Gender Motives for Web Acceptance and Use

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INTRODUCTION

In principle, males and females should be able to interact in a more gender-equitable environment. However, evidence has proved that behavioural differences due to gender—and other social indicators—may be currently more stressed in the online environments as users become representatives of these social categories (see Jazwinski, 2001; Wolfe, 2001); in fact, several studies have shown that individual differences–regarding gender—play an important role in how information technologies (ITs) are accepted and used.

The gender gap in computers and their applications has interested both computer and social science academics since the early 1980s. However, gender's role within the technology acceptance model (TAM) has been only recently investigated (see Gefen & Straub, 1997; Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). In fact, when TAM was initially introduced (Davis, 1986, 1989), there was no reference to gender differences; as Gefen and Straub (1997) noted, gender has been usually avoided by IT behavioural research. In this sense, we deem it necessary to highlight several main questions.

First, gender differences (1) are potentially critical to our understanding of IT's acceptance and use; and (2) could play an important role in determining how males and females make their decisions about adopting and using them (adapted from Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). Particularly, gender might moderate the influences of intrinsic and extrinsic motives in attitudes and intention to use the Web—dominated by males since inception. More attention should thus be given to gender effects on users' Web perceptions and outcomes; providing more detailed results about gender differences might be increasingly important for academics and Web sites managers.

Second, most of the TAM and gender role research has been basically conducted from an extrinsic-motivation perspective. For instance, Gefen and Straub (1997) (1) analysed gender differences regarding the IT diffusion model and TAM and (2) extended the TAM by also studying the constructs of perceived social presence and information richness addendum among workers using e-mail systems in the airline industry in North America, Asia, and Europe. In turn, Venkatesh and Morris, (1) integrated subjective norm into original TAM-beliefs (i.e., perceived ease of use and usefulness) and (2) analysed gender differences in the relative influence of the extending of TAM constructs on intention to use a new technology (specifically a system for data and information retrieval). Thus, despite the increasing concern for understanding gender's role in Web acceptance and use, a more in-depth analysis should also be made of its moderating influence in: (1) the relation between intrinsic motives (specifically the flow state defined as an intrinsically enjoyable experience) and traditional motives for using the Web (i.e., ease of use and usefulness); and (2) attitudes and intention to use it.

As Venkatesh (2000) notes, there is a significant and growing body of subsequent research regarding the importance of the role of intrinsic motives when using ITs (e.g., Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992; Malone, 1981; Venkatesh & Speier, 1999, 2000; Webster & Martocchio, 1992). Research in the HCI (human-computer interaction) tradition has long asserted that the research of human factors is a key to the successful design and implementation of technological devices, and should include extrinsic and intrinsic motives. Individuals have a full range of opportunities to interact with technologies for different motives that have been characterized as intrinsic, emphasising internal rewards such as pleasure and satisfaction from browsing, or extrinsic, focus-

ing on external rewards including, for instance, incentives and gratifications. It is thus important to consider the different motives based, respectively, on the TAM and the flow experience to understand the acceptance and Web usage (see Sánchez-Franco & Roldán, 2004).

To sum up, researchers have become increasingly aware of (1) the relevance of the non-cognitive aspects in understanding attitudes towards use of the Web and facets of behaviour; and, moreover (2), the gender differences related to acceptance and use of it. Specifically, males and females could differ in the extrinsic and intrinsic motives regarding online behaviour; males and females could be motivated to accept and use the Web for different motives. As Yi and Hwang (2003) suggest, "given that the Web is a relatively new technology and is a richer environment than any other traditional information technology in meeting various personal needs, we expect that these motivational variables will play critical roles in influencing individuals decision to use a Web based technology".

Our main objective in this article is to theoretically analyse and present, by means of a critical literature review, those questions associated with (1) the role of gender in ITs -more specifically, the Web- and (2) the relevance of the non-cognitive aspects (specifically the flow state) in understanding Web acceptance and use. In this sense, this paper is structured as follows: first, in the theoretical background, a brief presentation of TAM and flow state-of-mind is made in order to better position the development of the main part of this paper. Secondly, based on the previous background, we treat the role of gender in Web acceptance and the achievement of flow when using the Web.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL AND THE FLOW STATE

TAM is an adaptation of the theory of reasoned action (see Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TAM is considered to be the most parsimonious and robust model in explaining IT use at the individual level and has been widely used to explore (1) attitudes towards ITs and (2) the resultant effect on use. It has been concluded that TAM is a useful theoretical model in helping to understand and explain use behaviour in IT implementation. Moreover, several researches have demonstrated the validity of TAM across a wide variety of ITs (e.g., the Web) (see Moon & Kim, 2001).

According to TAM and its application to the Web, users' acceptance and usage behaviour are determined by their intention to use it, which are also influenced by their beliefs and attitudes towards it.

1. There is a direct and positive relation among users' attitude towards using the Web, their intention to use it and their actual use of it
2. In turn, perceived usefulness and ease of use determine their attitudes toward using the Web
3. Finally, intention to use the Web is viewed as being jointly determined by users' attitude towards using it and their perceived usefulness. These relationships have been examined and supported by many prior studies (e.g., Davis 1989, 1993; Davis, Bagozzi, & Warsaw, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 1996, 2000).

Therefore, TAM attempts to predict and explain certain ITs use by posing that *perceived usefulness* and *perceived ease of use* are two primary determinants of its acceptance. Firstly and centering our attention on the Web, perceived usefulness—raditionally the most important factor affecting user acceptance—is the degree to which a person believes that the Web would enhance his task performance (e.g., by reducing the time to accomplish a task or providing timely information); (i.e., the perception that users will want to perform an activity) "because it is perceived to be instrumental in achieving valued outcomes that are distinct from the activity itself, such as improved job performance, pay, or promotions" (Davis et al., 1992). Secondly, perceived ease of use is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using the Web does not require considerable efforts to use it. Moreover, it influences individuals' attitudes through two mechanisms: self-efficacy and instrumentality. Inasmuch as perceived ease of use has an indirect relation with the perceived complexity of use of the Web, it may also affect perceived usefulness. The Web sites that are easier to use would be more useful; i.e. if