of the device.
- *Convenience* refers to statements regarding the accessibility of the device.
- *Ease of use* refers to statements regarding how easy a device is to use.
- *Habitual* refers to statements regarding how comfortable they are with a device and how accustomed they are to using it.
- *Mobility* refers to statements regarding the mobility of the device.
- *Productivity* refers to statements regarding the increased productivity in terms of online shopping when using the device.
- *Purpose* refers to statements regarding the purpose of the activity when using the device.
- *Security* refers to statements regarding the security of the device.

- *Screen size* refers to statements regarding the screen size of the device.

6.5 Preferred devices for online searching

Table 3 summarises the reasons provided by the respondents for their preferred devices for searching online and the most significant percentages are highlighted.

TABLE 3: Reasons for preferred device(s) for online searching*

	Desktop (n=74)	Laptop (n=116)	Tablet (n=39)	Mobile phone (n=115)
	% of total	% of total	% of total	% of total
App	-	-	-	3.6
Connectivity	8.1	7.8	2.6	10.4
Convenience	45.9	50.0	56.4	57.4
Ease of use	12.2	14.6	25.6	13.0
Habitual	5.4	2.6	-	2.6
Mobility	-	3.4	5.1	13.0
Productivity	8.1	5.2	-	-
Purpose	4.1	0.9	-	-
Security	-	2.6	-	-
Screen size	16.2	12.9	10.3	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* The numbers of respondents making use of particular device types varied which resulted in different n values.

It is clear that convenience (45.9%) is the main reason why respondents prefer using desktops, followed by screen size (16.2%) and ease of use (12.2%). On the other hand, the main reasons why respondents prefer using laptops are convenience (50.0%), ease of use

(14.6%) and screen size (12.9%). The main reasons why respondents prefer using tablets are convenience (56.4%) and ease of use (25.6%). Moreover, respondents indicated convenience (57.4%), mobility (13.0%) and ease of use (13.0%) as the main reasons for preferring to use mobile phones.

6.6 Preferred devices for online browsing

The reasons for their preferred devices when browsing online are summarised in Table 4 and the most significant percentages are highlighted.

TABLE 4: Reasons for preferred device(s) for online browsing*

	Desktop (n=71)	Laptop (n=99)	Tablet (n=48)	Mobile phone (n=111)
	% of total	% of total	% of Total	% of total
App	-	-	-	0.9
Connectivity	9.9	4.0	6.3	3.6
Convenience	46.5	51.5	58.3	64.0
Ease of use	9.9	5.1	6.3	7.2
Habitual	4.2	4.0	4.1	1.8
Mobility	-	3.1	14.6	17.1
Productivity	8.4	12.1	-	1.8
Purpose	7.0	4.0	4.1	3.6
Security	1.4	2.0	-	-
Screen size	12.7	14.2	6.3	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* The numbers of respondents making use of particular device types varied which resulted in different n values.

Convenience (46.5%) was the main reason why respondents preferred using desktops, followed by screen size (12.7%). The reasons that respondents stated for preferring laptops

was convenience (51.5%), screen size (14.2%) and productivity (12.1%). For tablets, respondents indicated that convenience (58.3%) and mobility (14.6%) were the main reasons for preferring to use this device. Similarly convenience (64.0%) and mobility (17.1%) were the main reasons why respondents preferred using mobile phones.

6.7 Preferred devices for online buying

The reasons why respondents preferred certain devices when buying online are summarised in Table 5 and the most significant percentages are highlighted.

TABLE 5: Reasons for preferred device(s) for online buying*

	Desktop (n=72)	Laptop (n=83)	Tablet (n=29)	Mobile phone (n=41)
	% of total	% of total	% of total	% of total
App	-	-	13.9	12.2
Connectivity	7.0	2.4	3.4	2.4
Convenience	25.0	21.7	37.9	53.7
Ease of use	22.2	15.7	20.7	14.6
Habitual	1.4	-	-	-
Mobility	-	1.2	13.8	9.8
Productivity	8.3	12.0	-	-
Purpose	2.8	6.0	3.4	7.3
Security	19.4	27.7	-	-
Screen size	13.9	13.3	6.9	-

Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
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** The numbers of respondents making use of particular device types varied which resulted in different n values.*

Respondents indicated convenience (25.0%), ease of use (22.2%), security (19.4%), and screen size (13.9%) as the main reasons for preferring to use a desktop. The reasons provided for laptops were security (27.7%), convenience (21.7%), ease of use (15.7%), screen size (13.3%), and productivity (12.0%). On the other hand, respondents indicated convenience (37.9%), ease of use (20.7%), app (13.9%) and mobility (13.8%) as the main reasons for preferring to use tablets. Lastly, convenience (53.7%), ease of use (14.6%) and app (12.2%) are the main reasons why respondents prefer using mobile phones.

7. DISCUSSION

Increasingly, as more consumers shop online, retailers need to ensure that consumers are able to access and shop from their websites using various devices. If retailers have an understanding of the preferred devices for each online shopping activity, they can ensure that consumers can conveniently shop online. The study aimed to explore the preferred devices and reasons for using these devices for online shopping activities, namely searching, browsing and buying.

The respondent group was dominated by females between the ages of 26 and 35 years old, holding an Honours degree and permanently employed. The majority of the respondents indicated that they participated in all three online shopping activities, namely searching, browsing and buying online. This shows that retailers need to acknowledge all three online shopping activities as important aspects of the online shopping process. Retailers should therefore ensure that online shoppers can easily find their websites and the products or services that they offer while searching; make their websites more attractive in order to catch the attention of online shoppers while they are browsing; and ensure that online shoppers can go through the check-out process in an effortless manner when buying.

