

**A Comparison of the Internet Viewing and Buying Habits
of University Students in Spain and the USA**

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Abstract

The Internet is a worldwide phenomenon which is transforming education, research, entertainment and commerce. The researchers sought to ascertain the length of time university students from the United States and Spain spent on the Internet, where the internet was accessed, the favorite sites, how often these sites were visited, what was purchased and the reasons for shopping online. Comparisons were made between the two countries and between genders were statistically significant differences were found.

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Introduction

The Internet intertwines with our daily work and personal lives. The proliferation of Internet based workplace applications; e-mail, social networking sites and the on-demand viewing of television shows and videos have literally changed the way we perform our jobs, interact with others, and spend our leisure time. These changes have made high speed service a ubiquitous commodity akin to electricity and have given birth to Internet business. E-commerce is a burgeoning industry which reached \$143 billion in 2009 (US Chamber of Commerce, 2010). By understanding what sites attract viewers and what categories of items are purchased on-line, strategies can be developed to tap into this nascent market.

Many studies have focused on the viewing habits of consumers in the United States, but there is scant research on the Internet viewing habits in other countries. The purpose of this paper is to examine the online viewing and buying habits of university students in Spain and compare them with USA students to determine how marketers and businesses can target this segment of online shoppers.

Literature Review

The internet is a useful tool for hundreds of millions of people literally from around the world. It is a part of everyday life we couldn't live without. This is especially true for university students who have grown up with the Internet being readily available for research, academic assignments, entertainment, email, and purchasing.

The “Social Network” Facebook is a worldwide phenomenon with over 800 million users, of which 75% are located outside of the United States (Facebook.com/2011). In addition, Facebook.com was cited as the top domain by average time spent viewing per month at an average of 1 hour and 45 minutes of viewing time per month (42% of European web users turn to internet for news, 2008).

Patrick Odell, surveyed US college students at eight institutions and found a difference in how males and females use the Internet. The data revealed 25% of males visited “Adult sites” where only 1% of females said they visited the same sites. Other differences found 49% of males used the Internet for gaming and music while only 26% of females for the same purpose. In addition, there was a difference in the average amount of time spent on the Internet by major. For instance, majors in Engineering, Computer Science, the Natural Sciences, and Business spent more time on the Internet than Humanities, Social Science, Education, and Communication majors (Odell, 2000).

A Harris Poll Conducted for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company found more than 75% of respondents felt connectivity brought them closer to people rather than distancing them. They cited the benefits of receiving news and information, sending and receiving e-mail, and looking for jobs. This is especially important since the Internet is a treasure trove for employment related sites. More than half of the students surveyed (54%) reported visiting career-oriented Web sites such as monster.com, myjobs.com, jobdirect.com, and headhunter.com to help launch their careers (The Web-Connected Generation, 2001).

Search firms that are trying desperately to compete with Google are continually refining their search algorithms to incorporate customer behavior and collectively apply that knowledge to provide results that are relevant and useful (Lovett, 2007). But, perhaps the largest niche

market is in gender specific web sites. In order to address the needs of this new population, Google has partnered with Glam Media, a female centric distributor of over 300 sites (Shields, 2007).

When the Internet was in its infancy in 1996, there were double the males on-line. In addition, the average income of this online population was an astounding \$62,000. Interestingly, by 2001, women had taken the lead to comprise 51% of online users. Furthermore, the average household income for the online population decreased to \$49,800, which was more representative of the country as a whole (Bryce, 2001).

While middle-aged Americans fondly remember a time before computers, today's college students literally grew up with them. A report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project found 20% percent of more than 2,000 college students surveyed in 2002 began using computers between the ages of 5 and 8 (Greenspan, 2003). In effect, these students had been using the Internet for ten years before they entered college!

College students are universally using the Internet. Ninety-three percent of college students accessed the Internet in a given month, and Jupiter Research expects this market to slowly swell from 15.2 million in 2003 to 16.4 million in 2007(Greenspan, 2003).

