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By Lim Pei Ling & Mr. Rashad Yazdanifard

HELP College of Arts and Technology, Malaysia

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Does Gender Play a Role in Online Consumer Behavior?

Lim Pei Ling ^α & Mr. Rashad Yazdanifard ^σ

Abstract- Electronic commerce (online shopping) is increasing in popularity nowadays due to the popularity of computer usage and the prevalence of internet. Electronic commerce can produce numerous benefits to both sellers and consumers. Hence, the study of online consumer behavior can generate a better online atmosphere to facilitate greater profit to sellers and better online purchasing experience to consumer. Gender has universal characteristics, regardless of culture and time period. In this study, the gender differences in different aspects of online consumer behavior is concerned and investigated.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since computer and Internet are invented, human life has changed and this also effected the business market. Electronic commerce is also getting larger and larger in the business market in recent years. Electronic commerce is one of the business style which trades through public or private computer network instead of personal interaction (Suki, 2002). According to Euromonitor's statistics, the global online market has almost increased 17 percent annually from 2007 to 2012. The profit of online sales was \$236 billion in 2007 and has increased to \$521 billion in 2012 (Bon-Shabat, Moriarty, & Nilforoushan, 2013). Some researches still make positive prediction to the growth of electronic commerce in future. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2013), China makes more than \$190 billion in 2012. They also predicted that China will continue to increase electronic commerce's profit to \$650 billion in 2020. The same prediction was made to the United States as well. Malpuru (2013) predicted that United States will continue growing from \$262 billion in 2013 to \$370 billion in 2017. Those reports have demonstrated that online purchasing will be more and more popular in future business market.

Consumer behavior is always an important issue in marketing research. Without consumer, there is business cannot be done and no profit can be made. Therefore, many marketers and researchers try to figure out the factors which influence consumers to buy products or services. Consumer behavior is always defined as selecting, using and disposing of products or

services of individuals or organizations (Blythe, 2013). Selecting does not only mean to make decision in purchasing, but also includes searching information and evaluating options. The consumption of a product or service is a motivation or intention in which people buy a product or service. Sometimes, the method of using can be a re-invention of different ways by different consumers. Disposing of an individual's product is disposing goods which are worn-out or no longer needed (Blythe, 2013). However, consumer behaviors are hard to predict and explain completely. There have numerous factors to influence consumers such as external factors which include culture, gender, social norm, race and marketing activities and internal factors which include motivation, emotion, and personality.

Consumer behavior also have differences between online and offline shopping. Consumers are more influenced by brand names and price during online shopping than offline shopping (Degeratu, Rangaswamy & Wu, 2000; Chu, Arce-Urriza, Cebollada-Calvo & Chintagunta, 2010). Furthermore, light and heavy online shoppers focus on different aspects, for example light online shoppers acknowledge brand names and size loyalty more but lower acknowledgement to price (Chu et al., 2010). Those studies implies that motivation and perception of online and offline shopping are different. Generally, consumers feel more insecurities through online shopping because they cannot see and touch the actual products (Katawetawarakas & Wang, 2011).

Online commerce has become more profitable in recent years. Hence, the study of online consumer behavior has been paid more attention by many researchers (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Hasan, 2010; Huang & Yang, 2010). Gender always play a significant role to affect human's habit which includes buying behavior (Fan & Miao, 2012; Hasan, 2010; Seock & Bailey, 2008). Gender has some universal characteristics and regardless in other cultures or regions. Therefore, to investigate the role of gender in online consumer behavior is essential for marketers make better strategies to increase profit and consumers obtain better shopping experiences.

II. THEORIES OF ONLINE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

There are few theories which explain the online consumer behaviors such as consumer buying decision

Author α σ: Center for Southern New Hampshire University HELP College of Arts and Technology. e-mails: lingabcdef@gmail.com, rashad.y@helpcat.edu.my, rashadyazdanifard@yahoo.com

process, theory of reasoned action, technology acceptance model, innovation diffusion theory and social influence theory (Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007; Jeddi, Atefi, Jalali, Poureisa, & Haghi, 2013).

The consumer buying decision process refers to consumers who buy products and services which are based on external factors such as culture, race and marketing activities, and internal factors such as experience, motivation and personality. When consumers make purchasing behavior, the decision making process includes identifying problem, searching information, evaluating options, purchasing and after purchasing behavior such as satisfaction (Jeddi et al., 2013).

