Gender effects on Internet, catalogue and store shopping

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Abstract A survey of 300 men and 300 women consumers measured their attitudes towards shopping and their perceptions of Internet, catalogue, and store shopping based on 12 positive and 12 negative adjectives. The results indicate women have much more positive attitudes toward shopping in general. Women's ratings of catalogue and store shopping were significantly more positive and less negative than men's ratings. The opposite was true for Internet shopping. Women obtain more satisfaction from shopping and are likely to respond positively toward any enhancements to the shopping experience.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional division of labour within the home called for the man, the husband and father, to be the breadwinner while the woman, the wife and mother, was expected to take care of the family and the home. The assumption, and often the reality was that he would be fully occupied in earning the family income. Since she was not employed outside the home, she undertook the child care and nearly all the household chores, including shopping for the entire family. In fact, the single, primary requirement of the male sex role was to be a good breadwinner and the corresponding primary requirement for women was to put home and family first.¹⁻⁴

A host of factors far beyond the scope of this discussion have changed all that — well, nearly all. This research project revealed there are things many thought had changed when, in fact, they have not. Over the past half century, sex roles appear to have changed very substantially. Most couples apparently feel they require two incomes to keep pace with economic developments and the demands of the family. Vastly better educated and prepared than ever before, a very high proportion of women are employed outside the home. Many, if not most are consciously pursuing careers, rather than merely engaging in an occupation.

As women assume the formerly exclusive male sex role of family breadwinner in ever greater proportions,

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it was assumed by most that men would undertake — willingly, or perhaps begrudgingly — a greater share of what had been mainly, if not exclusively women's work. And, of course, the corollary assumption was that women would be more than willing to relinquish many of these tasks to their male partners. Unfortunately for those who would have it so, these assumptions have proved to be unfounded. Yet a large part of American society, including both men and women, fervently want to believe that sex roles have generalised, broadened and relaxed.^{5,6} Thus, it remains difficult to dispel the notion that sex roles have little or no meaning today.

In fact, while the woman's role in today's society has extended to include many activities and responsibilities traditionally regarded as masculine, the converse does not hold true.^{7,8} Men have not assumed a much more extensive role within the home.⁹ There are two possible reasons why they have not. The first, the most obvious, and certainly the most touted, is that men may be unwilling or unable to accept the burden of these domestic activities and responsibilities. The second, and rarely mentioned, potential reason is that women may often be unwilling to relinquish their domestic authority and responsibility. Probably both play a part, but the degree to which each apply is debatable.

Shopping attitudes

Shopping and buying for the family is an important domestic responsibility. It remains almost exclusively the province of women.^{10–12} They make the vast majority of family purchases, as well as buying the personal goods and services they need for themselves alone. But they also buy many of the personal goods for the men in their households. This,

despite the heavy pressures on their time and energy imposed by employment outside the home plus the other domestic tasks that remain their responsibility.¹³

Attitudinal differences may explain in part why women continue to be the principal buying agents for the majority of families. It may be that women find shopping and buying more satisfying or pleasurable, and/or less dissatisfying or irritating than do men. If so, that would account, in some measure for their continuation in the role of family buyer. It also suggests they are likely to remain the principal purchasing agent for the household for the foreseeable future.^{14,15}

Shopping styles

There are two, fairly distinct strategies or shopping styles consumers might use when shopping for a particular kind of goods. One strategy is to allocate a certain amount of time and effort, shop until time or energy runs out, then go back and buy the best alternative that was discovered.^{16,17} This strategy seeks to optimise value and price; to get the very best deal possible.^{18,19}

An alternative strategy would be for the shopper to establish in his or her mind just what attributes or characteristics are needed or desired and a price ceiling, so to speak, above which the shopper would not purchase. A shopper with this style would then begin to shop, examining and rejecting alternatives until one is found that meets the minimum product specifications and price limit. This strategy seeks to satisfy the requirements while it minimises the shopping time and effort.²⁰

Several factors might be identified that would affect whether one adopts a strategy that would maximise value or minimise shopping, but certainly one

factor would be the degree to which the person likes or dislikes shopping. Thus, a person who finds little or no pleasure or satisfaction in shopping, or feels it is often irritating or frustrating could be expected to employ a strategy that minimises shopping time and effort. Conversely, those who enjoy shopping and find it rewarding, or who do not often find shopping to be frustrating or onerous would more often adopt a value optimising style. If this holds true, women could be expected to pursue an optimising shopping style more often than men.

