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Exploratory Study on Consumer's Hedonic Value for Retail Advertising and Marketing Plans: Based on In-depth Interview on Consumer's Shopping Experience

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Abstract

Going shopping would be a very reasoned and well-planned activity, however, at the same time, it would not. People may go shopping just for fun and as their leisure. The motivations for going shopping and their experiences cannot be fully explained with the economic utility or the information-processing model.

Thus, this study explored the hedonic aspect of the experiences of shopping as an alternative explanation to consumers' motivations of shopping and discussed retail advertising and marketing plans. An in-depth interview was conducted to obtain a better understanding about hedonic value, and it was found that hedonic value affects a consumer's shopping experience and that understanding consumers' motivations for shopping and establishing competitive advertising and marketing plans is important in drawing more consumers. Strategic implications for establishing further retail advertising and marketing plans obtained from the findings were also suggested.

Keywords: *hedonic value, consumer, shopping, in-depth interview, advertising and marketing plan*

1. Introduction

The concept of shopping seems to be value-free. Going shopping can be considered an economic activity. However, it also can be regarded as a social or cultural communication. In general, shopping is considered a functional economic activity whereby people purchase products that they need and want. In the functional and economic perspective, it is assumed that people maximize their utility through the buying of products, and people go shopping for that reason. Those economic, functional, and utilitarian shopping motivations have been regarded as a dominant paradigm that explains consumers' motivations for shopping in the field of marketing [1, 2].

The functional and utilitarian approaches to consumers' shopping motivations and their behaviors have resulted in some limitations. First, the product-acquisition explanation of the economic, functional, and utilitarian approach would insufficiently explain the total experiences of shoppers' motivations. In particular, those approaches have assumed that consumers' shopping is a very reasoned or well-planned activity. Thus, they have focused on information processing of shoppers for examining of consumers' shopping behavior. Second, several studies based on the functional and utilitarian approaches have relied heavily on socio-demographic individual variables such as gender or age to explain the shopping experiences of consumers [3, 4].

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Going shopping would be a very reasoned and well-planned activity, however, at the same time, it would not. People may go shopping just for fun and as their leisure. These motivations for going shopping and their experiences cannot be fully explained with the economic utility or the information-processing model. Thus, this study would like to explore the hedonic aspect of the experiences of shopping as an alternative explanation to consumers' motivations of shopping.

In the concept of hedonic consumption, shopping could be interpreted as an activity for obtaining entertainment, fun, and play [5]. Some previous studies on consumer behaviors have pointed out that hedonic motives; for example, entertainment and relaxation are important in consumer behaviors, although the economic or functional utility is still considered as an important motive in consumers' shopping experiences [6, 7, 8, 9]. Although some studies examined the impact of hedonic motives on the consumers' shopping behaviors, they have been limited to the examination of statistical significance of some hedonic variables on consumers' shopping motivations. Thus, it can be argued that it would be necessary to understand consumers and their behaviors in terms of the relationship with hedonic aspects which affect the shopping experiences of consumers. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand a hedonic value as a consumer's motivation for shopping and to discuss retail advertising and marketing plans. Understanding consumers' motivations for shopping and establishing competitive advertising and marketing plans would be important in drawing more consumers.

2. Reviews of Previous Research on Consumers' Shopping Behavior

Research on consumer behavior at shopping has been done in several perspectives. First, most studies on consumer behaviors at shopping have been examined with economic, functional, and utilitarian approaches [1, 2, 3, 4]. These studies have focused on the process of the product-acquisition in which people purchase the products that they need and want. This conventional consumer behavior research on shopping motivations and behaviors has ignored non-economic dimensions of consumer behavior. In addition, the shopping motivations and behaviors of consumers have been considered as an activity which is mostly based on human beings' very well-developed reasoning. Compared to the conventional consumer behavior research, some studies illustrated the shopping behaviors of consumers under the institutional and socio-cultural aspects using the ethnography approach [10, 11, 12].

