Chapter XV

How Innovativeness Influences Internet Shopping

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Abstract

Innovativeness is a willingness to try new things. Combined with other factors, innovativeness leads consumers to be among the first to adopt new ideas, products, and practices, such as buying online. As an individual difference trait, innovativeness can be conceptualized at three levels of generality: a global personality trait, general marketplace innovativeness, and domain-specific innovativeness. The present study assessed the impact of the first and third of these types of innovativeness on cyber-shopping. Data were collected through a survey of 303 consumers. Four hypotheses were proposed and supported. Global innovativeness and domain-specific innovativeness (online innovativeness) were positively correlated with each other and with amount of online buying. Domain-specific innovativeness also mediated the influence of global innovativeness on online buying behavior. Moreover, the relationships were weakly moderated by gender of respondent. These findings are consistent with previous studies and help to explain how personality influences online buying.
Introduction

Shopping and buying on the Internet can be viewed as a “new product” and therefore is an area to which diffusion of innovations theory can apply (Rangaswamy and Gupta, 1999). The successful diffusion of new products is a perennial goal of marketing management. Consumer and market researchers have helped marketing practice in this regard by pursuing several avenues of theory and research. One approach has been to study and to improve the new product development process (e.g., Cooper, 2001). A second approach focuses on improving the marketing of new products (e.g., Mohr, 2001). A third approach describes the influence other people have on spreading new ideas, practices, and products (e.g., Gladwell, 2000; Keller and Berry, 2003). Finally, a large body of research has focused on the personal characteristics of consumers that influence their acceptance of new products, on the presumption that understanding the personality, motives, and attitudes of consumers leads to better new product marketing and, hence, successful diffusion (Gatignon and Robertson, 1991, p. 320). One of the personal characteristics of consumers that plays an important role in the adoption decision process is innovativeness.

Rogers (1995, p. 252) used the term “innovativeness” to describe “the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than other members of a system,” and based his typology (innovators, early adopters, early and late majority, and laggards) on it. However, as Dowling (1999, p. 113) points out: “This is a time- and behaviour-based definition as opposed to a trait- or attitude-based definition.” The latter approach argues that time-of-adoption is the behavior one wants to explain using other constructs (Midgley and Dowling, 1978), and one of these constructs is innovativeness, which can be described as a trait-attitudinal disposition to adopt innovations (Dowling, 1999, p. 114) or as a willingness to try new things (Hurt, Joseph, and Cook, 1977). Thus, several authors argue that innovativeness is an individual difference trait that leads people to adopt new things (Hirschman, 1980; Manning, Bearden, and Madden, 1995) and that it is permissible to think of a trait that we can term consumer innovativeness (Dowling, 1999, p. 111).

Some confusion can arise, however, if one fails to make explicit the “level of generality” (Blalock, 1970, p. 92) one has in mind when using the term “innovativeness.” As Clark and Watson (1995) make clear, many psychological constructs can be proffered to account for a pattern of behavior (such as adoption of new products). One reason for this conceptual abundance is that psychological constructs are ordered hierarchically at different levels of abstraction or breadth (Clark and Watson, 1995). Their example (p. 310) is instructive: “In the area of personality, for example, one can conceive of the narrow traits of talkativeness and physical expressiveness, the somewhat broader concepts of gregariousness and assertiveness, and the still more general disposition of extraversion.” Thus, to avoid confusion, consumer and market researchers should explicitly state the level of generality they have in mind when invoking innovativeness as a partial explanation for time-of-adoption. Moreover, to better explain and predict how individual differences influence consumers’ behavior, the related influence of all levels of a construct should be delineated (Clark and Watson, 1995).
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