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MOBILE OPTIMIZED WEBSITE IS A NECESSITY, NOT A LUXURY

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In today's multi screen world, people use smartphones for almost every digital activity. According to Pew Internet & American Life Project, 56% of adults in the US are smartphone owners who use their phones to surf the internet and check email. This percentage has doubled since 2009, when 31% people of mobile owners were reported to use their phones to access the internet.

Today, whether people want to shop, pay bills or have a video chat with family miles away, the small screen of a smartphone serves big purposes. In fact, it is safe to say that mobile devices have become a staple or the most ubiquitous communication gadget in everyday lives of people around the world. It also means that this inclination of accessing the web through mobile phones will keep on increasing with time, pressing on the importance of businesses to consider integrating a mobile optimized website in their online marketing strategy.

What is a Mobile Website?

A mobile website is similar to any other website that allows access to the World Wide Web, the only difference being that a mobile website is optimized for convenient and user-friendly mobile browsing. It is just another version of a primary website that can be accessed via a mobile phone's web browser to directly display text, images, and video.

In fact, Pew reported that 21% of mobile phone owners said that they use their devices as the primary source of accessing the Internet, instead of desktops and tablets. Thus, the need for a mobile optimized website cannot be ignored, particularly for a business that relies largely on web presence for generating sales.

However, being mobile-friendly does not just mean that a website should be accessible from a mobile phone. A mobile-friendly website must be specifically designed for smaller screens, making navigation easier through touch-screen buttons, and only show information that is most relevant to the visitor's needs.
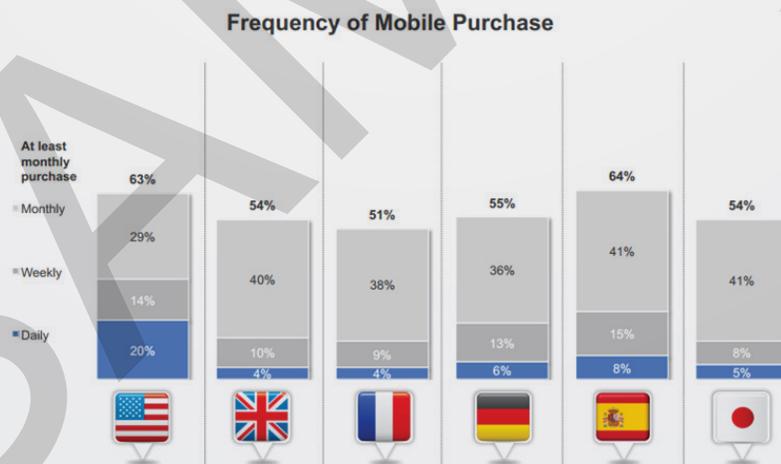
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The purpose of any business is to make profit. For an online business particularly, the aim is to persuade a customer to make a purchase when they visit the mobile website. From the point of view of a customer, they want a user-friendly experience when they access a business' website from their mobile phone.

Google's report "What Users Want Most from Mobile Sites Today" surveyed 1,088 US adult smartphone Internet users, out of which 67% of consumers said that a mobile optimized website increases the probability of them making a purchase. The majority of consumers also said that if they cannot easily navigate through a mobile website to find what they are looking for, they will switch to a competitor's mobile-friendly website instead of using their desktops or laptops to visit the primary website of a business.

This means mobile-friendly websites convert visitor into customers, fulfilling the aim of any business. Furthermore, 74% of people are likely to return to that website in the future, which means having a loyal customer base.

Another report by Google, "Our Mobile Planet: Global Smartphone Users", studied mobile consumer behavior in six countries - USA, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, and Japan. The results are depicted by these infographics:

Percentage of Mobile Users Who Made Monthly Purchases Using Their Smart Phones

Frequency of Mobile Purchase

At least monthly purchase					
Monthly	63%	54%	51%	55%	64%	54%
	29%					
		40%	38%	36%	41%	41%
Weekly	14%					
Daily	20%	10%	9%	13%	15%	8%
		4%	4%	6%	8%	5%

The infographics above reveal that more than 50% of Americans used their smart phones to make online purchase, out of which 29% purchase monthly, 14% purchase on a weekly basis and 20% on a daily basis. The percentage of daily online purchase through smart phones is highest in US but relatively low in other countries. However, the percentage of monthly online purchase is higher in all other countries, depicting how important it is to have a mobile friendly website for not only local business, but to reach the target market beyond borders.