In addition to those two approaches on consumers' shopping experiences, another approach emphasizes the shopping experiences' potential entertainment and emotional aspects. Hirschman and Holbrook suggested hedonic consumption as the facet of consumer behavior that relates to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience [5]. According to Hopkinson and Pujari, hedonic consumption is an experience that consists in the pursuit of fantasies, feelings and fun rather than task completion [9]. According to Backes, the paradigm of a visualizing culture made going shopping as an exercise in pleasure and diversion [13]. Westbrook and Black found that consumers' mall visit is made for the pleasure inherent in the visit itself as well as a motivation of purchase needs [14]. Dawson, Bloch and Ridgway also identified that some consumers have experiential motives for shopping that result from hedonic and recreational motivations [15]. Ibrahim and Wee found that many consumers made a decision of shopping based on the entertaining shopping experience [16]. Thus, consumers may use shopping experiences that result in impulse buying behavior to satisfy a number of needs that do not fit into theories of economic utility.

3. Method

In an attempt to obtain a better understanding on consumers' shopping experiences, this study especially used an unstructured in-depth interview. According to Fontana and Frey, unstructured interview is used to understand the complex behavior of people without imposing any limitation [17]. Moreover, in-depth interview is relatively appropriate in doing an exploratory research. Thus, in-depth interview with shoppers is useful in identifying the underlying effects of hedonic values in consumers' shopping experiences.

Specifically, in this study, in-depth interview was conducted with three U.S. suburban shoppers. Two

interviewees were males and one interviewee was female. The ages of male interviewees were 19 and 24 respectively, and the age of the female interviewee was 37. The race of interviewees was african-american, white-american and asian-american respectively. Interviews were conducted for two hours with each shopper. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. To avoid contamination of the data, each interviewee was not asked directly about their shopping motivations or behaviors in terms of hedonic values. Rather, interviewees were told that the project was designed to compare the difference of consumers' shopping satisfaction between off-line and on-line shopping. In addition to the interviews with three shoppers, another interview was conducted with a sales-person who was working at a U.S. suburban shopping mall.

4. Results

Why do people go shopping? What motivations make people go shopping? We asked a sales-person at a shopping mall why people come shopping.

We: In your opinion, why do people come to a shopping mall? For example, do they come to the mall just to buy something or for fun?

Sales-person: My guess would be that they come to look for a specific item, but they are here so they walk up and down the mall and look at all the different stores. Many times there are different things going on in the mall.

We: Do you think the motivations of people for coming shopping are different according to age or gender?

Sales-person: Young college kids are coming in and retired old people are coming here, so I do not see a specific difference of shopping with an age, gender or anything like that.

More specific hedonic values of people in their shopping experiences could be found in the in-depth interview with customers at the mall. Several hedonic values were found to be as critical as the direct motivations of people's shopping. Although the main reason for going shopping was a little bit different from person to person, however, in general, it was found that shopping malls are a place that people can have fun.

Man1: Shopping is doing for just fun, not for doing just for mother's day gift. Looking at all nice stuff. Initially, shopping is lot of fun. Initial excitement at looking at the item.

Man2: Generally, I go shopping because of something to do and something entertaining. I intend to browse different stores. I enjoy going to shopping because it is something that is a lot of fun, even if I do not have enough money.

Woman1: If there is an item that catches my eyes, I just buy it. But there isn't. I don't buy anything. I go shopping in twice a month to release my stress. When I get depressed, I go. You can get rid of stress and problems. Don't you feel nice?

The following interviews show that going shopping is considered by people as an escape from the problem they have.

Man1: I feel that sometimes people want to be distracted. We can spend time in learning how to use a new microwave. You got excited by new DVD and CD. You can just be distracted at being at the mall. Looking at items and loving them. You don't think about the outside world. You don't necessarily think about the exams and your job situations. All different things are coming into my mind and pushing out the problems there.

Man2: Shopping does feel like an escape to me. When I go shopping, I can separate myself from everything

in the inside world and from single-windowed room. It's definitely like an escape.

