

The factors influencing online shopping decisions of customers

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumers' purchase behaviour from offline to online, so many Chinese consumers depend on online platforms to purchase commodities. There are two basic online shopping platforms available to Chinese consumers: traditional online shopping platforms and social media platforms. While previous studies have focused on a single platform and analysed the factors affecting online shopping, this study combines traditional and social media and conducts analyses of the factors affecting online shopping and the future development of online shopping, including convenience, wide selection, affordability, economy promotion, and celebrity benefits. The study found that the factors affecting online shopping can be divided into three categories. The most important point is the epidemic, as government control has forced people to purchase goods online, which has had a mandatory impact on the development of online shopping. Secondly, online shopping also has significant advantages, allowing it to constantly follow the trend of the times and be favoured by consumers. Finally, the digitalization trend of the overall environment, national policy support for e-commerce, and the development of e-commerce are also affecting the development of online shopping.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of the Internet in China, online shopping is getting popular around the whole society [1-4]. Especially after the outbreak of the epidemic, online shopping has experienced unprecedented development, and the user base has shown a dramatic upward trend. Recently, as of December 2023, the scale of online shopping users in China reached 915 million people, accounting for 83.8% of the total Internet users [5]. From this, it can be seen that the epidemic has greatly promoted the development of the internet economy. Due to the government's imposing partial or complete lockdown upon citizens to control the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus within the country, people are restricted to their homes and most offline retail stores had to be closed [6]. In order to meet various needs of life, most citizens choose to shop online, so that they can meet their different needs without leaving their homes [7]. In addition, accompanied by the popularity of short video applications on the internet, like TikTok, various e-commerce companies

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have also emerged. The flourishing of online shopping is even more inseparable from the continuous progress of Internet technology. For instance, the evolution of live streaming technology allows hosts to explain products while viewers can directly place orders in the live room, and merchants will set up some discount mechanisms to promote the increase of transaction volume. This win-win approach has made online shopping a preferred way for people to purchase goods [8]. Marketing psychology aims to analyze the cognitive processes that influence consumer purchases or decisions by examining the signals that attract buyers to certain brands or goods. In recent years, companies and brands have increasingly tended to use the principles of marketing psychology research to enhance their promotional strategies. For this reason, marketing psychology is often considered an essential element of an effective social media marketing strategy. Commercial enterprises have the potential to enhance their social media marketing strategies by gaining a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanisms used by individuals who use social media platforms. According to the research [9], it is found that electronic shopping is closely related to consumers' happiness. Hence, businesses are using innovative strategies to evoke consumer emotions in order to increase brand awareness and drive sales.

Marketing psychology attempts to examine the cognitive mechanisms that affect customer purchasing choices by investigating the indicators that draw purchasers to specific brands or products [10]. In recent years, companies and brands have increasingly utilised the concepts of marketing psychology study to enhance their promotional efforts. Consequently, marketing psychology is frequently regarded as a crucial component of successful social media marketing tactics. Business organisations can improve their social media marketing tactics by acquiring a more profound comprehension of the cognitive processes employed by social media users. A study [11] shown that employing tactics that elicit emotional responses from clients can successfully enhance and solidify their loyalty. Therefore, companies are employing novel tactics to elicit emotions in consumers to enhance brand awareness and stimulate sales.

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has created new channels for communication between businesses and their clients. Nevertheless, the majority of enterprises have not benefited from the previously dominant monopoly strength in the economic sector. In the modern digital environment, businesses have to compete with intense competition to capture the attention and involvement of online consumers. Consumer reactions to marketing stimuli encompass various dimensions, including cognitive, physiological, and emotional factors [12]. In contemporary times, customers exhibit a greater inclination to prioritise their emotional connection with a brand prior to executing a purchase transaction.

1.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The main research aim of this article is to explore the main factors influencing online shopping. In other words, what are the ways in which online shopping has grown and developed, and what are the opportunities and challenges encountered during the development process.

Research question 1: What factors will affect online shopping.