Improved User Experience

Mobile websites are especially designed for smaller screens. Navigating a business's primary website from a smartphone would be a cumbersome and frustrating process. Mobile websites improve user experience and satisfaction as they are intended to be simple and concise, displaying only the most relevant information on the smaller screen.

Faster Download Speed

Mobile websites are designed to deliver an optimal download speed, which means less loading time and more browsing.

Engagement and Context

A mobile optimized website allows the user to engage with mobile-specific features like click-to-call. Furthermore, the location-aware technology in mobiles will make it easier for users to locate a local business when they are in geographic proximity.

Improved Search/SEO performance

Rankings on mobile-friendly search engines such as Google and Yahoo can be improved through a mobile website.

Brand Identity

A mobile friendly website becomes the brand advocate for a business by making it stand out in the crowd. It makes a positive statement about a business and shows customers that a business cares.

Competitive Advantage

As mentioned earlier, if a website is not optimized for mobile, users will switch to a competitor's mobile friendly website. Therefore, a mobile website will ensure that customers stay on your website and are not directed to your competitors.

Portability and Connectivity

A mobile can be conveniently carried anywhere, which offers an unprecedented opportunity to stay connected with the target audience at all times.

More Flexible and Cost-Effective

Building and usage of a mobile website is more flexible and cost-effective than app development. Mobile apps require the development of different apps for different platforms (BlackBerry vs. iPhone vs. Android), making app production expensive and time consuming. Also, an app requires downloading before usage. On the other hand, a mobile website is less costly to build and is universal to all smart phone browsers with internet connectivity.

Benefits Competitors

According to the same report compiled by Google, if a business does not have a mobile friendly website, its competitors will benefit from their lack of adequate online presence. The report revealed that:
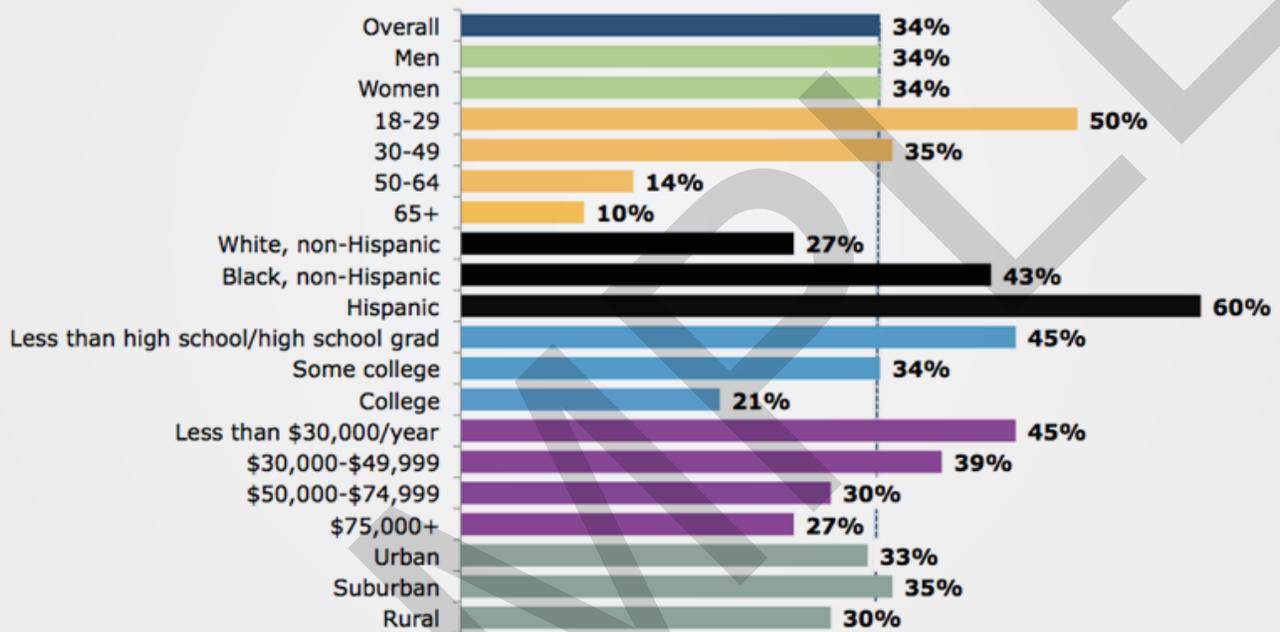
- 61% of consumers will move to a competitor's website if they do not find what they were looking for 79% of consumers said that will search for another website if they do not like what they see on one website.