Man2: I can look at all the things that I could have. At the same time, I can break a regular day, step outside and relax.

Woman1: You can get out from your present life, first of all. That's not your home. I like shopping. To me, it is fun. Catch up with fashion.

Woman1: After I finish shopping, I feel good. You know, I mean to be in a good mood. You know, I don't know why but it happens to me. Going there is fun and buying something is also fun.

Similarly, the following interviews show that shopping is like hunting, and it provides gratifications without any purchase.

Man1: Look for the sale and look for complements for accessories or clothes you already have. It's just like an adventure. You're hunting all the different stores. Hunting around all the stores. Yes, it's like an adventure. Shopping is a nice activity.

Man2: The mall has so many different options. Especially, in the Christmas season or holiday season, I need to find where the perfect item exists which fits each person. That is like hunting.

Woman1: The shopping mall has so many colorful things. It distracts your eyes and your stresses. You really forget about your problems and troubles. To me, shopping is fun and a hobby. This is more like sports.

Woman1: The shopping mall is not my home. It is a new place and they have new stuff. Shopping is a way to release stress but if I spent less and buy an inexpensive item.

Woman1: New people and new products, something new by looking at them. It is exciting. New color and new design.

Another reason people like to go shopping is that shopping is easy.

Woman1: Shopping is fun. Just take a bus, go there, and look around. If you have something you like, just buy it. And if you don't have something you want to buy, you don't need to buy anything. It's very easy. Shopping is not challenging.

The following interviews show that shopping provides the satisfaction of hedonic needs, and the purchasing specific products is the secondary aim of shopping. Thus, shopping is done without any plan.

Man1: Looking around, looking for things on sale, looking for things that fit, looking for things I like, it's like an addition, so to speak. It's very hard to stop. There is no penalty. There is fun.

Man1: Shopping has a very strong emotional aspect. I'm not hungry for an item. I just like it and enjoy. So, I do it.

Man2: Many of the times I go to the mall, I have no intention to purchase anything. I just go there and see what's available. Browse stores and look around. Shopping is definitely enjoyable.

Woman1: Most of the time, I purchase items that I didn't plan to buy. If an item looks nice, I just buy it. To me, the mood of the day is important. Sometimes, I don't purchase any item.

Woman1: I don't want to spend my time too much if they don't have interesting things.

Woman1: I like shopping and I go to the mall frequently just to see what kind of items they have and look around. If there is something I like, I buy it. People call it impulsive shopping, but I think it is a way to release my stress that I couldn't release the stress with other ways.

Shopping malls are public places where people can socialize with other people but at the same time, shopping is an activity which is very self-emotional.

Man1: When I go to the mall, I spent two or three hours at the mall. I tried to go to every store to see what kind of sales they have. When I looked at electronics or jeans, I enjoy myself at the mall.

Man2: At the food court, I keep on and hang out with my friends. We don't need to say that I am going shopping in 15 minutes. I go to the mall for my desire and I enjoy myself.

5. Conclusion

This study has identified through in-depth interview that consumers' motivations for shopping came from hedonic values. Evidence from this study shows that advertising and marketing practitioners must employ hedonic attributes in their retail advertising and marketing practices to attract consumers. For retail advertising practices, it is important for advertising practitioners to know that, in many cases, consumers go shopping without any specific purpose. Thus, it is good to plan on-spot advertisements which triggers consumers actual buying. For retail marketing practices, it is imperative for marketing practitioners to facilitate an entertaining shopping experience. The findings of this study suggest that marketers need to focus much on the aspects of entertainment and excitement.

There are some limitations to this study. Data were only collected from three shoppers and one salesperson at a shopping mall. Although this study was performed for an exploratory goal, the paucity of the data would constrain the generalization of results. Thus, future research could use a larger sample of consumers and would reduce the limitation of the study. Finally, this study believes that the understanding of hedonic attributes as the characteristic of consumers would be helpful to establish an effective advertising or marketing plan.

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