In a survey reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education (1999) students averaged about six hours online every week. However, these hours have increased significantly from 1999 to 2004. According to a recent study by the Stanford Institute for the Qualitative Study of Society (2004), the average Internet user spent 3 hours per day online. Further, the more educated the respondent was, the more time they were apt to be online. In addition, Howard (2006) found women spend an average of 58 hours per month on the Internet while men spend 67 hours per month.

For most businesses the Internet pot of gold is the ability to reach potential customers literally anywhere in the world. In 1998, Dolliver found 12 % of the general population has made purchases over the Internet while 51% of college students had made a purchase online. By 2000, student purchasing had risen to 81%. The most common items purchased were CDs (64 %), books (58 %), clothing (42 %) and concert/theater/event tickets (32 %) (Study shows college student Internet –savvy, 2000). In addition, students are becoming more sophisticated in their purchasing and have moved beyond music to banking services, concert tickets, apparel, entertainment products, cars, mortgages and appliances (Lester, 2005).

Shopping has often been considered a feminine activity. It has been estimated that women account for \$5 trillion in purchasing power. Since 2003 female Internet users have increased 19% as opposed to 12% for men (Howard, 2006). Further, women are now the dominant force on the Internet as they comprise 52% of web users. In a 1999 survey, 86% of women placed a high value on the Internet as a timesaving device, spending an average of nine hours per week online. Of new on-line users, 58% are women, with 42% percent of women online accessing the Internet at their workplace. This growth rate presents great news for advertisers because women account for more than 70% of household purchases (Tracy, 1999). However, Dholakia and Kuan-Pin (2003) found female college student shoppers were seen to be less technical, less spontaneous, and were not influenced significantly by product type, outlet type, or purchase purpose.

While large in numbers, specifically targeting these new customers may have additional challenges (Evans, 2006). Stark & Meier (2001) in a longitudinal study of usage and satisfaction levels of Internet shopping by college students found students purchasing over the Internet have nearly tripled during the past three years, from 20% to 55%, with the average dollar purchases

increasing from \$235 to \$471. More than 97% of the students reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their purchases.

A 2000 survey dealing with college students shopping preferences revealed 67% were willing to try new brands, 59% were budget conscious, 52% were brand loyal, 51% are very conscious of "their looks", 50% were willing to pay for quality, and 31% purchase the latest products (Targeting the college students just got easier, 2000). However, being comfortable with technology does not result in higher sales. Sorce (2005) found older shoppers searched for fewer higher priced products while their collegiate counterparts made numerous smaller purchases, but both had approximately the same value.

While technology adds speed and convenience it also substantially diminishes personal interaction that reduces customer loyalty and sense of relationships with the provider (Walker, 2005) (Newman, 2005). However, Internet purchasing continues to grow because of convenience, 24-hour availability, accessing information in a timely manner, and quick-response time (Stark & Meier, 2001). This level of convenience is further enhanced in isolated areas or in cases where the purchasers did not have transportation. For example, students on rural campuses, who did not have a vehicle, had a very positive attitude about shopping for apparel online (Yingjiao & Paulins, 2005).

Perhaps the major deterrent to success on the Internet is the issue of trust, which translates into fraud, theft and credit card abuse. In a survey of 2000 U.S. adults in October 1998, the major reasons given for not using online shopping are security concerns (71.6%), the inability to touch the merchandise (49.3%), not familiar with the online merchant (39.2%), and finding shopping too time consuming or difficult (23%) (Stark & Meier, 2001). While risk is an important determinate, a cross-national sample of 562 people from the United States, Canada and

U.K. found that satisfactory online purchasing reduced their amount of perceived risk (Ueltschy, 2004).

In European countries, the coming of broadband access encouraged online commerce. For example, about one third of customers who had this access were more likely to purchase items online. Conversely, another one-third of consumers felt there was no motivation for them to use the Internet for shopping. (2005, Broadband users most likely to shop and bank via the Internet). But this view has changed. Balmond (2006) cited the need for European brick and mortar retailers to continue introducing innovative formats if they are to stay one step ahead of their online rivals

Internet access was relatively slow to develop in Spain, but by 2014 is expected to increase 48% from 2009 levels (2010, Internet Access Industry Profile: Spain). Data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute states 63.6% of Spanish households with at least one person aged 16-74 had a computer in 2008 (2009, E-commerce) but, Garitaonandía, & Garmendia, (2009) in their study of 560 households who subscribed to a digital TV package found only 7.7% used of e-commerce.

