

# Marketers' Understanding of Web Users

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## Abstract

This paper tries to analyze the understanding of marketers of the web users/customers. Online business has been intriguing the researchers, and hence an effort to frame some point of reference for the new entrants in the business. The marketers are the driving force of an organization and the study reveals that from their perspective, the web users use web mainly for communication and not for buying the products/services (as desired). The reasons for the same are various technical and non-technical problems like 'payment security', 'lack of touch and feel', etc.

## Introduction

Marketers are the think tank of any organization; they decide the course to be taken to reach the customers. Customers have been gaining a lot of ground for the last few years. With the advent of web, their hold has grown even stronger. They are no longer by-standers in the process; they make more decisions now as compared to the time of traditional business. Customers decide- the time to buy (now it is 24/7 as compared to showroom timings of 10.00a.m. to 8.00 p.m.), the payment mode (web stores offer the customer the choice of either paying by card or "cash on delivery" ; the place (for a brick and mortar store, place of delivery is the store but in case of a webstore, customers get the things delivered at their doorstep, promotion (one-to-one marketing has replaced mass marketing).

## Need and Objectives

With the stronger customer, and constant pressure of cutting costs and making profit, marketers task has toughened over the past few years. Web space being a new entrant, no predefined rules or theories apply, therefore an effort is made to establish benchmark by analyzing the viewpoint of marketers of customers and how they perceive web as a medium of exchange.

The paper analyses the perceptions of marketer regarding:

- The age group of customers using the web comfortably (in order to decide the target group)
- Customers' purpose of use of web and what helps them in deciding to buy online (understanding this objective, in order to decide, how to gain strong hold)
- Problems of websites and e-commerce

- How to get the customers to their website?

## Methodology

The objective of the research paper required the study of marketers, whose decisions and viewpoint mattered and hence the universe comprised of CEOs, Chief Marketing Officers and top level marketing professionals from the leading web sites.

Keeping into consideration the objectives of the study a structured questionnaire was prepared for the marketers. The questionnaire was framed based on intuition, previous literature, discussion with experts in the field and opinion and verdict of web gurus. All the questions were close ended.

A sample of 250 marketers of leading web sites was selected on the basis of judgment sampling. The questionnaire was pre tested on 5 marketers. Wherever possible, the data was collected in the first place by visiting the marketers in person. The remaining data was collected by sending emails requesting the marketers to respond and for this purpose, emails were sent to the remaining sites selected and finally 51 fully completed questionnaires were received after repeated reminders and persuasion. The 51 marketer respondents studied belonged to varied industries like, entertainment, computer, travel, books, clothing, consumer durables, etc. In this paper, the focus is on the particular section of the research, where Weighted average scores were calculated to analyze the ranks assigned by the marketers and also where likert scale was used.

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## Findings and Analysis

### 1. Comfort level of Various Age Groups in Surfing the Web

The comfort to surf the web is the initial step that would further lead to the next and final step on that matters for the marketer and that is buying on the web. The marketers were asked to rank the age groups of people who they feel are more comfortable surfing the web, as compared to the others (where rank one is for most comfortable,..... and rank four for least comfortable) and then WAS i.e. Weighted Average Score was calculated.

**Table 1: Comfort of Various Age Groups in Surfing the Web**

No. of respondents→ Age Groups ↓	Rank1	Rank2	Rank3	Rank4	WAS
15-25years	40 (78.43)	8 (15.69)	2 (3.92)	1 (1.96)	3.71
25-35 years	6 (11.76)	26 (50.98)	18 (35.29)	1 (1.96)	2.73
<15 years	4 (7.84)	14 (27.45)	19 (37.25)	14 (27.45)	2.16
>35 years	1 (1.96)	3 (5.88)	12 (23.53)	35 (68.63)	1.41

(figures in parenthesis show percentage)

Table 1 shows that the marketers feel that the people in the age group of 15-25 years are most comfortable surfing the web (WAS 3.71). It holds good the belief that younger generation adapts more quickly to change. This is followed by 25-35 years of age (WAS 2.73), this target group is important for the marketer because this is the age group that possesses credit card (being the most commonly used mode of online payment) and also the buying capacity. The age group of 25-35 years is mostly the working class and so they are pressed upon for time and ROTI (i.e. return on time investment) is provided by the web. Less than 15 years of age people are comparatively considered better (WAS 2.16) than greater than 35 years of age people (WAS 1.41)

because it is a psychological belief that as the age increases, the resistance to change also increases.

