

WOMEN'S PREFERENCES WHILE SHOPPING ONLINE

PSYCHOLOGY 473

SECTION 101

TUES-THURSDAYS

DR. JESSICA CHOPLIN

WRITTEN BY

JAMES NUTTER

Shopping online is becoming ubiquitous; within an hour you can virtually visit multiple stores, browse, and make your purchases. Having a successful online business is a multilayer process; which involves understanding online buying behavior, and shopping habits. Many previous online retailers such as valueamerica.com, pets.com, living.com and furniture.com have closed their virtual doors for lack of knowledge of these online shopping characteristics.

Through my graduate studies in Human Computer Interaction, I have a deeper understanding of the intricacy of online buying behavior. This knowledge will not only help me pontificate while writing this paper, but will enable me to explain concepts to my reading audience in a clear and effective manner. The terminology and research evidence for this paper is derived from the field of psychology and computer science. Terms or concepts I feel are not familiar to the reading audience will be explained in footnotes and graphs. The logic flow for this research endeavor is going to focus on women's preferences while shopping online which is based on perceptions, social characteristics and understanding of technology. This paper will also cover the concept of prospective evaluations.

A June 2001 Nielson Net Ratings survey declared that the number of women online had grown to reflect their representation in the population, to 51.7 percent of active Internet users.¹ More women than men (58 percent vs. 42 percent) had joined the online consumer population in the two years prior to the 2001 America Online/Roper ASW cyber study. (Quinlan, 2003, p. 153) Particularly in today's society women not only hold corporate officer positions which has doubled since 1995 up 15.7 from 8.7 percent, (Kaplan-Leiserson, 2003) they have the buying power to make big-ticket purchases (e.g. 45ⁱⁿ LCD screen TV, SUV car purchases, and purchasing real estate.) Many so called "wired" homes have home theater rooms in their homes, which may include the following:

- Movie theater type chairs
- High quality projection screen
- Surround Sound audio system
- Touch-Screen Remote Control

These pieces of equipment can range from 3,000 dollars and up. (Arends, 2005, p. 1) One web site in particular, <http://www.crutchfield.com> will allow you to talk to a customer service representative in which you will tell them the dimensions of your room for the home theater and they will recommend each piece of equipment needed for your system. Women having the financial resource together with the virtual assistance of the web can make even complex purchases a seamless process.

Because of this financial freedom women no longer have the degree of dependency for men to supplement their buying habits. In the 1930s, 26 of 48 states had laws prohibiting the employment of married women. It was the midst of the Great Depression and there were not enough jobs to keep the men out of political mischief, so married women had to go. (Kearl, 1998) Jump ahead to 2003 women as a group earn 1 billion annually and influence the purchase of 85 percent of all products and services purchase. (Quinlan, 2003, p. 1) In an electronics store men typically asked the salesperson question relating to functions of the device or if this is the latest model, compared to women who inquire about how this device will serve her needs, the family needs, and fit into their lives and home. (Quinlan, 2003, p. 156) The device the fits in aesthetically with the furniture, the paint on the wall, and looks respectable under the current lighting conditions will be acquired repeatedly in the future. I have an example from my personal life to illustrate this concept. My sister and her husband recently purchase a new house, now they previously had a 26ⁱⁿ TV that they purchased when they go married (11 years ago), but now they had this big family room with high ceilings and walls. So they decided to get with the times and go online and purchase a plasma or LCD large screen TV. My sister forgot she had to pick up their daughter from a dance class so she left the house to go and do that. So two days later the TV arrived with this orange looking cabinet to hold it. Her husband excitement was soon halted by the facial expression he saw on my sister's face. "What is wrong he asked!" she said, "Our furniture is tanned colored and this cabinet is orange colored!" The days are numbered for women who have to count on a man's financial assistance to acquire big-ticket purchases for the house.

