

A Critical Review Of Gender Differences In Online Shopping

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RISE OF INTERNET IN INDIA AND WORLDWIDE

The position of women in a modern society is one of the true indexes of its cultural and spiritual attainments. It is women only who would make the difference for the transformation of developing countries like India. The traditional Indian woman too has undergone a metamorphic change in her roles and status, both at workplace and at home coupled with changes in technologies causing women empowerment in economic, social, and political walks of lives (Raja Ramchandran, 2000). To illustrate, the case before us is that of rise of Information Technology [IT]. Although, the Internet has penetrated almost every aspect of everyday life, the current reporting of data on the Internet and gender does not adequately capture the cultural and changing differences in gender roles, and provide a partial view of some of the differences in ways men and women use the Internet (Ruby Roy Dholkiya and others, 2003).

A brief review of IT industry indicates that more than 70 per cent of Internet users use Internet for sending and receiving emails followed with information search, chat sessions, and instant messaging etc. India was ranked fourth after the [51 million] United States [198 million], China [120 million], and Japan [86 million] in terms of the absolute number of Internet users by Computer Industry Almanac in 2005. The number of Internet users was 60 million in India compared with 207 million of U.S., 123 million for China, and 86 million for Japan as on September 2006 (southasia.oneworld.net). According to Statistics, there were 1,114,274,426 Internet users worldwide representing about 16.9 per cent of the population as in March 2007 (planning commission.nic.in). There were 38.5 million Internet users in India in the year 2005 (www.emarketer.com). India emerged as the fastest-growing economy in terms of number of Internet users with growth rate of 33 per cent having over 21 million Internet users aged over 15 years as on January 2007 compared to 16 million in January 2006. Worldwide number of Internet users grew by 10 per cent to reach 747 million people at the end of January 2007. The US leads with an online population of 153.4 million followed with 86.8 million Internet users of China, and 53.6 million of Japan as well as 32 million of Germany, and 30 million Internet users of UK. (www.iamai.in). According to Internet and Mobile Association India [IAMAI], the total value of e-Commerce activities within India had crossed ₹ 570 Crore during 2004-2005 with projected figure of ₹ 2,300 Crore in 2007 (www.iamai.in).

The use of Internet continued to grow at a slow but steady pace in India. To illustrate, the overall Internet usage amongst urban people showed a healthy growth of 28 per cent during April 2006 and April 2007. A survey released by IAMAI in association with IMRB (Indian Management Research Bureau), based on a primary survey conducted in early 2006 amongst 16,500 households covering 65,000 individual across 26 major Metros and small towns in India in addition to 10,000 Business and 250 Cyber Cafe Owners in September 2006 found that there were 37 million Internet users in India with 23 million active users (www.iamai.in).

GENDER & PROPORTION OF INTERNET USERS IN INDIA

According to IAMAI, there were 38.5 million Internet users in India during 2007. It was found that around 12.32 million online women Internet users were registered in India during 2005-2006, showing an increase of 4 per cent reflecting decline of 4 per cent male Internet users in India. It was found that the number of women Internet users surfing the Internet crossed the figure of 12 million mark in India in 2006. Of the total Internet users, the percentage of women web users increased from 28 per cent in 2005 to 32 per cent in 2006. The estimated figures for the male-female ratio will be closer to 60:40 ratios by 2007 in India, though the absolute number of male Internet users remains higher

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than women Internet users.

A study jointly conducted by the IAMAI and IMRB International with coverage of around 65,000 individuals from 16,500 households surveyed in 26 different cities across India showed that the number of heavy Internet users in India, had grown to 38 per cent in the year 2006, as against barely 16 per cent of 2001. Interestingly, the average time spent on Internet, in terms of minutes per week increased with the increasing age of the Internet user, showing that the older population spent more time on the Internet as against the younger ones who are considered to be more Internet-savvy. While the school going children spent an average of 322.3 minutes a week on the Internet, the college going students spent an average of 433.2 minutes per week and the older men spent an average of 580.5 minutes a week. Working women spent 535.3 minutes per week whereas non-working women spent an average of 334.5 minutes each week on the Internet. (www.iamai.in).