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is suitable to explain online consumer behavior and few theories have adopted its concept to develop innovative theories such as theory of planned behavior and technology acceptance model (Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007). According to Ajzen (1991), human behavior is determined by the salient beliefs to evaluate the benefits and costs of behavior (as cited in Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007). The salient beliefs generally include product perception, shopping experience, customer service and consumer risk. Those salient beliefs come from normative beliefs which were built by people's perception from the opinion of friends, siblings and even consumer reviews. The attitude and normative belief determine human behavioral intention and then the intention would affect human actual behavior (Bae & Lee, 2011; Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007).

In technology acceptance model (TAM), the perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are added into account for online consumer behavior whereas the normative beliefs are ignored. In recent years, some researchers realized the importance of social factors and some of them would adapt to the model (Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007).

In innovation diffusion theory (IDT), the application of innovative information technology is focused. Researchers can use IDT to study the adoption of online purchasing and online purchasing behavior. The components of IDT include relative advantage (the perception of advantage in online purchasing), compatibility (the level of satisfaction in online purchasing), complexity (the level of difficulty in online purchasing), trialability (the level of experience of the product in online shopping) and observability (the level of publicity of online purchasing). Those factors are related to the level of human adopt innovation (online purchasing) (Rogers, 1983; as cited in Cao & Mokhtarian, 2007).

III. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDE AND PERCEPTION TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASING

Attitude is a person's response to an object or condition by his/her favorable or unfavorable manner. The attitude is learnt from past experience or knowledge and can affect behavior towards the object or condition (Hasan, 2010). In other words, attitude indicates that people like or dislike online purchasing. Perception is how a person perceive and interpret an object or condition according to their past experience or knowledge. Many studies (Allen, 2001; Kwak, Fox & Zinkhan, 2002) indicated that males purchase and spend more money than female in online purchasing. The major perceptions towards online purchasing to most people is cheaper product and time saving but also risky (Petryl, 2012).

A study is done by Hasan (2010) who divided the attitude into cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects. In cognitive attitude, males scored higher than females in response to online shopping as a wise, useful and effective way to buy products. Cognition of an object is essential to decide buying behavior. Therefore, when females have lower cognitive attitudes, females also have lower affective attitude which includes favoring, feeling happy and excited towards online shopping. Females also indicated lower behavioral attitude such as buying in the future, intentions of buying and continuing to buy in the future.

Furthermore, when consumers feel challenged during online purchasing, the attitude towards online purchasing is different. The website challenge to males would affect the site attitude and pre-purchase evaluation. That means when males felt challenged to the website and the website's information is relevant, they have higher pre-purchase evaluation to the product. On the other hand, the website challenge to females which are affected by website attitude. That means when females felt challenged to the website, they perceived more negatively to the website (Richard, Chebat, Yang & Putrevu, 2010).

The present attitude which influences future intentions of online purchasing is different in gender as well. Females are less likely than males to change their future intentions (Hernandez, Jimenez & Martin, 2010). However, according to Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004), females more easily change their perceptions than males because of friend's recommendation and suggestion. On the other hand, males showed higher intention to online purchasing after they purchased online (Hernandez, Jimenez & Martin, 2010).

Website design is also a significant factor to influence consumers buying decision process (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Sebastianelli et al., 2008). The perception of website design also differed by gender.

Males perceived the same website as more visual and more fulfilling to the needs and expectation than females (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005).

IV. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MOTIVATION TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASING

The motivation of online purchasing can refer to people who perceive positively and beneficially to electronic commerce and thus they have desires to purchase things online. It also can be referred to one of the steps in consumer buying decision process which is identifying the problem (need/desire) (Jeddi et al., 2013; Monsuwe, Dellaert & Ruyter, 2004). In other words, to identify the desire and purchases the products people want.

The motivation of online shopping is divided into two main categories which are utilitarian and hedonic motivations as well (Huang & Yang, 2010; Monsuwe et al., 2004). Utilitarian motivation tends to have a rational approach and is also considered as a traditional buying decision process. As mentioned before, the benefits of online purchasing (e.g., time saving, detailed information of product, price comparison, greater option and cheaper price) can be considered as utilitarian motivation because the person purchase from online rationally (Gayathiri, Balachandran & Usha, 2014; Sarkar, 2011; Veronika, 2013). On the other hand, hedonic motivation tends to have an emotional approach. It means that people who buy products online are driven by emotions and feelings because they like, enjoy and feel excited to the online shopping experience. However, most of the purchasing behavior is influenced by emotional factors whether with utilitarian or hedonic motivation. Most of the successful purchase is heavily based on human desire (Bhatnagar & Ghosh, 2004; as cited in Sarkar, 2011; Seock & Bailey, 2008; Topalaglu, 2012). Normally, hedonic motivation occurs when a person is experiencing or using the actual product. Hence, online consumers tend to have utilitarian motivation to compare with hedonic motivation (Sarkar, 2011; Seock & Bailey, 2008).