In the entertainment realm, purchasing movie tickets online is now available (2010, Movietickets .com to provide online ticketing in Spain.) and it seems that Internet music piracy is a worldwide issue. However, the Spanish government has not issued a specific policy on the matter (Llewellyn, 2010).

Finally, in a comparison of online shopping in Spain and Japan, Martin et. al. (2009) found Spanish customers were more sensitive to the risks associated with shopping online.

Research Questions:

1. What is the length of time university students spend on the Internet?

2. Where do university students utilize the Internet?
3. What are the favorite sites visited by students?
4. How often do students visit their favorite sites?
5. What items are purchased online?
6. What are the reasons students purchase online?

Methodology

University students in the USA and Spain were asked to take part in an anonymous surveyed to learn more about their Internet viewing habits. Participation was voluntary and the results were confidential. A total of 882 usable responses were obtained. Results were entered into SPSS for analysis to see if any significant statistically differences emerged.

Results and Discussion

The respondents to this survey were predominantly undergraduate students between 20-24 years of age who did not work at any job. Females and Business majors were in the majority (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographics

		USA		SPAIN		TOTAL	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Female	393	56.5	117	62.6	510	57.8
	Male	302	43.5	70	37.4	372	42.2
	Total	695	58.6	187	41.4	882	
Ethnicity	African American	65	9.4	3	1.6	68	7.7
	Asian	10	1.4	1	0.5	11	1.3
	Caucasian	585	84.7	1	0.5	586	66.7
	Hispanic			144	77.0	144	16.4
	Other	31	4.5	38	20.3	69	7.9
						0	0.0
Age	< 20	68	9.8	12	6.4	80	9.1
	20-24	368	52.9	154	82.4	522	59.2
	25+	259	37.3	21	11.2	280	31.7
Education	High School	82	11.8	6	3.2	88	10.0
	College	527	75.8	37	19.9	564	64.0
	Graduate	86	12.4	143	76.9	229	26.0
Major	Business	283	42.2	151	81.6	434	50.9
	Education	121	18.1			121	14.2
	Other	154	23	31	16.8	185	21.7
	Not applicable	112	16.7			112	13.1
Employed	Not Working	226	32.6	118	63.8	344	39.2
	Part time	223	32.2	52	28.1	275	31.3
	Full time	244	35.2	15	8.1	259	29.5

1. What is the length of time university students spend on the Internet?

The largest percentage of Spanish students (27%) spent over 25 hours per week on the Internet. This group was nearly twice the size of students in the USA. Further, 54% of Spanish students spent at least 16 hours per week online vs 34% of USA students. This difference was affirmed by a Pearson correlation ($r = .185$ $p = .000$). Only 1% of Spanish students and 3% of USA students did not use the Internet at all. When viewing by gender students from each country spent similar amounts of time on the Internet and no statistically significant differences were found (see Table 2).

Table 2
Internet Usage Per Week in %

	Spain	USA
0 hrs per week	1	3
1-5 hrs	13	22
6-10	18	25
11-15	14	18
16-20	19	13
21-25	8	6
>25 hrs per week	27	15

	Spain		USA	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
0 hrs per week	2	0	4	1
1-5 hrs	15	12	25	19
6-10	18	16	24	25
11-15	15	12	17	19
16-20	17	23	12	14
21-25	9	6	5	6
>25 hrs per week	25	32	14	16

2. Where do university students utilize the Internet?

The overwhelming majority of students from both countries accessed the Internet from their homes. This finding infers a widespread penetration of home based service as the Internet appears to be a staple for the college going community. Using the Internet at the library ranked second and ranged from 37-54%. However, using the Internet at their place of employment ranked last, mostly due to the lower percentages of students who had full time positions or had positions which required the use of the Internet. Interestingly, the students in the USA utilized the Internet in a statistically significant manner more than those in Spain.

