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A CONCEPTUAL MODEL PROPOSAL FOR CONSUMERS' FLOW EXPERIENCES IN THE ONLINE INFORMATION SEARCH PROCESS* *** ONLINE BİLGİ ARAMA SÜRECİNDE TÜKETİCİLERİN AKIŞ DENEYİMLERİNE YÖNELİK KAVRAMSAL BİR MODEL ÖNERİSİ		
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ABSTRACT

Many previous studies have explained the relationship between flow experience and consumer behavior in the context of human-computer interaction. However, studies have inconsistently evaluated the flow experience in terms of its relevant dimensions. Autotelic experience, curiosity, intrinsic interest, sense of control, focused attention, and time distortion are dimensions of online flow experience that have been inconsistently evaluated across different studies. Unlike previous studies, this current study characterizes flow experience with these six dimensions. This study aims to put forth a conceptual model suggestion on the flow experiences of consumers in their online information search processes. It is thought that the conceptual model will contribute to future consumer studies in explaining the effect of flow situations that occur in consumers' computer interactions on their behavior.

Keywords: Online Flow Experience, Conceptual Model, Consumer Behavior

ÖZ

Daha önceki birçok çalışma, akış deneyimi ile tüketici davranışı arasındaki ilişkiyi insan-bilgisayar etkileşimi bağlamında açıklamıştır. Bununla birlikte, çalışmalar akış deneyimini ilgili boyutları açısından tutarsız bir şekilde değerlendirmiştir. Ototelik deneyim, merak, içsel ilgi, kontrol duygusu, dikkatin yoğunlaşması ve zamanın dönüşümü, online akış deneyiminin farklı çalışmalarda tutarsız bir şekilde değerlendirilen boyutlarıdır. Önceki çalışmalardan farklı olarak, bu mevcut çalışma akış deneyimini bu altı boyutla karakterize etmektedir. Bu çalışma, tüketicilerin online bilgi arama süreçlerindeki akış deneyimleri üzerine kavramsal bir model önerisi ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Kavramsal modelin, tüketicilerin bilgisayar etkileşimlerinde meydana gelen akış durumlarının davranışları üzerindeki etkisini açıklamada gelecekteki tüketici çalışmalarına katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Online Akış Deneyimi, Kavramsal Model, Tüketici Davranışı

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers tend to use online information resources to gather information about search and experience products (Bei et al., 2004). It is possible to disseminate and access information on the Internet without incurring excessive costs (Metzger, 2007). Blogs (Bar-Ilan, 2005) and vlog/video blogs (Parker and Pfeiffer, 2005) are knowledge-based resources that offer value with digital

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content. Consumers can freely search for information through blog channels, which have recently become an effective tool for both obtaining information and other fields of activity and displaying enormous marketing power (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). Video blog/vlogs, another online information network sharing channel, are a new and powerful media that has been added to our existing televised news sources by combining blogs with the richness of the expressions in the video (Gao et al., 2010). Especially in the field of marketing, video blogs that place sponsor vlogs/advertisements (De Jans et al., 2018) are videos published for a brand, product, company, or service promotion (Hill et al., 2017).

It should be noted that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory provides a useful framework for investigating user behavior (Kaur et al., 2016). This framework is thought to be particularly suitable for investigating voluntary user behavior (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). For this reason, the flow concept has been the subject of many studies covering human-computer interaction, psychology, information systems, and education disciplines (Pearce et al., 2005). Researchers have been studying the flow phenomenon in computer-mediated communication since the 1990s (Finneran and Zhang, 2005). Flow experience was first studied by Hoffman and Novak (1996) on the basis of marketing research in hypermedia computer-mediated environments. Recently, flow experience has been the topic of many studies on online consumer research (Richard and Chebat, 2016; Bilgihan et al., 2015; Gao and Bai, 2014; Lee and Wu, 2017; Baytar and Yükselen, 2018; De Jans et al., 2018).

It is remarkable to propose conceptual models to explain consumer behavior in parallel with technological developments and it is important to contribute to the relevant literature (Ramadan et al., 2017). This conceptual paper is one of the important initiatives that examines consumers' behavior regarding online flow experiences and proposes a conceptual model in this direction. In conclusion, this study aims to propose a conceptual model that can be used to explain both online information satisfaction and online purchase intentions in connection with consumers' flow experiences in the online information search process.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Flow Experience

Csikszentmihalyi (1975a) came up with the term "flow" to describe the emotions of mountaineers and dancers during an optimal experience. After conducting interviews with a large number of people as part of his qualitative research, Csikszentmihalyi (1975a) found a psychological state that he called a continuous "flow experience" or "flow state." Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a psychologist, was the first to investigate, discover, explain, and propose the flow phenomenon (or theory) in the 1970s.

