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Julie Francis

*University of Wollongong*, [jfrancis@uow.edu.au](mailto:jfrancis@uow.edu.au)

Lesley White

*Macquarie University*

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### Abstract

While there is a substantial body of literature relating to the activities of Internet marketers and the technology which drives E-Commerce, less attention has been given to consumer oriented research. To partially address this gap in marketing knowledge, a preliminary model of quality determinants in Internet retailing has been developed in this paper. In-depth interviews with 14 experienced Internet shoppers provided the data that was used to develop the model. Respondents discussed what they expected from Internet retailers and the quality of service that they have received. The analysis of results indicated that inherent differences between traditional and Internet environments increased the significance of some quality dimensions, resulted in the merging of others, and introduced new issues which were not accounted for by SERVQUAL. The resultant model identifies six potential determinants of quality; web site, product offering, company information, transaction system, product possession, and interaction with the firm.

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# A MODEL OF QUALITY DETERMINANTS IN INTERNET RETAILING

*Julie Francis, University of Wollongong, Australia*  
*Lesley White, Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Australia*

## ABSTRACT

While there is a substantial body of literature relating to the activities of Internet marketers and the technology which drives E-Commerce, less attention has been given to consumer oriented research. To partially address this gap in marketing knowledge, a preliminary model of quality determinants in Internet retailing has been developed in this paper. In-depth interviews with 14 experienced Internet shoppers provided the data that was used to develop the model. Respondents discussed what they expected from Internet retailers and the quality of service that they have received. The analysis of results indicated that inherent differences between traditional and Internet environments increased the significance of some quality dimensions, resulted in the merging of others, and introduced new issues which were not accounted for by SERVQUAL. The resultant model identifies six potential determinants of quality; web site, product offering, company information, transaction system, product possession, and interaction with the firm.

## BACKGROUND

A prerequisite to delivering service quality is to define, measure, and manage its components. In Internet retailing, a number of challenges increase the complexity of this task. To date, limited attention has been given to the development of empirically driven models and theories which can be used by Internet retailers (Gronroos, Heinonen, Isoniemi, and Linholm 2000; O'Keefe, O'Connor, and Kung 1998). Rather, the majority of Internet related literature tends to be either theoretical in nature or focused on a specific issue which may be one of many contributing factors in quality evaluations, such as the Web site design or information content. The situation is understandable given the rapid rate of growth and change in this relatively new field of marketing. However, with reports of low returns on Internet marketing investments (Nua Ltd. 2000a) and suggestions that online customer loyalty is low (Nua Ltd. 2000b), it is imperative to work towards amalgamating Internet related knowledge within a service quality framework.

When addressing this situation, three key issues warrant consideration. Firstly, it is pertinent to consider the extent

to which Internet related literature, in general, provides insight into the consumer's perspective. Exploring the differences between traditional and Internet retailing raises the concern that traditional models of service quality may not capture the full spectrum of determinants which are relevant to Internet shopping. And thirdly, acknowledging the global nature of Internet retailing creates the need to consider inter-cultural perspectives of quality. Each of these issues will be discussed in order to refine the research problem and justify the current investigation. The exploratory research method will then be described and the results reported. A discussion of these results will introduce the preliminary model of quality determinants in Internet retailing and provide direction for further research. Finally, the research conclusions will highlight that a subsequent investigation, which is based on these results, is warranted.

## Internet Consumers Perspective

Of the 6.4 million Australian adults who accessed the Internet during the twelve months to May 2000, an estimated 802,000 individuals, or 12.5 percent of users, ordered goods or services over the Internet for private use (Australian Bureau of Statistics data; ABSb 2000). Compared to the previous corresponding twelve month period (ABSa 1999), this represents an increase of 23 percent in the number of individuals who purchased products online. While demonstrating growth, the ABS data introduces the need to distinguish between Internet *users* and Internet *shoppers*. A review of demographic characteristics revealed that the sub-group of users who shopped online during the twelve months to May 2000 was not a representative sample of all Internet users. For instance, where 18–24 year olds were the most highly represented group of Internet users, they were only the third most likely demographic to shop online (after 25–39 year olds and 40–54 year olds).