Numerous studies show that men more than women are the dominant gender who shops online. Before purchasing a product men will search for product or service information, which usually leads to a purchase. (Rodgers & Harris, 2003) I have a close

married friend that was in the market for a digital camera. So his wife starts talking about which stores they can visit and how knowledgeable the staff is in each store. She says she is going to put a small notepad in her purse for writing down the prices and the salesperson's comments. As she is telling him all her plans, he is already at the computer pulling up a web page with a comparison of multiple digital cameras with buyer's reviews. "Best Buy and Circuit City have a Cannon and Minolta 5 mega pixel camera for 125.00 dollars with a 4 out of 5 star customer rating" she says "I thought we could visit the stores so we can physically touch the camera and the sales person can verbally gives us an overview. We can also have a nice lunch and conversation while we take a break from shopping." "He commented how much time they would save by doing some research before visiting stores" So they ended up narrowing their selection of possible digital cameras to purchase through the web and made their purchase through a brick and mortar store. When making a product purchase men prefer to do online research and comparison, while women prefer the more in-person tactile feel of the product.

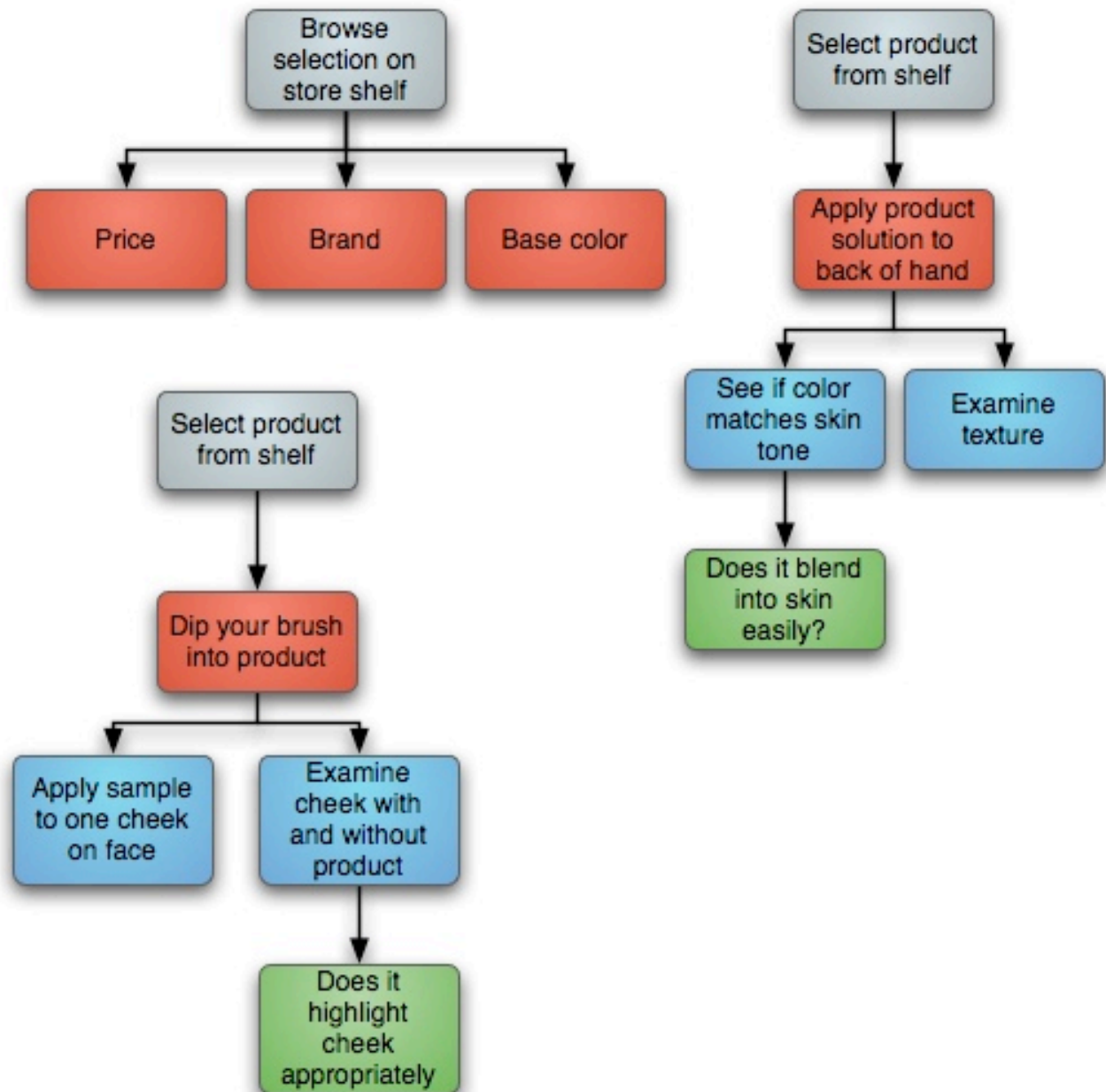
The online shopping emotional experience for women is at the cornerstone of a possible way to increase online shopping usage by women. (Rodgers & Harris, 2003) Women often describe the "experience" of a brick and motor store. They enjoy the personal relationships that develop with the sales personal. The salesperson might bring them a cup of coffee while they are shopping prepared the way they most enjoy it. They can clarify questions they have on the spot, without having to remember how to login to customer support. The arrangement of the products and how they are displayed ties into their perception of the store as a whole. The thing about duplicating this experience is that web site is run by software technology, which is only as good as the people that incorporate it into the site. If these people do not have the particular knowledge of how to manipulate a certain technology to duplicate this experience, then you are back to square one of not having more women using the internet as there primary mean of purchasing items.