Another survey conducted by IAMAI, with a sample size of 6,356 men and women Internet users too revealed that the use of Internet by women is more for personal purposes than for work. To illustrate, 96 per cent of women used e-mail for personal purpose while 92 per cent sent work related e-mails.

44 per cent of the women engaged in chat for personal purpose while only 26 per cent chatted to discuss work related matters. The other uses of Internet included gathering of information on matrimonial aspects; job search, and astrological predictions on a higher scale amongst women as compared to male Internet users (Source: Ibid). Overall, though in numerical terms, the proportion of the male Internet users increased, but in relative terms, it has showed an decline. To illustrate, the figures of male Internet users came down from 72 percent of 2004-2005 to 68 per cent in 2005-2006 whereas the figure of female Internet users increased from 28 per cent in 2004-2005 to 32 per cent in 2005-2006 (www.research.stikipad.com).

GENDER & USES OF THE INTERNET

A group of researchers have also attempted to uncover variations in terms of uses of Internet considering the gender of the Internet user that has mainly revealed the following.

A research study undertaken by **Rosie Heimrath and Anne Goulding in 1999**, when released its findings in 2001 provided that the use, interest and confidence while using the Internet was found to be as high amongst female Internet users as compared to its male Internet users. The females had not taken to the Internet as rapidly.

Linda A. Jackson and others (2001) made efforts to examine gender differences in use of Internet and factors responsible for these differences based on a general model of Internet use, and found that females used e-mail more than did males, males used the Internet more than females, and females reported more computer anxiety, less computer self-efficacy, and less favorable and less stereotypical computer attitudes. Path analysis used by the researchers to identify mediators of gender differences in Internet use revealed that computer self-efficacy, loneliness, and depression accounted in part for gender differences, but that gender continued to have a direct effect on use after these factors were considered.

Thomson S H. Teo (2001) employed efforts to evaluate linkage between the use of Internet vis-à-vis demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and motivation variables perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, and perceived usefulness associated with Internet usage activities defined in terms of messaging, browsing, downloading and purchasing etc. It was found that male Internet users were more likely to engage in downloading and purchasing activities while female Internet users were more likely to engage in messaging activities.

Randall S. Sexton and others (2002) put forward findings of their empirical research study carried out to identify factors causing influences on the individual use of the Internet and e-commerce based on analysis of a wide range of variables such as gender, overall computer usage, job related use and home etc. The study found that Males exhibit high levels off Internet usage probably due to a long history of cultural bias in areas of science and technology. Familiarity and comfort with computers in general can lead to higher levels of Internet usage.

ONLINE SHOPPING: A GROWING PHENOMENON IN INDIA & WORLDWIDE

Online shopping has been growing as a widely well-accepted route to shop online for different products and services like computer products; automobiles; travel products; investment products; clothing; flowers; books; music; and homes. The wide spread use and reasons for increased online shopping includes technological advances; changed

perceptions of the corporate world; convenient and customized offering by companies; availability of better navigation software as well as search engines; increase in the quality and quantity of the available information on the Internet, and above all, changing lifestyles of Internet users searching for pleasant and exciting experience. The online presence of well-known companies and brands too are responsible for generating greater interest among Internet users towards online shopping. Its key benefits to marketers include viz., lower cost of doing business; an opportunity for smaller entrepreneurs for doing business and that of also competition with bigger organizations as well as easier availability of information about products and services at relatively lower prices (Hoffman, Novak, & Chatterjee, 1995).

The results of the AC Nielsen online Consumer Opinion Survey have demonstrated that approximately 10 per cent of the world's population -that is more than 627 million people shop online, at least once. Europe and North America have the highest number of online shoppers, with Germany, Austria and the UK topping the list, with at least 95 per cent of online buyers.