Shopping modes

In-store purchases account for the vast majority of consumer buying. Yet catalogue and online (Internet) consumer sales are growing at a much more rapid rate than traditional, in-store sales. Increased time pressure on both sexes, but especially on women, has been cited as one of the principal advantages of catalogue or online shopping.^{21,22} Few would disagree that catalogue or online shopping ordinarily requires substantially less time and effort than store shopping. Saving time and effort, often designated by the rubric 'convenience', is reported as one of the main reasons for the rapid growth rates in these direct marketing modes.

If women remain the principal buying agents for their families or households because they find greater satisfaction or pleasure in shopping than do men, one would expect women to have a rather more positive image of store shopping than do men. On the other hand, if the family shopper and buyer role is unwelcome to women and they perform it only out of necessity, their perceptions of store shopping could be expected to be rather less positive than those of catalogue and online shopping.

Research questions

This study was designed to address three main questions:

- do women hold more favourable attitudes toward shopping than men
- do women more often use a value optimising shopping strategy than men
- do image profiles of store, catalogue, and online shopping differ importantly by gender?

METHODOLOGY

A convenience sample of adult consumers from the general public in the mid-Atlantic region of the USA was surveyed. Respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire delivered to and retrieved from them by university student field workers. Each field worker was assigned a quota of one man and one woman from each age decade from the 20s to the 60s and over, providing an almost exactly equal number of men and women in each age group. The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the nature of the project and seeking respondents' participation. The survey yielded a sample of 600 respondents.

Shopping attitudes

Respondents indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with each of 24 statements about their feelings toward shopping by ticking a box on a five-point scale with extremes labelled 'Strongly disagree,' and 'Strongly agree'. The items were based on the record of comments of consumers attending a focus group discussion regarding shopping attitudes and practices. Half the statements were composed so agreement would indicate a positive or favourable attitude towards shopping; agreement

with the other half would indicate a negative or unfavourable attitude. The items were randomly ordered on the questionnaire.

Shopping styles

Eighteen product categories commonly regarded by marketers as 'shopping goods' were selected to measure respondents' choice of shopping style for each. The items were listed randomly on the questionnaire. Respondents were instructed to indicate what they most often did when shopping for each type of goods by ticking a box on a four-point scale. The heading above the first two columns, labelled 'Always this way' and 'Mostly this way' asked, 'Do you tend to buy the first one you find that really meets your needs or has the features you really want'. The heading over the second pair of columns on the scale, labelled similarly to the first pair, said 'Do you tend to shop around to see what's available, then go back and buy the very best one you could find'.

Image profiles

Respondents rated the degree to which each of 24 adjectives described browsing or shopping

- at a store
- from a catalogue
- on the Internet or World Wide Web.

The extremes of the five-point semantic distance scale were labelled 'Perfectly' and 'Not at all'.²³ The items, shown in Table 2, were selected from a pool of adjectives used by focus group participants in their discussions of the three modes of browsing and shopping. Half of the randomly ordered items were negative adjectives and half were positive.

Demographic status

Respondents were asked to indicate their sex, age, marital status, education level, employment category, occupational category and family income. These data were used to judge field worker adherence to quota specifications and to allow assessment of the degree of representation of the general population.

RESULTS

Sample demographics

The demographic distributions of response for the entire sample and for computer owners and non-owners are shown in Table 1. The equal proportions of respondents in the sex and age categories indicates close conformity to the sample quota specifications. Compared to the population from which the sample was obtained, the responding sample tended to be more educated, affluent, and engaged in more up-market occupations.

