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Defining key drivers of online impulse purchasing: A perspective of both impulse shoppers and system users

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ABSTRACT

With the proliferation of e-commerce, a large part of online shopping is attributed to impulse buying. Hence, there is a particular necessity to understand impulse buying in the online context. Impulse shoppers incline to feel unable to control their tendencies and behaviors from various stimuli. Specifically, online consumers are both the impulse shoppers and the system users of websites in the purchase process. Impulse shoppers concern individual traits and system users cover the attributes of online stores. Online impulse buying therefore entails two key drivers, technology use and trust belief, and the mediator of flow experience. Grounding on flow experience, technology-use features, and trust belief, this study proposes a novel research model to examine impulse buying behavior in a complete manner. Data were collected from an online survey. Data analysis considers structural equation modeling technique with formative structure. Empirical results showed that flow experience is an important factor to affect impulse buying from its original drivers. Trust belief is also critical to impulse buying as perceived usefulness is not. Implications for managers and scholars are further discussed.

1. Introduction

Shopping is considered as an important part of our regular life. However, many purchases may be unplanned and even sudden while they are often initiated on the spot and are greatly associated with strong desire and feelings of pleasure and excitement. This kind of purchasing is generally known as impulse buying. A high proportion of 40% of online consumers considers themselves as impulse shoppers (Verhagen & van Dolen, 2011; Liu, Li, & Hu, 2013). Many online vendors have been attempting to understand online impulse buying for providing greater opportunities to attract and retain customers. Thus, the purpose of this study is trying to answer the question of what are the important contextual drivers that lead to occurrence of online impulse buying.

In essence, impulse shoppers tend to feel unable to control their tendencies and inherent behaviors from merchandising stimuli of visiting online stores (Wells, Parboteeah, & Valacich, 2011b). Specifically, online customers are both the impulse shoppers and the system users of websites in the purchase process since the involved task for consumers attempts to perform online shopping through the operations of using a website system. For the impulse shopper perspective, online consumers involve an individual psychological state of sudden and unplanned behavior toward a purchase decision process, which is often obscure and hard to understand (Floh & Madlberger, 2013). For the system user perspective, online consumers is a web system user for performing/interacting with all functions of an e-store in terms of searching and finding relevant product information, accomplishing payment mechanism, and tracking product delivery. Thus, web-technology use and trust belief on e-stores are two important concerns for online impulse buying (Wu, Li, & Fu, 2011; Wu, 2013). These concerns are important to determine consumer's online impulse buying.

Further, previous studies have suggested various perspectives to understand online impulse buying behavior. First, some studies have indicated shopping enjoyment as a mediator for the target of online impulse buying behavior from the drivers of a website's usefulness for shopping task (cognitive) and a website's interaction experience (affective) (Koufaris, 2002; Parboteeah, Valacich, & Wells, 2009). Next, others have emphasized the importance of e-store features (content, design, and navigation) as the antecedents of driving online impulse buying behavior through a mediator of affective perception, shopping enjoyment (Floh & Madlberger, 2013).

In sum, these studies have similarly focused on consumer's hedonic value to examine online impulse buying behavior in terms

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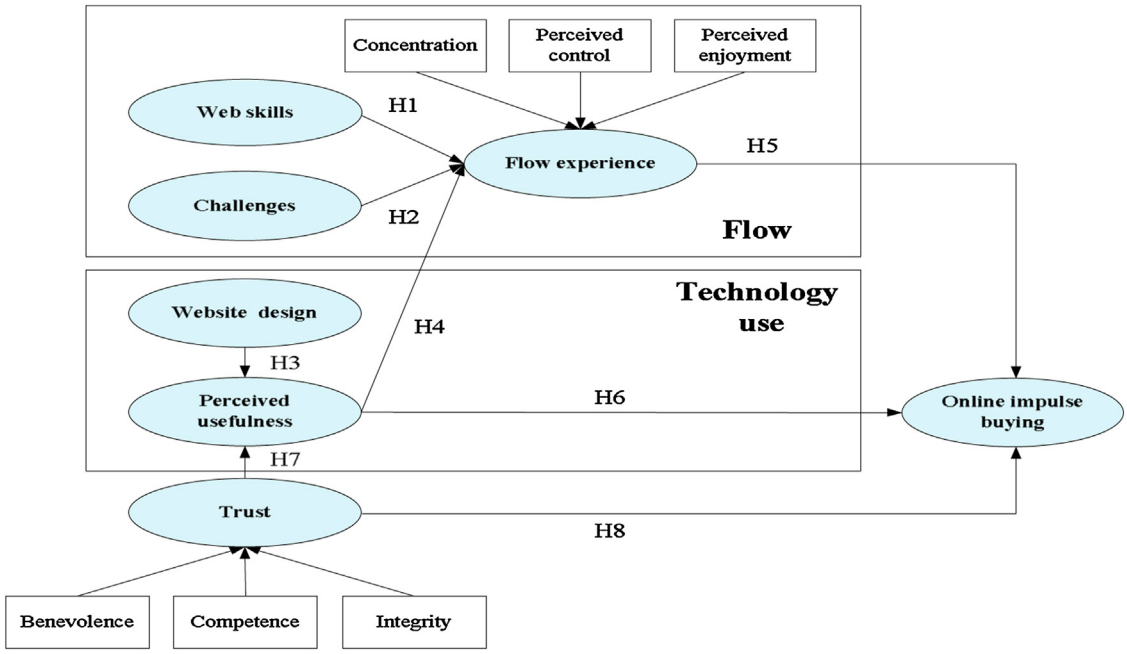