- 50% of consumers said that even if they are fond of a business, they will buy less often if the business does not have a mobile-friendly website.

- These statistics only point out to one thing – every dollar you lose from not having a mobile-friendly website goes into the pocket of your competitor.

Hurts a Business' Reputation

Giving potential customers a bad mobile experience costs a business more than just sales. A website which is not optimized for mobile use can make visitors feel frustrated, which translates into a bad reputation for the business. The report further revealed:

- 48% of consumers felt annoyed and frustrated when they visited a website that was not optimized for mobile

- 36% of consumers said they felt like visiting a non-mobile friendly website wastes their time

- 52% of consumers claimed that a non-user friendly mobile experience makes them less likely to engage with the business

- 48% of consumers said that if a website did not work properly on their mobile phones, they felt like the business did not care about them

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The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project published a report in 2013 that studied internet usage behaviors of 2,252 adults aged 18 and over, according to demographics of gender, age, ethnicity, profession, income, and locality. The results of the findings are shown below.

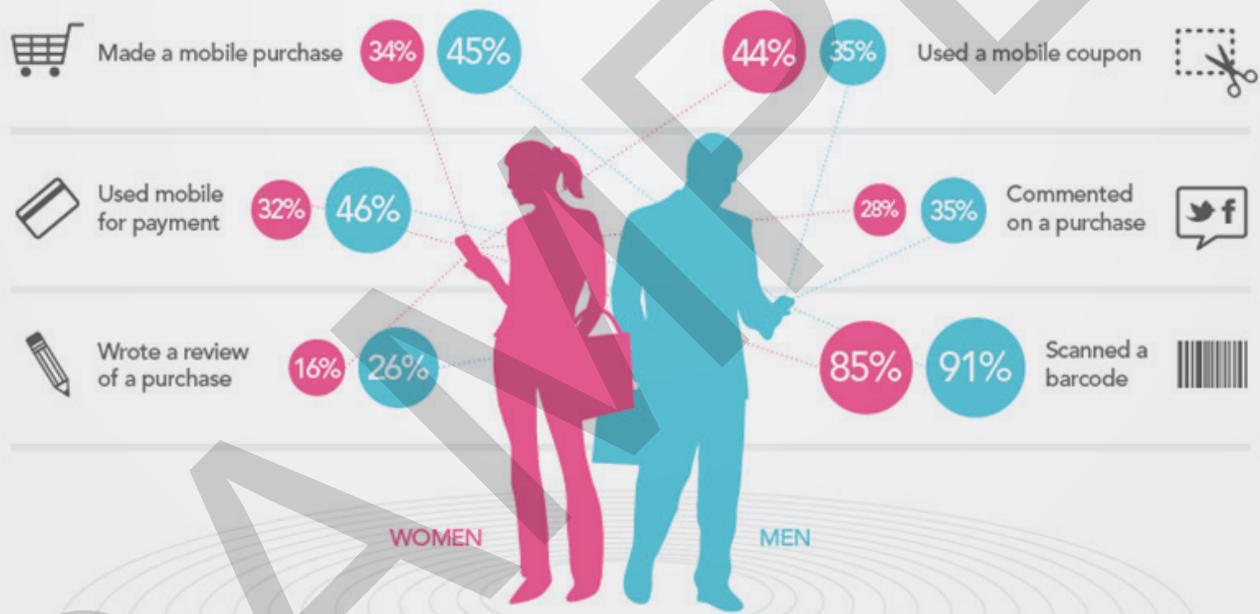| Category	Percentage
Overall	34%
Men	34%
Women	34%
18-29	50%
30-49	35%
50-64	14%
65+	10%
White, non-Hispanic	27%
Black, non-Hispanic	43%
Hispanic	60%
Less than high school/high school grad	45%
Some college	34%
College	21%
Less than $30,000/year	45%
$30,000-$49,999	39%
$50,000-$74,999	30%
$75,000+	27%
Urban	33%
Suburban	35%
Rural	30%

