



With or without you: The positive and negative influence of retail companions[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates whether the influence of shopping with a companion is consistent across retail contexts with service components or between genders. An experiment asked participants to recall and evaluate their most recent solo or joint restaurant or shopping experience. Results demonstrate that for restaurant experiences, there is a positive influence of others on individual time spent, money spent, satisfaction, and attitude toward the act. For shopping experiences, however, these effects were either strengthened or reversed dependent upon gender. For (males) females, joint shopping experiences are linked to (increased) decreased amount paid, attitude toward the act, and re-patronage intentions.

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1. Introduction

A friend or family member who accompanies a customer has been referred to as a purchase-pal (e.g., Bell, 1967) or a companion shopper (e.g., Lindsey-Mullikin and Munger, 2011). Research on these retail companions suggests that consumers are motivated to shop with others primarily for social motivations (e.g., company) or for assistance motivations (e.g., product expertise) (Hartman and Kiecker, 1991). Supporting the notion that retail companions satisfy individual motivations are findings which show that shopping with others has a positive influence on individual shopper behavior and satisfaction (e.g., Bell et al., 2011; Granbois, 1968; Kiecker and Hartman, 1993, 1994; Sommer et al., 1992; Woodside and Sims, 1976). Though previous findings are consistent, several questions remain. It is not clear whether the influences of a companion are consistent across retail contexts, include attitudinal components, or are equal between genders. In a broader sense, it is uncertain whether the influence of a companion on individual retail outcomes is even consistently positive. The present study evaluated these possibilities in solo and joint restaurant and shopping experiences. This investigation reveals that joint restaurant experiences are linked to increased individual time spent, money spent, satisfaction, and attitude toward the act. Critically, the valence of influence that a companion had on individual shopping experiences depended upon gender. Contrary to our expectations, for (males) females, joint

shopping experiences were linked to (increased) decreased amount paid, attitude toward the act, and re-patronage intentions. The related theoretical background, method, and implications are developed in the proceeding sections.

2. Review of the literature

Most retail research concerns the interactions between a company and its individual customers (Tsiros and Parasuraman, 2006). This research has largely foregone questions related to customer–customer relationships while focusing on firm–customer relationships (Verhoef et al., 2009). Though these studies are helpful in their control of social variables during firm–customer investigations, the reality of retail settings is one in which individuals are frequently influenced by other consumers and/or are acting jointly with them (Bagozzi, 2000).

Within the developing body of customer–customer literature, the influence of other customers is often examined from the friend/family perspective (i.e., purchase-pal, Bell, 1967; companion shopper, Lindsey-Mullikin and Munger, 2011). In total, companion shoppers have been shown to increase individual time spent (Granbois, 1968; Sommer et al., 1992), money spent (Bell et al., 2011; Granbois, 1968; Sommer et al., 1992; Woodside and Sims, 1976), and confidence (Kiecker and Hartman, 1994) while also reducing perceptions of purchase risk (Kiecker and Hartman, 1993). These studies motivate a series of hypotheses that we explore in the present study. We present each in sequence below, along with a brief background review for each. Some of these serve to replicate common findings in this literature in previously

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unexplored contexts. Others—primarily those of satisfaction, attitude, re-patronage, and gender—serve to extend our knowledge of the role of social variables in joint consumer experiences.

2.1. Time spent

H1. Consumer experience while (a) shopping and (b) patronizing a restaurant with a companion will be associated with greater time spent compared to the experience solo.

Though retail research has not demonstrated that having a companion increases time spent in a restaurant setting, the most central and common finding related to companions in retail settings is that companions increase the amount of time spent while shopping (e.g., Bell et al., 2011; Granbois, 1968; Sommer et al., 1992; Woodside and Sims, 1976). This increase in time spent could arise from several sources. First, having more persons acting jointly may require more time in order to coordinate their actions. Secondly, two or more consumers should be expected to have more needs to be met than a single consumer. As a result, more time would be needed to acquire more products or to place an order while acting jointly. Additionally, with a companion along, a consumer experience may be more enjoyable which in turn would cause a desire to prolong the experience. Along these lines, studies concerning food intake have shown a positive correlation between the number of people present at a meal and the amount individually consumed (de Castro, 2000; de Castro and Brewer, 1992). It is reasonable to expect that consuming more food will require more time at a particular restaurant. This background work frames the first hypothesis of the present study, which replicates this common finding in shopping experiences and extends it into restaurant experiences.

