



Shopping for fun or shopping to buy: Is it different online and offline?



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ABSTRACT

Consumers can shop both online and offline, either for fun or for needs. We investigate the consequences of shopping for fun or for need on word-of-mouth (WOM), intentional loyalty, and price consciousness directly comparing the offline and online settings. We find differences in the relationships among the considered variables, with the offline context being characterized by a simplified structure of causalities, greater maturity, and fewer but stronger ties among the considered constructs, compared with the online context. Furthermore, the content of WOM changes: consumers share experiential issues when they shop for fun, and efficiency issues when their shopping is goal-oriented

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1. Introduction

The role of emotions, fun, and pleasure in consumer behavior is now widely recognized as being of key importance, and consumers' shopping is usually discussed in terms of its "goal-oriented" or "utilitarian" value and its "recreational" or "hedonic" value (Griffin et al., 2000; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Wagner and Rudolph, 2010). Hedonistic shopping is described as the festive, ludic, or even epicurean way of shopping, and is related to fun and playfulness rather than to task completion, reflecting the experiential side of shopping, comprising pleasure, curiosity, fantasy, escapism, and fun (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Scarpi, 2012). On the other hand, utilitarianism is described as the ergic, task-related, and rational, meaning that a shopping expedition is based on efficiency and rationality. Utilitarianism is related to necessity rather than to recreation, and is often described in terms that are commonly used otherwise to evaluate work performance (e.g. success, accomplishment). As Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2001) p. 34 summarize, consumers can sometimes "shop to acquire items" and at other times "shop to shop".

A great deal of previous literature has debated whether the Internet is more suited to evoking goal-oriented shopping (e.g. by minimizing the time for browsing, saving preferences, and comparing products), or to evoking fun-oriented shopping (e.g. through aesthetic formality and aesthetic appeal, website design, and

features of virtual reality), or whether enhancing the experiential side of shopping can harm the goal-oriented side (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2001), rather than investigating the consequences of shopping for fun or for needs. Accordingly, the extant literature has reached a good knowledge on the influence of shopping orientation on channel choice, and on the parallel use of multiple channels to satisfy different types of need (e.g. information search on Internet webpages or social networks, and actual purchases in offline brick-and-mortar stores). However, less is known about the behavioral differences that might be displayed by customers once they have chosen which channel to use for their shopping purposes. The relatively small number of analyses that have focused on the different consequences of shopping orientation have usually investigated the effects on consumer satisfaction and purchase intention on potential buyers. Therefore, the present analysis adds to this latter stream of research and constitutes an advancement for four reasons. First, we assess the consequences of shopping for fun or for needs on two distribution channels simultaneously, directly comparing the online and the offline settings for fashion stores in the clothing category. To the best of our knowledge, backed by an extensive literature review as can in part be found summarized in Hoffman and Novak (2009) and Scarpi (2012), no previous study directly compared the effects of hedonism and utilitarianism online and offline: previous studies focused on one channel, and cross-channel comparisons have instead assessed features that facilitate shopping in a goal-oriented or experiential way (e.g. Wolfenbarger and Gilly (2001)), not their effects. The lack of a direct comparison between the two channels does not permit to rule out the possibility of a self-selection mechanism in channel choice as a function of consumers' shopping orientation. By providing a direct

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comparison of the online and the offline channels, this article aims to understand whether and to what extent consumers display different levels of hedonism and utilitarianism when shopping in these different channels and to assess the behavioral consequences of shopping orientation in the two channels.

Second, as observed by Scarpi (2012), the consequences of shopping orientation online and/or offline have either been neglected by previous works or have been considered separately, with different studies considering only one of them at a time, not their relationship or focusing on the antecedents of channel choice (such as demographics, channel knowledge, perceived channel utility, channel risk perceptions, price search intentions, or search effort). In the current article, we propose an articulated model aimed at assessing and comparing the behavioral consequences of shopping orientation between the two channels, and that specifically focuses on variables of key managerial relevance (loyalty, word of mouth [WOM] referral intention, price consciousness). We are not neglecting that there are relevant differences between the two channels that determine a different proclivity by the customers to use one of them thus exhibiting different shopping orientations; rather, we complement this stream of literature by observing the behavioral outcomes of shopping orientation online and offline.