Fig. 1. Research model.

of a relationship structure of considering individual affective perception as an important mediator for achieving this behavior from the drivers of e-store use and trust belief. In fact, individual affective perception is an emotional presentation of a consumer's psychological state in the online impulse buying. However, these studies are similar in a lack of considering trust belief as an important element in the online impulse buying as it has been widely concerned in terms of virtual stores (Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2009; Fang, Chiu, & Wang, 2011). While these studies have extended our knowledge of online impulse buying, they seemed to be either incomplete or fragmental in examining the whole picture of online impulse buying regarding the above argument, that is, online consumes are both the roles of the impulse shoppers and the system users of e-stores in the purchase process.

Accordingly, the above discussions lead us to propose a complete model with the two issues for the key drivers, technology use and trust issue, and a mediator of psychological state issue, to provide deep insight into the target of online impulse buying behavior. In the psychological state issue, flow experience has been widely used to capture the emotional reactions or motivations of consumers toward online shopping, in general (Lu, Zhou, & Wang, 2009; Lin, Fernandez, & Gregor, 2012). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are usually the major drivers to enable online buying behavior. Thus, intrinsic challenges and external web skills are the key antecedents in formulating flow experience adapted in this study. Further, flow experience is defined as three sub-constructs, concentration, perceived control, and perceived enjoyment (Jiang & Benbasat, 2005; van Noort, Voorveld, & Van Reijmersdal, 2012).

In the technology use issue, previous studies on this issue have mainly focused on the feelings of user's interaction with a website, such as pleasantness, visual appeal, navigability, or security (Luo, Ba, & Zhang, 2012; Floh & Madlberger, 2013). These characteristics can be defined as website design. In fact, a post-adoption behavior, perceived usefulness (PU), indicates the extent to which online users believe that shopping productivity will be improved by using a particular website (Shen & Khalifa, 2012). Further, website design (an initial-adoption cognition) has a link to PU (a post-adoption cognition) for their relationship (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003a; Wu, 2013). In the trust belief issue, it plays a belief role in enhancing consumer's willingness to transact with e-vendors (Hu, Wu, Wu, & Zhang, 2010). Many studies have shown the linkage of trust to PU (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003b; McCloskey, 2006). Trust belief further defines itself as three sub-constructs, benevolence, competence, and integrity (Wang & Benbasat, 2005; Palvia, 2009).

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Based on the above discussion, Fig. 1 provides a pictorial depiction of this research model. It includes three major components, technology concern, flow experience, and trust belief. Theory of planned behavior (TPB) also provides an overarching theoretical basis to develop the three components, technology use, flow experience, and trust, in this research model as it defines three similar components, attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norm, for a behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Venkatesh, Thong, & Xu, 2012). This can be explained specifically by Decomposed TPB (DTPB) as it further expands the three components for IT usage behavior (Taylor & Todd, 1995; Hsieh, 2015). Attitude is extended to include perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use for a technology-based concern. Perceived behavioral control is expanded to include self-efficacy and self-feelings of resource facilitating conditions for an individual recognition. Subjective norm is decomposed to include peer influence and superior influence for a social exchange or trust belief issue. Based on the description, DTPB implies that attitude in a similarity with a concern of technology use, perceived behavioral control in a similarity with individual state of flow experience, and subjective norm in a similarity with self-recognition of trust belief. The following discusses the theoretical foundations of this model and the development of hypotheses.

2.1. Online impulse buying

Impulse buying refers to when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent, urge to buy something immediately (Liu et al., 2013). Impulse buying often results from a specific stimulus during the shopping (Floh & Madlberger, 2013).