The extant literature focuses largely on an analysis of web sites, their benefits, and technical features. In addition to the majority of practitioner oriented text books, numerous sources provide reviews or content analysis of commercial Web sites (e.g., Hamill 1997a, 1997b; Klein and Quelch 1997; Perry and Bodkin 2000; Pitta 1998; Raman and Leckenby 2000). For example, Perry and Bodkin

(2000) provide a content analysis of Fortune 100 company Web sites. The categories of features investigated included product, price, and company information, advertising, sales promotions, and public relations as well as the use of visual images and navigation tools. The researchers commented “. . . that many companies have only a naive appreciation for the information requirements of customers . . .” (p. 93) and reasoned that technology use decisions appear to be driven mainly by the desire to imitate competitors.

Importantly, few reports offer any diagnosis of the relationship between technology use and the number of online purchases made by consumers (O’Keefe, O’Connor, and Kung 1998). Of relevance to the current investigation is that the reports rarely specify whether the technology use decisions are grounded in consumer research or based solely on the theoretical perspectives of marketers and technology developers. While the views of industry experts are undeniably warranted, a lack of consumer orientation creates the potential for an undesirable discrepancy between consumer expectations and management’s perception of those expectations. As such, content analysis of Web sites that are designed on theoretical grounds may provide only a limited indication of the determinants of consumer perceived quality.

A number of investigations have provided insight through the analysis of Web site use statistics. For example, Dholakia and Rego (1998) investigated the relationship between Web site features, hit rate and duration of visit statistics as well as the number and frequency of changes made to the Web site. However there are significant limitations inherent in studies which rely predominantly on Web site use statistics. For instance, the analysis of hit rate data is limited in its capacity to ascribe the proportion of attention, interest, and liking which should be attributed to the Web site versus the product or brand promoted within it. Furthermore, hit rate and duration of visit data is restricted in its capacity to distinguish between Internet shoppers and the more prevalent group of non-shoppers. And finally, conclusions based on the analysis of isolated aspects of observable online behaviour provide limited insight of consumers’ overall perceptions of quality and levels of satisfaction.

#### **Service Component of Internet Retailing**

A key difference between Internet and traditional retailing is the nature of service encounters. Amidst the attention which is devoted to the capabilities and use of enhanced interactive Web site features, a number of basic service encounter requirements may be overlooked. For

instance, criticisms of Internet retailers may include the inability to contact retailers via e-mail (Nua Ltd. 1999b), failure to provide pre-sales or purchase assistance (Nua Ltd. 1999a) and an inability to conduct transactions online (O’Keefe, O’Connor, and Kung 1998). While reviews and content analysis of Web sites can provide statistics regarding the proportion of retailers who neglect these areas, few studies have attempted to investigate the impact of these service failures on consumers (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner 2000).

Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) highlight that current marketing literature tends to focus on the interpersonal dynamics of traditional service encounters with far less attention being devoted to Self Service Technology (SST) encounters, such as the use of ATM’s, the Internet and telephone banking. The researchers conducted a critical incident study where an online survey was used to collect information regarding a memorable incident involving the use of SST. Over 800 useable data sets provided information regarding either a positive or negative technology based service encounter. The reports were subsequently analyzed to identify the primary source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Whilst the analysis did not segregate Internet interactions from other forms of SST’s, the results provide a valuable contribution to the current investigation.

The primary sources of satisfaction were found to be “Solved Intensified Need” (11%), “Did Its Job” (21%), and “Better Than The Alternative” (68%). The ability of SST to solve an intensified need involving a sense of urgency or acute problem was attributed to access availability and/or extended hours of operation that provided a solution to problems, such as requiring cash, in unexpected circumstances or locations. In relation to “Did its Job,” for 21 percent of participants, the key source of satisfaction was surprise or fascination with the fact that the technology worked. The researchers suggested that as the novelty factor wears out and customer expectations change over time, the experience of ordering a product online then actually receiving it, may not attract the same level of customer satisfaction.

The cases where SST’s provided benefits over non-SST alternatives (68%) were divided into six sub-categories. Time savings, which accounted for the source of satisfaction in 30 percent of cases, included obtaining information online more quickly than via the mail and avoiding time spent waiting in queues. Easy to use procedures, such as online ordering systems with clear instructions were mentioned in 16 percent of cases. For 8 percent of participants, the convenience of fulfilling needs at any

time of the day or night provided a source of satisfaction. Unlike the previously mentioned intense needs, this category relates to more routine or foreseeable needs, such as pre-purchase product information search or parcel tracking. Financial incentives associated with the use of SST's were the primary contributor to satisfaction in 6 percent of cases. These incentives included using the Internet to search for the least expensive product and obtaining price reductions for purchasing products via an SST option. The flexibility to obtain services from various location options, such as home, the office, or on the road, was a key factor amongst 5 percent of the satisfied participants. Avoidance of pushy or inefficient sales personnel accounted for 3 percent of the satisfying incidents.