However, gender role indeed plays a role to affect consumer motivation. In Seock and Bailey's (2008) study, they found females tend to have hedonic motivation because they have higher shopping enjoyment, brand consciousness, price consciousness and shopping confidence than males. The shopping enjoyment and shopping confidence are related with emotion and also the sign of hedonic motivation. On the other hand, males tend to be utilitarian motivation during online purchasing because they have higher concerns about the saving time than females. Saving time is one of the beneficial functions and also the one of the elements of utilitarian motivation in online purchasing.

A study conducted by Huang and Yang (2010) is consistent to the result of males as utilitarian

purchasers. In utilitarian motivation, males are concerned more on convenience, lack of sociality and time-saving than females. In this functional motivation, the main values for females are the availability of information, convenience and choice. On the other hand, females are also confirmed through previous researches that they are hedonic purchasers. Females are concerned more on adventures, sociality, fashion and value than males. In this emotional motivation, the main values for males are to go online, fashion and value.

V. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVING RISKS TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASING

Online purchasing is not always beneficial to consumers. It also contains risk sometimes (Alreck, DiBartolo, Diriker & Settle, n.d.; Bae & Lee, 2011; Fan & Miao, 2012; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Sarkar, 2011; Veronika, 2013). Generally, consumers perceive online purchasing is beneficial to shop anywhere and anytime, easier and greater selections and price comparison, and cheaper products (Alreck, DiBartolo, Diriker & Settle, n.d.; Veronika, 2013). On the other hand, the risk and problem of online purchasing is considerable as well. The risk and problem includes private information privacy, security, fraudulent website, missing delivery, poor quality of product and even product which is inconformity with order (Bae & Lee, 2011; Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Petryl, 2012; Suki, 2002). Other than that, people also feel annoyed of spams and troublesome e-mails (Katawetawaraks & Wang, 2011).

The privacy and security is always a concern to most of the online consumers (Petryl, 2012; Suki, 2002). Consumers are concern about their personal information privacy violated by the retailers such as unauthorized use of credit card and identity, revealing personal information to other businesses without consent and even hidden costs. For the security, most consumers' concern is personal information (e.g., identity and credit card number) to be taken by unknown third party such as hacker and identity thief (Suki, 2002). In reality, consumers have less likelihood to meet privacy and security problems compared to delivery and product problems (Petryl, 2012).

The delivery and product problems are also the popular risk that consumers concern. The first popular complaint is delivery of products which was never delivered successfully, the second is product and service problems where quality of product is poor or defective and the third is contract terms which refer to the privacy and security problems in United States (Petryl, 2012).

A research conducted by Garbarino and Strahilevitz (2004) indicated that females concerned more to loss of privacy, misuse of credit card, fraudulent

site and shipping problems than males. Furthermore, females perceived the consequence of those problems as more serious and bad than males. Another research conducted by Bae and Lee (2011) also indicated that females perceived higher risk to online shopping and thus they would be more cautious before purchasing. For instance, females are willing to survey more information and consumer reviews compared to males.

VI. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PRODUCT PREFERENCES TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASING

Gender difference does not only influence online motivation. It also influences the types of product that males and females prefer to purchase online. A study conducted by Sebastianelli, Tamimi and Rajan (2008) who found that females purchased significantly more on apparel (e.g., clothes, shoes and bags), health products, beauty products, toys, games, home accessories and garden accessories than males in online. On the other hand, males purchased significantly more on computer hardware and software and electronic products than females in online.

In Sebastianelli and his colleagues' study (2008), the products were also categorized into three aspects which are search (e.g., book, computer hardware and software, music and video games), experience (e.g., apparel, beauty products, gifts, foods, home accessories and jewelry) and credence (e.g., airline tickets, prescriptions, travel and vitamins). The result revealed that males are more likely to purchase search product whereas females are more likely to purchase experience product.

VII. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SEARCHING INFORMATION IN ONLINE PURCHASING

Searching information is one of the steps in consumer buying decision process. Human searches for information to figure out the product they want and to compare with similar products.

According to selectivity model, the gender differences are one of the factors in information search process. Meyers-Levy (1989) stated that males tended to be selective processors who search only focusing on the object they want and may miss other cues, whereas females tended to be comprehensive processors who searches lots of information and put effort to the object they want (as cited in Park, Yoon & Lee, 2009). Males only considered purchasing process is a mission and information search is one part of the mission, thus they only need a little information to complete the purchasing process. Females are significantly different from males. They considered purchasing process as an enjoyment and information search as a pleasure, thus they are willing to search as much as possible for information

(Campell, 2000; as cited in Park et al., 2009). Another research has proved that females are more willing to search for information to compare with males.