A survey covering 21,100 respondents in 38 markets from Europe, Asia-Pacific, North America, Latin America and South Africa clearly showed an upward trend in global online shopping. The study focused on online shopping experiences of Internet users around the world and respondents were asked about when they last did an online purchase, what were the items last purchased, the modes of payment, which payment card was used the most and the most preferred payment mode used for online shopping. Across the globe, over 212 million online shoppers mentioned books as among the last 3 items they purchased online, over 135 million people purchased DVDs and video games, nearly 135 million made air reservations, over 128 million purchased clothes/accessories/shoes, over 112 million paid for downloading music, CDs over 106 million purchased electronic devices.

Close to 98 million bought computer hardware and over 86 million made hotel and/or tour bookings. Online retail sales are expected to grow from \$81 billion in 2005 to \$144 billion in 2010. In the Asia Pacific region, South Korea and Taiwan were ranked as highest, with at least 90 per cent of online buyers (Sita Mishra, 2007).

The IAMAI has projected the total value of e-Commerce activities as ₹ 2,300 Crore in the 2007. Online shopping in India too relies upon several drivers like access to information and communication; proliferation of cyber cafes, and above all attitudes of Indians towards variety and ease, which is only possible through online shopping. In India, it is poised for greater acceleration as more manufacturers and marketers have begun to use the hybrid concept by integrating the Internet into their sales model. The Indian online shopping market is yet to take-off in a considerable way and is far behind the global trend. Internet is used more for searching than buying products and services. To illustrate, moreover, online shopping is now prevalent in nearly 2,000 towns and cities including tier-II cities like Surat, Ankleshwar, Solapur, Kottayam, Faridabad and Bhopal. Maharashtra tops the list with Kerala yet to pick up.

According to Third Annual Global E-Commerce Report of Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Interactive, the most popular online shopping in India comprises of products such as clothes (46 per cent of shoppers), music/CDs (29 per cent of shoppers) and books (26 per cent of shoppers). Therefore, big online players too have prepared themselves to capture the opportunity. To illustrate, eBay has merged with bazze.com to start its Indian operation goods, which are sold online and includes books, electronic gadgets, air and rail tickets, apparel, gifts, computer peripherals, audio and video CDs and DVDs, magazines, sport goods, movie tickets, jewellery and toys.

Though, many consumers are not using online shopping system in India, and it seems that at least, as of now, online shopping in India is not keeping up with the global trends of electronic marketing. The cautious Indian consumers obviously have many doubts, apprehensions, and are under fear while using the Internet services for accessing company's website mainly for the purpose of online shopping. As a result, many online shopping websites are now offering cash-on delivery to overcome the security concerns cited by Indian consumers. Secured payment gateways and use of SSL that is Secure Socket Layers, a protocol for transmitting private documents via the Internet have also become the accepted norms among e-commerce companies in India to offer better security to its consumers enabling them to use credit cards.

REVIEWING STUDIES ON GENDER & ONLINE SHOPPING IN INDIA & WORLDWIDE

Despite an increasing number of online shoppers and offering of wide range of products that are on the Internet, one finds paucity of research work undertaken with a focus on demographic variables especially gender as well as the

