

Online shopping: risks and benefits

[Sociology](#), [Shopping](#)



There has long been a need for the consumer to purchase goods without ever having to leave their home. The industry started with mail order catalogs such as Sears Roebuck that offered consumers the convenience to order goods without having to travel a long distance to see what was available. The catalog offered everything from clothing to toys, and even farming equipment that made it easier for early American families to purchase goods without having to travel to a city possibly hundreds of miles away. The industry has come a long way since the golden years of the Sears catalog.

When the personal computer was invented in 1976 people were astonished at its power. After later development and the PC went on the market for all Americans to purchase, it couldn't do much more than word processing and simplified record keeping, but when the PC was connected to the World Wide Web in 1989, the personal computer began to become a household item. The World Wide Web or better known simply as the internet, allowed users to access files, information, pictures, video, shop online, and much more.

The internet connects a personal computer to servers which connect computers from all around the world. Despite danger, the benefits of online shopping can outweigh the risks. Ever since the invention of the personal computer and the World Wide Web, consumers have become more and more eager to shop online. Shopping online can give a great advantage to many people. Shopping online also has many risks and disadvantages that could arguably equal or outweigh the benefits. When parents spoke of going shopping 20 years ago, it meant get ready and get in the car.

Today, it can mean either to get ready to go somewhere or go to the computer and get your credit card ready. Most people shop online for the convenience. Customers never have to leave their home and can do all of their shopping from the living room couch, which eliminates crowds, stress and the forsaken checkout line. Another convenience is that a website cannot turn out its lights and lock the door. Online stores in the US and Canada are also always open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The customer never has to worry about getting to a store before it closes, or waiting for it to open.

This makes online shopping, to most people, the most convenient form of shopping (Hobbs). Another advantage of shopping online is that it allows customers to shop or browse through many different categories of items. The internet also allows people to shop from places located hundreds of miles away and even around the world. If someone needs something from across the country that is not available in their area, it is more efficient to order online rather than traveling a great distance to purchase the item (Hobbs).

Shopping online is also faster and simpler than using a mail order catalog. It is easy to find just about anything you want to buy online versus getting in a car and driving to numerous stores while having to worry about things like finding a parking spot, burning fuel, and navigating through traffic only to look at items you may or may not be interested in at a brick and mortar store (Fabiola). Online shoppers are also less susceptible to impulse items. Every item found in a retail store is strategically placed to maximize sales in that particular store (Romeo).

For example, at home watching television and all of the sudden the screen goes black because the dog just chewed the cable to the TV. A trip to the nearest retail store is required just to purchase a replacement cable.

Retailers often strategically place items with enticing prices which could easily lead to the customer coming home with a new TV and not a replacement cable that would have fixed your old one. This is a good example of impulse shopping. This is what retail stores want customers to do.

They fill end caps and stack-bases with products they know customers will buy if they are visible but are not a planned purchase. Shopping online takes most of that away. There aren't shelves to place impulse items on for customers to see on their way in or way out of the door. The customer can click on what they need, purchase it, and be finished. When customers shop online, it is far easier to compare prices at different online stores than it is to compare prices of retail stores. When shopping online one can browse seamlessly site after site and even tab between different online stores with just the press of a button.

When comparing prices from retail and outlet stores, it means looking at sales papers and going from store to store to hunt down that great deal which can consume a great deal of time (Hobbs). Many people have been skeptical about shopping online. With its benefits, also come great risks and disadvantages. One of the most common problems with shopping online is security. When purchasing an item off the internet, it is important to know that the site is secure (Snowdon). Personal information such as credit card

numbers, addresses, and even personal computers need to be protected from any type of threat.

There are sites that are built specifically just to phish information like email addresses, usernames, and passwords; therefore, when consumers want to make a purchase online, they really have to trust the site and know it is secure and that their information is not at risk. Another disadvantage of shopping online is that it is not a hands-on purchase. Customers like to see and hold what they are buying in person. When shopping online, there is an image of the product, but the box cannot be opened to be sure it isn't damaged.

When there is a picture of the item, it's more than likely not the exact one you will receive (Jessica). For example, when purchasing a scented candle or even a bottle of perfume online, it is impossible to test the scent. Some sites offer sample scent cards that can be sent through the mail to be sure you like what you are ordering, but they don't usually offer that unless you are making a large purchase. Frequent online shoppers know all about expedited shipping. This is one of the most dreaded downfalls of online shopping. When purchasing an item at a retail store, it goes with the customer when the transaction is complete.

The clerk puts the purchase in a bag and the customer walks out the door and goes home. When shopping online, there is almost never an instance where one can get the purchase the same day unless there is in-store pickup from a major retail store that's nearby with the item already in stock. Prices are usually cheaper online, but shipping cost always has to be factored in to

the total. Sometimes online merchants offer free shipping on items over a certain amount, but most likely the customer will have to pay some sort of shipping cost. Then, there is always the wait.

Depending on shipping specifications, delivery could be the next day if you pay extra, but usually shipping takes one to four weeks depending on the size of the item and the company who delivers it (Chits). I believe that online shopping will grow for years to come. It is getting safer and harder for hackers to break into online sites. Shopping online is more convenient for some items like electronics, car parts, office supplies, and other items that may just inconvenience someone to go out for or for an item that may not be available in your area, but I also believe that shopping online will never replace the old-fashioned retail store.

Customers will always want to try on their jeans to make sure they fit before they purchase them, and see what is new on the market every time they go out. People love to go out and shop. They love the experience, even though some people would disagree. But, how would you feel if you did all of your shopping online? Never going to a store and never seeing the actual item they are buying. You would get tired of sending things back and not getting what you thought you were buying. Online shopping is definitely a great shopping tool but all that glitters is not gold.