Research question 2: Which factors are positive, and which are negative.

Research question 3: What are the most critical influencing factors.

To accomplish this, this study established three research objectives. The first point was to distill the specific influencing factors by means of a literature review. The second was to examine which factors in online shopping are facilitating and those that are hindering development. The third is to

address the dominant factors and how to continue to allow them to develop. And in the face of hindering factors, how should these challenges be avoided and solved.

2. Methodology

2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

After identifying multiple relevant articles based on the SLR principle [13], we decided to use inclusion and exclusion criteria to generate a list of related articles. The final inclusion and exclusion criteria are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Explanation
Inclusion	
1. Articles should be published in top peer-reviewed journals.	Reliable and high-quality journals.
2. Articles should be cited multiple times.	Persuasive and authoritative
3. Articles should be relevant to the theme studied in this article, namely online shopping and consumer behavior	Related to topic research
4. Articles publication should be in English	The universal language of high ranking and popular journals
Exclusion	
1. Articles published before 2014 not considered	Our topic is very innovative, so we referred to articles after 2015.
2. Articles should not be from books	They are unreliable without going through the peer review mechanism
3. Case studies are not considered.	They are subjective and specific

2.2 Final Screening

The selected article was published between 2015 and 2025. We chose this era because online shopping became prominent in 2015, especially after the outbreak of the pandemic in 2018. We identified 200 articles from the selected sources using specific keywords. We have removed duplicate articles, peer-reviewed articles, and articles unrelated to online shopping background Abhinav Srivastava that appeared due to multiple searches. This screening process resulted in a final list of the 30 most relevant articles. When selecting and analysing literature relevant to our current study, this study strictly followed the SLR guidelines and inclusion and exclusion principles [14].

Table 2

Publication Year

Year	No of publications	Share
2023-2025	47	34%
2021-2023	35	26%
2019-2021	23	17%
2017-2019	18	13%
2015-2017	13	10%

total	136	100
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2.3 Publication Method

Referring to the method used by Abhinav and Park [14] to screen reference articles, this study also demonstrated the screening process through a flowchart, ultimately identifying 136 articles that can be referenced.

