

Andrzej Szymkowiak, Urszula Garczarek-Bąk
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu

Gender Differences in E-commerce

Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are differences in online shopping behaviour between women and men. While gender is an important factor that affects purchasing behaviour it is still a poorly described construct, especially in the e-commerce market. This paper focuses on examining three areas: the sources of website visits, the infrastructure used to browse Internet resources and the activity on the website in case of the gardening sector (gender neutral). The activities of 352,971 people in the period from 1st October 2016 to 1st October 2017 were analysed. The results demonstrate that online shoppers behave similarly in many areas regardless of gender.

Key words: gender differences, e-commerce, buying behaviour.

JEL codes: J16, L81, L86

Introduction

Gender has universal characteristics, regardless of culture and time period (Lim & Yazdanifar 2014). In literature, gender differences are focused and investigated based on various factors such as perception, attitudes, motivation, preferences, perceived risk and satisfaction, which influence consumer behavior. Therefore, the examination of the role of gender in online consumer behavior is essential for designing and managing effective websites that can help businesses attract and retain online customers and consumers by offering better shopping experience. Even though studies of online shopping attitudes are widespread in the literature, studies of gender differences in e-commerce are scarce and the reported findings are inconsistent. We firmly believe that gender differences in online shopping attitudes deserve more attention and better understanding, therefore this study is dedicated to gender differences in e-commerce behavior.

Gender differences in buying behavior

The current literature focuses on how males and females differ in their purchase behavior (e.g. Okazaki 2007), yet, until recently, many researchers were convinced that no gender differences exist (e.g. Schubert, Brown, Gysler, & Brachinger 1999). Nowadays, various studies have proven that gender has a significant influence on consumers' buying behavior (e.g. Fan & Miao 2010). Men and women have different motives, perspectives, rationales and considerations towards shopping (Hasan 2010). According to Acturan (2011), consumer be-

havior varies depending on gender in terms of expectations, wants, needs, lifestyle, product attributes, adaptability and other factors. Shopping plays a stronger emotional, psychological and symbolic role for women compared with men (e.g. Noble 2006). Women find shopping and buying more satisfying or pleasurable than do men, which is reflected in more time spent on it (Mitchell & Walsh 2004). Thus, they shop more attentively and stop at shelves more frequently to consider all available product information (Haeusel 2008; Wiltinger 2009). Men tend to perceive buying as a mission – work that needs to be accomplished with minimum time and effort (Kuruville, Joshi & Shah, 2009). Therefore, men consider less information and are less confused by the wide range of products, so they take less effort when it comes to shopping (Mitchell & Walsh 2004). What is more, males may search for products less comprehensively than females and focus on selected information sources and topics (Rajagopal, 2015). Gender studies reveal that, as a result of sex-related social norms and traditions, women are more affected by the environment, because they look for more information and spend more time on decision making, while men are more dominant, assertive, objective and realistic (Sanz de Acedo Lizárraga, Sanz de Acedo Baquedano & Cardelle-Elawar 2007). When it comes to decision-making, previous studies show that women place more emphasis on aesthetics (as they place more value on fashion and style), whereas men prefer to shop for functional products, since they process product information on a logical and analytical level (Costa, Terracciano & McCrae 2001). On the contrary, women are more visually oriented and are better at decoding and processing nonverbal cues (Holbrook 1986). Hence, females decide more often on an affective level and remember product details based on emotional associations. Women consider all available information and analyze specific product messages (such as product shape and color) in detail (MeyersLevy & Maheswaran 1991), whereas men, when evaluating a product, take cognitive-related product cues (such as price) into account (e.g. Haeusel 2008).