attitudes, perceptions and profiling of online shoppers in India. An attempt has been made to throw light on gender based differences with regard to online shopping activities in India. ACNielsen, based on their research study, found that more and more Indians are willing to opt and make use of online shopping and this frequency of online shopping by Indian online shoppers may supercede this frequency of global average online shopping in the near future. Though the prevalent figure of online population of India may reveal a small proportion of its total population but, it represents a set of consumers that offer marketers an attractive combination, greater influence, and the willingness to adopt technology faster. It is very well supported by the expected growth projections based on the research study of the IMAI that has showed that there would be 38.5 million Internet users in 2007. The Internet & Online Association of India [IOAI] Research Report conducted in association with Cross Tab Marketing Services based on a total of 3099 respondents aimed at understanding the profile, Internet usage, products purchased along with propensity to shop along with the nuances of online shopping with the online shopper's affinity and aversions to online shopping in order to track Internet users' taste for online shopping. Out of the total respondents, it was found that 55 per cent had shopped online, and 87 per cent had shopped online more than once. 25 per cent of regular online shoppers were in the age group of 18-25 years, 46 per cent were in the age group of 26-35 years and 18 per cent were in the age group of 36-45 years. 85 per cent of Online Shoppers were male, whereas 15 per cent were female online shoppers (www.crm2day.com). Besides, various researchers have carried out varied research studies considering multidimensional aspects of online shopping and also covering issues related to gender based online shopping that has revealed the following. Tak Kee Hui and David Wan (2006) found that there was a general consensus amongst Singaporeans that the Internet is a convenient medium for information search or making purchases. Females indicated a strong dislike for not being able to savor a physically fulfilling shopping experience online.

Yu-Bin Chiu, Chieh-Peng Lin Taiwan and Ling-Lang Tang (2004) proposed a model of online purchase intentions and provided that the influences of personal innovativeness and perceived usefulness on attitudes and online purchase intentions were similar for males and females. Helga Dittmar and others (2004) through their two studies reported on gender differences in attitudes toward conventional buying and online buying. It was revealed that the online environment has an effect on buying attitudes, but more strongly, concerns are amplified rather than changed in the shift from conventional to online buying; women's motivational priorities show a reversal, and less involvement in shopping. In contrast to men, women's online buying is associated with barriers and facilitators grounded in their attitudes toward conventional buying.

Thompson S H. Teo (2001) examined demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and motivation variables such as perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, perceived usefulness associated with Internet usage activities defined in terms of messaging, browsing, downloading and purchasing. The study showed that males are more likely to engage in downloading and purchasing activities while females are more likely to engage in messaging activities.

A study by Lynda Andrews and others (2007) attempted to compare the experiential consumption values that motivate consumer choice to shop online for both male and female purchasers and non-purchasers. They found that male online shoppers are discriminated from female online shoppers by social value and from male non-purchasers by conditional value. Female online shoppers are discriminated from male purchasers by functional value and from female non-online shoppers' purchasers by social value.

Bijou Yanga and David Lester (2005) attempted to examine the existence of a gender gap in online shopping and found that, when it comes to online shopping, women tend to be affected by more factors than are men. Females seemed less inclined to take moral risks for money. Men seemed not to be affected by psychological factors.

The author studied differences in the use of the Internet by gender, with a consideration of access to the web, use of communication facilities related to email and chat rooms, frequency of use, and types of websites used. Men were more likely to use websites that provided financial information, government information, news and current events, and sexually explicit information. Women were significantly more likely to use religious and church sites, as well as cooking and recipe sites. (Ira M. Wasserman, Eastern Mich, 2005). The author examined that significant gender differences emerge with respect to evaluative criteria and use patterns, with men liking some of the bells and whistles and women using academic web sites more. Women are more likely to adopt the technology in a manner that fits with their everyday practice, as compared to men, who are more likely to use the technology for its own sake. (Ananda Mitra, Jennifer Willyard, Carrie Anne Platt, Michael Parsons, 2005).

The author examined with exploratory studies whether consumer trust appears to vary by gender. This study detected

only minor gender based perception of online shopping, gender based variations, registering a high level of concern overall, regardless of gender. Online shoppers' innovators were generally younger, educated, technology competent males. The results suggested only marginal and statistically insignificant gender differences. (Alisa Kolsaker and Claire Payne, 2002)