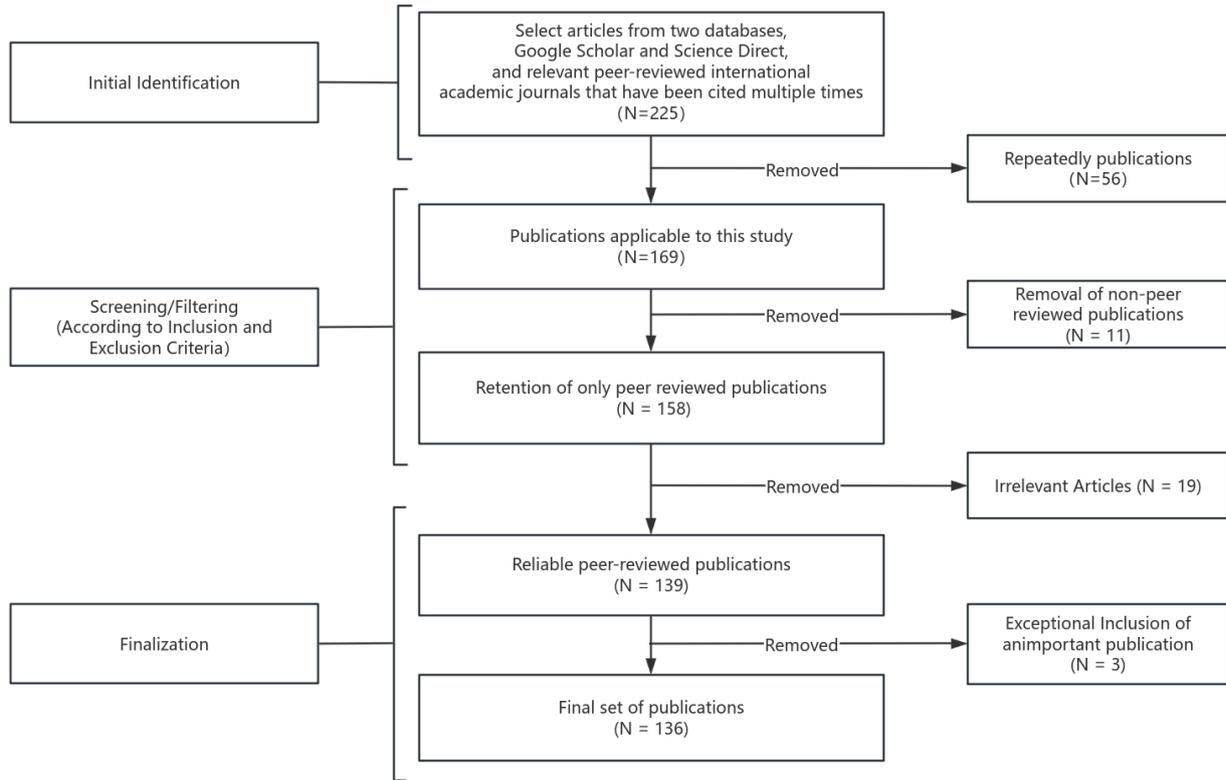


Fig. 1. Paper selection procedure

3. Results

3.1 Advantages of Online Shopping

Online shopping must have many advantages to make it the mainstream shopping method in China today. Overall, According to previous studies, it can be divided into these five main aspects according to their importance : Convenience, Wide Selection, Affordability, Economy Promotion and Celebrity Benefits.

Convenience: According to the previous description, online shopping is a very convenient way of shopping. Buyers can search and browse the goods they want to buy directly on their mobile phones' shopping applications, and then place an order through WeChat payment or Alipay payment. The courier will also deliver the goods to the door according to the address filled in by the buyers. The whole process can be done without leaving home, without the need to go to crowded shops, which is a very advantageous and convenient way for people with limited or enabled mobility or living in remote areas [15]. In addition, a study also emphasizes the convenience of online shopping [16]. Online stores are open all day, and customers can freely shop at their preferred time. Therefore, they

are safer and more convenient to shop online [17]. On the other hand, online shopping allows for shopping abroad without the need to travel abroad [18].

Wide Selection: Furthermore, Online shopping brings together goods and shops from all over the country and even the world [19]. Buyers only need to search for the product they want to purchase, and the system will automatically push all the shops that sell this product. The number of options for the same product can reach tens of thousands. Buyers can then choose the most suitable one based on their needs and budget. People can also distinguish the quality of a product by reading reviews from sellers who have already purchased it, thereby ensuring that they can buy their desired item [20]. In addition, the development of online shopping has given rise to the industry of purchasing agents. Through bulk imports, the cost of imported goods is greatly reduced, providing buyers with more choices.

Affordability: Low price is also an important advantage for online shopping to attract a large number of users. For sellers, the difference between opening an online store and a physical store is that they can waive rental fees. Meanwhile, there is no need to hire store clerks, which can save labor costs. Therefore, the cost of rent and labor will not be included in the products, and the price of the products will naturally decrease. On the other hand, for buyers, online shopping only requires browsing and placing orders on their mobile phones, without having to go to physical stores, saving transportation expenses and thus reducing shopping costs.

Economy Promotion: In addition to providing various benefits to the public, online shopping can also promote the development of the social economy to a certain extent. The popularity of online shopping cannot be separated from the development support of industries such as digital marketing and logistics transportation. To meet the increasing demand for online shopping orders and customer service, these industries have also provided more job opportunities, promoting the healthy development of the domestic economy.