Online purchase behavior

There is no doubt that consumer behavior differs in terms of motivation and perception when it comes to online and offline shopping. In the case of e-commerce, consumers are more influenced by brand names and price than in offline shopping (e.g. Chu, Arce-Urriza, Cebollada-Calvo & Chintagunta 2010). According to Punj (2011), the three most common online shopping advantages for consumers are that it saves time, saves money and helps find products that best match their needs. Online shopping is mainly based on the cyberspace appearance, such as pictures, images, quality information and video clips of a product, not on the actual experience (e.g. Kolesar and Galbraith 2000). That is why the promise of electronic commerce depends, to a great extent, on user interfaces and the way people interact with computers (e.g. Griffith, Krampf & Palmer 2001). According to Reynolds (2000), characteristics of information presentation, navigation, order completion are considered as important factors in building electronic commerce trust.

There are numerous studies on factors influencing or contributing to online shopping attitudes and behaviors taken from different perspectives and focusing on different factors (Lim & Yazdanifar 2014). Current examples of such research include the consumer buying decision process, theory of reasoned action, technology acceptance model, innovation diffusion theory and social influence theory (Cao & Mokhtarian 2007; Jeddi, Atefi, Jalali, Poureisa & Haghi 2013). However, Moshrefjavadi, Dolatabadi, Nourbakhsh, Poursaedi and Asadollahi (2012) emphasize that numerous studies examined individual factors affecting e-commerce behavior independently (as isolated concepts), ignoring certain factors, which may lead to the lack of generalizability of the findings.

Huang and Yang (2010) explain that the motivation of online shopping is divided into two main categories, that is, utilitarian and hedonic motivations. The first category encompasses all benefits of the rational approach, such as time saving, detailed product information, price comparison, greater option and cheaper price, which is considered as a traditional buying decision process (Sarkar 2011; Veronika 2013). The second category is understood as an emotional approach, meaning that people who buy products are driven by aspects such as liking, enjoying or feeling excited with respect to online shopping experience. According to Lim and Yazdanifar (2014), most purchasing behaviors are influenced by emotional factors, whether with utilitarian or hedonic motivation.

Impact of gender on consumer behavior in e-commerce

Despite the fact that gender plays a significant role in online consumer behavior (Lim & Yazdanifard 2014), only very few studies have explicitly addressed gender differences in online shopping attitudes (Hasan 2010). Gender differences in the attitude towards online purchase is a fairly recent concept. A brief overview of gender differences in online behavior as 'historically' framed concepts is included below.

Prior research indicates that men were more likely to shop online than women. For instance, Grummert (2000) found that 43% of male internet users shop online as compared to only 28% of female users. Similarly, an extensive review of the literature on online shopping by Chang, Cheung and Lai (2005) shows that men buy online more frequently than women. Rodgers and Harris (2003) stated that men are more familiar with online shopping, since they are more technology-oriented and their interest in it is greater as compared to women. Despite the fact that men have historically been the early adopters of online shopping, women have caught up with them quickly and the gap has recently started to decrease (Hernandez, Jimenez & Martin, 2011). According to a study conducted by PaymentSense (2017), 72% of women shopped online within 30 days, as compared to 68% of men. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) noticed that more women are engaged in e-commerce due to the emergence of social networks offering the possibility of conversing, liking and giving feedback about products easily and effectively. Interestingly, however, mobile acceptance is similarly promising for both genders, yet, men are more likely to make purchases on mobile devices (45% vs. 34%) (Ecommerce-platforms 2016).

So far, gender difference in e-commerce have been examined from various perspectives, such as perceived risk of online buying (Garbarino & Strahilevitze 2004), website usability and design (Cyr & Bonanni 2005), and technology acceptance (Porter & Donthu 2006; Sanchez-Franco 2006).

Yang and Lester (2005) compared the predictors of shopping online for men and women and revealed that, for men, the only predictor was the number of hours spent online. Females, on the other hand, appear to be affected by substantially more factors – besides their computer anxiety and the number of hours they spend on the internet, their attitudes towards money also affect their marginal propensity to shop online.

While there is no longer a significant difference between genders as regards online shopping and the stereotype of technology acquaintance no longer exists (e.g. Kaplan 2011), other differences are also noteworthy. A fundamentally different set of characteristics for women and men have been described in the following sections.