REVIEWING STUDIES ON GENDER & ONLINE VERSUS OFFLINE SHOPPING IN INDIA & WORLDWIDE

Fram, Eugene H. and Grady, Dale B. (1995) carried out an online research with the help of a questionnaire on the Internet to assess consumer reactions of 378 online shoppers and it revealed that 80 per cent of them were men. They purchased relatively few product categories viz., computer hardware/software, books, music, magazines and nearly all of them were either satisfied, or highly satisfied, with their online shopping. Their major concerns were related to credit card security to improve the online shopping environment. They wanted more visuals and graphics; to locate products, and services easily and also to have better and faster software. Women online shoppers appeared to have little interest in online shopping. Alka Verma and others (2000) found that generally higher amounts of Internet use for non-shopping activities are associated with an increased amount of Internet product purchases. Importantly, however, this relationship is moderated by domain-specific but not general innovativeness. Implications for business practice and academic research are provided.

Sheril L. Loken, and Stanford (2003) conducted a web based survey that was responded by 130 faculty and staff from university located in the South Eastern United States and suggested that the difference between online shoppers and offline shoppers correspond with categories of adopters, and that the educational needs of consumers also differ based on their previous experience with online shopping. The results of this study indicated that online shoppers are younger and have more self-reported computer skills than non-online shoppers. Online shoppers revealed several perceived advantages of shopping.

Ruby Roy Dholkia and Outi Uusitalo (2002) revealed about behavioral pattern of switching to electronic stores of online shoppers and related it with consumer characteristics and their perceptual benefits of online shopping to study its association with gender, socio economic status of female online shoppers. The study found that gender had no impact on the perception of computer shopping benefits but did impact the perception of store shopping.

Kaun-pin Chiang and Ruby Roy Dholkia, (2003) examined consumers' intention to shop online during the information acquisition stage with specific consideration of three essential variables that are likely to influence intentions convenience characteristics of shopping channels, product type characteristics, and perceived price of the product. They found that convenience and product type influence consumers to engage in online shopping.

Charles Dennis, Lisa Harris and Balraj Sandhu, (2002) considered aspects of shopping & shopping styles, comparing e-shopping with bricks and mortars, and speculated on the possible future of shopping by relating their age and income variables. Web shoppers had a strong preference for shopping in shopping centers rather than online as more enjoyable and sociable.

Bijou Yang and David Lester (2004) undertook a survey of eleven positive features and ten discouraging features of online shopping that was administered on 180 students which identified certain behavior patterns for online shoppers versus offline-shoppers. It was found that online shoppers have consistently stronger positive feelings about online shopping than do offline-shoppers whereas offline-shoppers have more negative feelings about online shopping than do online shoppers.

Patricia Source, Victor Perotti and Stanley Widrick (2005) evaluated the shopping and buying behavior of younger and older online shoppers as mediated by their attitudes toward Internet shopping and found that, while older online shoppers search for significantly fewer products than their younger counterparts, they actually purchase as much as younger consumers. Attitudinal factors explained more variance in online searching behaviour.

Sendy Farag, (2006) conducted an empirical study on e-shopping and its relationship with in store shopping from the Netherlands and USA to study its association with behavioral and attitudinal variables of online shoppers. The findings indicated that online buying can be explained by socio- demographic, spatial, behavioral and attitudinal variables.

Thompson S. H. Teo (2006) examined dilemma of adopters and non adopters to buy or not to buy online in Singapore to relate it with their income, education level and Internet usage. The main reason cited for not purchasing online was the preference to examine products. Ronald E. Goldsmith and Leisa R. Flynn (2004) examined selected demographic

and psychological characteristics that lead consumers to buy clothing online and their findings showed that that online apparel buying is motivated more by Internet innovativeness than by clothing innovativeness.

Chaung Hoon Park and Young Gul Kim, (2003) focused on identification of key factors affecting consumer purchase behavior in an online shopping context with focus on Information satisfaction, relational benefit, and website commitment. The results showed that information satisfaction and relational benefit were the significant factors affecting a consumer's site commitment in online shopping context.

