Chapter 5
Identity Influence in Consumer Behavior on the Internet

Ritu Vats

 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2390-8105
M.M. Institute of Management, Maharishi Markandeshwar University (deemed), Mullana, Ambala, India

Reeta Clonia
M.M. Institute of Management, Maharishi Markandeshwar University (deemed), Mullana, Ambala, India

ABSTRACT

Consumers today have several ways to express who they are, including social media and digital networks in addition to their assets and purchasing habits. The identity signalling phenomena and identity strength are the main topics of this essay, which seeks to comprehend these digital consumer behaviors. To explain the scope and nature of behaviors associated with digital identities, the authors build a conceptual model that integrates internal and external influences. They base the study hypotheses on the example of gender identification because it is one of the topics that is discussed the most and most heatedly in online consumer forums. Additionally, they analyse the internet habits of trans customers and propose how offline and online identity signalling behaviors are connected. This underlines the distinctive characteristics of digital identity signalling behaviors as well as the variety of identities, including gender, and offers insightful information for academics and marketers.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing was revolutionised by the various new possibilities that social media and digital platforms gave businesses to communicate with their clients (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Digital networks are actively used by consumers, who even upload brand selfies on social media or propagate online word of mouth (Hartmann et al., 2021; Stephen, 2016). They do so, in part, to reveal their consumer identities (Grewal et al., 2019).

In 1970 saw the beginning of identity research in marketing and consumer behaviour, which grew in popularity in the 2000s (Reed et al., 2012). Although consumer identity signalling has developed into a somewhat well-established study topic over the years, there is still a need for additional research on its causes, effects, and uncharted forms (Gal, 2015). Offline consumer identity signalling, or purchasing belongings that might indicate one's identity, is the subject of the majority of study in this area (Gal, 2015). Digital identity signalling through digital assets and online interaction with businesses and other customers is becoming more and more common, but many of its aspects are yet unexplored (Belk, 2013; Bernritter et al., 2022; Grewal et al., 2019). In order to examine how consumers' internal identity-related traits and external stimuli they encounter in the online world affect their digital identity signalling behaviours, we create a conceptual model and numerous research hypotheses. We go on to discuss the connections between offline and online identity signalling.

We pick the gender identification as the identity on which we will expand on our model. This is due to two factors.

To begin with, companies have just begun to actively engage consumers in the discourse regarding gender. Examples include companies like Gillette, which conducted a campaign criticising men aggressive behaviour. The campaign elicited a variety of responses from consumers and helped spark discussions on social media (Bogen et al., 2021). Interesting instances like these demonstrate that there is still online pushback when established gender standards are questioned, despite overall shifts in gender social roles and stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2020). According to Banet-Weiser (2018), the rise of sexism and feminism in public discourse at the same time has ushered in a new era of gender conflicts. We believe it is crucial to comprehend the motivations behind customers' gender-specific digital behaviours as well as the role gender identities play in these behaviours.

In addition, gender is a wide identity that customers frequently value (Oyserman, 2009). A person's perception of their gender is formed in early childhood and can change over the course of their life (Tobin et al., 2010), hence it is debatable whether or not gender constitutes a significant portion of a person's total self-concept.

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