Table 3
Where Do Students Use the Internet

	Spain	USA	X ²	p
Home	76%	92%	37.2	.000
Work	21%	39%	19.4	.000
Library	37%	54%	16.7	.000

	Spain		USA	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Home	94	90	90	95
Work	19	36	39	38
Library	45	41	49	61

3. What are the favorite sites visited by students?

The top three sites for USA students were Facebook, Weather and Shopping while students from Spain favored Facebook, Music and Travel. Over half the students from both countries visited Facebook. A number of weak, but statistically significant differences were

found. For example, USA students more often viewed Gaming, Shopping, Sports and Weather while Spanish students more often viewed Chat, Music and Travel sites (see Table 4).

Table 4
Favorite Sites by Country

	Spain	USA	r	p
Adult (xxx)	6	8		
Chat	20	12	.099	.003
Employment	30	16	.144	.000
Entertainment	34	35		
Gambling	6	3		
Games	17	26	-.085	.011
Music	47	36	.096	.044
Facebook	57	56		
News	36	39		
Reference	18	25	.071	.035
Shopping	23	42	-.164	.000
Sports	26	35	-.079	.018
Travel	38	14	.257	.000
Weather	16	46	-.237	.000

When comparing by country and gender female students in Spain viewed were Facebook, Music, and Travel while USA females chose Facebook, Shopping and Weather. Males in Spain viewed Sports, News and Facebook while USA males preferred Sports, Facebook and Weather. Spanish females favored Employment, Music, Facebook, and Travel sites while males preferred Adult, Gambling, News and Sports in statistically significant manners. In the USA, females chose Shopping, Reference, and Travel while males preferred Adult, Entertainment, Gambling, Music and Sports (see Table 5).

Table 5
Favorite Sites
by Gender

	Spain		r	Sig	USA		r	Sig
	Female	Male			Female	Male		
Adult (xxx)	1	16	-.293	.000	2.5	13.9	-.214	.000
Chat	26	14			10.4	13.9		
Employment	37	21	.160	.028	18.1	14.2		
Entertainment	35	39			27.7	44	-.170	.000
Gambling	1	13	-.258	.000	0.3	7.3	-.195	.000
Games	15	24			21.4	31.5	-.114	.003
Music	56	40	.151	.040	32.8	40.1	-.075	.049
Facebook	70	46	.242	.001	54.2	59.3		
News	31	49	-.178	.015	36.9	42.7		
Reference	20	16			28.8	19.5	.106	.005
Shopping	27	19			51.7	28.8	.230	.000
Sports	8	60	-.568	.000	15.3	60.9	-.474	.000
Travel	47	29	.182	.013	16.5	9.6	.101	.008
Weather	19	13			46.6	44.4		

4. How often do students visit their favorite sites and is there a difference due to country or gender?

Over 80% of students from Spain and 73% of USA students visited their favorite sites at least once a day. In fact, over one third of Spanish students visited their sites more than once a day which were a statistically significant difference to the USA students.

Spanish Males were more apt to view their favorite sites daily while Spanish females were more likely to visit their sites 2-4 times per week. USA males were more likely to view their preferred sites more than once per day(see Table 6).

Table 6*How Often are Favorite Sites Visited*

	Spain	USA	X^2	sig
> Once a day	34 %	23%	8.36	0.004
Daily	48 %	50%		
2-4 week	13 %	18%		
Weekly	5 %	10%		

	Spain		X^2	sig	USA		X^2	sig
	Female	Male			Female	Male		
> Once a Day	38	26			20	27	5.22	0.022
Daily	42	62	6.53	0.011	51	49		
2-4 Times a Week	16	5	5.41	0.002	18	18		
Weekly	4	8			11	8		

5. What items are purchased online?

Travel was the most purchased category by a substantial majority of Spanish students followed by Accessories and Clothing. USA students purchased Books, Clothing and Music. Statistically significant differences emerged with Spanish students preferring Appliances and Travel services while USA students preferred Books, Clothing, Electronics (see Table 7).