In short, it is possible to define flow as the "bottom line of existence" of the best possible emotions and the most pleasurable experience in human life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1982). Flow is a holistic experience that individuals experience or feel over and over again during an optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1975b, 1997). The holistic experience is about the manifestation of the level of participation, while the holistic approach is about the level of enjoyment and the perception of time during the session (Saadé and Bahli, 2005).

Web-based flow experience is associated with "consumer satisfaction", which corresponds to a psychological experience in the online information search process (Ghani et al., 1991; Webster et al., 1993; Özkara, 2015). Flow should be considered not only as a general condition, but also as

a process (Pearce et al., 2005). Consumers experience flow in process-oriented online information search (Özkara, 2015).

2.2. Flow Experience Dimensions

The flow experience introduced by Csikszentmihalyi has been summarized in nine characteristic dimensions; “clear goals, immediate feedback, potential control (or sense of control), merging of action and awareness, a balance between personal competencies appropriate to the challenges given, focus (or concentration on the task at hand), loss of self-consciousness, autotelic experience, and transformation of time” (Choi et al., 2007; Pace, 2004; Rettie, 2001). Jackson and Marsh (1996) proved in their applied study that there are nine dimensions used in the measurement of flow experience with confirmatory factor analysis. However, some dimensions such as curiosity and intrinsic interest, which are not included in Csikszentmihalyi's studies and used in information-seeking activities of computer users (Pace, 2004) and human-computer interactions (Webster et al., 1993), were evaluated as flow experience dimensions (Trevino and Webster, 1992). As a result, there is no scientific agreement among academics on the flow's dimensions (Lee and Wu, 2017). Possible reasons for the lack of such a scientific consensus are that the very broad concept of flow has many different definitions in different contexts (Koufaris, 2002; Liu et al., 2016). Flow is a complex concept (Lu et al., 2009). According to previous studies, the concept of flow is still in a “conceptual identity crisis” (Pelet et al., 2017) due to its multifaceted and comprehensive related structures (Hoffman and Novak, 2009). As a result, flow experience dimensions, which have been evaluated in many studies to explain the behavior of consumers in the online information seeking process and included in the conceptual model proposed by this study, are explained as follows.

Autotelic experience: The autotelic personality trait characterizes a person who is more likely to experience flow for a particular activity (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Autotelic experience is the result of an intrinsically rewarding experience and being in the flow of being able to enjoy what one does, regardless of whether one can win external rewards to reward oneself (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). However, the term enjoyment is frequently used instead of the term autotelic experience (Jackson and Marsh, 1996), which has a more universal structure compared to other flow dimensions in the related literature (Jackson and Marsh, 1996; Özkara, 2015). Indeed, in many studies beyond the autotelic experience, enjoyment (Chen et al., 2000; Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Novak and Hoffman, 1997; Ghani and Deshpande, 1994; Hsu and Lu, 2004), cognitive enjoyment (Webster et al., 1993; Lee and Wu, 2017) or intrinsic enjoyment (Koufaris, 2002; Hoffman and Novak, 1996) has been accepted as a dimension, that is, a feature of the flow experience.

Curiosity: Curiosity is an intrinsic motivation that affects human behavior and instills the desire to explore, be interested, minimize ambiguity, obtain knowledge, learn, and gain competence at all stages of life (Webster et al., 1993; Loewenstein, 1994; Litman et al., 2005). Curiosity refers to the extent to which a person's sensory and cognitive interest is aroused during the flow experience in human-computer interaction (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000; Nel et al., 1999).

Intrinsic interest: According to the Turkish Language Association; While it means internal, inward, related, internal, interest means any dependence, belonging, relevance, relationship, a dependency between two things. According to the Turkish Language Association; spirit, in the science of psychology, means an interest, a tendency to focus attention on a certain thing first, or to be close to a certain event or activity, to like it, and to give priority to it. Therefore, it is possible

to define the concept of intrinsic interest as 'the feeling of satisfaction and closeness experienced for the content presented on the website during participation in online communication'. Indeed, intrinsic interest includes a specific area of flow in computer interactions (Webster et al., 1993). According to intrinsic interest; the interaction of the individual with technology is beyond the technological means to be enjoyable and entertaining as an end in itself (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000).

Sense of control: A sense of control refers to one's perception of being in control during the flow experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1990; Baytar, 2018; Baytar and Yükselen, 2018). Perceived control is a cognitive process that allows people to believe that their actions are under their control (Ajzen, 1991; Xin Ding et al., 2010; Yang and Lee, 2018).

Focused attention: Focused attention is the fact that the person focuses on the activity he is in and does not take into account the conditions and situations that cause dissatisfaction in the flow experience by closing his consciousness to information that is not related to the experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1990; Baytar, 2018; Baytar and Yükselen, 2018). In other words, focused attention refers to a person's intense focus on an activity involving information and communication technology devices and services (Zhou, 2013; Yang and Lee, 2018).