Women profile

Various studies offer three main explanations for gender differences in e-commerce (e.g. Zhou, Dai and Zhang 2007). The first point underlines that it is natural that women's online shopping orientation is different from that of men, as women are more motivated by emotional and social interaction (and the lack of face-to-face communication or social interaction may deter more women from shopping online) (Dittmar, Long & Meek 2004). The second point concerns the difference in cognitive attitude, indicating that females value the utility of online shopping less than their male counterparts do. Cho (2004) found evidence that women prefer and enjoy physical evaluation of products such as seeing and feeling the product before they make a purchase. Hasan (2010) noted that although businesses can provide very clear images and animations of their products on their website, customers cannot touch or feel these products. Therefore, in order to enhance females' cognition of the utility of online shopping as well as their liking of online shopping, additional efforts are needed (which must provoke playfulness and pleasure and generate the feeling of being stimulated by offered products). According to James (2013), females value online shopping as a standalone experience and appreciate it for the perceived value and benefits it offers. The main values related to e-commerce for females are the availability of information, convenience and choice. Moreover, women are more focused on adventures, sociality, fashion and value than men. Seock and Bailey (2008) noticed that females tend to have higher online shopping enjoyment, brand consciousness, price consciousness and shopping confidence than males.

Men profile

According to Hasan (2010), the e-commerce model would be more suitable for men, as they tend to treat shopping as a mission – to put it briefly: locate the item, buy it and get away. Moreover, males have higher concerns about time saving, convenience and lack

of sociality than females (Lim & Yazdanifar 2014), therefore they appreciate the relaxing, effective, effortless and time saving traits offered in the online environment (as opposed to the uneasiness of the social experience associated with traditional shopping). James (2013) graciously notices that men take a cold and clinical approach to e-commerce and they are willing to return to a website to make a purchase if they have been given enough hard facts, so they can be described as objective-focused. Hence, such consumers prefer an informative product description, extensive details and a clear, concise list of functions (Chiou and Ting 2011). They are not concerned with the process of researching, comparing prices and browsing. Cyr and Bonanni (2005) explain that males expect websites to be well structured and easy to navigate (more visually accessible and better meeting their needs and expectations) and provide them with the expected result with as little inconvenience as possible.

Data and research design

Whereas studies reveal that men and women work differently with different types of stimuli and different criteria of evaluations, our aim was to determine gender differences in e-commerce related to a universal product (i.e. a product that is not sex-typed). The study analyzes the differences of behavior in an online store offering gardening accessories and various kinds of outdoor plants. However, it must be pointed out that the product offer of the store is of secondary importance for the examined issue. It stems from the fact that during the analysis of reflections concerning the differences in the activity of people of different sex, the marketed item determines the number of people that are interested in the offer. The main aspect that was analyzed during the study was the extent to which the analyzed groups were equinumerous, which affected the selection of statistical tests. The analysis covered users' behaviors from 30.11.2016 to 30.11.2017. In the examined period, the website was visited by 492,765 users identified by IP's and cookies, who visited the website 652,367 times altogether. This indicates that some users visited the website more than once, which will be analyzed in more detail. It was possible to determine the sex of 225,157 out of 492,765 users, that is, in less than half of the cases. On the internet, sex is determined by linking data stored in a browser cache, derived from the data provided during the creation of accounts, e.g. e-mail. In the analyzed case, 67 per cent of the users were women (152,297) and 33 per cent were men (72,860). It may result from the type of offer or the place where the website was promoted, yet, the attempt to identify and assess this aspect is not the subject of this paper. The study was focused on three areas: the sources of website visits, the infrastructure used to browse internet resources and the activity on the website. The data was originally obtained through API Google Analytics. R and RStudio programming languages licensed by GNU were used for the analysis.

