

Cyber peers' influence for adolescent consumer in decision-making styles and online purchasing behavior

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Abstract

Nowadays, there is a boom in online purchasing, especially by adolescents. In fact, scholars and marketers alike have long noticed the emergence of adolescent consumers and their consumption behaviors. This research aims at exploring the effect of adolescent decision-making styles on online purchasing behavior, with peer influence as a moderating variable. An online questionnaire survey was conducted on 2,419 adolescents and further verified by regression analysis and analysis of covariance. Adolescents with planned purchase behaviors can be considered as rational consumers, in that they do not care about fashion, or recreational, hedonistic shopping consciousness, but rather focus on brand, price value, and high quality. Indeed, adolescent purchase decision making can be strengthened by peer influence.

Introduction

Due to the flourishing of Internet use and foreseeable business potential, online shopping has become the latest trend. Online shopping sites aggressively lay out strategic moves, and consumers are eager to try online shopping. According to Taiwan's Institute for Information Industry (2010) survey on Taiwan's online shopping markets, the last year's aggregate growth rate of online shopping was 30.4%, and the future market size is aiming toward New Taiwan Dollar 311.6 billion. Moreover, InsightXplorer's December 2009 Survey on Internet Uses indicates that most users are concentrated in the age group of 15–19, followed by the group of 25–29. Adolescent consumers are therefore the main users of the Internet (InsightXplorer Market Research consultants, 2009).

Scholars and marketers alike have long noticed the emergence of adolescent consumers and their consumption behaviors (Niu, Chiang, & Tsai, 2012). Several researchers have even ventured the idea of "global teens" (Arnett, 2002; Kamaruddin & Mokhlis, 2003), meaning to capture the explosive growth in adolescent consumption. Adolescents are easily affected by current fashions and trends, their peers, and several peculiar consumption characteristics (McAlister & Pessemier, 1982). Adolescents have also gained greater influence on family purchase decisions (Arnett, 2002; Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006; Belk, 2003; Kamaruddin & Mokhlis, 2003; Moschis & Moore, 1979). The trend of physical stores extending to virtual ones offers great business growth potential, and hence adolescents' online purchasing behaviors cannot be ignored.

Consumer decision-making styles determine and shape consumer choices, and the styles are predictable. The mental characteristics of consumers can be likened to personality traits (Sproule, 1985). In addition, recent surges in Internet usage show that the consumers (in particular aged 18–26) have shifted reliance from traditional media (such as TV and radio) to the Internet (Johnson, 2008). Relevant studies have also found that the fastest growing occupation category of online shoppers is students of adolescent age (in particular, more than half of online shoppers are under 30) (InsightXplorer Market Research consultants, 2009). Given the rapid growth in the number of Internet users, it is now common for consumers to sit in front of their computer screens, click freely onto shopping sites, and choose products; they complete the shopping by themselves. Therefore, nowadays the boom in online purchases makes it even more important to understand this shopping venue by studying consumer characteristics and consumption behavior with the knowledge of consumer decision-making styles. This shows the urgency of understanding adolescents' online purchasing behaviors, but relevant studies are still lacking. Past studies have more or less emphasized aspects of business operations, online auction mechanisms, or consumer shopping intentions (Anthony & Jennings, 2003; Ariely & Simonson, 2003; Hijikata, Ohno, Kusumura, & Nishida, 2006; Menasce & Akula, 2006), but not adolescents' online shopping decision-making styles. Thus, this study focuses on the age group of 16–30, and explores the influence of consumer decision-making styles on adolescents' online purchasing behaviors.