Research supports the theory that men like to explore various websites and read websites that deal with analysis of issues, while women will seek out information on how to reduce her to do list. (Shade, 2002, p. 64) Many people I know use itunes as their digital music player of choice. One of the features of itunes is the ability to download shows called PodCasts. For

people that are not familiar with podcasts they are a multimedia file distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds, for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. I was reviewing the podcasts that I listen to and the majority of them do deal with the nature of investigating concepts. This Week in Tech, boagworld Web Design, and Dignation. All three of these podcasts deal with exploring the concepts and products in the world of technology. There is a “how to” characteristic but the conversations are geared towards how does this apply to “x” or what does this mean for the future with this idea implemented. The Podcast that have noticed that my women friends listen to are more task oriented. Learn how to sew, Cook a family meal in 30 min, and Time management for moms. This particular selection of Podcast seem to centered around what (Rodgers & Harris, 2003) was saying about how women’s buying decisions focused mainly on two things: how is this going to ease my life and how is this going to benefit our family. So after reading this research I understand, why there was a lack of interest in subscribing to the Podcast I listen to. I would tell my women friends how this would help them at networking events, because you are able to discuss trends and products in the world of technology. They want to know how pontificating about ambient intelligence is going to help them cook a pot roast for dinner and pick up the dry cleaning before 6:30pm.

One of the many products that women buy often and will spend whatever amount of money to purchase is a beauty product. The beauty and cosmetic industry will grow from \$509 million in 1999 to \$10.4 billion in 2004. (Shade, 2002, p. 59) Women require an interactive experience when purchasing cosmetics (e.g. blush, base, face powder. and brushes to apply this makeup.) In the HCI profession we have an analysis technique called task analysis, which involves improving the design of tools or procedures that aid in performing the task. In performing task analysis you systematically breakdown a task into its elements, specifically including a detailed task description of both manual and mental activities, task and element durations, task frequency, task allocation, task complexity, environmental conditions, necessary clothing and equipment, and any other unique factors involved in or required for one or more humans to perform a given task. The below sample task analysis for selecting a base foundation makeup and brush could be used to help accurately duplicate the “experience” concept to an online store, which was mentioned in previous section of this paper.

See Diagram on next page.