The sources of dissatisfaction were found to be "Technology Failure" (43%), "Poor Design" (36%), "Process Failure" (17%), and "Customer Driven Failure" (4%). Technical failures and breakdowns, which accounted for the highest proportion (43%) of dissatisfying incidents, included the inability to log on to an online broker and unserviceable ATM's. The second largest category, Poor Design (36%), was segmented into technology design (17%), and service design (19%). In this category the technology functioned as required. However an element of the service design, including SST usage charges and lack of information regarding the firm's rules and regulations, created a source of dissatisfaction for 19 percent of participants. The remaining 17 percent in this category were dissatisfied with a technical design issue such as the complex or time consuming nature of using the technology as well as a lack of clear instructions for use.

Process failures, or breakdowns in the service delivery after the customer-technology interaction, accounted for 17 percent of the negative incidents. This category included problems with product delivery and billing errors. Lengthy time spans between the initial interaction and the customer becoming aware of the problem heightened the impact in some cases. The final category encompassed situations where 4 percent of participants accepted responsibility for their role in the dissatisfying outcome, such as forgetting their password or PIN number. In discussion of the results, Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) comment that the issue of recovery from service failure was conspicuous by its absence. Where recovery is a source of satisfaction, and failure to recover is a source of dissatisfaction, in traditional service encounters, the issue was not raised in the SST study. The researchers suggest that many SST firms have not developed effective recovery strategies and are missing opportunities to appease their dissatisfied customers.

## Cultural Issues

By its nature, the Internet automatically places electronic retailers in a wide variety of international markets simultaneously and thus raises the issue of intercultural differences in the perception of quality (Eriksson, Majkgard, Sharma 1999; Imrie, Durden, and Cadogan 2000; Strauss and Mang 1999). Concerned with the lack of research relating to the provision of service in international markets, Knight (1999) reviewed all articles published in 31 academic journals during the period of 1980 to 1998. The researcher found that the majority of articles reported on highly specific issues, industries or locations and that there was a prevailing absence of research pertaining to the development of theories and models which could be generalized to international services. Furthermore, Imrie, Durden, and Cadogan (2000) highlight that the conceptualization of Service Quality has developed from a predominantly North American and European perspective. These researchers examined inter-cultural differences in the evaluation of service quality. Empirical evidence from cross-cultural studies was cited to illustrate the possibility that international markets, such as Asia, may assess quality on different criteria (e.g., Buttle 1996; Llosa, Chandon, and Orsingher 1998; Malhorta, Ulgado, Agarwal, and Baalbaki 1994).

Strauss and Mang (1999) focused on the changes in culture bound expectations over time. They found that consumers with the same cultural background as the service provider placed higher expectations on the provider to conform to local standards and practices. That is, in same culture interactions the zone of tolerance for deviation between expected and perceived quality was small. By contrast, when dealing with a foreign service provider, consumers initially made greater allowances for deviation. For example, a German customer of a Japanese provider was more tolerant of service gaps which could be attributed to cultural differences. However, the zone of tolerance for inter-cultural differences was found to diminish as the number of cross-cultural encounters experienced by the consumer increased.

The background literature suggests that there is a need to develop a richer understanding of how consumers evaluate quality in Internet retailing. At the same time however, limitations associated with existing Internet retailing knowledge may inhibit comprehensively identifying the issues which warrant investigation. Subsequently, it was considered necessary to perform a preliminary examination of the Internet shopper's viewpoint. Specifically, it was considered pertinent to explore the Internet consumer's expectations and experiences, examine the

relevance of traditional quality determinants to the Internet environment in addition to comparing perceptions of local and overseas based Internet retailers. The objectives of performing such an investigation were to establish a preliminary model of the quality determinants in Internet retailing. In turn, the preliminary model would provide the foundation for conducting a comprehensive investigation.

