



Linking usage and shopping: How value experiences can distinguish consumers



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ABSTRACT

This study uses the context of a ready-to-wear market to analyze the value of two consumer experiences, usage and in-person shopping. A logit model applied to 374 questionnaires highlights the relationships between the value dimensions of each experiment. This research demonstrates the link made by consumers between these two moments of consumption. Consistent with shopper typologies established by literature, the study reveals three classes of consumers. One class is shown to highly value sign and self-expression of usage and the utility dimension of the shopping experience, which questions the overall purchase experience. The study proposes some measurement instruments and suggests further research to address this specificity.

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1. Introduction

The maximization of customer value is often seen as the ultimate goal for firms, along with shareholder value (Bolton et al., 2007; Woodruff, 1997). To analyze value, focus recently moved from the producer and the production of goods to the usage of resources by the customer during usage processes (Gummerus, 2013). This can be illustrated, for example, by the development of many fashion-related social media applications (e.g Gilt, Gap Style Mixer¹) which allow consumers to interact with retail brands, stores, and related elements. Consumers are showing a willingness to connect their various interactions to increase their global value. However, although retailers are recognizing that little things—ease of interaction with the firm, consistency of the message across all communication channels, provision of multiple buying channels (Grewal et al., 2009)—make big differences, they are failing to account for the link that exists in consumers' minds between shopping and usage experiences. During usage, consumers select, drop, reject, and choose to wear items. While shopping, they mentally manipulate their associations with those items. Are the two experiences independent? Does a consumer consider each experience without any representation or any memory about items already owned? Studies of shopper experiences have not yet

considered the effects of previous usage experiences.

Shopper-oriented marketing refers to “the planning and execution of all marketing activities that influence a shopper along, and beyond, the entire path-to-purchase, from the point at which the motivation to shop first emerges through to purchase, consumption, repurchase, and recommendation” (Shankar et al., 2011, p. 29). In this sense, because shoppers become consumers after they make purchases, shopping and usage must be considered simultaneously to acknowledge and achieve advantages along the entire purchase path.

This research seeks to establish a link between usage and shopping throughout the cycle.

Researchers (Baron and Harris, 2008; Lusch and Vargo, 2012; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) have identified consumers as integrators of operant resources (physical, social, cultural) as they immerse themselves in experiences in the course of defining experiences and creating value and highlighted the importance of interaction. A consumer experience exists primarily to provide consumer value, which can be conceptualized in various ways (Boztepe, 2007). Value is widely used as a key indicator of behavior, and is the subject of intense research interest (Gallarza et al., 2011). The role of usage in the value generation process is still under examination (Iyengar et al., 2011; Datta et al., 2015). As a hidden source of value, it is drawing interest as a key factor in updating existing typologies of shoppers (Babin et al., 1994; Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Darden and Reynolds, 1971; Stone, 1954; Tauber, 1972; Westbrook and Black, 1985), and is regarded as the starting point of the shopping trip (Buttle, 1992). However, most research focuses on

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¹ <http://www.gilt.com>, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/gap-stylemixer/id326347260>

the cognitive approach of the consumer (Puccinelli et al., 2009) and does not investigate the value attained through the connection between shopping and usage experience.

This study investigates the value that consumers attain in the shopping and usage stages of their consumption. To bridge the gap between the values of usage and shopping, we assess and measure shopping and usage experiences values separately. By defining consumer values in this way, we seek to understand and track various types of consumer-shoppers. Our research focuses on the nature and mechanisms of the interaction between the shopping and usage experiences, from a consumer perspective. We use market data from the French ready-to-wear retail market. This market offers a suitable research context because the product types enforce the links between shopping and usage. Furthermore, the market relies strongly on interactions (Murray, 2002; Thompson and Haytko, 1997).

Using dimensional measures of shopping and usage experience values, our study constructs two consumer typologies (shopping and usage) and establishes a link between dimension values of each experience by using a logit model to explain consumer classification. We adopt an inductive approach to reexamine issues related to perceived value typology (Ormerod, 2010; Tellis and Gaeth, 1990).

We identify three classes of consumers. In addition to the anticipated opposite classes of “enthusiasts” and “apathetics,” we find a third class, the “pragmatics”, that highly values the usage experience and the utility dimension of the shopping experience. For this class, the shopping experience is associated with staying connected to fashion, rather than an interest in shopping itself. This is a new vision of usage value that questions the overall purchase experience.

