ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE SHOPPING

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Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from a seller over the internet using a web browser. Alternative names are: e-shop, e-store, Internet shop, web-shop, web-store, online store, and virtual store. An online shop evokes the physical analogy of buying products or services at a bricks and mortar retailer or shopping center, the process is called business to consumer (B2C) online shopping. The largest of these online retailing corporations are eBay and amzone.com both based in the United States.

Online contracts are classified as distance contracts, which means that the trader (service provider, seller) and the consumer (natural person who is acting for purposes which are outside his trade, business or profession), in lack of their simultaneous, actual and physical presence enter into contract not by meeting in person (e.g. in commercial premises, market, open-air market, via trade agent etc.), but only in an electronic way.

With more and more people becoming internet users in today’s world, there has been great increase in online shopping websites all over the world. The number of people shopping online has increased to 60 per cent in the past two years, with nearly nine out of 10 (more than 85 per cent) of the world’s web users logging on to internet to buy, according to new research. The advancement of technology and easy navigability are the some of the main factors because of which online shopping has achieved great heights in World Wide Web.

HISTORY OF ONLINE SHOPPING: The first World Wide Web server and browser, created by Tim Berners-Lee in 1990, opened for commercial use in 1991. Thereafter, subsequent technological innovations emerged in 1994: online banking, the opening of an online pizza shop by Pizza Hut, Netscape’s SSL v2 encryption standard for secure data transfer, and Intershop’s first online shopping system. Immediately after, Amazone.com launched its online shopping site in 1995 and eBay was introduced in 1996.

CUSTOMERS: Online customers must have access to the Internet and a valid method of payment in order to complete a transaction. Generally, higher levels of education, and personal income, correspond to more favorable perceptions of shopping online. Increased exposure to technology also increases the probability of developing favorable attitudes towards new shopping channels. In a
December 2011 study, Equation Research found that 87% of tablet users made online transactions with their tablet devices during the early Christmas shopping season.

**LOGISTIC:** Consumers find a product of interest by visiting the website of the retailer directly or by searching among alternative vendors using a shopping search engine. Once a particular product has been found on the website of the seller, most online retailers use shopping cart software to allow the consumer to accumulate multiple items and to adjust quantities, like filling a physical shopping cart or basket in a conventional store. A "checkout" process follows (continuing the physical-store analogy) in which payment and delivery information is collected, if necessary. Some stores allow consumers to sign up for a permanent online account so that some or all of this information only needs to be entered once. The consumer often receives an e-mail confirmation once the transaction is complete.

Less sophisticated stores may rely on consumers to phone or e-mail their orders (although full credit card numbers, expiry date, and Card security code or bank account and routing number should not be accepted by e-mail, for reasons of security).

**PAYMENT METHODS IN ONLINE SHOPPING:** Online shoppers commonly use a Credit Card or a PayPal account in order to make payments. However, some systems enable users to create accounts and pay by alternative means, such as:

- billing to mobile phones
- cash on delivery (C.O.D.)
- cheque
- debit card
- direct debit in some country
- electronic money of various types
- postal money order
- wire transfer/delivery on payment
- invoice especially popular in some markets/countries such a Switzerland

Some online shops will not accept international credit cards. Some require both the purchaser's billing and shipping address to be in the same country as the online shop's base of operation. Other online shops allow customers from any country to send gifts anywhere.

The financial part of a transaction may be processed in real time (e.g. letting the consumer know their credit card was declined before they log off), or may be done later as part of the fulfilment process.
PRODUCT DELIVERY: Once a payment has been accepted, the goods or services can be delivered in the following ways:

- **Downloading**: The method often used for digital media products such as software, music, movies, or images.
- **Drop shipping**: The order is passed to the manufacturer or third-party distributor, who then ships the item directly to the consumer, bypassing the retailer’s physical location to save time, money, and space.
- **In-store pick-up**: The customer selects a local store using locator software and picks up the delivered product at the selected location. This is the method often used in the bricks and clicks business model.
- **Printing out provision of a code for, or e-mailing of such items as admission tickets and scrip** (e.g., gift certificates and coupons). The tickets, codes, or coupons may be redeemed at the appropriate physical or online premises and their content reviewed to verify their eligibility (e.g., assurances that the right of admission or use is redeemed at the correct time and place, for the correct dollar amount, and for the correct number of uses).
- **Shipping**: The product is shipped to a customer-designated address.
- **Will call**: ICBO (In Care Of Box Office), or "at the door" pickup: The patron picks up pre-purchased tickets for an event, such as a play, sporting event, or concert, either just before the event or in advance. With the onset of the Internet and e-commerce sites, which allow customers to buy tickets online, the popularity of this service has increased.