### 2. Use of Web

Customers use web for various purposes. In addition to being a medium of communication, it has other established uses as well like entertainment, research information and buying. Therefore, once the age group is identified, it becomes imperative to analyze for what purpose the web users surf the web.

Five most common uses were enlisted and the marketers were asked to share the significance that they feel the customers attach to the purpose of use of the web, on the five-point scale. For the purpose of analysis, weights ranging from five to one were attached, five for the response in case of Most Significant Use and one for Least Significant Use and based on that the WAS were calculated. The responses so obtained have been presented in Table 2

Table 2 shows that the marketers indicate that 'communication' is the main purpose people use the web for, followed by 'gleaning information about the products', 'research', 'entertainment' and 'buying of products and services'.

'Communication' (WAS 4.41) has wide implications, under the present circumstances; it basically stands for email/chat/social networking etc which takes place between family/friends. This is the initial level of communication people feel comfortable with, what follows next is the flow of communication between consumers and business, and that is the stage that would benefit the marketers. Twitter, facebook and other social networking sites have further added strength to web as a medium of communication. Communication based sites earn more revenue than their counterparts.

The presence of both online and offline structures has been highlighted by the fact that the marketers themselves

**Table 2: Use of Web**

No. of respondents→ Use of Web ↓	Most Significant Use	Significant use	Moderately Significant Use	Slightly significant use	Least Significant use	WAS
a) Communication	39 (76.47)	2 (3.92)	5 (9.80)	2 (3.92)	3 (5.88)	4.41
b) glean information about products/services	10 (19.61)	14 (27.45)	10 (19.61)	16 (31.37)	1 (1.96)	3.31
c) research	1 (1.96)	15 (29.41)	20 (39.22)	9 (17.65)	6 (11.76)	2.92
d) entertainment	0 (0)	19 (37.25)	11 (21.57)	17 (33.33)	4 (7.84)	2.88
e) buy products/services	1 (1.96)	1 (1.96)	5 (9.80)	7 (13.73)	37 (72.55)	1.47

(figures in parenthesis show percentage)



feel that the customers are more interested in gleaning information about the products/services (WAS 3.31) than they are in buying them (WAS 1.47). So the features of the products should be highlighted considerably in order to help the customer decide on the products/services that they want and finally they will end up buying them either online or offline. The sites of Universities, libraries, journals have attracted more than a few educationists and researchers and hence 'Research' (WAS 2.92) is ranked third. 'Entertainment' (WAS 2.88) i.e. games, movies news, etc are also ranked high because of the ease of availability. The analysis shows that the marketer feels that the customers have been using web, basically for 'communication' which is an encouraging feature, because eventually it will move substantially from being personal to professional i.e. between the marketer and the customer. Also, it is evident that the sites which excel in providing 'communication' facility are earning through the advertisements, because a large chunk of web traffic comes to them.

Marketers feel that though the customers do not buy on the web but the 'information about the products/services' does interest them more than 'entertainment' and 'research'.

### 3. Decisive Features to Buy through the Web

The marketers were asked to rank the features that they feel are important to the customers while buying on the web. Six such features were identified and enlisted and the marketers were asked to rank them from the view point of the customers, assigning rank one to the most important feature and six to the least important one, the WAS was calculated, to finally decide what is of most importance to the customers.

The table 3 shows the rank that all the respondents assign to the various necessary features that the web comprises of.

Table 3 shows that the marketers ranked 'low price' at one, followed by 'right quality', 'timely delivery', 'payment

security', 'reasons to trust business people' and 'a place to reach in case of difficulty'. The misconception holds true even today, the marketers feel that people surf the web to look for best bargains which they measure in terms of low price (WAS 4.14). To cater to this, many sites try to lure the customers by providing them low price for the products by mentioning both, the original and the reduced offer price. The marketer also understands that the 'right quality' (WAS 4.10) has to be combined with low price to give the best bargain to the customer and for some, who opted to compromise on quality to give a low price and earn a profit, had no standing anyway. The concern for 'timely delivery' (WAS 3.55) is thought to be a necessary feature of any service provided because the saving of time is the foremost thing that gets people to the web and delayed delivery would not satisfy the customer. 'Payment security' (WAS 3.22) is also considered to be of importance by the marketer because the customers interest are to be taken care of by the marketer only.

