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The Internet has revolutionized many aspects of daily life none more so than shopping. Consumers can now shop for and buy goods or services from a seller over the Internet without an intermediary service. Indeed, an online shop or virtual store evokes the physical analogy of buying products or services at a bricks-and-mortar retailer or shopping centre. However, online shopping provides greater choice, freedom, and flexibility than do traditional retail outlets.

To begin with, consumers can find what they are looking for by visiting the website of the retailer directly or by searching through an array of online vendors using a shopping search engine. Online stores typically describe products for sale with text, photos, and multimedia files. Some online stores provide or link to supplemental product information, such as instructions, safety procedures, demonstrations, or manufacturer specifications. Some provide background information, advice, or how-to guides designed to help consumers decide which product to buy. Many also allow customers to comment or rate their items. There are also dedicated review sites that host user reviews for different products. In addition to such online reviews, peer recommendations on the online shopping pages and social media can also play a key role in helping online shoppers during their search.

Once a particular product has been found on the web site of the seller, most online retailers use shopping cart software to allow the consumer to accumulate multiple items and to adjust quantities, like filling a physical shopping cart or basket in a conventional store. A "checkout" process follows in which payment and delivery information is collected, if necessary. Some stores allow consumers to sign up for a permanent online account so that some or all of this information only needs to be entered once. The consumer often receives an e-mail confirmation once the transaction is complete. Less sophisticated stores may rely on consumers to phone or e-mail their orders.

One advantage of shopping online is being able to quickly seek out deals for items or services with many different vendors. Search engines, online price comparison services and discovery shopping engines can be used to look up sellers of a particular product or service.

Shipping costs (if applicable) reduce the price advantage of online merchandise, though depending on the jurisdiction, a lack of sales tax may compensate for this.

Another major advantage for retailers is the ability to rapidly switch suppliers and vendors without disrupting users' shopping experience; with the tendency of many Internet users to engage in regular 'web surfing', this is a particularly important aspect of online shopping. Online shopping also tends to be very convenient because online stores are usually available 24 hours a day, and many consumers have Internet access both at work and at home; internet cafes and schools can be used by those who do not have Internet at work or at home.

Online shopping has extended into just about every niche product. There are even dedicated vendor sites for purchasing Exclusive gifts and handicrafts. Convenience, efficiency, and value-for-money are three things that can be readily associated with online shopping.

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