According to (Shade, 2002, p. 62) there are two methods for serving up subject matter to women online; the “Wal-Mart approach” which offers an assortment of products across many product lines or a “specialization approach” which narrows in on one specific product line. The magazine article by (Waldman, 1995) will illustrate the “Wal-Mart approach”. QVC, which stands for Quality Value Control, sold 3 billion worth of goods last year. (Waldman, 1995) The audience for QVC is 80 percent female, mainly middle age or older, and mostly middle class. The selling staff or “hosts” at QVC evoke the emotional need to belong and possess a product that will in “theory” bring them felicity. For example, when selling beauty products, the “hosts” place you in a common scenario, among the target audience. For example, “Ladies this product will enable you to have that just wax feeling and looking comparable to a 60 dollars salon session.” Women can easily relate to this statement and they can acquire that “salon wax” feeling at a lower cost if they just pick up the phone and order the product. Also when they buy and use the product, which produces that affect that the “hosts” proclaim they call into the show for a “testimonial”. Other buyers hear these testimonials and it creates this community atmosphere. This everydayness of these “common scenarios” makes people feel part of a community of interests sharing a common goal.

Victoria Secret online store will illustrate the “specialization approach”. Victoria's Secret Direct, with sales of approximately US\$870 million sells items that are available through their online catalog. (“Variety’ KO for ABC,” 2004, p. B06) The company really gains recognition when supermodels were used in advertising and their fashion shows. The theme of the advertising campaign rests on the personification of sex appeal from the super models. The measurements and the degree of beauty of these models are comparable to finding a \$20 bill on street, it is rare but it does happen. The last statement probably has some women saying, “Give me a break”. From a business perspective, they want you to have the lingerie correlated with this sexy super model persona. This advertising approach not only evokes feelings of sexiness when women view this lingerie, but maybe for a couple of seconds women actually assume this super model persona. Because there is a large assortment of lingerie available to purchase women can in theory duplicate the “sexy” image they see in the advertisements. Need some padding in your push up bra?, need a high quality satin bra instead of an uncomfortable underwire?, need a variety of sleep wear colors in different lengths?

Because women like to have products that ease their life maybe the Victoria Secret Company can incorporate a virtual model. You can enter your measurements and select an occasion from a drop down list and you will get a visual list of possible products. If you do not want to enter your measurements you can select from a measurement range. Based on your occasion selection the virtual model will select an assortment of lotions, perfumes, and face creams to better the occasion.

These two approaches for serving content to women online do have distinct marketing angles. One taps into the emotional aspects of shopping online the other appeal to the vanity aspects of a women. (Rodgers & Harris, 2003) When these approaches are implemented correctly as we have seen by the two examples the result is a successful experience for women shopping online. Let me take you back about 6 years ago I was working at Brookstone, a specialty items store. I was there top salesperson and a fellow co-worker asked me “ How do you sell some many items? Before I read the research for this paper, I had grown up mostly with women, so when I started working at Brookstone I knew I had to take a distinguishable selling approach. One of the first approaches I used and the research supports this is establishing a relationship based on trust and honesty. First ask questions about some experiences she may have had with this product line. Be honest about what the product can do for them, and possibly why this particular item will not fit their needs but this one will.

For the online world maybe you can refer to your interviews with women about their shopping experiences and derive the most common scenarios and illustrate these points in a flash presentation.

If one of the benefits she hopes to receive from the product is the ability to help her relax from a long day at work; (Shade, 2002, p. 63) have text explain to her that this product has voice recognition technology. Inform her that you do not have to “train” it to recognize you voice that you just select a predefined term and select “voice recognition.” To illustrate this point you could create a flash demo the demonstrates a scenario comparable to the following: you walk into your house after many meetings and carrying out many project at work and you say two simple words “music 1”. The house is immediately filled with your favorite type of music.

Now she has a well-grounded understanding of how this product can benefit her. (Quinlan, 2003, p. 156)

Even if they are doing their online shopping at the airport and access to a LAN line phone is not close by, the invention of the cell phone with its ubiquitous status enables them to contact their “social network.” (Quinlan, 2003, p. 69) This “social network” is usually composed of their closest friends with whom they seek regular purchasing advice or have a particular knowledge based that is directly related to the product. In many cases women do not make a significant buying decision without referring to these networks. These networks help them explore viewpoints or past experiences that they do not see or do not remember. If one of your products was associated with having to have multiple repairs before working probably and the story is being expressed by of the women in her “social network” then her desire to consider the product for purchase is decreased.

