



Shopping orientations of US males: A generational cohort comparison

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ABSTRACT

Male shoppers are recognized as an important and distinctive market segment. While initial steps to categorize and classify male shoppers have been taken, the majority of existing empirical research considers male shoppers as a single, homogeneous market segment. Recognizing that our understanding of male shoppers can be improved by identifying smaller, more homogeneous sub-segments, this exploratory study uses Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) as a framework to examine the shopping orientations of US men across four different generational cohorts: the Silent generation, the Baby Boomers, the 13th Generation, and the Millennials. The findings of this study support the use of GCT as a market segmentation tool for male shoppers and provide insight to help retailers understand how men in the four cohort groups approach shopping. Specifically, the findings suggest that male shoppers in the Millennial generation exhibit significantly higher levels of shopping enjoyment, recreational shopping tendency and market mavenism than males in the other generational cohorts.

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1. Introduction

While overall retail sales for 2010 were lukewarm at best due to the sluggish economy, shopping by men was still one of the brightest stars in the retail environment (Albright, 2010; Keenan, 2010). For example, during the 2010 back-to-school shopping period, fathers were projected to outspend mothers by an average of \$126 dollars—with fathers spending \$671 compared to only \$545 spent by mothers on back-to-school items (Wellington, 2010). Additionally, in a 2010 study by Yahoo with over 2400 US men ages 18–64, nearly 6 out of 10 of the men interviewed said that they were their household's chief shopper for health, pet, and packaged goods as well as clothing (Neff, 2011).

Considering this evidence that males are actively shopping, it is important to engage in research to better understand the group's approach to the shopping environment. The majority of previous studies have provided insight into male shopping behavior by looking at similarities and differences between male and female respondents (e.g., Dholakia et al., 1995; Torres et al., 2001; Alreck and Settle, 2002; Hart et al., 2007; Seock and Bailey, 2008; Hansen and Jensen, 2008). In contrast, research efforts exploring male shopping behavior without comparison to women have been far less frequent. Extant male-specific studies include examinations of mall shopping behavior and the importance of various shopping mall attributes (Lee et al., 2005; Du Preez et al., 2007), shopping dependence (Dodd et al., 2005), perceptions of the shopping

environment (Otnes and McGrath, 2001), and satisfaction (Torres et al., 2001). Only two studies (Bakewell and Mitchell, 2004; Du Preez et al., 2007) offer insight into male shopping orientations and both studies treat males as a singular group, not going further to examine or compare sub-segments within the gender.

In light of the importance of male shoppers as a market segment and the dearth of extant research specific to segmentation of male shoppers, the purpose of this exploratory study is to provide an initial investigation of shopping orientations among male shoppers across four US generations: the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, the 13th Generation, and the Millennials. We offer the following research question to guide the study:

RQ1: Do male shoppers in the four US generational cohort groups differ in their shopping orientations?

Bringing together two streams of the literature (generational cohort theory and shopping orientations), this study explores the application of shopping orientations within the framework of generational cohort theory among an understudied consumer group. The findings will provide initial insight into the relationships between generational cohort membership and shopping orientations of men in the four US generational cohort groups. In addition, it is hoped that this exploratory application of GCT as a framework will stimulate future research focused on the segmentation of male shoppers.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Generational cohort theory

Generational cohort theory is a practice used by marketers and academics to segment markets based on generational cohorts'

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attitudes, ideas, values and beliefs (Tsui, 2001). A generation can be defined as the years of birth, extending 20–25 years in duration, or as long as it generally takes one birth group to be born, age and have children of their own (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Meredith and Schewe, 1994). First characterized by Ryder, (1965) in 1965, the term generational cohort theory was coined by Inglehart (1977) in 1977. Strauss and Howe (1991) later defined generational cohorts as those groups of people born during the same time period and living through similar life experiences and significant emotional events during their formative years. These experiences and events leave individuals within each group with similar values, attitudes, and beliefs that set them apart from other cohort groups (Chen, 2008; Meredith et al., 2007). According to Meredith and Schewe (1994), the passage of these experiences and events when people are between the ages of 17 and 21 will be reflected in their core values concerning jobs, money, tolerance, sexual behavior, etc., which “do not change with one’s age or stage of life” (p. 24). Different nations will of course often have different types of defining events but for the US events such as the Great Depression, World War II, the Vietnam War, the invention of the Internet, and September 11, 2001 are all events that help define generational cohorts.