Shwu Ing wu, (2003) attempted to evaluate the relationship between consumer characteristics and their attitude towards online shopping by relating it to online shoppers' demographics; benefit perception; lifestyles, and attitudes. The study found that consumer demographic items had a significant relationship with the attitude toward online shopping.

Tulay Giard and others (2003) empirically studied the relationship of the type of product; shopping orientations and demographics with preferences for online shopping on the Internet. The researchers' findings also confirmed that the relationships of shopping orientation and demographic variables with purchase preference for shopping online significantly differ by product category.

Heejin Lim and Alan F. Dubinsky (2004) attempted to analyze an expectancy value approach to study consumers' perception of e-shopping characteristics with reference to e-store factors viz., merchandise; convenience, interactivity; reliability; promotions, and navigation. The findings obtained demonstrate that consumers' attitude towards online shopping was positively related to their perceptions of Web site merchandise and reliability attributes.

Despina A. Karayanni (2003) examined an empirical evaluation between online shoppers and offline-shoppers' compatibility, relative advantage and demographics with their Internet browsing activities; use of direct shopping; time efficiency, and availability of 24 hours of online shopping. The study found that web shoppers seem to be less concerned with enjoyment derived from traditional shopping.

A M. Levin, I. P. Levin, J. A. Weller, (2005) focused on the tradeoffs consumers make in evaluating online and offline shopping modes based on multi-attribute analysis of preferences for online and offline shopping as well as differences across products; consumers, and online shopping stages to study its linkage with gender and age of online and offline shoppers.

SUMMARIZED FINDINGS OF RESEARCH STUDIES ON GENDER & ONLINE SHOPPING

An attempt has been made to summarize key findings received from various research studies relating to gender based differences in case of online shopping activities. One could find significant differences in the ways males and females use computers. To illustrate, females use online communication as a means of building and sustaining relationships, whereas males favour task oriented communications. Females appear to be more concerned about personal privacy particularly, about receiving unsolicited e-mails and are more cautious about online shopping as compared to their male counterparts. Females feel less at ease exploring websites, or at least do not find this activity as enjoyable as males do. Females tend to see conventional shopping as an on all sides of and psychologically involving activity and experience, in which the actual ownership of the products forms a comparatively small part. In contrast, males frequently depicted shopping trips as a difficult and distasteful task, best carried out as quickly and efficiently as possible that has to be endured as a means to achieve the main goal of buying: getting the goods. It is suggested that females may be more concerned about trust, security and confidentiality, as elements of a good relationship and thus record higher levels of concern about these important online issues. Females' major concerns are related to payment security. Only marginal differences were detected between the genders about the payment security. Gender appears to be equally concerned about providing confidential information to a website. (Alisa Kolsaker and Claire Payne, 2002). Gender differences were found to be also associated with the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism of male and female online shoppers. For males, the more extraverted they are, the greater their use of leisure services, and, the more neurotic they are, the less their use of information services. Females are more conscious of the possible link between heavy use of credit cards and the danger of debt. Females are more cautious about spending money and were more aware of saving and paying bills on time. Females are more retentive and conservative than males. Social prestige discriminates males who shop online from female purchasers. Perceived risk is the most important consumption value for females who choose not to shop online. Functional value is the most important consumption