The marketer feels that the online presence serves the purpose and the customer would not be much interested in finding 'reasons to trust business people' (WAS 3.04) and they feel that the customers do not attach much significance to 'a place where they could reach them in case of difficulty' (WAS 2.96).

This analysis shows that the Marketers feel that the customers seek satisfaction in the form of 'low priced', 'high quality' product 'delivered in time' with a 'secured payment option'.

### 4. Problems Delaying the Take Off of Web as a Medium of Exchange

The marketers have been in business for sometime now and they realize that there are certain problems that the customers face when they come online. Eight such problems were identified and the marketers were required to provide the Agreement level that they attach to them, ranging from

**Table 3: Decisive Features to Buy through the Web**

No. of respondents → Features ↓	Rank1	Rank2	Rank3	Rank4	Rank5	Rank6	WAS
Low price	12(23.53)	9 (17.65)	15 (29.41)	8 (15.69)	3 (5.88)	4 (7.84)	4.14
Right quality	17 (33.33)	8 (15.69)	4 (7.84)	10 (19.61)	9 (17.65)	3 (5.88)	4.10
Timely delivery	1 (1.96)	15 (29.41)	13 (25.49)	10 (19.61)	6 (11.76)	6 (11.76)	3.55
Secure environment for making payment	6 (11.76)	10 (19.61)	5 (9.80)	7 (13.73)	14 (27.45)	9 (17.65)	3.22
Reasons to trust business people	12 (23.53)	4 (7.84)	5 (9.80)	4 (7.84)	5 (9.80)	21 (41.18)	3.04
A place to reach in case of difficulty	3 (5.88)	5 (9.80)	9 (17.65)	12 (23.53)	14 (27.45)	8 (15.69)	2.96

(figures in parenthesis show percentage)



**Table 4: Problems Delaying the Take Off of Web as a Medium of Exchange**

No. of respondents → Problems ↓	VS	S	NSNIS	IS	VIS	WAS
<b>Problems of moderate agreement level</b>						
a) lack of payment security	28 (54.90)	20 (39.22)	3 (5.88)	0 (0)	0 (0)	4.49
b) lack of touch and feel	22 (43.14)	21 (41.18)	5 (9.80)	3 (5.88)	0 (0)	4.22
<b>Problems of slight agreement level</b>						
c) ambiguous privacy policy	9 (17.65)	20 (39.22)	15 (29.41)	5 (9.80)	2 (3.92)	3.57
d) complicated ordering system	8 (15.69)	18 (35.29)	19 (37.25)	4 (7.84)	2 (3.92)	3.51
e) availability of everything from the nearest store	7 (13.73)	21 (41.18)	15 (29.41)	7 (13.73)	1 (1.96)	3.51
f) problem of after sales service	5 (9.80)	25 (49.02)	12 (23.53)	8 (15.69)	1 (1.96)	3.49
g) delayed delivery	4 (7.84)	25 (49.02)	12 (23.53)	9 (17.65)	1 (1.96)	3.43
h) hidden cost fear	1 (1.96)	18 (35.29)	19 (37.25)	12 (23.53)	1 (1.96)	3.12

(Figures in parentheses show percentage)

Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. For the purpose of analysis, weights ranging from five to one were attached, (5 for Strongly Agree ,.....and 1 for Strongly Disagree ) and based on that WAS were calculated and shown in Table 4. The table 4 shows the perceptions of the marketers regarding the problems exclusively confined to web as a medium of exchange and their respective WAS.

'Lack of payment security', (WAS 4.49), concerns the marketer the most because he also realizes that customers are deterred from buying online mainly because of payment security issues, customers are not comfortable using their credit cards (which is the most opted for mode of payment) , for the fear of losing their credit card number, 94.12 percent respondents agree to it.