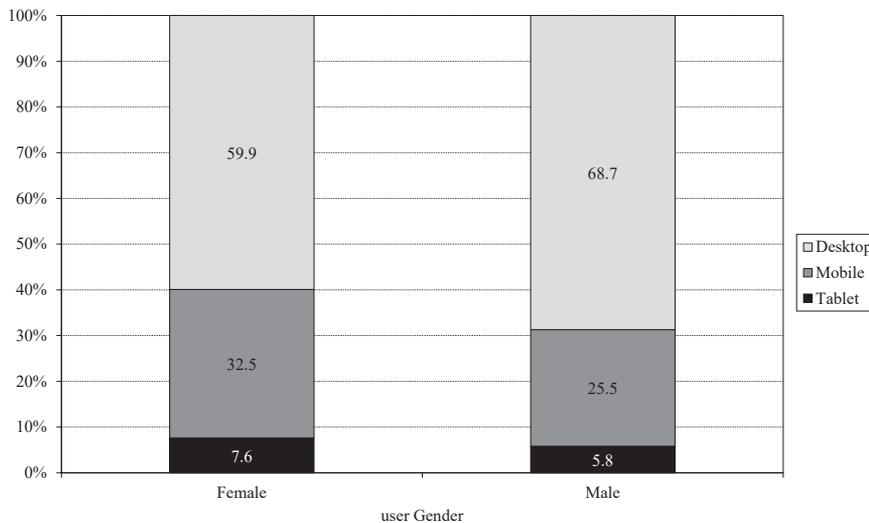
Gender differences

Based on the primary data, the structure of devices used for accessing the website was divided into desktop, mobile and tablet, disaggregated by sex (Figure 1). Both women and men

used a PC or a laptop most frequently, and least frequently – a smartphone. The conducted analysis of proportions with the use of χ^2 test made it possible to reject a zero hypothesis concerning the equality of proportions in each case.

Directed content analyses were also conducted. They confirmed the assumption that women use desktop devices less frequently than men $\chi^2(1, N=148781) = 1690.7, p = .0001$. Women, on the other hand, use mobile devices more often to access online stores: smartphone – $\chi^2(1, N=71769) = 1203.8, p = .0001$ and tablet - $\chi^2(1, N=16634) = 1203.8, p = .0001$.

Figure 1
Device usage (%)

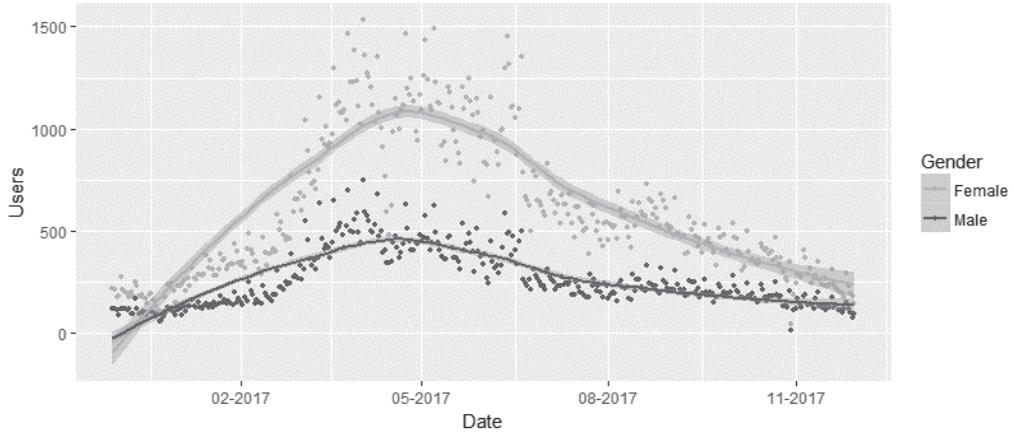


Source: own elaboration.

Another analysis (Figure 2) was related to website visits on individual days of the year. A smoothing trend line, which was outlined based on locally weighted regression, was added to the second chart, apart from values referring to the visits of people of different sex.