Time distortion: Time distortion means a situation in which hours can turn into minutes, minutes into seconds, and seconds into seconds during the optimum/highest experience that a person has made, in short, time passing faster than it is can not be followed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1990; Baytar, 2018; Baytar and Yükselen, 2018). In other words, time distortion as a temporal change indicates the situation where the passage of time cannot be followed as a temporal dissociation during the interaction experience of the individual with the computer (Li and Browne, 2006).

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Online contexts are information-rich, dynamic, crowded marketplaces that emphasize information overload and technological innovation (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013). The effect of information presented on the Internet on the user experience is significant. (Hsu et al. 2012; Chau et al., 2000). People are likely to experience a state of online flow as a central process in computer-mediated media activity and web traffic (Chen et al. 1999; Huang, 2006). It is seen that online flow is experienced in activities in a computer-mediated environment (Pelet et al., 2017). Information, system, and service quality as quality indicators of the website are important predictors that affect the perceived flow (Hsu et al., 2012). While watching online content, the musicality, entertainment quality, integrity, and value of digital content have a positive effect on the flow of digital content (Kim et al., 2010). Flow experience is associated with the perceived qualities of computer software (Webster et al., 1993). Therefore, features of digital content such as design, scenario, and structure are important for the value that users attach to it (Kim et al., 2010). Therefore, the following proposition is proposed.

P1: Flow experience will occur when searching for information through online channels.

In general, websites, web-based blogs, and video blogs have been developed to provide "information, raise awareness, and influence people's attitudes and behaviors" (Skadberg and Kimmel, 2004). Customer satisfaction is affected by website quality indicators, information, system, and service quality (Hsu et al., 2012). In other words, website content features affect consumers' satisfaction with digital technologies (Calvo-Porrall et al., 2017). Accordingly, the following proposition is proposed.

P2. Information satisfaction will occur when searching for information through online channels.

Purchasing intention is affected by information, system, and service quality as quality indicators of the website (Hsu et al., 2012). In addition, it is known that product presentation styles affect purchase intention (Park et al., 2005). Consumers intend to purchase while reading blogs (Yazgan, 2012; Shiau and Luo, 2013) and watching vlogs (De Jans et al., 2018; Lee and Watkins, 2016) through online information channels. Consumers read the information on the blogs before showing a purchasing tendency or intention and confirm the accuracy of this information from other sources (Yazgan, 2012). An increase in the intention to purchase a product is associated with a more positive evaluation of online reviews (Xu et al., 2015). The effect of increased blog engagement on the current effect of customer experiences on purchase intention is significant (Hsu and Tsou, 2011). In short, purchase intention is influenced by verbal or text-based information presentations (Kim and Lennon, 2008). In other words, the effect of online product information review via blogs on purchase intention is significant (Vineyard, 2014). Thus, the following proposition is proposed.

P3. Online purchase intention will occur when searching for information through online channels.

It is possible to reach information by reading web-based texts (Fang et al., 2004). People can experience flow while reading and writing (Pilke, 2004). Flow is a significant factor for learning (Hoffman and Novak, 2009). Aside from the fact that flow-related activities are linked to information acquisition, communication, and engagement, information seeking is the most common activity for web use here (Chen et al., 1999). People who are flow tend to learn more about the digital content offered on the website (Skadberg and Kimmel, 2004). Flow experience positively affects the satisfaction and acceptance of information technology (Choi et al., 2007). Flow experience in the online information search process is a significant antecedent that affects online information satisfaction (Özkara, 2015). The effect of flow experience on online satisfaction is significant (Shin, 2006; Deng et al., 2010; Zhou and Lu, 2011; Zhou, 2011; Baytar and Yükselen, 2018). Flow experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction (Gao and Bai, 2014). Based on this, the following proposition is proposed.

P4. Online information satisfaction will occur due to the flow experience seen in the online information search process.

It is seen that flow experience is associated with arousal and dominance, flow leads to pleasure, and ultimately flow positively affects purchase intention (Richard and Chebat, 2016). Flow and enjoyment have a positive effect on purchase intention through the mediating role of perceived value (Chen and Lin, 2018). In addition, the flow has a direct effect on purchase intention and reconsideration (Ettis, 2017). Flow experience is effective on consumer behavior towards purchase intention (Çabuk and Kuş, 2019; Ozkara et al., 2017; Hsu et al., 2012; Hoffman and Novak, 2009; Richard and Chebat, 2016; Liu et al., 2016; Ettis, 2017). As a result, the flow experience, which affects consumer behavioral intention, such as the probability of purchasing from a website, appears as an important precursor to purchasing intention (Gao and Bai, 2014). Therefore, the following proposition is proposed.