Third, we compare not only the total amount but also the specific content of the WOM by those who shop to satisfy a goal and those who shop experientially. Finally, we do not investigate the self-reported intention to buy by respondents in a simulated setting; instead, we base the empirical analysis on actual buyers in natural settings for fast fashion stores, both offline and online.

In summary, our investigation is novel in that the literature on shopping orientation has yet to provide rewarding indications of the direction of the moderation effect played by the Internet, has focused on only one channel at a time, and has sometimes provided contradictory findings (e.g. Watchravesringkan et al. (2010) found offline that utilitarianism leads to purchase intention more than hedonism does, whereas Goldsmith and Goldsmith (2002) found the opposite online).

In the following paragraphs, we review the relevant literature and build on it to suggest a framework that binds together some of the (sometimes contradictory) evidence provided by the extant literature. Then, we present the results and discuss their theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Shopping for fun, shopping for needs, and price consciousness

Consumers have been shown to display different degrees of willingness to spend time and effort shopping around if they need to purchase something at a lower price. Price consciousness refers to the extent to which a consumer uses price information as the main cue in purchasing (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). In line with previous works, price consciousness can be either high (when consumers reflect a strong concern for and attention to the price paid), or low (when consumers display a low reliance on price and do not focus primarily on price).

Because price can be a source of emotional as well as functional value, consumers may display different reactions to price depending on the hedonic or utilitarian value associated with the shopping experience (Jin et al., 2003). Consumers experience utilitarian value when they think of shopping mainly as work, that is, when their main goal is efficiency: to purchase the right product at a deal price in a short time (Babin et al., 1994; Childers et al., 2001). In other words, shopping satisfies functional needs for these consumers, and – accordingly – their price consciousness will be

influenced by the extent to which they consider the prices imposed by the retailer to be aligned with an efficiency criterion. Shopping for needs has been suggested to be about buying at the lowest price possible (Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Wagner and Rudolph, 2010). As a consequence, we expect that customers with a stronger utilitarian approach to shopping will be more willing to dedicate effort to seek lower prices. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H1a. Utilitarianism will positively affect price consciousness.

At the same time, price can be a source of emotional benefits for those consumers who associate price with more hedonic values such as prestige and higher aesthetic value (Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Neeley et al., 2010), and also for those consumers who enjoy bargaining and looking for deals not for the sake of saving money or for a more efficient money allocation, but because they like the emotion of deal-hunting and enjoy spending time shopping (Griffin et al., 2000). Previous studies have found that when shopping for fun, consumers take pride in paying low prices as a result of their superior bargaining abilities (Babin et al., 1994) that in turn can elicit positive emotions about feeling smart (Babin et al., 1994). Thus, also experiential shopping has been found to be positively related to paying attention to price levels (Scherhorn et al., 1990) and transaction-related costs (Lee and Murphy, 2009); to cherry-picking products, and to hunting for bargains (Griffin et al., 2000). In line with these considerations, we expect a positive relationship between price consciousness and hedonism. Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H1b. Hedonism will positively affect price consciousness.

In summary, in H1a in H1b we expect a positive relationship between both kinds of shopping orientations and price consciousness, although for different reasons (i.e. consumers being price conscious for efficiency reasons vs. for the emotion of deal-hunting). If price consciousness were related to only one specific shopping orientation (e.g. utilitarianism), then we would see mostly utilitarianism online and very little hedonism. Instead, several noticeable hedonic approaches to the Internet have been observed by recent studies (Hung et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2010; Scarpi, 2012). This is to say, price consciousness is not specifically related to shopping for fun or for needs.

With regard to the comparison of the offline and online channels, we expect that the distribution channel moderates the relationship between shopping orientation and price consciousness. Previous research has highlighted that the online channel makes it easier for consumers to compare prices across retailers (Grewal et al., 2010). As a consequence, one might expect that higher price consciousness could be observed in the online than in the offline context. In other words, we expect the relationship between hedonism/utilitarianism and price consciousness to be stronger online than offline.

Accordingly, we hypothesize the following:

H1c. The relationship between hedonism and price consciousness will be weaker offline than online.

H1d. The relationship between utilitarianism and price consciousness will be weaker offline than online.

2.2. Shopping for fun, shopping for needs, and intentional loyalty

Loyalty can be separated into a behavioral and an attitudinal dimension (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Intentional loyalty happens when attitudinal loyalty is accompanied by the intent to take a positive action in the near future, typically to visit a store again or to re-purchase a brand.

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