## METHOD

Given the exploratory nature of the research, qualitative research was considered to be the most appropriate. In depth one on one interviews were conducted based on an interview guide using open ended questions. To qualify for participation in the study, prospects were required to have made at least one Internet purchase in the previous twelve months. Given that the proportion of Australians who have purchased products online in the previous twelve months is relatively low (6%, ABS 2000), selecting participants from a random sample of the population would have yielded an inadequate number of useable data sets. Therefore, a convenience group was chosen from self selected respondents to an emailed invitation to participate in the study. All respondents were employed as either university academic or general staff.

The subsequent sample of 14 participants included 6 males and 8 females, of which 2 were non-Australian (1 Bosnian, 1 American). One participant was under 25 years of age, 5 were 25–35 years and 8 were 35–45. Six participants were classified as Experts (E) on the basis of working, lecturing, or consulting in the area of marketing and/or information technology. The remaining 8 participants were classified as Consumers (C).

Preliminary information was gathered regarding the respondent's purchase behaviour as well as the cost and types of products purchased. Respondents were then asked questions regarding their expectations with various aspects of the Internet purchasing process and their satisfaction with the performance of Internet retailers. They were then asked to rank Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1985) ten determinants of quality with respect to the Internet retailing context and separately for traditional retailing. Finally the discussion was directed to international issues, including any perceived differences between Australian and overseas Internet retailers.

## RESULTS

### Key Expectations

Speed and reliability of product delivery was the most frequently mentioned expectation (N = 6; E = 2, C = 4)

followed by detailed product and/or company information (N = 5; E = 3, C = 2). Interestingly, while security was mentioned by 5 participants (E = 3, C = 2), 1 Expert stipulated that their comment was "based on knowledge" [of consumer perceptions] while the two Consumers who raised the issue did so in order to state that they were not concerned about it. The actual transaction process was raised by four Consumers who felt that Internet retailers should provide a transaction system which is easy to understand and provides feedback at each stage in the process. One Consumer who dislikes having to learn a new system for each retailer suggested that firms should standardize the process. None of the Experts raised this issue.

Additional issues which were raised included the ease of obtaining e-mail addresses and the firm's responsiveness to e-mails (E = 2), after sales service (E = 1, C = 1), financial benefits from Internet firms (E = 2), reputation of the firm (N = 2), shopping cart and wish list facilities (C = 1) and product uniqueness (C = 1). Whilst only 1 participant specifically mentioned that they expect Internet retailers to provide unique products, a large proportion of the participants appeared to have been motivated to purchase goods online because of the product uniqueness. That is, whilst a number of purchases were made online because it was more convenient than visiting a physical store, a large proportion of purchases were made because the product was not available in physical stores (e.g., car parts, special sized clothing, collectors items, literature, and software which are not carried in Australian stores).

### Satisfaction with Internet Retailers

Participants felt that, more often than not, Internet retailers met their expectations. Whilst generally quite happy with the service, eight participants described situations in which their expectations had not been met. These incidents related to delays in receiving the product, slow responses to e-mails, problems with the online ordering system, the online product range not matching the physical outlet range and web sites that didn't offer the promised facilities.

Four participants believed that the service failure they encountered would not have occurred in a face-to-face situation. One participant clarified that in a physical store you can just go in and demand service where as on the Internet you rely on them to read and reply to your e-mail. This was an interesting comment given the Internet is supposed to empower the customer. Of the remaining participants who had experienced a service failure, one felt that the proportion of Internet and physical store retailers "getting it right" was about the same and added

that "inadequate service is inadequate service no matter what the medium." Another commented that people seem more forgiving of Internet service failures saying "If you went to a physical store and they kicked you out and closed the door, you'd get pissed off, but on the Internet, if the system crashes you'd come back later."

**Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's 10 Quality Determinants**

When asked to rank the importance of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1985) 10 determinants of quality in an Internet retailing context, a number of participants expressed that the task was either difficult or unrealistic. The comments made included that some of the determinants didn't really apply, others should be combined and some issues were not covered. Internet and Service Quality knowledge appeared to hinder one Expert from making judgments. In this case the task became quite time consuming and the participant did not rank all of the determinants. Two Consumers also failed to provide a ranking for each determinant. After completing this task participants were asked to rank the importance of each determinant whilst imagining a traditional retailing situation. Given the small number of accurately completed response sets, results were analyzed by recording the number of times each determinant was ranked amongst the three most important and three least important deter-

minants. There were no significant differences between the rankings of Experts and Consumers.