2.2. Money spent

H2. Consumer experience while (a) shopping and (b) patronizing a restaurant with a companion will be associated with greater money spent compared to the experience solo.

Though it may be intuitive that the presence of a companion shopper impedes individual dollars spent, research has previously demonstrated that when shopping individual consumers are more likely to make unplanned purchases (i.e., spend more) when accompanied by a companion (Bell et al., 2011). This additional spending while in the presence of a companion can be traced to the way in which others may influence risk perception, consumer confidence, and time spent. Previous findings show that having a companion shopper reduces perceptions of purchase risk (Kiecker and Hartman, 1993) and raises a consumer's confidence (Kiecker and Hartman, 1994) therefore encouraging additional spending. Similarly, studies have shown that increased total time spent at a retailer increases the amount of unplanned purchases (Granbois, 1968; Sommer et al., 1992). Finally, as food studies have found that the presence of others increases individual food intake (de Castro, 2000; de Castro and Brewer, 1992), so too is there an expectation that more food will require spending more money. In combination, these studies suggest, as a second hypothesis, that consumers will spend more time when shopping or patronizing a restaurant if they are in the presence of a companion.

2.3. Satisfaction

H3. Consumer experience while (a) shopping and (b) patronizing a restaurant with a companion will be associated with greater satisfaction compared to the experience solo.

In much of marketing research, satisfaction is a key outcome. Studies involving crowding of retail shops (e.g., Pan and Siemens, 2011) and extended service encounters (e.g., Noone and Mattila, 2009) have shown that perceived crowding has a varied influence on satisfaction. In retail settings, this relationship is described as an inverted-U, wherein consumers are more satisfied with medium crowding compared to light or heavy crowding (Pan and Siemens, 2011). In extended service encounters, perceived crowding is a negative influence particularly when consumer goals are utilitarian (Noone and Mattila, 2009). However, the present research is concerned with the influence of intentionally shopping or experiencing a restaurant with someone the consumer knows (rather than a stranger). Contrary to retail experiences with strangers (i.e., crowds), retail experiences with a member of one's social network (i.e., a companion) could be seen to offer greater social satisfaction toward. Given the recognition that consumers are often motivated to shop with another person for the companionship (Hartman and Kiecker, 1991), there is an expectation that such jointness (Blomberg, 2011; Tollefsen, 2005) of activity will have a positive influence on consumer satisfaction.

2.4. Attitude toward the act

H4. Consumer experience while (a) shopping and (b) patronizing a restaurant with a companion will be associated with enhanced attitude toward the act compared to the experience solo.

Though studies on the effects of others on individual shopping outcomes have frequently examined money and time spent (e.g., Bell et al., 2011, Granbois, 1968; Sommer et al., 1992), attitudinal outcomes have not yet figured into these investigations. Without measuring attitudinal changes, it is unclear whether increased time and money spent during joint shopping is a result of positive attitudes or simply a result of other factors, such as time for coordination. However, given that research has shown social motivation frequently influences shopping alone (Kim et al., 2005) and the decision to bring a companion shopper (Hartman and Kiecker 1991), there is reason to believe that consumer attitude toward the retail act (shopping or eating at a restaurant) will be positively impacted by the presence of a companion who may serve to socially satisfy the shopper. In terms of literature surrounding satisfaction, the presence of a companion can be seen to impact a consumers overall or cumulative satisfaction (Andreassen, 2000). In other words, consumers are expected to hold positive attitudes toward joint consumption acts as these joint acts are more socially satisfying than solo ones.

2.5. Re-patronage intentions

H5. Consumer experience while (a) shopping and (b) patronizing a restaurant with a companion will be associated with higher re-patronage intentions compared to the experience solo.

With the expectation that jointly carrying out consumer acts will enhance satisfaction and attitude toward the act (see Section 2.4 above), it is also expected that consumers will have greater intentions to patronize the retailer or restaurant again. These expectations stems from retail studies in which satisfied consumers are shown to have greater intentions of re-patronage (e.g., Baldinger and Robinson, 1996; Grace and O'Cass, 2005) and restaurant studies showing that attitudes toward specific elements of a service encounter influence intentions of re-patronage (e.g., Yap and Kew, 2007). Though consumers' future intentions may or may not include jointly acting with a companion, the presence of a

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