Chapter 12

Understanding the Reasons for Gender Difference in Online Information Processing of Consumers: Based on Theories

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to provide proposals about understanding the gender difference in online information processing that have been developed based on the theories and the findings of the current research. Major findings in the literature indicate the gender difference in online information processing. This chapter can be used to help gain insight about the online consumer behavior based on gender approach by presenting theoretical perspective, providing basis for future research, enrich the understanding about gender differences in online information processing, and to give suggestion for implications requiring strategic decisions.

INTRODUCTION

Advancements in technology have been declared as the most dramatic forces in current highly competitive marketing environment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016:108), which deeply encourages consumer behavioral alterations.

Although gender difference has decreased in consumer behavior thanks to technology, it has still been observed in online information processing of consumers. Therefore, gender is demonstrated as a significant variable in predicting and explaining the differences in information processing (Wang, Zhou, Jin, Fang, & Lee, 2017; Yasin, Yasin, Baghirov, Baghirov, Zhang, & Zhang, 2017; Zaharia, Kauke, & Hartung, 2017; Sin, 2016; Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015; Bae & Lee, 2011; Halder, Ray, & Chakrabarty, 2017).
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2010; Park, Yoon, & Lee, 2009; Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, & Schmitt, 2001). More specifically, gender has been suggested as a useful influencing variable to comprehend cognitive and social background of information processing (Halder, Ray, & Chakrabarty, 2010). Furthermore, many academicians argue that gender should be considered in developing theory regarding the information processing (Lu & Hsiao, 2009:149) and information technology as well (Lin, Featherman, & Sarker, 2017; Gefen & Straub, 1997: 398).

In this book chapter, proposals about understanding the gender difference in online information processing have been developed based on the theories and the findings of the current research. This study is expected to help gaining insight about the online consumer behavior based on gender approach by presenting theoretical perspective, providing basis for future research, enrich the understanding about gender differences in online information processing, and to give suggestion for implications requiring strategic decisions. For the beginning, the theoretical infrastructure about the gender difference is given. This is followed by the gender difference theories in information processing, and then specifically the gender difference in online information processing. Finally, conclusions and implications are discussed.

GENERAL THEORIES ABOUT GENDER DIFFERENCE

Biological, psychological, and social literatures are suggested to explain the sex differences in behavior by many academicians (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2015; Wood & Eagly, 2012; Eagly & Wood, 1991). In this section, the origin of gender difference is expounded based on the biological, psychological, and social theories.

Evolutionary theories are deemed as one of the explanatory theories that explain the root of the gender differences. It is claimed that males as hunters and female as gatherers in the ancestral past, naturally evolved sex-specific variation in personality traits. For instance, female engaged in nutrition and caution, whereas male took risk and were dominant in seeking. Inherent sex differences in personality traits have been indicated that it may become more likely to materialize as modern societies have transformed into being more egalitarian. In particular, cross-national research have demonstrated that compared to males across most nations, females have higher levels of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness as personality traits (Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008: 168-169). Another study in gender differences has illustrated that females determined themselves to be higher in neuroticism, agreeableness, warmth, and openness to feelings, whereas men identified themselves to be higher in assertiveness and openness to ideas (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001: 322).

Evolutionary psychological theory and social psychological theory are considered as origin theories emphasizing the sex differences in human behavior. Evolutionary psychological theory indicates that females and males have sex-specific mechanisms, are psychologically different, and have tendency to possess different social roles. Thus, causation flows from evolutionary adaptations to psychological sex differences in this theory. Sex-specific evolved tendencies are approved as psychological propensities which are made through genetically mediated adaptation to primeval context. As to social psychological theory, causation flows from social structure to psychological sex differences. Females and males have different propensities to perform different social roles, and they become different psychologically through adaptation of these roles. Sex-specific dispositions are viewed as formed through accommodation to the contemporaneous sexual division of labor. Furthermore, division of labor in the given society is viewed as an engine of sex-specific behaviour, and also physical differences between females and males are ac-