SHOPPING CART SYSTEM:

- Simple systems allow the off-line administration of products and categories. The shop is then generated as HTML files and graphics that can be uploaded to a web space. The systems do not use an online database.
- A high-end solution can be bought or rented as a stand-alone program or as an addition to an enterprise resource planning program. It is usually installed on the company's webserver and may integrate into the existing supply chain so that ordering, payment, delivery, accounting and warehousing can be automated to a large extent.
- Other solutions allow the user to register and create an online shop on a portal that hosts multiple shops simultaneously.
- Open source shopping cart packages include advanced platforms such as Interchange, and off-the-shelf solutions such as Magneto, osCommerce, PrestaShop, Zen Cart.
Commercial systems can also be tailored so the shop does not have to be created from scratch. By using an existing framework, software modules for various functionalities required by a web shop can be adapted and combined.

**DESIGN:** Customers are attracted to online shopping not only because of high levels of convenience, but also because of broader selections, competitive pricing, and greater access to information. Business organizations seek to offer online shopping not only because it is of much lower cost compared to bricks and mortar stores, but also because it offers access to a worldwide market, increases customer value, and builds sustainable capabilities.

**INFORMATION LOAD:** Designers of online shops are concerned with the effects of information load. Information load is a product of the spatial and temporal arrangements of stimuli in the web store. Compared with conventional retail shopping, the information environment of virtual shopping is enhanced by providing additional product information such as comparative products and services, as well as various alternatives and attributes of each alternative, etc.

Two major dimensions of information load are complexity and novelty. Complexity refers to the number of different elements or features of a site, often the result of increased information diversity. Novelty involves the unexpected, suppressed, new, or unfamiliar aspects of the site. The novelty dimension may keep consumers exploring a shopping site, whereas the complexity dimension may induce impulse purchase.

**CONSUMER NEED AND EXPECTATIONS:** A successful web store is not just a good looking website with dynamic technical features, listed in many search engines. In addition to disseminating information, it is also about building a relationship with customers and making money. Businesses often attempt to adopt online shopping techniques without understanding them and/or without a sound business model; often times, businesses produce webstores that support the organizations’ culture and brand name without satisfying consumer expectations. User-centred design is critical. Understanding the customer’s wants and needs is essential. Living up to the company’s promises gives customers a reason to come back and meeting their expectations gives them a reason to stay. It is important that the website communicates how much the company values its customers. Customer needs and expectations are not the same for all customers. Age, gender, experience and culture are all important factors. For example, Japanese cultural norms may lead users there to feel privacy is especially critical on shopping sites and emotional involvement is highly important on financial pension’s sites. Users with more online experience focus more on the variables that directly influence the task, while novice users focus on understanding the information. To increase online purchases, businesses must expend significant time and money to define, design,
develop, test, implement, and maintain the webstore. It is easier to lose a customer than to gain one. Even a "top-rated" website will not succeed if the organization fails to practice common etiquette such as returning e-mails in a timely fashion, notifying customers of problems, being honest, and being good stewards of the customers’ data. Because it is so important to eliminate mistakes and be more appealing to online shoppers, many webshop designers study research on consumer expectations.

MARKET SHARE: E-commerce B2C product sales totalled $142.5 billion representing about 8% of retail product sales in the United States. The $26 billion worth of clothes sold online represented about 13% of the domestic market and with 72% of women looking online for apparel; it has become one of the most popular cross-shopping categories. Forrester Research estimates that the United States online retail industry will be worth $279 billion in 2015. There were 242 million people shopping on-line in China in 2012. For developing countries and low-income households in developed countries, adoption of e-commerce in place of or in addition to conventional methods is limited by a lack of affordable Internet access.

ADVANTAGES OF ONLINE SHOPPING:

- **Saving your money:** In your online purchase you can find several deals, discounts and online codes for the products and all other purchases. Everyone loves to buy products through online and earn money online without investment just by getting wonderful deals, but you need do a careful search to find the best available discounts and bargains to acquire the excellent discounts regarding particular products while purchasing online. Searching with regard to deals and also discounts through online purchasing websites isn’t a difficult task and it’s also thought to be a fine art. Once if you recognize the best online shopping sites you can sign up using them so that you will not miss valuable deals offered for your time.

- **Comparison of Products:** Through online purchase you can easily compare goods from multiple brands; this is where online shopping makes a difference. This comparison of product of different retailers at same time for price and quality is good idea and provides great benefit, which just isn’t possible while purchasing with the nearby shops. There are many websites in .net development India which provide this feature of comparison so that you can make the right choice. This helps you to get the best quality as well as reasonable price from the comfort in just a second. This is how online shopping is helping people in making right choices.

- **Secure shopping:** Internet shopping can be secure if you purchase things from trusted websites. Just be careful while making online transactions. It is necessary that you read the
terms and conditions before doing online shopping. You can check the security of the site by checking the website address, if the website address contains https: instead of http: it means it is a secure website and you can continue entering personal information without worrying, this can be implemented in sites with the help of .net developers Chennai. Every e-commerce websites have secure online payment page, where you can enter your credit or debit card details. So just take care while entering credit card details and have enjoyment while shopping online.