Web provides customer with various benefits but there are certain aspects which cannot be sorted out, even by spending more (also known as non-technical limitations), one of them is 'touch and feel', i.e. this medium suffers from 'lack of touch and feel' problem, 84.32 percent marketers agree with it, (WAS 4.22). Products like clothes and durables owe their importance to the touch and feel and the web does not provide it.

Marketers have assigned high significance to the problem of 'ambiguous privacy policy' (WAS 3.57), 'complicated ordering system' (WAS 3.51) and 'availability of everything from the nearest store', (WAS 3.51) and 'problem of after sales service', (WAS 3.49). These problems are considered significant by the marketers but most of them are within the scope of work of the marketer except for the 'availability of everything from the nearest store' because that deals with the psychological aspect and needs unique offers with the products/services which are otherwise available every where.

Out of the problems enlisted, 'delayed delivery' and 'hidden cost fear' get the least WAS of 3.43 and 3.12 respectively. This is because the marketer feels that the customer understands that sometimes due to distances the delivery can be delayed and so they feel that it is not a big problem. Hidden cost fear also carries low weightage because they feel that it does not exist and even if it does, it is in a small proportion.

This analysis shows that the marketers feel that 'lack of payment security' and 'lack of touch and feel' are considered grave problems from the viewpoint of the customers. 'Ambiguous privacy policy' is considered a problem and hence a clear policy should be framed, which should not be a big task for the marketer. 'Complicated ordering system' has also been perceived to be a problem, therefore the marketers' effort should be to make the ordering system as simple as possible. The plan for 'after sales service' should be highlighted and the customer should be satisfied on these grounds. 'Delayed delivery' and 'hidden cost fear' are least relevant amongst the problems.

## 5. Modes of Reaching a Site

Once the demographic profile of the customers have been understood , their areas of interest and problems analyzed, the marketers then chalk out the plan to get the customers to their website.

There are so many ways in which the customer can be reached today. An effort was made to enlist the sources and the marketers were required to rank first four of them in order of their use made by the customer. In this case also, rank one was to be given to the most frequently used source and 4 to the least used. Only the first four preferences were to be ranked because it is believed that customers would reach them through the first four choices or will not reach



**Table 5: Modes of Reaching a Site**

No. of respondents → Modes ↓	Rank1	Rank2	Rank3	Rank 4	No Rank	WAS
Search engine	23 (45.10)	8 (15.69)	11 (21.57)	6 (11.76)	3 (5.88)	2.82
Word of mouth	16 (31.37)	15 (29.41)	9 (17.65)	5 (9.80)	6 (11.76)	2.59
Email	2 (3.92)	4 (7.84)	13 (25.49)	14 (27.45)	18 (35.29)	1.18
Print ads	4 (7.84)	7 (13.73)	5 (9.80)	9 (17.65)	26 (50.98)	1.10
Random surfing	1 (1.96)	7 (13.73)	9 (17.65)	11 (21.57)	23 (45.10)	1.06
TV, radio, etc	4 (7.84)	6 (11.76)	1 (1.96)	4 (7.84)	36 (70.59)	0.78
Banner ads	1 (1.96)	2 (3.92)	1 (1.96)	2 (3.92)	45 (88.24)	0.27
Email magazines	0 (0)	1 (1.96)	2 (3.92)	0 (0.00)	48 (94.12)	0.14

(figures in parenthesis show percentage)

them. More over one cannot assign proper ranks to eight variables.

The table 5 shows the rank that the marketers assign to each of the eight options, only first four preferences were to be given. WAS were also calculated and are shown in the table.

In most of the cases the marketers feel that 'search engine' would bring the customer to their web sites (WAS 2.82). Marketers also realize that 'word of mouth' carries a lot of importance for the Customer (WAS 2.59) i.e he realizes that the customers should be satisfied in order to spread a good word of mouth and hence attract more customers in return.

Though not very closely but 'email' follows next because it is one of the most widely used mode of communication, (WAS 1.18). Marketers feel that print ads (WAS 1.10) also get customers to their site.