Shopping attitudes

The comparisons of women's and men's shopping attitudes as measured by the 12 positive and 12 negative shopping statements are plotted in Figure 1. It should be noted that these items appeared in the questionnaire prior to the listing of the shopping goods for which shopping styles were solicited. Thus, it seems safe to assume respondents were thinking in terms of shopping in general, rather than shopping for a particular kind of goods.

All the mean values for the positive items for women exceed the midpoint on the scale that ascends from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. The positive items were sorted from those with which women agreed the most to

Table 1: Demographic distributions of the responding sample

	All (N = 600) %	Men (N = 300) %	Women (N = 300) %
<i>Age</i>			
20s	20	21	21
30s	20	20	20
40s	20	20	20
50s	20	20	19
60s and over	20	19	20
<i>Marital status</i>			
Married	60	63	57
Not married	40	37	43
<i>Education</i>			
Not high school graduate	5	4	6
High school graduate	31	29	34
Some college	26	24	28
College graduate	24	26	21
Postgraduate	14	17	11
<i>Employment</i>			
Company employed	44	50	39
Employed in education	11	7	14
Government employed	9	11	8
Self-employed	7	10	4
Not employed	29	22	35
<i>Occupation</i>			
Professional	13	10	17
Executive, Managerial	15	21	9
Engineering, Technical	5	8	1
Administrative, Clerical	12	3	22
Sales, Marketing	8	11	4
Skilled Craft, Trade	10	14	7
Semi-skilled work	4	6	2
Unreported	34	37	38
<i>Family income</i>			
Under \$10,000	4	4	4
\$10,000–\$19,000	3	2	4
\$20,000–\$29,000	5	5	5
\$30,000–\$39,000	9	9	10
\$40,000–\$49,000	7	7	7
\$50,000–\$59,000	8	7	9
\$60,000–\$69,000	7	7	7
\$70,000–\$79,000	7	7	8
\$80,000–\$89,000	6	7	5
\$90,000–\$99,000	2	3	2
\$100,000 and over	18	19	17
Refused	23	23	23

the least. The negative items were sorted from least to most agreement for women respondents. The item evoking the most agreement from women refers to shopping with friends or family, while that obtaining the least feminine agreement indicated a preference to have a family member do the shopping for them. The picture that emerges for women shoppers reveals their sense that

shopping is a fairly social and pleasurable activity.

A very different attitudinal set was evoked from men by this set of items. Male respondents tended more often to disagree with the positive statements about shopping and agree with the negative. Agreement above the midpoint for items such as 'I really don't like to shop' and 'I avoid

Figure 1 Comparison of men's and women's shopping attitudes

shopping until I absolutely have to do it' reveal a general masculine aversion to shopping. Agreement with such items as 'I don't go shopping unless I intend to make a purchase' and 'I shop as quickly as I can to get it over with' indicates men often view shopping as a necessary evil.

To highlight the distinctions between women's and men's attitudes about shopping, the differences in the vectors of mean scores for positive and negative items are plotted in Figure 2. The two items with the largest differences in mean scores for the positive group, which

women rated higher by over one point, on average, on a five-point scale, were 'I think going on a shopping trip is a lot of fun' and 'I love to shop'. Men rated three items more highly than women by the same, one-point margin: 'I really don't like to shop' had the largest difference among the negative items, followed by 'I shop as quickly as I can to get it over with' and 'I prefer to have a family member do my shopping for me'. Presumably, that family member to which the last item refers would be a woman, given the differences in attitude profiles.

Figure 2 Differences in men's and women's shopping attitudes

Shopping styles

The percentages of women and men who indicated an optimiser shopping style for 18 categories of goods are shown in Figure 3, sorted in sequence from that which evoked an optimising strategy from the highest proportion of women to the lowest. While over half the male respondents chose an optimising style for all but three of the 18 items — clothing, shoes and apparel accessories — they indicated the strategy that would minimise shopping more often than women for every product category.

