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## Gender Differences in Modeling the Influence of Online Marketing Communication on Behavioral Intentions

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### Abstract

To empirically prove that there are gender differences in the way online consumers react to online marketing communication attempts, the present study builds on a previously tested and validated empirical model showing the influence of online marketing communication on behavioral intentions by continuing in a SEM approach. Significant differences between male and female users are found and implications online communication practitioners are discussed, together with strategic proposals stemming from these novel results.

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*Keywords:* Online Communication; Consumer Behaviour; Consumer Perceptions; Gender

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### 1. Introduction

Online marketing communication has become essential in the last decade, as information and communication technologies (ICT) has spread among the general public, as a result of both accessibility and lower cost. More than 79% of the EU population use the Internet regularly (Eurostat, 2014). At the same time, the increasing presence of women on the Internet has made gender relevant for e-business.

Since the use of information and communication technologies strongly influences the way that enterprises are run, information is shared with business partners, internal communication is organized, and customers are communicated with, gender targeting in the online environment has become compulsory and empirical research in the information

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systems (IS) literature should be complemented with improved designs for content distribution and richer studies on user interaction with various marketing stimuli.

In marketing research in general and consumer behaviour modelling especially, the study of control variables indicating consumers' social and demographic characteristics is a must. Gender, a key variable in marketing segmentation and research often indicates different responses from males and females in using the Internet for online shopping, communication and relationship management (Chan et. al., 2015). A better understanding of the moderating effects of gender on various consumer intentions in an online communication context can yield results of both scientific understanding and practical relevance. By continuing the work on a previously tested and validated conceptual model (Perju-Mitran et. al., 2014), examining the effect of a variable such as gender by complementing the research on the model previously confirmed on a sample of 1097 Romanian Internet users, reveals results that may aid researchers in explaining the inconsistencies of prior online marketing communication research, as well as provide practitioners with a better understanding of gender preferences and likely responses in an online communication context.

The research on gender differences in the way consumers reach the intention to further inform themselves, share information or become loyal to a company as the result of online marketing communication efforts, should enrich the theoretical understanding of the particularities of online user behavior and empirically underline and demonstrate differences in behaviour which can be employed in the design of future specific online marketing communication strategies.

This paper's aim is to explain how men and women differ in both their perceptions of online marketing communications messages the result of these perceptions, manifested as intentions to use the information, distribute it, or become loyal to a company or brand. In order to meet the paper's objective, a multi-group structural equation modeling approach is used in order to compare men and women and allow for a straightforward discussion of strategic alternatives that can be suggested for an online communication context for each gender.

## **2. Theoretical background on gendered perceptions of online marketing communication**

From a commercial perspective, success in the online environment depends in large part on company familiarity with the size, characteristics, and demands of the Internet user market. Thus, better understanding of who is using the Internet, what they demand from it and how they behave in an online context is crucial for businesses looking to establish an effective online presence.

Research efforts directed towards gender differences in general advertising effectiveness indicate clear differences in beliefs, attitude formation and behavioral intent (Wolin and Korgaonkar, 2003). Furthermore, the specificity of online media provides opportunity for users to engage with marketing communication efforts differently, thus an assessment of similarities and differences between traditional media advertising and web advertising is critical.

Just as usage motivations differ across gender (Grubbs Hoy and Milne, 2010), the attention paid to gender differences is also important when it comes to behaviorally targeted online advertising. Noting that communication and information are the dominant motivators in the use of ICT, the specific motivators and their weight in influencing the intention to further inform oneself, share marketing information or become loyal as the result of an online relationship with a specific brand in men and women would allow for gender targeted strategic alternatives in brand positioning and other online marketing communication efforts.

Both male and female users may perform differently in their online activities such as communicating with others, viewing photos and videos, tracking people, events, posting or forwarding information, playing online games, reading and sharing promotional information with others (Luna-Nevarez and Torres, 2015). For instance, men and women become loyal in their behavior for different reasons, as a lesser influence of trust on loyalty towards Internet service providers, while effects of satisfaction on commitment and of trust on loyalty are stronger for men than for women (Sánchez-Franco et. al., 2009).

Riegner (2007) found that consumers perceive emotional and practical benefits in participating in electronic word of mouth activities and recognize that they pose a great influence over the products and brands they consider when intending to make a purchase. Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003) found that although men were more likely to make online purchases than women, the latter indicated a stronger preference for choosing shopping sites compared to men,

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