value for females to use the Internet for shopping. Female shoppers perceive value in the functional aspects such as relative advantage of shopping online. Females are more sensitive to relevant information online than males when making judgments, causing subsequent purchase attitudes and intentions rendered by males and females to vary. (Lynda Andrews and others, 2007). Moreover, in the field of IT usage, males tend to exhibit more strongly and sensitively the attitudes of task-oriented and instrumental applications than females, indicating that the influence of perceived usefulness on attitudes via IT usage is stronger for males than for females. The influences of personal innovativeness and perceived usefulness on both attitudes and online purchase intentions are similar for both the male and female shoppers. The finding of significant gender differences has provided additional support to psychological theories, stating that males and females have different gender-based perceptions which can influence their preferences and decisions while making online shopping. The stronger influence of perceived ease of shopping on both attitudes and online purchase intentions for females compared to males indicates that online shopping intentions and attitudes are sensitive to female perceptions, given a higher demand for the physical in store environment or a stronger desire for the sensory pleasures associated with touching a product (Yu-Bin Chiu, Chieh-Peng Lin, Ling-Lang Tang, 2005). Significant Gender differences also influences personality factor of online shoppers. Female online shoppers indicated a dislike for not being able to savor a physically fulfilling shopping experience online. Female online shoppers are found less emotionally satisfied with e-shopping and they tended to find online shopping more of a hassle than males. There existed a general consensus amongst the male and female online shoppers- that the Internet is a convenient medium for information search and for making an online shopping (Tak-kee Hui and David Wan, 2006). Male online shoppers are comparatively more motivated by functional factors, whereas female online shoppers are more motivated by emotional and social factors. Female online shoppers tend to focus on the often enjoyable process of shopping, whereas male online shoppers focus on the outcome to obtain the actual goods with the least fuss. Female online shoppers have highly positive attitudes toward shopping and associate it with a leisure frame, whereas male online shoppers tend to have negative attitudes towards shopping and see it as work that they want to accomplish with minimum input of time and effort. The buying environment may play a much more important role for female online shoppers, whereas male online shoppers may be able to fulfill their main concerns relatively easily in either environment. For female online shoppers, perceived advantages of conventional shopping, such as emotional involvement and social experiential benefits, may function as barriers for online shopping. Buying consumer goods is more integral to the personal and social identity of female online shoppers, at least in terms of traditional gender identity functional issues that are particularly important to male online shoppers and emotional-social and identity-related motivations are particularly important to female online shoppers (Helga Dittmar and others, 2004). Male online shoppers are more likely to engage in Internet usage activities such as downloading and purchasing activities as compared to females (Thompson S.H. Teo, 2001). Gender had no impact on the perception of computer shopping benefits, but did impact the perception of store shopping, specifically female rated store shopping more positively on the hedonic benefit, consistent with the view that more women are recreational shoppers (Ruby Roy Dholkia and Outi Uusitalo, 2002).

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS OF RESEARCH STUDIES ON GENDER & ONLINE SHOPPING

Women and men seem to differ in their shopping orientation. Since gender is generally acknowledged to strongly influence response to marketing strategies, specifying the moderating impacts of gender can guide e-marketers in designing different strategies for different consumers. Marketers need to seriously consider some of the following key marketing implications before they create, build and offer online products/services to male and female online shoppers. It calls for finding of ways of improving public perception of their trustworthiness in order to take advantage of the potential of e-commerce, for the benefit of consumers and organizations. Both, male and female online shoppers have shown equal concern on security of payment, confidentiality of information and integrity of returns and refunds etc., suggesting that marketers need to create and build trust amongst both of them. Companies offering online shopping facilities need to understand gender differences as more females can be encouraged to shop online.

Marketers can segment its target markets through their relativistic preference for an interactive experience in terms of the identified consumption values for the specified gender, and shopping behavior and then drive their behavior online through integrated marketing communications campaign that could involve both online and offline shopping

strategies. Marketers should develop an offline campaign to target and persuade existing female online shoppers by actively promoting online shopping events as social activities. It calls for combining of both online and offline high profile advertising and incentive programs to emphasize the social prestige value. Marketers should emphasize risk reduction communication strategies to handle security issue of online shoppers.