The differences in the percentages of men and of women who choose an optimising strategy over a strategy to minimise shopping is plotted in Figure 4. Nearly a quarter more women than men would optimise when shopping for clothing. For apparel accessories, gifts, small appliances and even car accessories, over 10 per cent more women than men indicated they would be optimisers. The data on choice of shopping strategies or styles supports the results of the attitudinal data; namely, that women appear to find satisfaction or pleasure in

Figure 3 Percentage of men and women optimisers by product category

shopping far more than men, while men have significantly more disdain for shopping than do women.

Shopping modes

The mean values for the image profiles of store, catalogue and online shopping modes are listed in Table 2. While all 300 women and 300 men rated store and catalogue shopping, only 102 women and 134 men, those who had or used a home computer, rated Internet shopping. The positive adjectives are listed in Table 2 from that which women rated highest to lowest for stores. The negative items are listed in the opposite order.

The focus of this inquiry is mainly on the differences with which women and

men view each of the three shopping modes under consideration. Those differences are displayed in Figure 5 to make them more discernible. Positive items are ordered from that for which women's ratings exceed men's the most to the least, while negative items are in the opposite sequence.

Women's ratings of store shopping differed from men's most widely, while women's and men's ratings deviated from one another the least for Internet shopping. For most items, both positive and negative, the differences between women's and men's ratings of catalogue shopping were similar to the differences for stores, but of a lesser magnitude. This was not the case when comparing gender differences for the Internet with those for either stores or catalogues. Men's ratings

Figure 4 Percentage more women than men optimisers

of online shopping were higher than those for women in every case for the positive adjectives. Women's and men's ratings of the negative image items were very similar, with women's negative ratings slightly higher for seven of the 12 items and men's negative ratings very slightly higher for the remaining five. In summary, women had a markedly more positive or less negative image of store and catalogue shopping than men, but women's and men's image profiles for Internet shopping were almost identical.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate with substantial clarity that women do hold markedly more positive and less negative

attitudes toward the shopping experience. Their more favourable view toward shopping is further substantiated by the fact that they more often employ a value optimising shopping strategy than do men, and for a broad range of shopping goods. Women also reported they hold a much more positive image of store shopping and catalogue shopping than their male counterparts, although the feminine image of Internet shopping was approximately the same as the masculine perspective.

Implications for retail stores

Since men do not appear to find much enjoyment or satisfaction from the shopping experience *per se*, they are

Table 2: Image ratings of shopping modes by gender*

Item	Stores		Catalogues		Internet	
	Women (N = 300)	Men (N = 300)	Women (N = 300)	Men (N = 300)	Women (N = 102)	Men (N = 134)
Enjoyable	3.73	2.91	3.49	3.06	3.11	3.15
Fun	3.58	2.67	3.12	2.77	3.07	3.13
Entertaining	3.29	2.64	3.06	2.67	3.05	3.19
Easy	3.26	3.10	3.97	3.73	3.16	3.48
Rewarding	3.24	2.89	2.78	2.82	2.75	2.84
Relaxing	3.19	2.44	3.79	3.20	2.95	3.03
Exciting	3.16	2.41	2.78	2.49	2.84	2.98
Informative	3.15	3.04	3.39	3.34	3.53	3.64
Amusing	3.15	2.77	3.00	2.73	3.07	3.28
Fulfilling	3.07	2.65	2.81	2.68	2.60	2.83
Stimulating	3.04	2.49	2.68	2.61	2.85	3.05
Economical	2.69	2.64	2.75	2.98	2.55	3.06
Unpleasant	2.13	2.82	1.94	2.39	2.60	2.56
Boring	2.24	3.08	2.32	2.72	2.57	2.52
Difficult	2.30	2.60	1.93	2.28	2.71	2.67
Risky	2.32	2.59	2.22	2.49	2.89	2.92
Unproductive	2.39	2.86	2.29	2.60	2.77	2.66
Confusing	2.44	2.91	2.27	2.63	3.00	2.87
Demanding	2.50	2.95	1.86	2.28	2.64	2.69
Discouraging	2.59	2.81	2.35	2.62	2.69	2.74
Frustrating	2.60	2.98	2.09	2.40	2.79	2.78
Tiring	2.87	3.20	1.78	2.15	2.36	2.45
Exhausting	2.89	3.13	1.65	2.13	2.33	2.37
Costly	3.64	3.65	3.08	2.99	2.99	2.96