Many of the products we sold at Brookstone where the identical products sold at other stores. Because the products were placed on well-made display furniture with appropriate lighting, the product’s image in a woman’s eyes was perceived as higher quality. In addition to this higher quality perception, the employees that work at these stores are well groomed and wear dressy style clothing. The shopping bags are of a higher quality and have visually pleasing type printed on the bag. On of the most requested items that are an accessory if you will to the shopping bag was a handle that formed a more comfortable way to carry the items purchase from the store. To try to duplicate this type of environment online the company has incorporated the following:

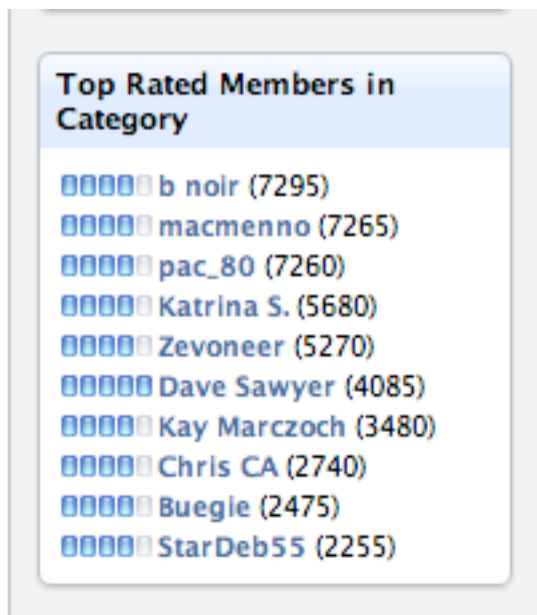
- Gift Wrapping
- Gift Card (gives you the ability to type a personal message)
- High quality product photos
- Toll Free 800 number

Online stores Apple.com and Adobe.com offer not only products for purchase but also offer what is call e-communities. (Scott & Johnson, 2005) These communities differ from the typical discussion list or chat room by offering tools to expand their knowledge base, personal development, and collective action.

People or members that participate in online communities are nine times more likely to return to the site and 2 times more likely to purchase items. (Scott & Johnson, 2005) People returning to the site do so for the points listed below:

- Members come from similar social economic backgrounds so they have that “came from the same stock mentality”
- Moderators as they are called maintain a sense of decorum by enforcing sanctions on members.
- Ideas and opinions are shared under an umbrella of anonymity
- Members come from various regions of the country or different areas of the world, so diverse perspectives are shared.

To maintain an activity level on these e-communities a “badge of honor” system is used to place value on posting to the community. Here is an example of how Apple integrates this visual icon.



This concept is very similar to the stars the many children receive in elementary school for receiving the highest score on a spelling test. The person or people with the most stars are recognized for their achievement and our place on a pedestal if you will. The other children

may want what they have so they may study harder next test session in order to receive more stars. There is also a psychological behavioral management technique being employed. Reward those behaviors you want repeated and place sanctions on those behaviors you do not want repeated. The more postings and positive ratings you have the more stars are placed beside you name.

From watching my sister that stays at home with her kids' full time, comparison shopping and stretching the family dollar is something that has to be done efficiently and effectively. So going to multiple web sites to compare prices, features, and looking at numerous pictures is not an option. Going to an e-community for moms and entering a specific product search will yield a multitude of recommend products with links. Also the recommendations will help narrow down the choices on which item to purchased.

