

Chapter 65

Internet Consumer Behavior: Major Moderating Variables

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the model of internet consumer behavior by describing some key moderating variables such as gender, need for cognition (NFC) and optimum stimulation level (OSL)(Figure 1).

BACKGROUND

The selection of each moderating variable (i.e., gender, NFC and OSL) is justified with appropriate background and its moderating effects on the model of Internet consumer behavior are explained.

Gender

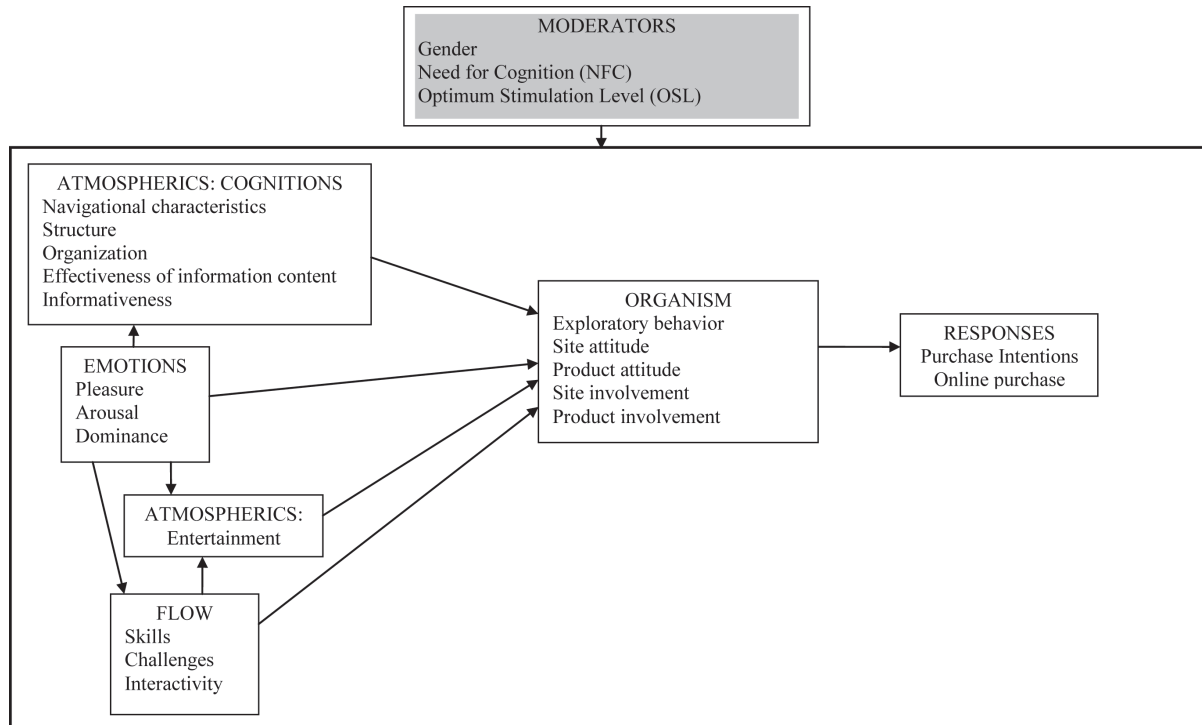
As shopping online becomes more common, the number of women shopping online shows a cor-

responding increase although male consumers are considered to be early adopters of Internet shopping (Asch, 2001). By 2005, men and women are equally likely to be online, including 68% of men and 66% of women (Pew, 2005). There has been an increase of 3% for men versus 12% of women (2000-2005) for information search on products and services, and by 2005, 82% of men vs. 75% of women conducted searches on products.

Despite the growing importance of the Internet, little research has investigated web browsing behavior. Some investigated differences between males and females in their perceptions of web advertising (Schlosser, Shavitt, & Kanfer, 1999), use patterns (Weiser, 2000), and online privacy concerns (Sheehan, 1999). However, little is known about how Internet experience and web atmospherics impact navigational behavior and about the moderating effects of gender on the relationship between Internet experience and web atmospherics, on one hand, and browsing behavior, on the other.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-611-7.ch065

Figure 1. Model of consumer navigation behavior: selected moderators (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 Unpublished doctoral dissertation, HEC-Montreal Business School.)



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Males have more internet experience and higher skills than females, except with emailing; but over time, this gender gap in experience and skills has narrowed (Schumacher & Morahan-Martin, 2001). Since males engage in less detailed elaboration of commercial messages than females and less likely to engage in detailed and thorough examinations of messages which involve extended decisions based on product attributes (Putrevu, 2004), the effects of *both* skills and challenge on exploratory behavior are stronger for females compared to males. In addition, no gender differences are expected on the effect of challenge on attitude toward the website (Luna, Peracchio, & de Juan, 2002). Finally, since males buy more online than females (Rodgers & Harris, 2002), and are less likely to fully explore the website,

their challenge is more focused on developing pre-purchase evaluations (Putrevu, 2004).

Explanations from Psychology

According to the *selectivity hypothesis*, females are comprehensive processors, i.e., they give equal weight to self- and other-generated information; males are heuristic processors, i.e., they do not process all the information, but rather a subset of it, and are driven by overall message themes or schemas (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991). An alternative explanation comes from Putrevu (2004): females are *relational* processors, i.e., they value category-based messages that focus on common themes; males are *item-specific* processors, i.e., they value attributes-based messages that

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