**Other Quality Determinants**

When asked if factors other than the 10 determinants were used to determine quality in Internet retailing, various participants suggested the level of technology being used, aesthetic or entertainment value of the web-site, cost/price of products, range of products available, delivery mechanism, and ease of navigation.

Respondents were then prompted on other possible determinants of Quality (access to web-site, the transaction process, delivery and contacting Internet retailers). Regarding access to a web site, 11 participants said they would try again later if unable to access a retailer's web-site. One participant stated "I understand that sites crash from time to time" while others raised issues such as product uniqueness, lack of available alternatives, the inconvenience of physical stores and loyalty as reasons for returning. One participant specified that if they could not access the web-site on the first visit they would not try later. Only three participants discussed competitors' Web-sites or physical stores as an alternative.

Ten participants stated that they had not encountered any problems with the transaction process. Of these, one

**TABLE 1**  
**Frequency of Ranking Amongst the Three Most and Least Important Determinants**

Internet Retailing			Traditional Retailing		
Determinant	3 Most Important	3 Least Important	Determinant	3 Most Important	3 Least Important
Reliability	10	0	Understanding	7	1
Security	7	1	Access	5	3
Credibility	5	0	Communication	5	3
Responsiveness	5	0	Courtesy	4	0
Access	5	3	Reliability	4	2
Communication	5	4	Credibility	4	4
Understanding	2	4	Competence	2	5
Competence	0	6	Security	2	7
Courtesy	0	10	Tangibles	2	9
Tangibles	0	11	Responsiveness	1	2

participant added that even if they had, it would not deter them as problems can happen anywhere. Another explained that while they minimize the risk of fraud by using a credit card which only has a \$500 limit, they are actually more concerned about misuse of their personal information. Three participants had encountered system failures midway through placing an order which resulted in either a double order or uncertainty about the order. In each case the individual e-mailed or phoned the firm and was satisfied with the resolution. One participant had personally encountered a situation of credit card fraud which had been satisfactorily resolved by the credit card company and they had not contacted the retailer in question. Participant loyalty to a small number of well established brands and comments about avoiding unfamiliar transaction systems should be noted when considering these favourable responses.

With respect to delivery, when asked if they had received products by the expected time, nine participants reported "yes" and five "mostly yes." Of the delay examples provided, three of the five were from Amazon.com. However, the delays did not deter future purchases. One participant said that the tracking facilities keep you informed, another accepted the potential for delay when ordering from overseas while the third stated that there was no alternative. The participant who had experienced a very lengthy delay due to a stock-out has since used the same firm again and commented that delivery, overall, has improved now that couriers deliver outside of office hours. The fifth participant who had experienced delays attributed the problem to couriers. Only three participants had returned products and each were happy with the resolution. A further three had thought about it but decided it would be too difficult or not possible. Two participants had successfully changed an order although one was not able to do so immediately.

All but one participant had contacted an Internet retailer either by phone or e-mail in the past. Of the four who used the phone, one complained of being repeatedly transferred until finally obtaining the name and e-mail address of a person. Two others reported that they were pleased to discover they could contact service staff by phone, after hours. Of the nine participants who had made contact via e-mail, three complained about lengthy waiting periods and/or not receiving a reply while another was critical of pre-format auto-response replies. The six participants who were satisfied used descriptives such as prompt, reliable, or personal in their responses. An overall, general impression that participants needed to feel as though they could communicate with a "real person" who had a name seemed to emerge.