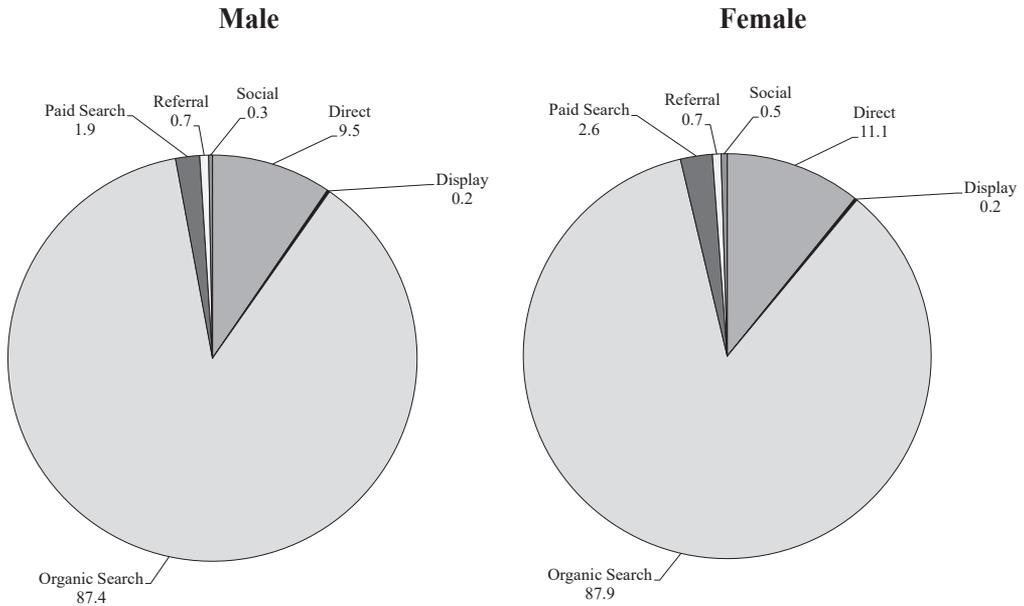
Anderson-Darling normality test was conducted. Data collected both for women (A-D= 10.151, p=0.0001) and men (A-D= 11.805, p=0.0001) do not prove the conformity of the visit number distribution, income distribution and normal distribution. The conducted analysis with the use of U Mann-Whitney test (W = 111280, p=0,0001) indicates a statistically significant difference between the average number of visits by women (M=599, SD=346) and men (M=258, SD=140). Such a difference may result from the subject area of the examined website, yet, it should be pointed out that, comparing the two groups, the level of interest varied during the year.

Figure 2
Annual e-commerce activity trend



Source: as in Figure 1.

Figure 3
Website marketing activities (%)



Source: as in Figure 1.

Data presented on the pie charts illustrate the website visits sources. In the analyzed case, groups matching particular marketing activities have been distinguished. They include: instances of direct website access, free search results, social networks, chargeable search results, display ads, links leading to other websites. Statistical interference on the extent to which the demonstrated differences represent statistically significant variables as well as cases in which a zero hypothesis that the data come from a single population cannot be rejected was conducted. Contingency tables and V-Cramer's contingency coefficient were used. Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that marketing activities promoting a website on the internet influence people of different sex in a slightly variable way ($VC = 0.036$ for $\chi^2(5, N=240253) = 322.10$, $p = .0001$). It means that both women and men search for information and react to promotional activities undertaken by e-commerce owners in a similar way. There is a significant statistical difference between individual items (their proportional share), which is affected by the study sample, yet, there are no grounds to claim that sex determines the source of website visits to a great extent.

The activity within a website is another key issue related to the behavior of e-commerce users. Measures illustrating the level of interest include website browsing depth. Depth is here understood as the number of viewed webpages before one leaves the website, whether a transaction has been completed or not. According to the theory presented above, the study has shown that women view a greater, statistically significant, number of tabs before they make a decision: Mfemale ($SD=9.071202$, $n=201782$) $=4.550797$, Mmale ($SD=7.024324$, $n=89320$) $=3.919962$. However, the e-Hedges' effect size was -0.074 . The number of viewed subpages does not decide about the character of a given visit. The time spent on a website by a given user is a different aspect. This kind of data makes it possible to assess how briefly and how carefully the users analyze the contents of the website. While in the discussed case, it is not possible to determine the limit value of the above-mentioned situations, the length of sessions, divided by sex, will be analyzed. The study on 28,694 men and 80,082 women has revealed that women spend more than 207 seconds ($SD=225$ sec) on a website on average, whereas men – ca. 130 seconds ($SD=123$ sek). The effect size measured with the use of Hedges' g coefficient was $H=0,38$, which should be identified as an average effect.

