



# Women connect. Men choose.

How to leverage gender differences to grow online business



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## The goal: Serve each individual, individually

When there is endless data about each individual, the challenge is to harness our knowledge to treat each individual as an individual.

“...People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”  
- Maya Angelou

Years ago, when retailers actually knew their individual customers in the physical world, the butcher knew to offer Mrs. Jones the nicer cuts, whereas Mr. Smith preferred whatever was on sale. The florist could subtly direct Mrs. Jones to the flowers nearing the end of their shelf-life, while making sure they matched the color scheme of her living room. Retailers knew that how each customer felt vis-à-vis their establishment could make or break their business.

Today, the e-commerce ecosystem has reached a level of sophistication we could only have dreamed of a decade ago. With competition only a click away, online retailers truly appreciate what small-town retailers understood so well: successful product marketing is all about looking at your products and services from the customer’s point of view.

In the digital arena, there are more customers and prospects than the local butcher or florist ever imagined. And there are endless sources of detailed data about these individuals. The challenge facing online retail today is no longer what we know about each of our millions of customers and prospects. Rather, retailers today need to focus on effectively harnessing

**In this second paper of the Clicktale Psychology and Customer Experience Series, we examine how retailers can leverage gender differences to reach visitors more effectively, raise conversions, and keep customers coming back.**

*Make sure to read the other three papers in the Psychology and Customer Experience Series:*



**Different people, different clicks.**

Harnessing buyer personality insights to grow your online business



**Seekers & browsers.**

How building diverse purchase paths can increase conversions



**Rational actors, emotional reactors.**

How leveraging emotion-based learning can yield business results

## Gender differences count online, too

How can we put inherent differences between the cognitive styles of men versus women to work for online businesses?

Online or offline, gender is an obvious and important variable when considering how to reach different customers.

Research has indicated that there are inherent differences between the cognitive styles of men versus women. In other words – and this will come as a surprise to no one - men and women think, perceive, and remember information differently.

The question is, how can we put this understanding to work in e-commerce?



## Systemizing and empathizing

Research shows that women tend to be stronger empathizers and males are often stronger systemizers.

According to Simon Baron-Cohen<sup>1</sup>, there are observable differences between how boys and girls behave at birth: while baby girls tend to give most of their attention to social stimuli such as human faces and voices, boys tend to pay more attention to non-social, spatial stimuli - such as the movement of a mobile hanging above a crib. Throughout their lives, he claims, male and female individuals continue to manifest these traits in more and more complex ways.

Baron-Cohen considered this childhood behavior to be early evidence that females are stronger empathizers and males are stronger systemizers. Although some researchers disagree, there is evidence that males spontaneously systemize to a greater degree than females, while females spontaneously empathize to a greater degree than males.

Other studies suggest that these differences are expressed in professional contexts. For example, mathematics, physics, and engineering - all of which require a high degree of systemization - are more commonly male occupations. Women tend to be drawn to occupations which require decoding nonverbal communications, picking up subtle nuances from tone of voice or facial expression, or judging a person's character.

Obviously, these findings deal with population-level tendencies, and in no way indicate that all men are systemizers and all women are empathizers.

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<sup>1</sup>Baron-Cohen, S, Knickmeyer, R. & Belmonte, M (2005) Sex differences in the brain: Implications for explaining autism. *Science*, 310, 819-823.

## Experience vs. mission

Women, the study found, are more focused on the shopping experience. Men are focused on the mission.

Gender differences impact every aspect of our lives, and online shopping behavior is no exception.

A study entitled “Men Buy, Women Shop” revealed significant differences between the offline shopping behaviors of men and women. According to Wharton University marketing professor Stephen J. Hoch, “Women think of shopping in an interpersonal, human fashion, and men treat it as more instrumental. It’s a job to get done.” He adds that this data has implications for businesses that are interested in developing a more segmented approach to building and maintaining loyalty among male and female customers. Women, the study found, are more focused on the experience. Men are focused on the mission.

Women react more strongly than men to personal interactions with sales associates, while men are more likely to respond to the utilitarian aspects of the experience - the availability of parking, whether the item they need is in stock, the length of the checkout line, and more.

## Applying gender differences

The online behavior of men and women reflects their different cognitive styles and distinguishes their interactions with websites.

How can these observations impact website design, the online experience and the customer journey?

Here are some examples of how the online behavior of men and women reflects their different cognitive styles and what distinguishes their interactions with websites:

### Reasons to go online

Men are more oriented toward impersonal or individualistic goals. Women are more oriented toward social integration. While women enjoy the browsing process, men are more task-oriented and focus on how well they are able to accomplish a task and find what they are looking for.

### Website type

Women focus on socializing and communication and spend more time on social networking and writing email messages. Men care more about functionality and are more likely to use a website as a tool - to check the weather, get news, or download software.

### Attention

Women are much more concerned about online security. They tend to need more information to make a decision—which is consistent with Clicktale analyses indicating that women read more pages than men. They prefer to choose among different colors, read more ad copy, read stories in detail and care more about bargains. Men, on the other hand, tend to be more impulsive shoppers, prefer headlines and bullet points, and are less concerned about shipping costs than women.

## Case study: The proof is in the pudding

Clicktale showed that men were far more systematic in their behavior on a recipe website, while women displayed a far more empathizing cognitive style.

To illustrate how gender influences online behavior, Clicktale conducted a study of how men and women behave on a popular recipes website. Clicktale heatmaps revealed a number of insights that support the systemization versus empathizing theory.

Side-by-side mouse-click heatmaps showed that many more women engaged with the top menu bar, clicking into the various categories to view different recipes. Women were also more likely to click on left-side icons rather than sticking solely with the current recipe. Men, on the other hand, tended to be far more limited in their clicks – they searched exactly for what they came for and then left the site when they were done.

Side-by-side attention heatmaps compared men's attention on the web page (left) and women's attention (right).



Clicktale attention heatmaps comparing male (left) and female (right) attention on the page.

As seen by the narrow 'hot' band in the center of the page, men were very focused on the ingredients of a recipe and how to prepare it. Women, on the other hand, browsed up and down the page more and were less focused – as seen by the wider, more diffuse 'hot' band.

Both heatmaps confirm that men were far more systematic in their behavior on the site, while women displayed a far more empathizing cognitive style.

## The bottom line

In order to effectively address individual shoppers – online and offline - we have to consider the impact on customer behavior of inherent characteristics such as gender.

With increasing competition and customer sophistication, online retailers need to ramp up efforts to effectively and intelligently address each individual shopper. The subtleties of human behavior, as well as inherent customer characteristics such as gender, can be quantified and leveraged to grow conversions - with the right awareness and the right tools.

To harness what we know about each of our millions of customers and prospects, it is crucial to effectively treat each individual as an individual. Adapting website design to take into consideration known gender differences helps businesses make websites more relevant and enjoyable, empowers visitors, and ultimately increases revenues.

**Interested in how Clicktale can help you improve the customer experience on your website, mobile site and apps, for all buyer personalities?**

[Request a demo](#)

# About the Psychology & CX Series

Clicktale's Psychology & CX Series is based on original online behavioral research initiated and led by Clicktale Web Psychologist Dr. Liraz Margalit.

There are many different psychological theories as to what influences online visitor behavior, and this field of research is still young. The Clicktale research team developed and tested a theory based on the Interactionism approach to behavior, which states that in order to predict behavior, we have to take into consideration personality and environmental factors. Our research integrates the different factors found to influence online behavior, merging these into a comprehensive theory that incorporates gender, personality, state of mind, intent and environmental factors.

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