- 34% of both men and women use their smartphone to access the internet
- 50% of people aged between 18-29 use their smartphone to access the internet, and the percentage decreases with increase in age.
- 60% of Hispanics use their smartphone to access the internet
- 45% of school going or high school students use their smartphone to access the internet
- 45% of people with an annual income less than $30,000 use their smartphone to access the internet
- 35% people living in suburban areas use their smartphone to access the internet

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The trends in using smart phones for shopping have been studied deeply in a survey conducted by uSamp in 2012. uSamp conducted a surveyed 1,100 Americans, aged 18 to 75, to study their mobile shopping habits. The study revealed that men are more likely to make mobile purchases than women.
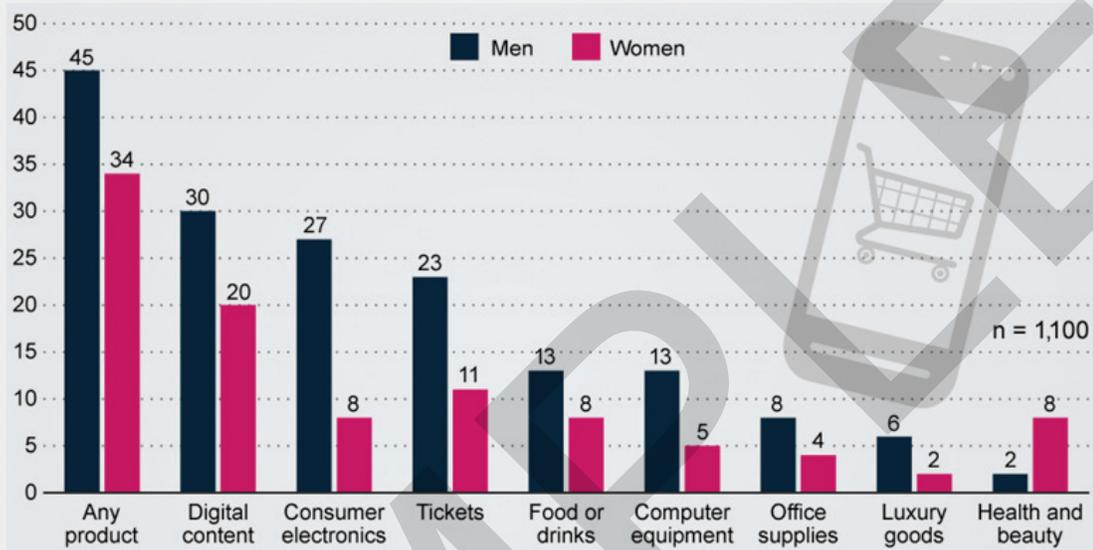
Smartphones Use for Different Activities

The infographics below shows that 45% men have used their smartphone to make a mobile purchase while only 34% of women surveyed had done so. More men use their smartphones for other activities such as making payments, writing a review, commenting on purchase or scanning a barcode. Women trump men only in using their smartphones for a mobile coupon.

91% of men have scanned a product barcode with their mobile device vs. 85% of woman. The survey revealed that men and women who scan barcodes with smartphones are shopping at these types of stores:

- Electronic store: 27% male vs. 12% female
- Convenience store: 7% male vs. 3% female
- Health & Beauty Store: 6% female vs. 2% male