Table 7*Items Purchased over Internet*

	Spain	USA	r	p
Accessories	26	32		
Appliances	38	6	.384	.000
Books	14	54	-.337	.000
Clothing	22	51	-.242	.000
Cosmetics	9	6		
Electronics	16	35	-.169	.000
Furniture	3	3		
Games	9	19	-.113	.001
Housewares	4	10	-.092	.006
Music	19	36	-.148	.000
Shoes	7	27	-.200	.000

Sports	5	23	-.193	.000
Travel	53	31	.194	.000
Video	3	15	-.148	.000

When examining the results by gender it was found Spanish females purchased Travel, Clothing and Music while Spanish males bought Travel, Accessories, and Clothing. Statistically significant differences were found with females who purchased Cosmetics while males bought Sports, Games and Accessories.

USA females select clothing, travel, and music while males preferred Books, Electronics and Music. Statistically significant differences were found with females who purchased Cosmetics, Housewares and Travel while males bought Sports, Games and Electronics (see Table 8).

Table 8

Items Purchased over Internet

	Spain		r	p	USA		r	p
	Female	Male			Female	Male		
Accessories	15	34	-.219	.003	32	32		
Appliances	2	9	-.164	.025	5	8		
Books	15	14			56	52		
Clothing	21	26			53	47		
Cosmetics	15	1	.215	.003	10	1	.192	.000
Electronics	12	26	-.177	.016	24	49	-.267	.000
Furniture	3	1			4	3		
Games	4	17	-.217	.003	12	27	-.186	.000
Housewares	3	4			13	6	.119	.002
Music	18	24			33	39		
Shoes	5	10			26	27		
Sports	1	11	-.239	.001	11	37	-.311	.000
Travel	58	51			35	25	.114	.003
Video	1	7	-.173	.018	12	18	-.075	.048

6. What are the reasons for purchasing online?

Students in Spain purchased items online due to finding a lower cost followed by the ability to shop at anytime while USA students shopped online primarily due to the ability of

shopping anytime followed by the desire to find items that weren't available locally and then those who used the Internet due to lower costs. Interestingly, shopping due to a friend's recommendation was the lowest factor. USA students cited the ability to shop anytime and the lack of items locally at a statistically significant manner.

When examining the results by gender, USA males preferred a lower cost while there were significant differences between Spanish students (see Table 9).

Table 9
Why Purchasing Online

	<i>Spain</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Lower Cost	47	45		
Ability to Shop Anytime	41	61	0.170	.000
Lack of Items Locally	9	49	0.341	0.000
Costly but Convenient	5	4		
Friends Recommendation	4	4		

	<i>Spain</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>USA</i>		<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>		
Lower Cost	46	57	none		36	56	-0.194	0.000
Ability to Shop Anytime	44	41			64	57		
Lack of Items Locally	11	7			46	53		
Costly but Convenient	3	7			4	3		
Friends Recommendation	3	7			3	4		

Conclusion

More than 75% of the students in Spain and 92% of USA students utilized the Internet at home. This finding signifies the high penetration of Internet services and its necessity for

education. Over half the students from both countries were on the Internet at least 11 hours per week with males being online slightly more than females. However despite their prolonged exposure, only Facebook reached over half the respondents from both countries of the survey. Spanish students visited Music sites second, but their viewing rate was ten points behind the behemoth social media site while USA students appear to be more engaged in Shopping and Weather sites. Even though Facebook was the most viewed site, in order to reach males, Sports sites were the top choice of males from both countries. However, since over 70% of these respondents visited their favorite sites at least daily, marketers can count on this level of consistency and customer availability.

Even though Spanish students spent much time on the Internet, much of the time was on Facebook with little purchasing with the exception of Travel services. It appears this study supports the findings of Garitaonandía & Garmendia, (2009) who found only 7.7% participated in e-commerce. In addition, the findings of Martin et. al. (2009) citing Spanish customers were more risk sensitivity to online buying.

While seeking a lower cost was the primary reason for Spanish students buying online, USA students valued the ability to shop anytime and the greater selection found.

Perhaps marketers should concentrate on social networking sites such as Facebook promotions and specials to get this group to purchase from them. The marketers may wish to stress the security and lack of risk. Also, to reach males, advertisements should be placed on Sports sites.

Future Research

Additional research could focus on how much they spend and the frequency of their purchases. In addition, the Internet viewing and buying habits of students in other countries could be compared with the respondents of this survey

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