Based on such experiences, the US population can be loosely categorized into four groups as defined by Strauss and Howe (1991): the Silent Generation (also known as the Matures—born between 1925 and 1942), the Baby Boomers (aka Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960), the 13th Generation (known most commonly as Generation X—born between 1961 and 1981), and the Millennial Generation (often referred to as Generation Y—those born between 1982 and 2000).

2.1.1. The Silent Generation

Approximately 49 million people were born in the US between 1925 and 1945 and as of 2010 were between the ages of 65 and 85. The term “Silent generation” refers to this generation’s conformist and civic instincts (Pew Center Reports, 2010). This generation was generally too young to join in the fight for WWII when it first started, although some of the oldest in this generation did see action before it was over, while the youngest of this generation fought in the Korean War or the Vietnam War. As children, many of this generation experienced all or part of the Great Depression.

This is “a generation with strongly middle-age values” (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 279) and is composed of conformists who are conventional in their thinking, and who desired nothing more than to get married early, raise families, and work hard. The Silent generation, having experienced the Great Depression, went “straight...from a cashless childhood to the cusp of affluent elderhood” (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 284). Many in this cohort retired more financially secure than the generation before them or the Baby Boomer generation after them (Strauss and Howe, 1991).

2.1.2. The Baby Boomers

Young males, eager to start their lives and their families after returning home from tours of duty in WWII and the Korean War, gave rise to a huge “baby boom” of approximately 79 million babies in the US. The dramatic increase in births during the Baby Boom helped lead to exponential increases in the demand for consumer products, suburban homes, automobiles, roads, and services (Rosenberg, n.d.). When young, Baby Boomers were the generation that was “the cultural and spiritual focal point for American society as a whole” (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 301).

This generation, often referred to as having idealistic thinking, are considered spiritual, negative, rebellious, nonconformist, and interested in the promotion of the self instead of the community (Strauss and Howe, 1991). The sheer size of the Baby Boom generation was a delight for retailers when Boomers were children and beginning the process of procuring items with which to start their own lives. However, retirement of the boomers will cause great concern to retailers as spending on many consumer products will decline, although because of their sheer number, they are still responsible for over \$900 billion in spending. People over 60 have been characterized as focusing more on families and finances, medical services, services such as home cleaning and yard care, and travel (Dunne and Lusch, 2008). Although grouped together by generational cohort theory, some have warned not to treat all within this cohort as unidimensional in either their personality, activity, or spending habits (Dunne and Lusch, 2008; Strauss and Howe, 1991; The Food Institute Report, 2006).

2.1.3. The 13th generation

Strauss and Howe (1991) termed the next generation the “13th Generation”. People in this cohort were born between 1961 and 1981 and were estimated during those years to number in the range of 46–51 million, a “declining percentage of the population” (Dunne and Lusch, 2008, p. 73; Thielholdt and Scheef, 2005). With increases in the divorce rate and an increasing number of women working, this generation was the first to experience “latchkey” kids—those who came home to an empty house after school. Perhaps because of this, people in 13th Generation possess the personal characteristics of independence, self-reliance, and being mistrustful of institutions (Thielholdt and Scheef, 2005).

This generation was largely responsible for an explosion in information as members of this generation were the first true users of the internet, which became available for public use in 1992. Perhaps because of the exposure to more information than any previous generation, consumers coming from this cohort group are more sophisticated in their buying habits and appear to be turned off by slick and generalized promotions (Dunne and Lusch, 2008). Although small when compared to previous or subsequent cohorts, this group is still responsible for approximately \$125 billion in annual spending in the US (Dunne and Lusch, 2008).

2.1.4. The Millennials

The Millennial Generation is composed of those people born between 1982 and 2000. This generation consists of 26% of the total US population, or approximately 80 million citizens and comprises the most racially diverse generation ever with approximately one-third of the group being of minority descent (Cone Inc., 2006). According to Dunne and Lusch (2008), three out of four Millennial consumers come from families with working mothers and have already demonstrated more liberal spending patterns than any previous generation accounting for more than 4% of annual household spending.

Millennials tend to exhibit traditional values and appear to be the most optimistic group in US history. They respond to learning and place a high value on education (Dunne and Lusch, 2008; Strauss et al., 2006). Millennials, when compared with previous generations, are more likely to have completed high school and they are “on course to become the most educated generation in American history, a trend driven largely by the demands of a modern knowledge-based economy” (Pew Center Reports, 2010, para 9). Martin (2005) said “(they) are the blunt, techno-savvy, contradictory children of Baby Boomers who believe education is a key to success, technology is as transparent as the air, diversity is a given, and social responsibility is a business imperative” (p. 39). With a spending power of roughly \$172

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