Also having an e-community will provide "tips and tricks" and "features to avoid" for that product. The "tips and tricks" section have freed my sister from hours of frustration and hours that may have been eliminated from other tasks. For instance, the Federal Express delivery person dropped off a package that contained a baby crib. I happened to be over at her house at the time and I was reading the directions and saying to my sister "This is written in the English language, right? She went to the kitchen table and took a document from the table and it contained revised directions in "plain English" so to speak. Within an hour we had the crib complexly set up and ready to be used. Because of the information provided by this particular e-community my sister was able to complete everything she had to do that day and because of this was in good mood was also benefited her husband. I would like to add this quote from my father that does not die directly into the content of the paragraph but is a valuable added bonus, "if momma is not happy, nobody is happy!"

Today's family life is filled with doctor's appointments, kids activities, church activities, taking kids to day care etc. We do not have time to sit and talk to our neighbors. I can remember when I was growing up, my mom used to have women's bridge (card games) get-togethers. The women would be dressed in sun type dresses with high heels. For a couple of hours they would sit around a card table playing cards, talk about their life and drink coffee while eating finger sandwiches. I was told to play in the basement or play kick ball outside with one of my friends.

The virtual world brings this back with e-communities. (Scott & Johnson, 2005) One thing I believe that was missing from my mom's era was diversity in the social groups. I am not just talking about ethnic background but the diversity of the topics discussed. You might purchase a product or use a service but discover from the e-community that Sara from Paris, Emily from India, Jane from Iceland and Isabella from Cuba uses this product to shave her legs but the intended use was sunscreen lotion. What are the chances that you would live next to all these women from different background, who are stay at home moms, and live in your neighborhood? Some come from vastly different cultures and background and come ready to share unique ways of accomplishing tasks, living life, and communicating.

There is a married couple that I know and the wife spends months at a time in another country on business. The husband visits her often, but before he leaves she gives him a list of items to purchase from the United States. The husband is an elderly man and before I taught him how to buy the items he needed for his wife online, he would spend hours driving around to different stores buying these items. Sometimes he would spend days trying to find a particular item. After using the Internet for a couple of hours for his shopping, he completed the list without setting a foot in a store or driving around for hours. His reason for not using the Internet which is lack of knowledge of where to go to make purchases and how to pay for the items; this conflicts with the consumer and government organizations study stating that the two primary concerns for consumers shopping online is privacy and security. Maybe it was his engineering workplace exposure or his familiarity with computers in general but he felt a greater sense of security because these transactions were "paperless" and made through a "secure" connection.

You might be thinking the same thing I am thinking, Are these products he is purchasing so unique that they can ONLY be purchased in the United States. The answer is no. It has to do with his wife's perceived risk towards purchasing items through the Internet. ("BUSINESS FOCUS; Online Shopping," 2005, p. NA) In contrast to the wife's perceived risks for NOT shopping online, insert reference here paper states that there is little research to support the claims of "privacy and security issues relate to consumer risk perceptions and anticipated purchase behavior". One day at work she hit a wrong sequence of letters on her keyboard and

up pops a dialog box saying, “Do you really want to clear all of your stored cookies?” She said to herself “ what is a cookie and what happens if I delete it?” So as many people do she “Googled it” aka used Google search engine to look up a word. She found some article from unknown website talking about how these cookies can analyze information and report it to the company that runs the website. The part about “analyzing “ information is just not possible by the cookie itself, and typically cookies are filled with information that is provided by the consumer ONLY. (Miyazaki & Fernandez, 2001, p. 27)

The husband was telling his wife how much time he saved by buying the items online as opposed to going from store to store. He did not tell her that I have been training him on how to purchased items online and the pitfalls. With her busy schedule she did not have time to look for these items in an unfamiliar country. The perceived risks she associated with shopping online did not have to be confronted and she got exactly the items she wanted.

After reading the numerous articles regarding women and online shopping there are distinct environments that need to be created in order for women to complete a purchase online. Maybe through intensive interviews and usability testing, a virtual assistant can provide that “relationship” component that is missing from the online shopping community. Some person out in the world has probably developed this virtual assistant to analyze type text and reply with a “personalized” answer directly addressing the message. Many sites use “live chat” to satisfy this relationship component, but that requires human capital which is expensive. This research I have read and this paper I have written will benefit my future employer and me greatly because I will have a specific knowledge base to access for women shopping online.