Celebrity Benefits: With the improvement of material life, people's lives have also developed towards entertainment, and idols created by various entertainment companies have become the objects they follow. And these idols have also become an advantage for online shopping. For example, the followers want to support an idol's career, so they enter his live streaming room and purchase the product he endorses or promotes, which is not what the fans themselves need, but only to improve their idol's performance. This can lead to two concepts, which are Static Shopping and Dynamic Shopping. The former is very easy to understand, which means that buyers search for the products they want to buy in the search box of shopping software and make decisions based on the displayed pictures and reviews. This is called Static Shopping. The latter is a relatively novel way of shopping. The formation process of dynamic shopping is more complex compared to static shopping, and each link is interactive [21]. And the behavior of supporting celebrities mentioned earlier is a typical example of dynamic shopping.

3.2 The State of Online Shopping

In recent years, many scholars have conducted extensive research and discussions on online shopping. Of course, different conclusions have also been drawn. Researchers hold their own opinions on whether online shopping is superior to offline shopping. This article focuses on the development and current state of online shopping in the China region.

Some scholars believe that the flourishing of online shopping is a benign development. Digitization provides consumers with higher quality and wider choices, increasing their happiness

index, this indicates that online shopping has replaced traditional shopping [22]. Moreover, the invention and popularization of lots of modern communication devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops have connected people to virtual digitization and continuously advanced towards the information age of providing services through big data [23]. Silpa et al. [24] proposed that “online shopping is one of the fastest-growing phenomena” and defined it as “a form of e-commerce that allows consumers to make purchases”. Therefore, online shopping must have very obvious advantages. Firstly, convenience is a very important reason why consumers choose to purchase goods online [7, 25]. In addition, being able to comprehensively understand the information, origin, and functions of products [26] and other customer reviews are also important reasons for supporting consumers in online shopping, as they can have a more detailed understanding of product information. This online live streaming shopping method has promoted the development of the digital economy and also facilitated the circulation of goods. More importantly, online transactions can avoid some force majeure effects, the most obvious of which is various pandemics, such as the Spanish flu (1918-1919), the Asian flu (1957-1958), the Hong Kong flu (1968), SARS (2002-2003), and the Swine Flu (2009-2010) as history reveals and the current pneumonia outbreak, Covid-19 [27].

The prominent feature of online shopping in China now lies in the fierce competition among various e-commerce platforms. Nowadays, online shopping platforms such as Taobao, JD.com, and Pinduoduo are very popular among consumers. As one of the first shopping apps to develop, Taobao has been leading the continuous development of e-commerce in China with its large market share. Later, through cooperation with major e-commerce hosts (such as Li Jiaqi), Taobao provided consumers with some discount mechanisms. The influence of these hosts on online shopping further drove the trend of online shopping. JD has taken a different approach by establishing its own stores, which have the advantage of fast shipping and receiving, while also providing consumers with peace of mind about the quality of its products, establishing its own competitive advantage. Pinduoduo, as a rising shopping platform, has created a unique way of purchasing through price wars by offering different products to consumers with different levels of consumption, resulting in a prominent price advantage.

3.3 Online vs. Offline Shopping

Traditional shopping began before civilization began. Under socially regulated conditions, people exchange or buy to obtain the items they want and need to live. This process can be viewed as early offline shopping [27]. Make offline shopping a shopping method that can be relied upon [18] by means of which the customer needs to be in the store to obtain the product and can inspect the physical object [28]. With the rise and development of digitalization, online shopping, as a form of e-commerce that allows consumers to purchase, provides consumers with products and services on the Internet [29]. Nevertheless, some scholars have also pointed out the drawbacks of online shopping. Some consumers believe that online shopping carries certain risks [30]. There are several reasons why they propose this viewpoint: Firstly, online shopping is a virtual shopping method where consumers are unable to see the actual product or touch or try it out with their hands, which leads them to worry that the physical item may not match the photo. In addition, some insincere businesses may maliciously beautify pictures and descriptions of goods to induce customers to place orders. In fact, customers receive goods that are not up to standard or do not meet their expectations [13]. And the impact of the rapid development of online shopping is not entirely positive. More consumers choosing online shopping means that offline shopping will become unpopular, leading to