Online advertising is a way to search for online information as well. A study conducted by Wolin and Korganonkar (2003) who stated that males' attitude towards online advertising is more positive (useful, informative and fun) than other media, whereas females' attitude towards online advertising was more negative (annoying and deceptive).

VIII. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EVALUATING OPTIONS IN ONLINE PURCHASING

Evaluating options is the last process before purchasing process. People would evaluate the worthiness of the products or services by motivation and information first and then making decision for the products or services (Suri, long & Monroe, 2003). People perceive a product which is expensive as more valuable and superior when the person has high motivation and has searched for information (Suri et al., 2003).

Females prefer to purchase products by novel-fashion which is funny and attractive whereas males prefer to purchase products by brand which is famous and expensive (Yang & Wu, 2007). This also similar with the motivation of online purchasing and also confirmed that motivation is related with purchase intention.

Consumer reviews is considered as evaluating options in consumer buying decision process. As mentioned before, consumer reviews can affect consumer buying decision process. It also has proven to affect more in females than males (Bae & Lee, 2011; Fan & Miao, 2012). Park and his colleagues (2009) stated that females are more willing to view consumer reviews than males. Furthermore, females viewed more consumer reviews when they are purchasing experience products such as clothes and domestic products (Park et al., 2009). The expertise and rapport in online consumer reviews can enhance the comments' credibility and affect the willingness of purchasing to females (Fan & Miao, 2012; Park et al., 2009).

IX. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVING SATISFACTION TOWARDS ONLINE PURCHASING

Satisfying consumers is an important issue to all businesses. Because when consumers are satisfied, they will repurchase more products. The website quality is always considered as a significant factor to influence consumers buying decision process. The website quality includes many dimensions such as ease of use, navigation, website design, information, security, responsiveness, supportive customer service and assurance (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Sebastianelli et al.,

2008; Tabaei et al., 2011). Another important factor for satisfying consumer is a product which includes a reasonable price, good quality and is reliable and consistent with the order (Tabaei et al., 2011).

Consumers' satisfaction is influenced by the perception of website design which also differs between genders. Males perceived the same website as more visual and more fulfilling the needs and expectation than females (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005). A study indicated that high quality image could increase females' satisfaction and purchase intention whereas males have increased satisfaction but not purchase intention (Flavian, Gurrea & Orus, 2011).

X. DISCUSSION

In this study, gender differences are focused and investigated with various factors such as perception, motivation, preferences which influence online consumer behavior. Nowadays, human life is changed by computers and internet considerably and that also includes business market. Consumer behavior is a popular issue in marketing research. To study consumer behavior, sellers can create a better purchasing experience to consumers and they can make more profit from consumer as well. Consumer behavior is influenced by numerous factors which divide into external factors such as culture, social, gender and race, and internal factors such as personality, emotion and motivation. Electronic commerce is larger and more profitable in recent years. Hence, marketers and researchers pay more attention to online consumer behavior nowadays. There also have many theories to explain consumer behavior such as consumer buying decision process, theories of reasoned action and innovation diffusion theory.

People's attitude and perception of online purchasing are important to online purchasing and gender has influences to it. The general perceptions of online purchasing have cheaper products, time saving and risks. To purchasing online, males indicated more positive attitude and thought this is useful and informative. They are more willing to purchase and spend money than females online as well. On the other hand, females indicated more negative attitudes and less future intention to purchase online compared to males. The website challenge facilitates females to have more negative attitude to online purchasing. The perception of website design is more visual and satisfying on males comparing to females. The reason females have less positive attitude than males may be due to them not familiar with computers. Besides, females feel more insecurity towards online purchasing compared to males.

Motivation is a major part in online purchasing because it indicates the reason people have desires to purchase online. Motivation generally divides into

utilitarian and hedonic motivation. Utilitarian motivation is driven by rational and functional approach such as time saving, cheaper products, broader options and detailed information. Hedonic motivation is driven by emotional approach such as enjoyment and excitement. Motivation is different in males and females. Males tend to have utilitarian motivation because the reason they purchase online is saving time, convenience and boarder options whereas females tend to have hedonic motivation because they feel adventures, enjoyments and confidence in online purchasing. Generally, both motivations are important to motivate consumer purchasing. Females tend to hedonic motivation can be proven by the relationship between satisfaction and purchase intention. When females experience satisfaction which means they enjoy the experience, their purchase intention is increased as well. On the other hand, males are more rational in purchasing. Although they experience satisfaction, but the satisfaction does not increase their purchase intention and this is the proof of utilitarian motivation in males.