Works Cited

- Bucy, Erik P., and John E. Newhagen, eds. Media Access: Social and Psychological Dimensions of New Technology Use. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=104629867>>.
- Burnett, Robert, and P. David Marshall. Web Theory: An Introduction. London: Routledge, 2002. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=108095522>>.
- "BUSINESS FOCUS; Online Shopping Insecurity." Manila Bulletin 26 Dec. 2005: NA. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5012218303>>.
- Cook, Jack, and Mike Finlayson. "The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Web Site Design." SAM Advanced Management Journal 70.3 (2005): 15+. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5012062218>>.
- Dennis, Charles, Tino Fenech, and Bill Merrilees. E-Retailing. New York: Routledge, 2004. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=108552768>>.
- Dix, Alan. "3 Human-Computer Interaction and Web Design." Handbook of Human Factors in Web Design. Ed. Robert W. Proctor and Kim-Phuong L. Vu. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. 28-46. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=107375576>>.
- Fiore, Frank. "The 10 Laws of On-Line Shopping." The Futurist Mar.-Apr. 1997: 63+. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5000422031>>.
- Herman, James. "Customer-Centric E-Business." Business Communications Review Aug. 2000: 24. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002363556>>.
- "Internet Shops Becoming Serious Retailers." The Birmingham Post (England) 24 Jan. 2006: 22. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5012431139>>.

- Jackson, Linda A., Kelly S. Ervin, Philip D. Gardner, and Neal Schmitt. "Gender and the Internet: Women Communicating and Men Searching." Sex Roles: A Journal of Research (2001): 363. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001039677>>.
- Jordan, Tim. Cyberpower: The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace and the Internet. London: Routledge, 1999. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=102884173>>.
- Knack, Ruth Eckdish. "Retail vs. E-Tail." Planning July 2000: 24. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001058068>>.
- Korgaonkar, Pradeep K., and Lori D. Wolin. "A Multivariate Analysis of Web Usage." Journal of Advertising Research 39.2 (1999): 53. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5001885093>>.
- Michman, Ronald D., Edward M. Mazze, and Alan J. Greco. Lifestyle Marketing: Reaching the New American Consumer. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=106951651>>.
- Miller, Daniel, and Don Slater. The Internet : An Ethnographic Approach/. Oxford: Berg, 2000. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=102305570>>.
- Miyazaki, Anthony D., and Ana Fernandez. "Consumer Perceptions of Privacy and Security Risks for Online Shopping." Journal of Consumer Affairs 35.1 (2001): 27. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5000995725>>.
- "Online Shopping 101." The Advocate 7 Dec. 1999: 48. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002339937>>.
- "Online Shopping Is a Real Threat, in That It's Easy Convenient and Often Cheap!." The Journal (Newcastle, England) 22 Dec. 2005: 24. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5012176762>>.

- Quinlan, Mary Lou. Just Ask a Woman: Cracking the Code of What Women Want and How They Buy. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2003. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=106412617>>.
- Rodgers, Shelly, and Mary Ann Harris. "Gender and E-Commerce: An Exploratory Study." Journal of Advertising Research 43.3 (2003): 322+. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5002439966>>.
- "Safer Shopping Offers Online Peace of Mind." The Birmingham Post (England) 5 July 2005: 22. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5009788279>>.
- Scott, James K., and Thomas G. Johnson. "Bowling Alone but Online Together: Social Capital in E-Communities." Journal of the Community Development Society 36.1 (2005): 9+. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5012408972>>.
- Shade, Leslie Regan. Gender & Community in the Social Construction of the Internet. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=106436860>>.
- Wang, Fang, Milena Head, and Norm Archer. "E-Tailing: An Analysis of Web Impacts on the Retail Market." Journal of Business Strategies 19.1 (2002): 73+. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5000771710>>.
- Wood, Andrew F., and Matthew J. Smith. Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity, and Culture. 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005. Questia. 13 Nov. 2006 <<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=105196972>>.