For all three online shopping activities, the majority of the respondents indicated that the main reason for their preferred devices was convenience which, in this context, means the accessibility of the device. Generally, desktops and laptops would be accessed at work or at

home. On the other hand, tablets and mobile phones are portable and could be accessed almost anywhere. It seems that respondents will make use of whichever device they are closest to at the time of their online shopping activity.

Furthermore, a common reason that respondents provided for their choice of desktops and laptops for all three activities was the larger screen size of these devices which makes it easier for respondents to navigate shopping sites and to view all the information and images of products and services during their online searching and browsing. It is also easier for the respondents to provide their personal information and go through the check-out process with a bigger screen size.

For online searching and buying, the reason provided for all four devices is that they are easy to use. It seems that respondents are familiar with the various devices and are comfortable making use of them while looking for specific products and services that they would like to purchase, as well as while going through the check-out process.

Mobility was one of the main reasons for making use of tablets and mobile phones, during the browsing activity. The respondents also indicated that mobility is a reason for using a tablet to buy online. Even though a tablet has the benefit of mobility, it is usually kept at home where respondents are comfortable browsing and buying products and services online. On the other hand, respondents indicated that they would rather use a mobile phone for online searching and browsing because of the mobility. Individuals generally carry their mobile phones with them where they go and this implies that respondents may browse for products or services on their mobile phones to pass time or specifically to search for products or services when these are needed.

Respondents indicated that, for online browsing and buying, laptops are a preferred device in terms of productivity. Laptops are similar to desktops and mobile devices in that, in addition to being portable, they have a keyboard and mouse and this makes it easier for respondents to navigate shopping sites from different locations, thus allowing them to be more efficient.

Respondents indicated that, for online buying, desktops and laptops were preferred for security reasons. Based on the reasons provided, respondents have a perception that

desktops and laptops are safer than tablets and mobile phones when providing personal information and card details during the buying process.

On the other hand, respondents also indicated that they preferred using tablets and mobile phones because of apps such as specific online shopping apps or mobile banking apps used to make payments to retailers. It seems that respondents do not mind buying online through apps.

8. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study need to be taken into consideration. Due to the fact that the sample size was small, and that convenience sampling was used, the results cannot be generalised to the South African population. Having a larger sample size with different respondent profiles could therefore yield different results. In addition, one coder was used to group the data which could have resulted in some bias in the research results. However, as the study was exploratory in nature, its purpose was not to provide conclusive results, but rather to provide recommendations for retailers and suggestions for future research areas. Furthermore, even though the researcher ensured that the questions were clear and easy to understand by pre-testing the questionnaire and making revisions before the primary data was collected, the respondents could have misinterpreted the questions. This, in turn, could have influenced the answers provided by the respondents.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Technology is improving and consumers are constantly adapting to the changing online shopping environment. Having explored the different devices being used and the reasons for their use in shopping online, the following recommendations can be made:

- As more consumers are becoming accustomed to shopping online, it is recommended that retailers invest in online shopping platforms in order to increase the sales of products and services.
- Online retailers should ensure that they streamline, continuously improve and update their online shopping platforms in order to enhance the online shopping experience for consumers.

- Convenience and ease of use were the main reasons identified for all four devices for online searching, browsing and buying. It would appear that consumers are likely use and switch between different devices which they own or have access to. Therefore, it is recommended that retailers ensure that shopping sites are accessible and that they function well with any of the various devices that consumers find the most convenient to use at a particular time.
- The screen sizes of desktops and laptops were highlighted as a reason for preferring to use these devices for online searching and browsing. It is therefore recommended that retailers ensure that information and images regarding the products and services are well presented and clear so as to ensure that consumers can search and browse effortlessly online. Detailed information and images should also be available for consumers who wish to conduct in-depth research on products or services that they are interested in.
- Mobility was identified as a reason for using a mobile phone for online searching and browsing and for using a tablet for online browsing and buying. It is therefore recommended that retailers ensure that their E-commerce sites can be viewed on devices with smaller screens and that they incorporate easy-to-use search functions into these sites so that consumers can easily access information regarding the products and services that they are looking for.
- Security was identified as a reason for preferring to make use of desktops and laptops for online buying. It is therefore recommended that retailers ensure that safety and security measures are in place in order to protect consumers as well as inform them of the precautions that they should be follow when buying online, particularly when using mobile devices.
- Apps were identified as a reason prompting consumers to make use of tablets or mobile phones for online buying. It is therefore recommended that retailers develop shopping apps which will enable consumers to buy their products or services easily online using mobile devices. Again, the retailer should ensure that the app functions well on the various mobile devices and that it will allow consumers to buy online in an effortless manner.

- Ultimately, all retailers should provide consumers with the choice to use whichever device is most convenient to them during the shopping process – wherever they may be at the time.

10. CONCLUSIONS

In this study the preferred devices used for online shopping activities and reasons for using the devices were explored. Even though the research identified desktops and laptops as the most preferred devices, preference for tablets and mobile phones will very likely increase as more consumers grow accustomed to using these devices for online shopping.

Furthermore, the research revealed that convenience was the main reason why consumers use their preferred devices for all three online shopping activities considered in the study. The literature reported that consumers engage in online shopping as it is more convenient than going to physical stores to purchase products and services – something that can also explain why consumers also prefer to use those devices which are convenient for them while engaging in the online shopping activities.

Technology is constantly improving and consumers are evolving and it is therefore recommended that future research should further explore the development and use of tablets and mobile phones for online shopping and the integration of these mobile devices into consumers' online shopping practices. Future research on the design of online platforms for specific device types will further contribute to the body of knowledge. The recommendations provided in this article can be utilised by South African retailers both to create new online shopping platforms and to improve their existing ones.

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