Risk is the major concern in online purchasing. Online purchasing's risks include information privacy and security, fraudulent websites, missing delivery, poor quality of product and others. The major concern to consumer is information privacy (e.g., misusing credit card, revealing personal information and hidden cost) and security (e.g., hacker and identity thief). However, the major complaints from consumers are delivery problems (e.g., product never delivered) and product problems (e.g., poor quality and defective). Different genders perceive the risk differently as well. Females perceived higher risk and more concerns than males. In perceiving risk in online purchasing, females have higher concerns compared to males. This is reasonable because females purchase more on products they have more experiences on such as clothing and beauty products which are used directly on their body.

Gender influences product preferences in online purchasing. As mentioned before, females prefer to purchase products which they have experiences on such as apparels, beauty products, food and home accessories which can be used directly on a person. Males prefer to purchase search products such as electronic products, computer hardware and software. Different gender also differs in searching information, product preferences and evaluating options. In searching information, females are more willing than males to search information. On the other hand, males viewed online advertising positively (e.g., useful and funny) whereas females viewed them negatively (e.g., annoying and deceptive). The reason females search more information is because they have high concerns and purchase more in experience product. When they know more about the products, their concerns decrease as well. Males only need to search the exact products

that they want and do not need to care much on other information.

Evaluation is to examine the worthiness of product through motivation and information. This process is related to motivation, product preferences and risk. Consumer reviews is one of the methods to evaluate the products as well. Females are more affected by it than males, especially when the reviews contain rapport and expertise. That is because females are more sociable compared to males. They can accept others' suggestion more than males. The satisfaction of consumers can divide into product quality and website quality. Both of the qualities are significant to influence consumers' satisfaction and purchase intention. To satisfy customers is one of the important factors to be successful in business. Different genders also can increase different level of satisfaction towards online purchasing. Females had higher satisfaction than males when the product's image is large and high quality.

The present studies have investigated most of the major issues (e.g., attitude, perception, motivation, searching information and evaluating options) regarding gender role in online consumer behavior. However, some issues are still underdeveloped, such as the evaluation of options in online consumer behavior. However, gender only plays a factor in online consumer behavior, but research which combines two factors (e.g., gender and culture role in online consumer behavior) is rare recently.

There are few aspects which are not inconsistent. Although many researchers revealed that one of the motivation in online purchasing is cost saving, a study conducted by Yang and Wu (2007) also indicated that males prefer purchasing famous and expensive products from online purchasing. Another inconsistent study is the perception of risk in online purchasing. Most of the studies in my study stated that males perceived or concerned less security issues to compare to females, whereas Gayathiri and his colleagues (2014) stated there is no difference of perceiving risk in online purchasing.

XI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, gender role plays a significant role in online consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is important to marketers to generate better strategies for profit and consumers' satisfaction. Computer and internet are one part of human life which includes electronic commerce. Hence, online consumer behavior has paid more attention by research nowadays. Males contain more positive attitude and more willingness to purchase than females online. That is because females are not secure and familiar with online purchasing. Males tend to have utilitarian motivation because they focus more on time saving and convenience which is rational approach to purchase online. Females tend to

have hedonic motivation because they focus on more on adventure and enjoyment which is an emotional approach to purchase online. Generally, everyone is concerned about the risk of online purchasing. However, females have higher insecurity and think of the consequences of risk seriously than males. The concerns also related to product preferences because females prefer to purchase experience products such as beauty products which they may get hurt from the product. On the other hand, males prefer to purchase search products such as electronic products and computer devices. The searching information also related to perceiving risk, because females concern more thus they search more information to the product they want to purchase. Males only need to search for products they want to purchase thus they normally ignore the information. Evaluation process is a process of people examining their motivation and information of the product. The consumer reviews can affect females more than males because females are more sociable and willing to accept advices than males. Satisfaction comes from product quality and website quality. Females more easily increase their satisfaction than males. That is because females are enjoying rather than doing a mission during online purchasing. However, some issues are still unclear and underdeveloped.

Gender is really a crucial factor which affects every single process during online purchasing. Consumerism is a complex action which involves many factors. Online consumer behavior is still a new topic in recent years and some issues are still unclear yet. However, online consumer behavior will be concerned by more marketers because the electronic commerce is accepted by more and more people already.

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