

Chapter 62

Internet Consumer Behavior: Flow and Emotions

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INTRODUCTION

As the internet is a new medium and a new distribution channel, it is important to understand the behavior of site visitors. This requires the development of a new model of Internet consumer behavior. The model in Figure 1-1 is an original model based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) *SOR* paradigm (i.e., stimulus, organism, response) which is explicated in this chapter and the next three ones. In this chapter we will explain the shaded areas of Figure 1

and response variables are flow, emotions and web atmospherics. This chapter develops the flow construct, composed of skills, challenge and interactivity, and the emotions construct, composed of pleasure, arousal and dominance. The next chapter will develop the web atmospherics variables.

Flow

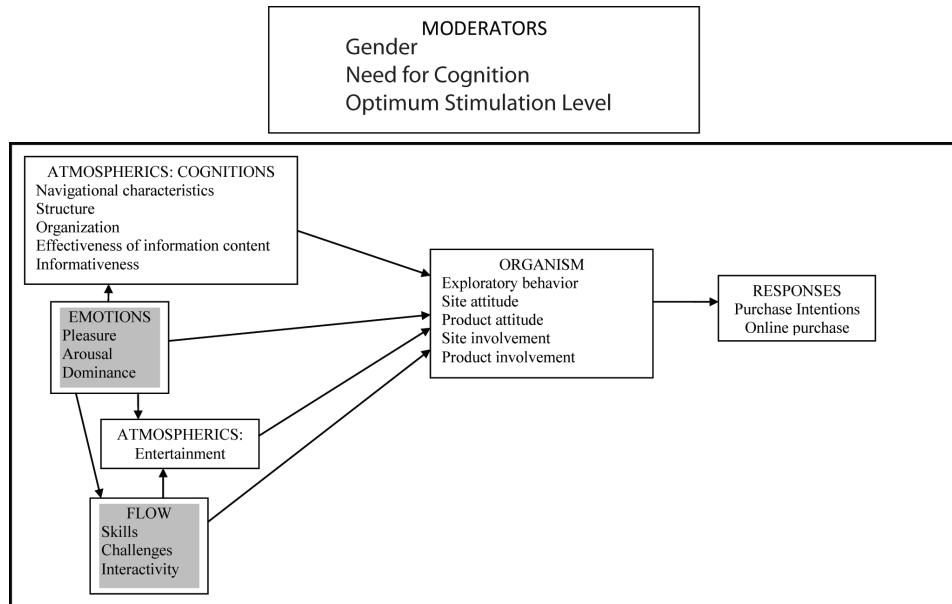
Flow is defined as a state occurring during internet navigation which: 1) is characterized by a seamless sequence of responses facilitated by machine interactivity; 2) is intrinsically enjoyable; 3) is accompanied by a loss of self-consciousness; and 4) is self-reinforcing and 5) leads to a sense of playfulness (Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Flow is related to skills, challenges and interactivity.

BACKGROUND

The key concepts which are part of the stimulus dimension of *SOR*, i.e., inputs to the organism

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-611-7.ch062

Figure 1. Model of consumer navigation behavior: flow and emotions (Source: Adapted from Richard, M.O. (2009). Modeling the internet behavior of visitors by the study of cognitive variables and moderators, unpublished doctoral dissertation, HEC-Montreal Business School.)



Skills

Novak, Hoffman and Yung (2000) define *skills* as the consumer's capacity for action during the online navigation process. Ghani and Deshpande (1994) report that skills directly affect the flow: they show that the level of perceived skills, as well as perceived challenges, is positively associated with the achievement of flow which, in turn, predicts exploratory behavior. Ghani (1991) discovers that flow is related to exploratory use behavior (considered as the consequences of flow; Hoffman & Novak, 1996). Ghani and Deshpande (1994) state that flow is present when skills and challenges are both high, since they independently contribute to the flow (Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000). Although they operate independently, studies demonstrate that high skill and high challenge levels lead to satisfying consumer experiences on the Internet (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Richard & Chandra, 2005). Although marginally significant, skills are a predictor of perceived interactivity and

people with high skills levels perceive the website as having greater interactivity (Jee & Lee, 2002; Wu, 2000).

Challenge

Another predictor of flow is challenge in internet activities. Novak, Hoffman, and Yung (2000) define challenges as the opportunities for action on the internet. Skills at navigating the web do not affect the surfing experiences and behavior of site visitors, since those planning to make online purchases have already developed basic navigational skills. But, positive challenges have an important influence on web experiences, since visitors must use their skills and abilities in navigating the site, learning how to interact with it, process information and make decisions on the purchase of needed products. On the other hand, negative challenges lead to slow downloading times, frustration and aborted buying processes. Positive challenges lead to positive site and product attitudes, as well

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