The same study accounted for the types of products men and women purchase online through their smartphones.
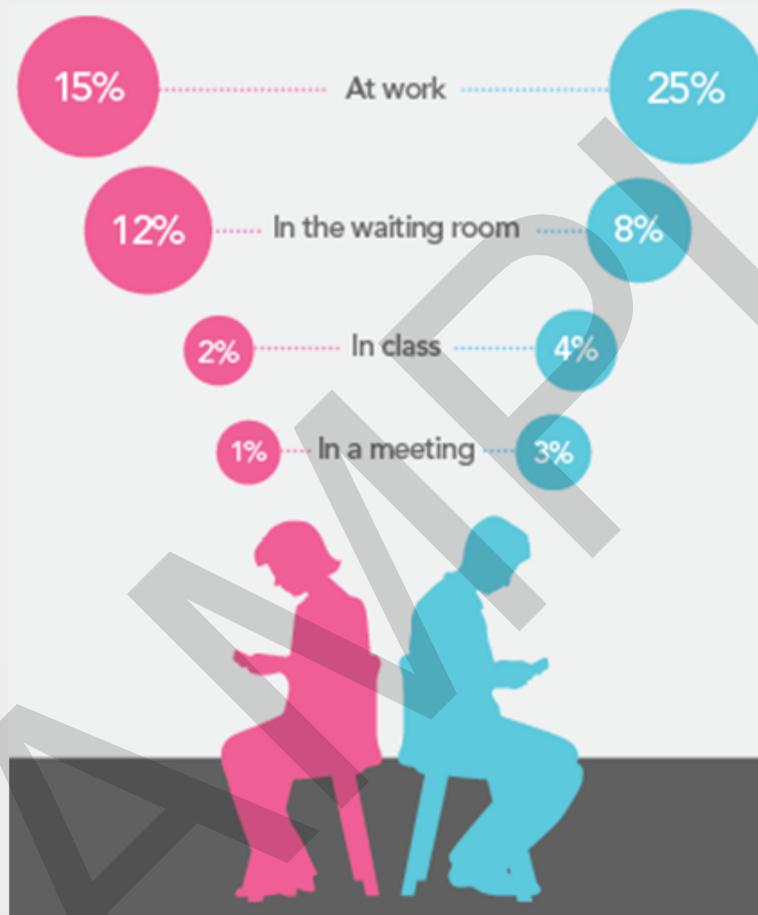

As depicted by the chart above, men have a significantly higher percentage for the purchase of products in all categories, except health and beauty products where only 2% men have made a purchase through their smartphone while 8% women have done so. Overall, men take the lead over women in mobile shopping.

- 27% of men purchase consumer electronics on mobile vs. 8% of women
- 23% of men purchase movie and event tickets on mobile vs. 11% of women
- 30% of men purchase digital content on mobile vs. 20% of women
- 13% of men purchase food and drinks on mobile vs. 8% of women
- 13% of men purchase computer equipment on mobile vs. 5% women
- 6% of men purchase luxury goods on mobile vs. 2% women
- 8% of men purchase office supplies on mobile vs. 4% of women

This cues online businesses that have a target market comprised largely of men to build and improve their internet marketing efforts for websites that cater to men for increasing or expanding their business. The survey also indicates that there is a large window of opportunity for online businesses that cater to women to tap the mcommerce market for their target audience. More mobile optimized and improved websites can increase the percentage of women who purchase from their smartphones.

In addition to the buying behavior of men and women, uSamp surveyed at what locations smartphones are used most.

The same trend can observed from this infographics. Men use their smartphones more than women in a variety of settings like at work, in class or in a meeting, while women were observed to use their smartphones more than men only when they are in a waiting room. More smartphone usage by men translates into more online purchases.

As mentioned earlier, a mobile website needs to be designed differently than a primary website. Mentioned below are the factors a developer must be mindful of when developing a mobile website for a business:

- Keep it simple by displaying only relevant information and avoiding unnecessary text or graphics.
- Don't overcrowd – keep it concise only to focus on the brand message and call-to-action.
- Reduce touch events with minimum pinch, tap, and swipe.
- Opti¬mize for speed.
- Allow for smooth navigation with appropriately sized buttons and tabs.
- Strike a balance between different screen sizes and resolution.
- Use text links instead of snazzy fly-out menus or rollovers.
- Provide a link to view the full website.
- Highlight and provide link for call-to-action.
- Employ auto-correct and auto-suggest for keywords which customers will use for finding the mobile website.

Incorporating the above mentioned factors, a mobile optimized website can be developed that will be easy to find, easy to use, convey the brand message by providing all the relevant information about the business.

Conclusion

The trend of ecommerce is now shifting towards mcommerce. Therefore, the importance of having a mobile friendly website for a business cannot be ignored, regardless of the business size. As studies indicate an exponential growth in smartphone usage and an increasing number of people accessing the internet from their smartphones, it becomes imperative for businesses to develop websites that their target audience can view and use conveniently from their smartphones.

Although more and more people are getting inclined towards using the internet on-the-go, the opportunity of mcommerce avenue has not been fully tapped. Online business owners need to realize that a mobile friendly website is no more a luxury for big business, but has become a necessity even for small businesses. Today, having a web presence has become important more than ever, and businesses who fail to recognize this will lose a greater part of their target audience to their competitors who have a strong foothold on the digital real estate.

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