more physical stores being forced to close down due to reduced sales and inability to pay high rent and labor costs, especially small and medium-sized individual shops. This seriously affects the development of the real economy. Although there has been a qualitative leap in e-commerce and digital service platform technology today, it has not yet reached a state of perfection, which has also given some criminals the opportunity to exploit loopholes. The main ways of online shopping in China are placing orders through live streaming or shopping apps, using electronic transactions for payment, and engaging in social interactions. Although it provides a shopping and trading platform for merchants and consumers, this electronic consumption model of online shopping has huge hidden dangers, such as personal information leakage, fund theft, and other phenomena. Instead of the social interaction behavior that exists in offline shopping, online shopping is only a unilateral consumption behavior of customers. Over time, excessive dependence on online shopping may lead to a decrease in social interaction, affecting personal social skills and quality of life. When using shopping apps, people can browse different online stores, compare prices and the properties and functions of various products. Therefore, compared to physical store shopping, online shopping improves shopping efficiency and saves time [31]. "Post purchase reviews" provide consumers with a channel to share their experiences, as well as convenience for those who have not yet purchased the product, reduced product return rates and improving consumer happiness [32]. Additionally, this is also beneficial for helping businesses establish a good reputation and credibility. Based on the dynamic shopping mentioned earlier, we can argue that live streaming e-commerce is also a novel online shopping method nowadays. When we are browsing Tiktok, big data will analyze and push you the live broadcast rooms of the anchors in some fields you are interested in. They encourage you to click into the live broadcast room to watch by setting captivating titles and covers. Therefore, sometimes you may not need these products very much or even be of no use to you, and you will still buy them because of the host's promotion or the recommendation of your favorite celebrity.

Although there are certain drawbacks to online shopping nowadays, it is undeniable that the progress of online shopping also represents the progress of human civilization, digitalization, and intelligence. Therefore, for a long time in the future, online shopping will be the main direction for consumers to choose their shopping methods. Meanwhile, experts and scholars have also proposed some measures to improve and solve this situation. For example, constantly innovating and improving product quality, reducing production costs, and striving to narrow the advantages of online shopping. Merchants should actively embrace new technologies and promote the digital transformation of the real economy. In addition, training should also be provided to employees to improve their quality, attract traffic to the store, and attract more customers through social media platforms and big data support.

4. Conclusion

This article first presents the current development status of online shopping and focuses on China as a country for analysis, as the collision between online shopping and offline shopping in Chinese society is representative. By listing the advantages of online shopping separately, the research objective is introduced: the factors that affect online shopping, in other words, the benefits of online shopping, while dialectically analyzing the existing drawbacks and solutions of online shopping. Due to the development of e-commerce, the development of online shopping has attracted much attention. This article evaluates online shopping in China and its influencing factors through literature review. The study found that the factors affecting online shopping can be divided into three categories. The most important point is the epidemic, as government control has forced people to

purchase goods online, which has had a mandatory impact on the development of online shopping. Secondly, online shopping also has significant advantages, allowing it to constantly follow the trend of the times and be favored by consumers. Finally, the digitalization trend of the overall environment, national policy support for e-commerce, and the development of e-commerce are also affecting the development of online shopping. The previous section compared online and offline shopping, and found that online shopping owners have irreplaceable advantages, such as being able to obtain goods without leaving their homes, even imported goods, which cannot be achieved by offline shopping. In addition, online shopping has an absolute price advantage, saving store costs and labor expenses, greatly reducing product costs, and is also an indispensable advantage for consumers. In future research, it is possible to combine typical national cases for analysis and study, such as comparing the similarities and differences in factors affecting online shopping between China and Australia. Or analyze the attitudes of consumers from different countries towards online shopping and the influencing factors that contribute to this difference. However, this article also has some limitations. For example, there is no specific age group for online shopping analysis, and comparative research is conducted on the habits and influencing factors of online shopping between minors and adults, or adults are divided into multiple categories such as youth, middle-aged, and elderly for comparative analysis. In addition, there has been no gender analysis, such as the similarities and differences in online shopping habits and influencing factors between men and women.

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