## International Issues

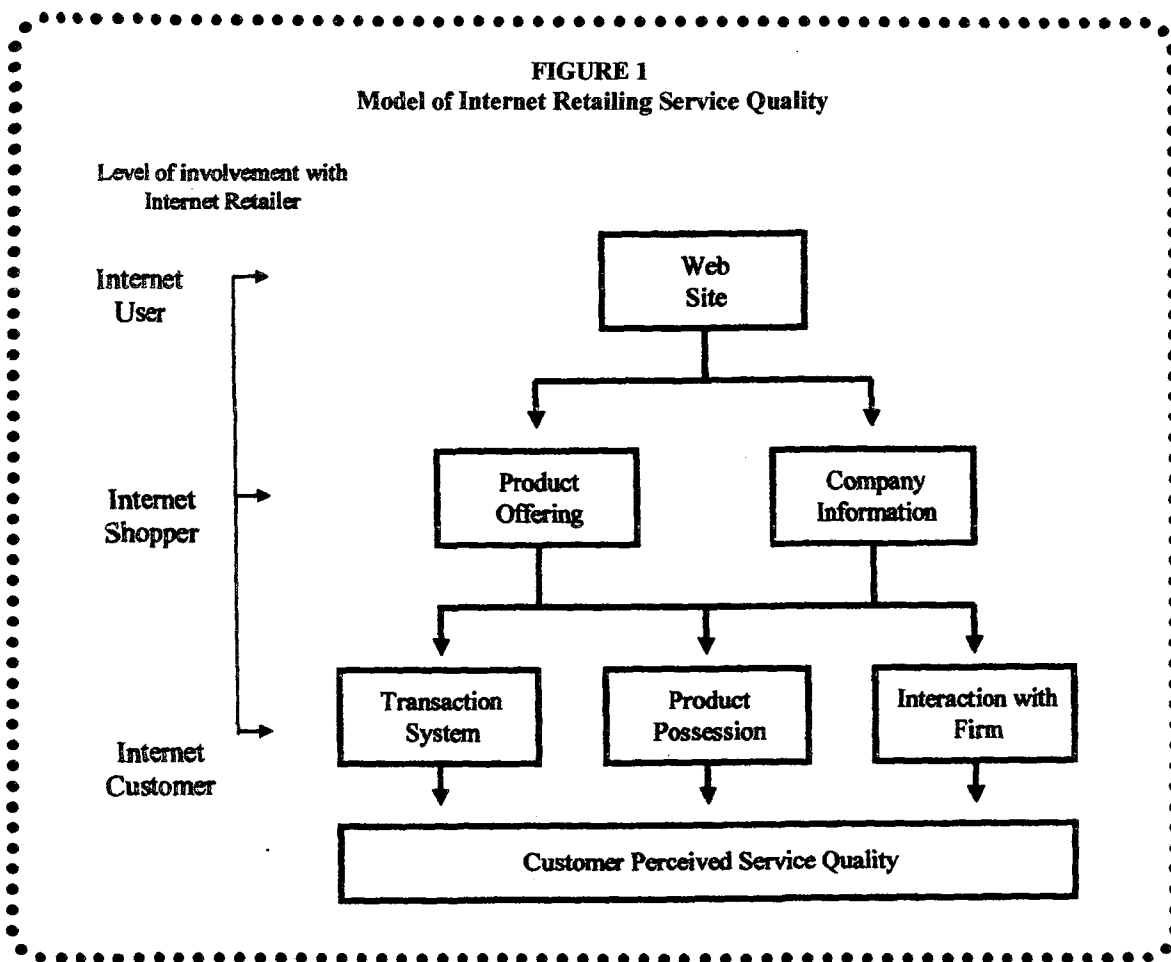
When asked to compare Australian and overseas based Internet retailers, all but three participants confined their responses to Australian and American based companies. Only two participants mentioned having purchased products from a non-American overseas retailer (Canadian x 1, British x 1) while the third discussed European Web sites in general. In regards to noticing any differences, seven participants said no, five said yes, and two were not sure if the differences were due to country of origin. Of the seven participants who felt that there were no major differences, the general consensus was that most sites are standardized or modeled on U.S. sites. One Expert was critical of this and suggested that Australians have different consumer behaviour patterns compared to Americans who are more likely to use mail order. One participant stated that, except for language, it was difficult to differentiate. Two members of this group did mention differences such as currency and shipping times. Of the five participants who felt the differences were more obvious, three felt that American sites were easier to use, provided more information, and were more reliable. The fourth participant was critical of Australian service standards saying "they pass the buck" while the fifth participant felt that overseas retailers were cheaper and offered greater product availability. The question of whether participants would purchase products from an overseas retailer who did not have a physical presence in Australia produced the most consistent responses of all the interview questions. Not only did 13 of the 14 say yes, 10 participants conveyed that they had purchased online specifically because the desired product was not available locally.