P5. Intention to purchase online will occur due to the flow experience seen in the online information search process.

In recent years, the importance of online satisfaction has increased in the marketing literature (Evanschitzky et al., 2004). User satisfaction reflects a person's attitudes and beliefs regarding the

advantages of using computers (Kulviwat et al., 2004). Online purchasing decisions are influenced by perceived knowledge about the Internet (Flynn and Goldsmith, 2001). The effect of satisfaction on online purchasing decisions is significant (Baytar and Yükselen, 2018). Satisfaction is one of the important predictors of intention (Oliver, 1980). That is, satisfaction is effective on the tendency of purchasing behavior (Yazgan, 2012). Thus, the following proposition is proposed.

P6. Online purchase intention will occur due to the information satisfaction seen in the online information search process.

As a result, a conceptual model that can be used to explain online information satisfaction and purchase intentions of consumers with their flow experiences in the online information search process is shown in Figure 1. Flow experience in the model is characterized by six dimensions: autotelic experience, curiosity, intrinsic interest, sense of control, focused attention, and time distortion.

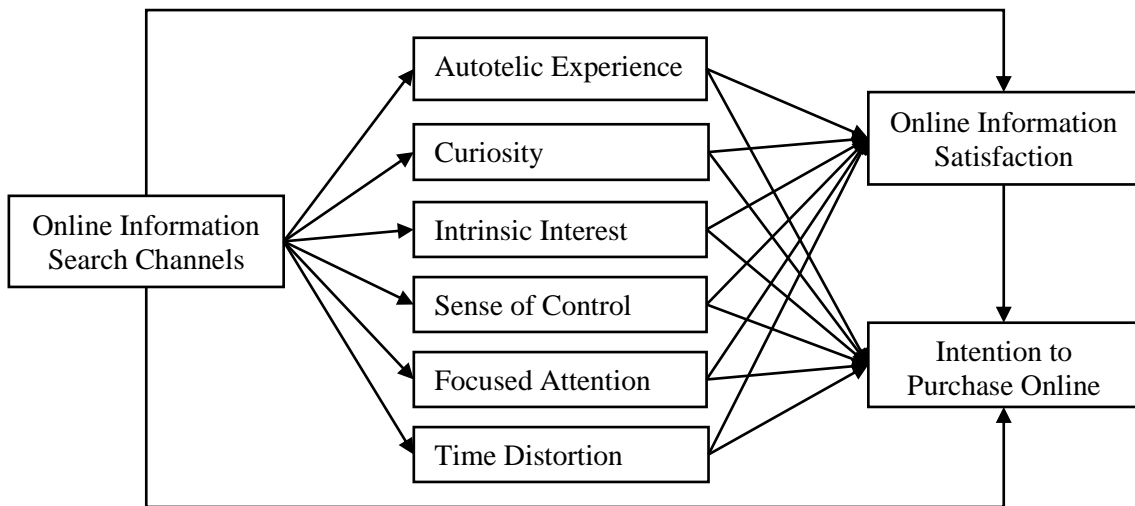


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

4. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper designs a conceptual framework on the relationship between online sources of information, online flow experience, online information satisfaction, and online purchase intention. In other words, this study proposes a unique conceptual model that can be used to explain the relationship between online information search resources, flow experience in the online information search process, online information satisfaction, and online purchase intention. According to the model proposed in the study; based on the flow theory framework, it is possible to evaluate the online flow experience dimensions of autotelic experience, curiosity, intrinsic interest, sense of control, focused attention, and time distortion, and the effects of these dimensions on consumers' online behavior with further studies. Indeed, it seems possible that a model based on the theoretical foundations of flow theory can contribute to marketing researchers in understanding consumer behavior, especially in the context of human-computer interaction (Özkara and Özmen, 2016). Pioneering studies on online flow experience, especially in consumer research, make a significant contribution to the literature (Koufaris et al., 2001; Koufaris, 2002).

For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1975a, 1975b, 1988, 1990) made significant contributions to both the psychology and marketing literature with his pioneering work on flow experience.

Recent studies have pointed out that the online flow experience makes a significant contribution to understanding the online shopping behavior of consumers (Baytar and Yükselen, 2018; Çabuk and Kuş, 2019). In addition, it is thought that testing the proposed conceptual model in future studies will provide additional contributions to the understanding of consumer behavior. If the proposed model is tested, it is thought that it will provide information about how important it is to produce online content that is interesting, intriguing, providing autotelic experiences, forgetting the time flow, focusing attention on the activity, and making the consumer feel in control, to explain the online behavior of consumers. As a result, it is necessary to be informed about the flow experiences of consumers in the online information search process and to produce appropriate content that will affect consumer behavior accordingly.

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