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Gender differences in the effect of communication on college students' online decisions



Chunlei Chai, Xun Wu, Danni Shen, Dan Li, Kejun Zhang*

State Key Lab of CAD&CG, Zhejiang University, China

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on gender differences in the influence of online communication on e-commerce purchase decision strategies. From the literature, we deduce a new theoretical model based on three foundational theories and design a 2 * 2 mixed factorial experiment to test the influence of online communication in cases with and without online communication. This involves analyzing screen-recording data to check the effect of shopping behavior initiation, and using questionnaire research to test differences in the user experience before and after such communication. Finally, we concluded that the influence of online communication differs between men and women, and the influence is largely positive to both males and females.

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1. Introduction

The Internet is becoming an important aspect of communication strategy because of its ability to deliver information, entertainment, and e-shopping. Online shopping is becoming an increasingly popular consumption choice. Numerous users of literature research have noticed differences in consumer online cognition and behavior (Bae & Lee, 2011). Thus, gender differences in cognitive and behavioral similarities and differences in online shopping are highlighted, including the influence of different level decisions on shopping for different sex shoppers. For example, research on inconsistent comments on gender differences shows that inconsistent online reviews can significantly strengthen the link between emotional trust and purchase intention (Zhang, Cheung, & Lee, 2014). This article focuses on the impact of online communication on gender differences in behaviors and experience, and discusses whether online conversation with the opposite sex positively affects behavior initiation and user experience. Furthermore, we also explore whether males and females differ in this regard is also explored.

The popularity of e-businesses and virtual social networks has changed people's understanding of traditional social lifestyle.

Although these two new Internet-driven trends have become increasingly ubiquitous, room remains for improvement (Cyr & Head, 2013b). Especially important is the integration of e-business purchase behavior and social communication behavior (Zhou, 2014). Numerous studies have found online shopping behavior to be a relatively closed scenario activity that does not involve communication (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004). On the one hand, a review of the human offline shopping environment reveals the centrality of communication to human life. The behavior of network scenarios and interaction mostly comes from the study of real scenarios and learning transfer, and this kind of online communication behavior model transfers learning to the social shopping environment. However, few studies have discussed the integration between the two kinds of Internet behavior. In the future development of the Internet, network consumer behavior is bound to converge towards better patterns of online communication behavior. On the other hand, owing to gender difference, males and females tend to shop differently when they have different goals. Gender advantages or disadvantages in communication produce complementarity, and complementary performance in turn helps users better undertake online consumption and results in different consumer experiences (Hansen & Järvelin, 2005).

Few studies have investigated gender differences in online communication. Instead our study simply focused on the impact of online communication on network consumer behavior theory. Specifically, this research investigated the impact of communication on online purchase and whether this impact varied with

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Dishengchai@126.com (C. Chai), wuxun@zju.edu.cn (X. Wu), dnshen@zju.edu.cn (D. Shen), idan199205@126.com (D. Li), zhangkejun@zju.edu.cn (K. Zhang).

gender.

This paper begins with an overview of the theoretical background to the research, including evolutionary theory, which presents perspectives intended to explain the origins of gender differences, and socio-culture theory, which focuses on social influences. Also, the selectivity hypothesis illuminates gender differences in information processing. This is followed by an explanation of the new research model that is put forward in our research, and an elaboration of the literature supporting our research model (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015). Therefore, consistent with the previous theory, we conclude that gender differences in cognition exhibit directional lines, with males preferring to trust while females favor risk perception. One gender difference involves the direction of attitude when shopping, with males partially goal-directed and females tending to be interest-driven. Thus males adopt utilitarian processing in the shopping process, while females adopt hedonic processing. Therefore, we propose four hypotheses involving how opposite sex communication between roles promotes the initiation of network shopping behavior and also exerts different degrees of influence on the shopping experience. This research conducted a set of control experiments to verify the hypothesis, and ultimately collected 30 sets of data for scientific statistical processing. Finally, we concluded that impact in online interaction differs on gender lines in terms of initiation for shopping and shopping experiences. The method and results are presented, and the paper concludes with a discussion that outlines both theoretical and practical implications.