2. Theoretical background

According to Kwortnik and Ross (2007), experience is composed by “fusing tangible (sensory) and intangible (symbolic) attributes co-produced by consumer and marketer to create an event that is pleasurable, meaningful and memorable.” Experience is characterized by a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization (Gentile et al., 2007). The entire experience includes search, purchase, consumption, and after-sale phases (Verhoef et al., 2009).

Holt (1995) and Holbrook (1999) conceptualize perceived consumer value as a result of an interaction with a product during the course of such an experience. Literature highlights both the theoretical and managerial potential of perceived value (Arnould, 2014; Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014; Rivière and Mencarelli, 2012) but also recognizes the difficulty of developing an integrated theory of value. Research shows retailers who use a “store as the brand” strategy should continue to invest in creating a specific, unique shopping experience for their target customers. From a consumer's viewpoint, obtaining value is a fundamental goal of all successful exchange transaction (Holbrook, 1999).

Consumer value can help predict the future behavior of consumers (Prentice, 1987). Consumer perceived value is better suited than satisfaction or loyalty for measuring customer preference for the point-of-sale over time because it mitigates the impact of occasional shortcomings in quality of service (Antéblan et al., 2013; Berry and Carbone, 2007; Carpenter, 2008; Chaudhuri and Ligas, 2009).

In order to measure value, Evrard and Aurier (1996) recommend combining a functional theory of attitudes (Herek, 1986, 1987) with the theory of value (Holbrook, 1999; Holt, 1995; Lai, 1995; Richins, 1994; Sheth et al., 1991). They complete the initial works of Herek (1986, 1987) and Katz (1960) on attitude (Lutz, 1991). This larger

framework adds the consumer–object relation (Evrard and Aurier, 1996) to overall experience evaluation (Aurier et al., 2004) in a factorial design in which components of value are defined from the intersection of the fundamental dimensions of experience. Six components describe the consumer–object relation (Aurier et al., 2004): (1) utilitarian value (benefits the consumer receives from using the products together), (2) value of knowledge (expertise gained through the interaction with the object and other consumers), (3) stimulation value (when the experience offers interest during the shopping process), (4) self-expression value (opportunity for the consumer to express something personal), (5) social value (obtained through interactions with other people), and (6) spirituality value (self-reflection in a changing world). The nature of the value dimensions is important because the structure of the experience and links between experiences across the shopping cycle can have emergent effects. Consumers who differ in certain traits may develop different relationships during their consumer–object experiences.

Our research goal is to assess the link between shopping and usage experiences. To test for the existence and nature of this link, it is necessary to identify shopper and user typologies. Stone (1954) identified four main types: economic shopper, personalization seeker, ethical shopper, and apathetic shopper. Darden and Reynolds (1971) provide external validation for Stone's (1954) typology and suggest a shopping orientation perspective, featuring utilitarian and recreational modes. Babin et al. (1994), in their discrete evaluation scale for shopping experiences, include hedonic (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) and utilitarian motivations and identify six groups of shoppers: entertainers, optimizers, apathetic shoppers, smart shoppers, smart shoppers interested in hedonic aspects, and shoppers with unknown motivations. Three categories of shoppers remain constant across the various classifications: apathetic, social, and economic. Usage and shopping are closely related processes in the consumption cycle. As noted by Buttle (1992), people try to account for shopping behavior logically: shopping trips result from external causes and for practical reasons, linked to usage. Therefore, we explore the mechanisms of experience interactions throughout the shopper typologies. Re-examination of the typologies is necessary to determine which remain stable and which need readjustment, to account for usage values and the evolution of the market.

3. Data and methodology

By using a snowballing technique from a random initial group of 250 French respondents, we collected 374 online questionnaires during May 2010. This approach supported communication with each member of a large population. The study sample is predominantly female (77%), from urban or suburban locations (90%). Single-person households represent one-third of the sample; higher socio-professional categories represent more than the half (56%). Although this sample is not perfectly representative of the population, it allows focus on our main target (cf. Appendix A).

Although Davis and Hodges (2012) suggest a holistic perspective, built on previous works (Babin et al., 1994; Diep and Sweeney, 2008; Kim, 2002; Mathwick et al., 2001), findings on shopping value are inconsistent and unreliable. Therefore, we have adapted an integrated approach to determining a measurement scale for consumption value, by applying two scales that have been validated for shopping and usage experience in the French retail ready-to-wear market (cf. Appendix B). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criteria are used and met for the validation, the factor loadings are greater than 0.5 and R^2 is greater than 0.1 (cf. Appendices C and D). We adopt the readily available indicators of Aurier et al., 2004 and Evrard and Aurier (1996) that reflect Herek's

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