This analysis shows that marketer feels that 'search engines' are a preferred mode of locating a web site, the customers would rather type a search word than anything else. 'Search engine' is followed closely by 'word of mouth', which has to be a good word of mouth and for that the marketers need to satisfy the customer. With more and more people joining twitter, orkut, the word of mouth travels even faster

e.g. "My Name is Khan" got into a controversy before its release, and was discussed heavily on these websites, the result was record opening at the box office. Marketers feel that the 'links on the emails' also help the customer in reaching the desired web sites but this should not be taken as a plea to 'email spamming' which immensely disgusts the customer. Thus judicious use of email should be made. 'Print ads' follow next in the priority of the marketers as a source of driving the customer to their sites. The marketers feel that the customers rarely use T.V., radio, banner ads and E mail magazines for reaching a desired web site.

## 6. Problems on the Web Sites

The marketers understand that customers move to web because of the value features it provides, i.e. ease of availability, saving of time, relevant information at the click of the mouse, (or 'touch' now), etc. There exist certain features related to a web site which should be avoided because given those features, the customer is bound to get disillusioned. An effort was made to identify the problems related to a web site that the customers do not approve of. Five important problems were identified and it was assumed that all the problems are significant from the viewpoint of the customers. The marketers were to assign them significance from Most Important.....Least Important, (weights were attached to them ranging from one for the most significant problem, ..... and five for

**Table 6: Problems on the Web Sites**

No. of respondents → Problems ↓	Most Important	Important	Moderately important	Somewhat Important	Least Important	WAS
a) Slow downloading	25 (49.02)	19 (37.25)	5 (9.80)	1 (1.96)	1 (1.96)	4.29
b) irrelevant content	20 (39.22)	14 (27.54)	15 (29.41)	0 (0)	2 (3.92)	3.98
c) too many advertisements	4 (7.84)	6 (11.76)	9 (17.65)	25 (49.02)	7 (13.73)	2.51
d) missing links	0 (0)	10 (19.61)	16 (31.37)	12 (23.53)	13 (25.49)	2.45
e) lesser links	2 (3.92)	3 (5.88)	5 (9.80)	14 (27.45)	27 (52.94)	1.80

(figures in parenthesis show percentage)



the least significant one) and the WAS was calculated.

Table 6 shows the percentage of marketers assigning different significance and WAS.

The results shown in table 6 reveal that, 'Slow downloading due to big graphics', is what marketers feel disgusts the customers the most, (WAS 4.29). Return on time investment is what attracts the Customers to the web and they do not want to waste time.

'Irrelevant Content', (WAS 3.98), follows next because if the Customer comes to seek some information and he does not find the same on the site of the marketer, then he is bound to get annoyed.

'Too many advertisements', WAS 2.51, are a problem too because they also hinder the best utilization of time and space for the customer. 'Missing links', WAS 2.45, and 'lesser links', WAS 1.80 follow next.

The analysis shows that the marketers feel that all the problems enlisted are of significance to the customer except 'lesser links' on the site. They feel that 'slow downloading' of the site poses the biggest problem for the customers because they want ROTI i.e. return on time investment. 'Irrelevant content' also denies the same right of ROTI to the customers. It is a good sign that the marketers realize that these problems are significant and hence would work in this direction. 'Too many advertisements' and 'missing links' problems have to be catered to by the marketers. But the problem with 'too many advertisements' is that, as long as the marketer gets those advertisements, they cannot do without them since selling on the web is yet to gain momentum and 'advertisements' bring them revenues. 'Missing links' are more often attributed to 'low connectivity' or some other technical problem, rather than the fault of the marketer.

## Conclusions

The marketers' viewpoint towards various aspects of e-commerce has been studied. From their perspective, the younger age group (15-30 years) surf the web comfortably but mainly for communication and product information. The web users are least interested in buying online but seeking product related information (mainly for comparative shopping) is a positive sign which may ultimately lead to buying. The problem of 'payment security' has been rated as the biggest problem, the marketers understand that it needs to be sorted out. The marketers feel that since search

engine is the most used tool to reach to any website, "Search engine optimization" strategies would come in handy in getting customers to their website, where they would provide them with a fast website and relevant content along with product/ services of high quality at a lower price. Therefore the lessons for the new entrants are

"The new entrants in this domain should come out with the products/ services for 15-35 year old people. Provide them with lot of product related information (along with comparisons with related products, if possible). Website should be attractive but not heavy, should have only relevant content. Water-tight 'payment security' or else give them the option of 'cash on delivery'."

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