2. Theoretical background

A review of the literature revealed numerous studies on gender differences in consumers' online decisions that have yielded mixed results. In general, socio-cultural theories, evolutionary theory and selectivity hypothesis are the three major theories for explaining differences in gender cognition, attitude, and behavior. The following sections present a brief review of empirical studies on gender differences in shopping value and attitude, followed by the introduction of the selectivity hypothesis, which serves as the base theory for the inferences of this study.

2.1. Shopping cognition and attitude

Gender differences can be classified based on their origins as either congenital or socialized. The explanation for the first category lies in evolutionary theory, which offers a perspective on the origins of gender differences. The explanation for the second category lies in socio-cultural theory, which is focused on social influence.

Evolutionary psychology focuses on the impact of human biology, namely, the mechanisms humans evolved to adaptively address environmental challenges faced by their ancestors (Buss & Kenrick, 1998). Evolutionary researchers also suggest mating concerns may explain some well-established gender differences, namely greater aggression and lower risk aversion in males. So gender cognitive differences are easily deduced from evolutionary theory (Cosmides & Tooby, 1987). Compared with men, women perceived more risk associated with buying online, in terms of both probability and likelihood (Durndell & Haag, 2002; Ong & Lai, 2006; Sam, Othman, & Nordin, 2005). Males also show more positivity than females towards new objects such as e-commerce and also exhibit more trust in online shopping.

One theoretical approach to gender differences proposes that these differences arise from social, cultural, psychological, and other environmental forces. According to this theory, two factors determine gender differences: physical differences and socio-

cultural influences. Because of their communal tendencies, women may be particularly sensitive to environmental cues, making them more likely to modify their behavior in context-appropriate ways (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Consequently, shopping orientation in females differs from that in males. While men prefer convenience to social interaction, women are more motivated by emotional and social interaction. Male patterns of communication tend to be based on the notion of a social hierarchy, while female patterns tend to be network-oriented. Generally, women focus more on creating intimacy, while men focus more on asserting independence and seeking respect (Gefen & Straub, 1997). That is, males, who are primarily concerned with self-focused argentic goals, are more likely to be focused on message claims that affect them directly. Meanwhile, females, who are driven by relationship-oriented communal goals, are more likely to consider all message claims because they are interested in overall message impact.

According to our understanding of innate differences and environmental influences, two shopping decision models have been constructed, each with different orientations, for men and women making shopping decisions. This is consistent with the Environmental Psychology Model. Online retail shopping is recognized as encompassing both utilitarian and hedonic components. (Cyr & Head, 2013a). Male tend to Utilitarian consumption, which is focused on the achievement of predetermined outcomes typical of cognition related to consumer behavior. Alternately, female prefer to hedonic consumption, which is focused on affective or emotive user perceptions and outcomes that result in pleasure, enjoyment, or involvement (Beck & Michael, et al., 2001; Bruner & Kumar, 2005; Kumar & Benbasat, 2002).

In the Environmental Psychology Model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) an individual's emotions mediate the effects of environmental stimuli on behavior. Based on a Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) paradigm, the theory suggests that environmental stimuli can influence individual internal states (i.e. cognitive and affective reactions), which in turn produce either approach or avoidance behaviors. Relevant to the current investigation, using the S–O–R framework we argue that online communication is one environmental condition that is likely to affect user behavior and shopping process. To be more specific, we define that the online communication in this research is between the opposite sex, namely, female online chat with male. Online communication with opposite sex is parallel to the different shopping environment.

2.2. Selectivity hypothesis

The selectivity hypothesis holds that the different genders employ different strategies and have different thresholds for processing information (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991). More specifically, it proposes that, compared with males, females tend to process information more comprehensively, and possess a lower threshold for information apprehension. This renders females more likely to detect, elaborate more extensively, and form assessments based on less accessible and more distally relevant information. In contrast, males process data more selectively than females and rely more heavily on less effortful heuristics. In the online shopping situation, it was found that women spent more time viewing each page but viewed fewer pages, whereas men spent less time per page but accessed more pages while performing the task (Arcand, Nantel, & Sénécal, 2011).

Two types of gender differences exist in cognition and attitude, involving near relative opposites and different strategies employed in the information selection process. We can conclude that, due to differences in cognition and attitude, males play a more initiative-

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