Chapter 7.1
A Critical Review of Online Consumer Behavior:
Empirical Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Empirical research on online consumer theory has been examined under diverse contexts over the years. Although researchers from a variety of business disciplines have made significant progress over the past few years, the scope of these studies is rather broad, the studies appear relatively fragmented and no unifying theoretical framework is found in this area. In view of this, this study attempts to provide an exhaustive review of prior theoretical literature and to provide an integrative model of online consumer behavior. This framework not only provides us with a cohesive view of online consumer behavior, but also serves as a salient guideline for researchers in this area. The paper is concluded with a research agenda for future studies.

INTRODUCTION

Online consumer behavior has become an emerging research area with an increasing number of publications per year. The research articles appear in a variety of journals and conference proceedings in the fields of information systems, marketing, management, and psychology. A review of these articles indicates that researchers mostly draw theories from classical consumer behavior research, such as behavioral learning (Skinner, 1938), personality research (Folkes, 1988), information processing (Bettman, 1979), and attitude models (Fishbein, 1975).

A close examination of the literature in this area reveals that most of the components of consumer behavior theory have been applied to the study of online consumer behavior. However, the applica-

tion is not as straightforward as simply borrowing the components and applying them. There are still significant differences between off-line and online consumer behavior that warrant a distinguishing conceptualization. For example, Vijayasarathy (2001) integrated the Web-specific factors (online shopping aid) into the theory of reasoned action (TRA) to better explain consumer online shopping behavior. Song and Zahedi (2001) built on the model of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and examined the effects of Web site design on the adoption of Internet shopping.

In addition, a review of online consumer research finds that the scope of published studies is rather broad, the studies appear relatively fragmented with contradictory results, and only very few prior studies (e.g., Jarvenpaa & Todd, 1996; Koufaris et al., 2001) have attempted to systematically review and develop a framework for the study of this important research area. In this vein, the objectives of this study are (1) to provide a systematic and exhaustive review of online consumer behavior research, (2) to identify important constructs that are specific to the context of online purchasing, (3) to propose an integrated framework that enhances our understanding of the underlying driving factors of online consumer behavior, and (4) to provide directions for future research in this area.

The paper is organized as follows. The second section outlines the research approach, and the third section describes the results and the literature analysis. The fourth section presents an integrated framework for the study of online consumer behavior. Finally, the fifth section addresses the discussion, and the sixth section concludes the paper by considering the future research agenda in this area.

A STRUCTURED RESEARCH APPROACH

Prior literature provides us with a rich foundation on which to build a research framework for the study of online consumer behavior. As suggested in Douglas et al. (1994), strong theoretical and conceptual frameworks can be developed through an integration of constructs from different research traditions and disciplines. In the current study, we review the prior literature of online consumer behavior and analyze the theories and the underpinning factors.

A systematic and structured approach in search and review is strongly recommended in writing sound IS literature reviews (Webster & Watson, 2002). In this study, we conducted an exhaustive and systematic electronic search using ProQuest, Social Science Citation Index, and IEEE Xplore. Moreover, we conducted a literature search in the EC-specific journals including the *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* and *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy.* In addition to the search for referred journal articles, we included three IS-related conference proceedings (AMCIS, HICSS, ICIS) in our literature search and analysis.

The literature search was based on keywords such as *online shopping*, *Internet shopping*, and *online consumer purchasing behavior.* Each article was reviewed and screened in order to eliminate the articles that were not pertinent to the current focus. A total of 355 articles in the area of online consumer behavior was identified from 1994 to June 2002. For any study to be included in our analysis, it had to focus primarily on consumer purchasing behavior on the Web. Electronic copies of most articles were obtained from digital libraries and online databases.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS RESULTS

The 355 articles were analyzed and classified in terms of publication year, title, and the underlying theory/framework. We believe that this clarification provides fruitful insights about online consumer scholars. In particular, this analysis helps researchers discover deficiencies and identify

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