Marketers shall focus also on social-experiential factors which are seen as an important benefit of conventional buying, and their lack as a serious drawback of the Internet. Especially for female online shoppers, social-experiential factors are important in order to discriminate between female online shoppers versus non- online shoppers. E-marketers must concentrate on setting up of user-friendly online shopping system, which too is emphasized in its marketing communication campaigns. The use of word-of-mouth broadcasting by other female consumers could be an important approach to help female consumers to overcome hurdles and barriers of accepting online shopping. With the help of use of an interactive virtual reality along with background music, e-marketers could efficiently demonstrate to female consumers regarding how to use products in a fashionable manner, and engage them with surprising visual effects, and thus successfully stimulate their positive attitudes and increase online shopping intentions. E-marketers should provide increased personal sales assistance or more security features, based on that they can formulate strategies to accommodate such concerns when marketing their products over the Internet. It also calls for wider use of providing and sharing of information coupled with support of educational awareness programmers in order to convince the less educated and to persuade the starters of online shopping. E-marketers need to make consumers realize that online shopping is relatively hassle free and offers products/ services at competitive prices. E-marketers aimed at targeting a female market must focus on and consider social-experiential dimensions as well as needs such as increasing visual material, or offering online alternatives to trying consumer goods. E-marketers should focus on making the experience of online shopping as widely accommodating and users friendly to emphasize on the positive features of online shopping.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS ON GENDER & ONLINE SHOPPING

The findings of research studies carried out on gender and online shopping activities hold interesting and serious business implications. An attempt has been made to outline few of the areas that would become crucial in deciding the success and wider penetration of online shopping in near future.

Researchers need to focus on the different gender based perceptions such as personal values and social influence that can influence their preferences and decisions during online shopping. These additional perspectives should be included to provide a more extensive explanation of consumer choice behaviour towards online shopping. More research studies shall be required to investigate whether large number of countries too displays similar gender differences or not in case of online shopping intentions. Further evaluation of demographic variables of online shoppers such as age, personal income, marital status, ethnic groups and career life cycle and its linkage with their shopping attitudes could be based on a specific industry or product.

Researchers need to understand the factors that help and hinder female's and men's participation in on-line shopping, as well the quality of their on-line shopping experience, and the positive or negative consequences it may have for their shopping and spending patterns. It calls for further research required in order to specify the online shopping activities involved in the use of Internet and to identify the settings such as work, home, school, public facilities where these different types of Internet usage activities could be engaged in by males and females.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Learning gender differences is significant. Although, gender differences in attitudes towards use of Internet may lessen over time with the increased participation of females, it is unlikely that these differences will disappear any time soon. Several analyses of consumer behaviour have suggested that males and females differ particularly in their processing of information. Males and females respond in different ways to alternative consuming tasks and stimuli such as pictures versus words. Females easily and quickly respond to non-verbal stimuli by evoking more associative, interpretations and more elaborate descriptions than males. In order to attract more female online shoppers, marketers should focus on female online shoppers; perceive her value in the functional aspects and emotional aspects such as relative advantage and social prestige value of shopping online and social experiential dimensions. The stronger influence of perceived ease of purchasing on both attitudes and online shopping intentions for females compared to

males indicates that online shopping intentions and attitudes are sensitive to female perceptions, given a higher demand for the physical environment or a stronger desire for the sensory pleasures associated with touching a product. Marketers could better target consumers and consequently foster more positive attitudes on their online shopping intentions. Offering male consumers the right products whenever they need them and responding to inquiries in a timely fashion can strengthen the attitudes and purchase intentions of male consumers. Establishing an online consumer community based on gender and hobby provides another method of improving female perceptions of ease of shopping owing to the effective communications among female consumers themselves. Compared to females, males tend to reveal more masculine traits such as being assertive, impatient, and goal-oriented indicating that they desire to successfully accomplish efficient online purchases without distraction. (Yu-Bin Chiu, Chieh-Peng Lin, Ling-Lang Tang, 2005). Hedonic benefits may be obtained from social components of the online shopping experience. E-retailers interested in moving their customers to some form of electronic shopping must improve perceived hedonic benefit and not concentrate only on utilitarian benefits. Finally, the gendered nature of conventional buying emerged clearly; women prefer emotional and psychological involvement in the online and offline shopping process, whereas, men focus on efficiency and convenience in obtaining shopping outcomes from the actual products.

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