* Differences between men's and women's score vectors significant, prob. <0.001

more likely than women to find retail stores appealing if the stores allow them to 'get in and get out' as quickly and easily as possible — to acquire what they need with a minimum expenditure of time and effort. But this does not often appear to be the case for many women. Rather, their responses here indicate they often find the shopping experience to be satisfying and sometimes, perhaps, quite enjoyable. This may explain, in part, the success of some retail store merchandisers who have turned their attention to creating an entertaining physical shopping environment.²⁴

Women's shopping proclivity may also prove to be firm underpinning for the growing retail trend toward patronage of warehouse/membership clubs, big box retailers, so-called 'category killers' (superstores confined to a single category such as books, office supplies or home improvements that kill off small,

independent retailers) and superstores (combined supermarkets and discount stores of 150,000 square feet or more).^{25,26} Cognisant of the fact that the longer shoppers stay in the store and the more goods they are exposed to, the more they are likely to buy, such giant outlets may provide such amenities as children's play areas, cafes and snack bars and various forms of in-store entertainment. Given that women typically continue to be the family buying agent, and that they seek and find enjoyment from shopping itself, such enhancements to the shopping experience might be expected to intensify patronage motives as well as increase sales volume.

Implications for cataloguers

The women who participated in this study found catalogue browsing easier,

Figure 5 Differences in men's and women's image ratings

more relaxing and more informative than store shopping and they were markedly more positive about the catalogue shopping experience than were men. The relatively favourable view women have of shopping in general and their view of the shopping experience as at least somewhat satisfying, if not outright enjoyable might explain the success of colourful, stimulating specialty catalogues, while their plainer, more mundane

cousins, the old-line, general merchandise catalogues have all but vanished from the retail scene.

Catalogues take only a small bite out of the total retail apple, yet they are growing at approximately twice the rate of in-store retailing. Women are often the buying agents for their households. They find some degree of satisfaction or pleasure from shopping. Yet they frequently lack the time and perhaps the

energy required for retail store shopping because of their careers and other outside activities. Thus, it would appear that catalogue browsing and buying provides some degree of satisfaction and enjoyment — though not as much as a trip to the store or mall — while allowing women to get the family purchasing job done.

Implications for online marketers

Online shopping is the one area where women were not more positive than men. This is, perhaps, not surprising, given that the stereotype of an Internet shopper appears to be a youngish, well-educated, office-employed man. A wife and mother devoted to homemaking and family rearing could be viewed as the least likely home computer user and Internet shopper.²⁷ While many may support the proposition that the Internet is primarily a 'man thing,' there are also those who claim otherwise.²⁸ They identify such conditions as time pressures on working women and greater exposure to computers on the job as factors that encourage Internet shopping.^{29,30} In their view, the computer gender gap, if it ever existed, is disappearing as masculine and feminine needs and interests converge.

This study refutes that proposition. While fewer women than men had home computers (34 per cent versus 45 per cent, respectively), those women who did have Internet access were certainly far from sanguine about shopping online. While one would expect the image of online shopping to improve among women as they gain greater access and familiarity with the Internet, it seems likely that the point where women find it as easy, informative and relaxing as browsing a catalogue will be a long time coming.³¹

Implications for all retailers

The existence of a sizable gender gap in shopping attitudes, styles and images of shopping modes revealed by this study may be regarded as somewhat unwelcome news by many marketers, no matter what channel or combination of channels they use. For those selling to both sexes, it would obviously be more economical to be able to use a single, common strategy, approach and programme. Given the social commentary in the public press, some marketers might be led to believe that such a unitary approach would be workable now or in the very near future. This study suggests that consideration of the gender of the market to be served would be a better approach in most cases. While the shopping gender gap may constitute a complicating factor for consumer marketers, it would be better to recognise the gender differences and accommodate them than to remain ignorant of them, operating under a set of false assumptions regarding the diminishment of sex roles and gender differences.

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