- **Convenience:** Online stores are usually available 24 hours a day, and many consumers have Internet access both at work and at home. Other establishments such as internet cafes and schools provide internet access as well. In contrast, visiting a conventional retail store requires travel and must take place during business hours.

In the event of a problem with the item (e.g., the product was not what the consumer ordered, the product was not satisfactory), consumers are concerned with the ease of returning an item in exchange for either the correct product or a refund. Consumers may need to contact the retailer, visit the post office and pay return shipping, and then wait for a replacement or refund. Some online companies have more generous return policies to compensate for the traditional advantage of physical stores. For example, the online shoe retailer Zappos.com includes labels for free return shipping, and does not charge a restocking fee, even for returns which are not the result of merchant error. (Note: In the United Kingdom, online shops are prohibited from charging a restocking fee if the consumer cancels their order in accordance with the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Act 2000.

- **Other Benefits:** There are many other advantages other than the above mentioned ones, like you can enjoy shopping at any time of day or night according to your convenience without even worrying about closing time of stores, at your own comfort and you can buy things from different websites at same time according to your choice at the ease of one click. With the advanced technology, there is almost nothing left which won’t be available online. Some websites also offer some percent of cash back options through coding from .net developer India if you have purchased something from that website to a certain amount thus saving extra pennies.
DISADVANTAGES OF ONLINE SHOPPING:

- **Fraud and security concerns:** Given the lack of ability to inspect merchandise before purchase, consumers are at higher risk of fraud than face-to-face transactions. Merchants also risk fraudulent purchases using stolen credit cards or fraudulent repudiation of the online purchase. However, merchants face less risk from physical theft by using a warehouse instead of a retail storefront.

  Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption has generally solved the problem of credit card numbers being intercepted in transit between the consumer and the merchant. However, one must still trust the merchant (and employees) not to use the credit card information subsequently for their own purchases, and not to pass the information to others. Also, hackers might break into a merchant’s web site and steal names, addresses and credit card numbers, although the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard is intended to minimize the impact of such breaches. Identity theft is still a concern for consumers. A number of high-profile break-ins in the 2000s have prompted some U.S. states to require disclosure to consumers when this happens. Computer security has thus become a major concern for merchants and e-commerce service providers, who deploy countermeasures such as firewalls and anti-virus software to protect their networks.

  Phishing is another danger, where consumers are fooled into thinking they are dealing with a reputable retailer, when they have actually been manipulated into feeding private information to a system operated by a malicious party. Denial of service attacks are a minor risk for merchants, as are server and network outages.

  Quality seals can be placed on the Shop web page if it has undergone an independent assessment and meets all requirements of the company issuing the seal. The purpose of these seals is to increase the confidence of online shoppers. However, the existence of many different seals, or seals unfamiliar to consumers, may foil this effort to a certain extent. A number of resources offer advice on how consumers can protect themselves when using online retailer services. These include:

  - **Sticking with known stores, or attempting to find independent consumer reviews of their experiences; also ensuring that there is comprehensive contact information on the website before using the service, and noting if the retailer has enrolled in industry oversight programs such as a trust mark or a trust seal.**

  - **Before buying from a new company, evaluate the website by considering issues such as: the professionalism and user-friendliness of the site; whether or not the company lists a**
telephone number and/or street address along with e-contact information; whether a fair
and reasonable refund and return policy is clearly stated; and whether there are hidden
price inflators, such as excessive shipping and handling charges.

- Ensuring that the retailer has an acceptable privacy policy posted. For example note if the
  retailer does not explicitly state that it will not share private information with others without
  consent.
- Ensuring that the vendor address is protected with SSL (see above) when entering credit
  card information. If it does the address on the credit card information entry screen will start
  with "HTTPS".
- Using strong passwords, without personal information. Another option is a "pass phrase,"
  which might be something along the lines: "I shop 4 good a buy!!" These are difficult to hack,
  and provides a variety of upper, lower, and special characters and could be site specific and
  easy to remember.

Although the benefits of online shopping are considerable, when the process goes poorly it can
create a thorny situation. A few problems that shoppers potentially face include identity theft, faulty
products, and the accumulation of spyware. Whenever users purchase a product, they are required
to put in their credit card information and billing/shipping address. If the website is not secure,
customer information can be accessible to anyone who knows how to obtain it. Most large online
corporations are inventing new ways to make fraud more difficult. However, criminals are constantly
responding to these developments with new ways to manipulate the system. Even though online
retailers are making efforts to protect consumer information, it is a constant fight to maintain the
lead. It is advisable to be aware of the most current technology and scams protect consumer identity
and finances.

Product delivery is also a main concern of online shopping. Most companies offer shipping insurance
in case the product is lost or damaged. Some shipping companies will offer refunds or compensation
for the damage, but this is up to their discretion.
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