The Impact of In-Group Membership on e-Loyalty of Women Online Shoppers: An Application of the Social Identity Approach to Website Design

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to propose and test the Social Identity Approach to Website Design research model, which considers the role of Social Identity in the development of e-Loyalty. Using an online survey instrument comprised of existing Information Systems and Social Identity measures, data were collected from 322 women online shoppers who were members of the salient ingroup. The results of this study indicate that, in women online shoppers, the perception of social presence in an online retail store positively influences their enjoyment of the online shopping experience. The results also suggest that women online shoppers’ enjoyment of an online shopping experience positively influences their intention to revisit the website or recommend the website to other online shoppers, which are e-Loyal behaviors. In addition, this study extends related studies by proposing and testing the psychographic nature of human-computer interaction as a possible catalyst for e-Commerce Success.

Keywords: e-Commerce, e-Loyalty, Enjoyment, Gender, Information Systems Success, Online Shopping, Social Identity, Women

1. INTRODUCTION

Determining how to increase e-Loyalty by enhancing the shopping experiences for women online shoppers is a major issue faced by online retailers (Cyr, 2008). Research suggests that women online shoppers are more likely to revisit a website if the design and capabilities are appealing (Rosen & Purinton, 2004). E-Loyalty, which is an enduring psychological attachment to an online retailer, is manifested in customer attitudes and behaviors toward the e-tailer (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Butcher et al., 2001) and thus, research that examines the elements that contribute to e-Loyalty should consider the impact of the psychological profile of online shoppers.

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Questions surrounding online retail environments and how the effects of traditional in-store cues impact the shopper’s experience continue to emerge as the number of transactions increase (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003). Emotions play an important role in creating a positive online shopping experience as presented in previous research findings. This is particularly significant in relation to women online shoppers. Research suggests that they perceive websites differently than men and that women are generally more receptive to emotive or hedonic design elements embedded in the online experience (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005; Rodgers & Harris, 2003; VanSlyke, Comunale, & Belanger, 2002). Although Cyr et al. (2007) identifies this gender distinction in response to motive responses, many organizations do not currently consider these preferences in their website design.

Further, some research suggests that women are less likely to engage in transactions via the Internet and are overall less satisfied with their online shopping experiences (Garbarino & Strahilevitz, 2004; Rodgers & Harris, 2003). According to Moss and Gunn (2005), this lack of satisfaction may result from website designs that are not compatible with women’s design preferences. Thus, the inadequate emotional benefits as traditionally perceived by women may invoke less involvement in online shopping activity by women (Rodgers & Harris, 2003).

Interestingly, women’s online presence is significantly increasing so enhancing their customer satisfaction is extremely relevant for retailers. According to Phillips (2009), 106.3 million women or 51.8% of all Internet users are women, with an expected increase to 115.2 million women (52.1%) in 2013. In addition, women’s annual spending online is gradually increasing. To gain success with this target market, this data strongly suggests website designers must consider the preferences of women and examine in detail the elements that contribute to their perceptual differences (Cyr & Bonanni, 2005).

1.1. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study examines the relationship between website design and e-Loyalty vis-à-vis psychographic preferences and tendencies of women online shoppers using the Social Identity Approach to Website Design (Coverdale, 2010). Applying the Social Identity Theory to the realm of e-Commerce, research suggest that online shoppers’ social identities influence their buying behaviors. The purpose is to understand the impact of these preferences and elements that influence women online shopping behavior.

The research questions that serve as the foundation for this study are as follows:

- How is e-Loyalty in women online shoppers influenced through website design?
- What role does the psychological tendencies and preferences of women online shoppers play in their inclination toward revisiting or recommending an e-Commerce website?

In the empirical examination of these research questions, it is expected that the perceived psychological presence of others as created through social presence website design elements will have a positive influence on women’s enjoyment of an online shopping experience. In addition, this research study posits that the degree of a woman’s social identification, as it relates to a particular social group made salient through website design, will have a positive impact on her enjoyment of an online shopping experience.

It is also expected that her enjoyment of a particular online shopping experience will positively influence her intention to revisit the website or recommend it to other women online shoppers, both of which are e-Loyal behaviors.
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