## DISCUSSION

The exploratory interviews indicated that the development of an Internet specific model of service quality is warranted. As suggested in the literature review, inherent differences between traditional and Internet retailing altered the importance of some quality dimensions, resulted in the merging of others and introduced new issues which were not accounted for by the traditional determinants of quality. A key consideration in developing a framework for the subsequent research was to structure the issues raised by participants into a model which identifies the potential determinants of quality. Furthermore, a distinction was drawn between the factors which affect all visitors to the Web site and the factors which predominantly influence actual Internet shoppers on order to enhance the diagnostic value of the model. The resulting model (Figure 1), and a description of the factors, may be seen below.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Model of Internet Retailing Service Quality**



Web Site involves elements of the retail store which may be evaluated by Internet users and shoppers alike. It encompasses ease and speed of navigation, reliability of site access and operation, aesthetic and entertainment value as well as lower order interaction features such as customization options and wish list/shopping cart facilities. Product Offering encompasses the range and uniqueness of products, visual and verbal descriptions of attributes as well as availability and shipping time information. It also involves cost issues such as price, shipping charges, currency information, taxes or duty, and value relative to traditional purchasing alternatives. Company Information is required to determine credibility, especially when dealing with unfamiliar firms. Company Information needs also include explanation of policies or contract regulations, the billing name, use of personal information, and warranties.

Transaction system includes Web site security and explanations of security features. Transaction system also encompasses the ease of placing and amending orders,

feedback regarding the stage and status of transactions as well as the accuracy of billing. Primarily, Product Possession relates to the speed and reliability of delivery. In the case of physical products it also includes the provision of order tracking facilities, notification, and explanation of delays as well as the convenience and flexibility of delivery times and locations. For electronically delivered goods, it involves the ease of preparing the product for use, including downloading, installing and/or printing. Interaction with Firm involves the ease of making contact via e-mail or phone options, the response waiting time, quality of replies or assistance, responsiveness to service failures, and unprompted communication by the firm.

Whilst it would be expected that elements of the PZB (1985) model of quality determinants would be included in this model, differences between the determinant rankings in the two shopping modes found in this research suggest that the development of an Internet specific model of quality is warranted. Only two determinants, Communication and Access, produced similar

results in both forms of shopping. Reliability was the determinant which most consistently ranked amongst the three most important Internet retailing issues. This was consistent with participants' previous responses to the unprompted interview question in which the most frequently stated expectation was speed and reliability of product delivery. Although the high ranking of Security is consistent with previously published data (ABS 2000), it is not consistent with participants' unprompted responses to earlier interview questions. Finally, whilst the capacity for mass customizations is often portrayed as a major advantage of the Internet (e.g., Hanson 2000), Understanding and Courtesy, which include meeting individual needs and friendliness, did not appear to be important in the Internet retailing context.

### Directions for Further Research

This research suffers from two major limitations. Firstly, a relatively small number of respondents were interviewed and secondly, respondents were sourced from a restricted geographical area. Importantly however, the preliminary research results provide a foundation for conducting further research. Clearly the model should be empirically tested using a large sample. Subsequent testing should be conducted in a variety of cultural settings and across a range of Internet retail firms and industries.

### CONCLUSIONS

As a domain of academic interest, Internet Marketing is yet to emerge from a stage of relative infancy. The vast

majority of Internet related literature focuses on marketer, rather than consumer, oriented issues, with Web site design and the advantages for marketers attracting particular attention. This form of literature is often theoretical in nature or based on observations of Internet marketer activities. Meanwhile, investigations of the consumer oriented issues predominantly center around quantitative measures of online behavior. Oftentimes, these fail to distinguish between Internet users and Internet shoppers or they provide only limited insight and diagnosis of the underlying attitudes, values, and motives of consumers. This raises the potential for undesirable discrepancies between consumer expectations and management's perception of consumer expectations. This gap in marketing knowledge has a number of consequences, one of which includes impeding the development of effective strategies to attract new customers or recover from service failure.

Therefore, overall, Internet marketing literature is characterized by a disproportionately low level of empirical investigations which address the consumer's viewpoint. In relation to service quality in Internet retailing, the unanswered questions include; What exactly do consumers expect from Internet retailers? What factors contribute to evaluations of quality? How do customers perceive the online purchase process? Is satisfaction a sufficient indicator of future purchase intentions? What is the impact of technical or process failures? How important are inter-cultural differences in this global medium? In what ways will expectations and levels of satisfaction change over time?

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For further information contact:  
 Julie Francis  
 University of Wollongong  
 Wollongong 2522  
 Australia  
 Phone: 61.2.42.21.3610  
 FAX: 61.2.42.21.4154  
 E-Mail: [dromo@smartchat.net.au](mailto:dromo@smartchat.net.au)

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