Conclusions

The available literature regarding gender differences in e-commerce is inconclusive. Our aim was to systematize knowledge on factors, which the customer (male or female) is guided by during the process of purchasing products online. While examining the significance of gender in e-commerce, it is instrumental to think about values that are essential for customers during the process of shopping. Literature lacks credible information on gender differences in the context of e-commerce based on hard data. In-depth insight into what factors drive online consumers most, how they work and influence consumers and e-commerce vendors. Apart from the resolution of the academic theory, the presented perceptions of gender differences might result in relevant managerial implications, especially in the field

of website development and marketing communication. By considering the distinctive differences between male and female online shoppers, in terms of their motives and expectations, it will be possible to give them the experience they demand. It must be pointed out that the transferability of the findings must be done with particular caution. Therefore, future research should consider other methods, for instance a combination of eye-tracking with the think-aloud method, to provide a full picture of e-shopper activities, which may shed light on the process of e-commerce decision making.

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Różnice w zachowaniach zakupowych kobiet i mężczyzn w e-commerce

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest sprawdzenie, czy występują różnice w zachowaniach zakupowych *on-line* między kobietami a mężczyznami. Mimo iż płeć jest jednym z czynników, który wpływa na decyzje zakupowe konsumentów, jednak w aspekcie rynku *e-commerce* ten konstrukt jest wciąż niedostatecznie zbadany. W artykule omówiono wyniki analizy porównawczej wybranych parametrów związanych z korzystaniem ze sklepów internetowych, takich jak: zastosowane urządzenia, źródła wejść oraz statystyki sesji, na przykładzie wybranego sklepu internetowego z branży ogrodniczej (nieukierunkowanej na płeć nabywcy). W tym celu przeanalizowano 352 971 aktywności użytkowników z okresu od 1.10.2016 r. do 1.10.2017 r. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że osoby dokonujące zakupów w Internecie w wielu obszarach zachowują się podobnie bez względu na płeć.

Słowa kluczowe: różnice płci, *e-commerce*, zachowania zakupowe.

Kody JEL: J16, L81, L86.

Отличия в покупательском поведении женщин и мужчин в э-коммерции

Резюме

Цель статьи – проверить, выступают ли отличия в покупательском поведении онлайн между женщинами и мужчинами. Хотя пол – один из факторов, который влияет на решения потребителей о покупках, однако в аспекте рынка э-коммерции этот конструкт все еще недостаточно изучен. В статье обсу-

ли результаты сопоставительного анализа избранных параметров, связанных с использованием интернет-магазинами, таких как примененная аппаратура, источники входов и статистики сессий, на примере избранного интернет-магазина с ассортиментом товаров для сада и огорода (не направленным на пол покупателя). Для этого провели анализ 352.971 активности пользователей за период с 1.10.2016 г. по 1.10.2017 г. Полученные результаты указывают, что лица, осуществляющие покупки в интернете, во многом ведут себя сходным образом независимо от пола.

Ключевые слова: отличия полов, э-коммерция, поведение во время покупок.

Коды JEL: J16, L81, L86

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Afiliacja:

dr Andrzej Szymkowiak

dr inż. Urszula Garczarek-Bak

Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu

Wydział Zarządzania

Katedra Handlu i Marketingu

al. Niepodległości 10

61-875 Poznań

e-mail: andrzej.szymkowiak@ue.poznan.pl

e-mail: urszula.garczarek-bak@ue.poznan.pl