



## Self-expressiveness in shopping

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### ABSTRACT

Some people experience self-expressiveness in shopping. *Self-expressiveness in shopping* is defined as the degree to which consumers they think shopping activity is an important part of their self-concept. This paper reports on the testing of a model dealing with antecedents and consequences of self-expressiveness in shopping. Based on eudaimonistic identity theory, we hypothesized that feeling of self-expressiveness in shopping is influenced by consumers' flow experiences in shopping activities, self-realization potential through shopping, and effort expended through shopping. We also hypothesize that self-expressiveness in shopping increases overall life satisfaction, mediated by perceived impact of shopping on life satisfaction. The model was tested using a panel of 5440 shoppers. The results provide good support for the model. Managerial implications are discussed in addition to avenues for future research.

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## 1. Introduction

Consider the following scenario. The consumer is a traditional housewife living in a rural area; let's call her Amina. She is a mother of four children of varying ages. Her husband is gainfully employed and leaves all household affairs to his wife. Amina thinks of herself as a good housewife and a mother. She takes her household duties very seriously. She has a family to take care of. Every morning she goes to the farmer's market to buy fresh vegetables. At the farmer's market she engages the merchants. She asks about prices, the freshness of their produce and meat. Amina bargains with the merchants and closely inspects the produce and meat for freshness and other quality features. She wants the best for her family. Her shopping activity reflects her self-concept—her personal identity of being a good housewife and mother. She enjoys her daily shopping routine. It makes her happy. She feels that her shopping is an important task in meeting her family needs while ensuring that the family's budget is not compromised. She feels that what she does contributes to the quality of her life and her family. She shops frequently. Her identity is closely tied with

her daily shopping routine. This may be due to the fact that she invests a great deal of time and effort in shopping; she feels that shopping is an important task (perhaps a duty) in her life overall; she perceives that shopping is a way in life to realize her potential as a good housewife and mother; and that when shopping she feels truly engaged and becomes totally absorbed in the activity.

Consumers engage in shopping, some are extrinsically motivated while others are intrinsically motivated (Shah and Kruglanski, 2000). Extrinsically-motivated shoppers engage in shopping simply to acquire the needed items. In contrast, intrinsically-motivated shoppers engage in shopping to experience fun or to express their shopping competence. Intrinsically-motivated shoppers view shopping as an important self-defining activity and shopping is a salient component to their personal identity (Guiry et al., 2006; Shim and Dubey, 1995). In other words, they experience feelings of being alive and fulfilled. They experience *self-expressiveness*, which in turn contribute to their overall life satisfaction (cf. Waterman, 1990, 1993).

This paper reports a study that focuses on *self-expressiveness* in shopping. The concept of self-expressiveness in shopping is defined as the degree to which consumers think shopping activity is an important part of their self-concept. Individuals experience self-expressiveness in any activity when the activity allows them to engage in meaningful and self-defining ways that lead to actualization of one's potentials (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al.,

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2008). Translated in a shopping context, self-expressiveness in shopping is a state of mind shoppers experience when they engage in shopping in meaningful and self-defining ways that lead to actualization of one's potential.

Although past research have examined hedonic shopping (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; BäckströmK, 2011; Carpenter and Moore, 2009) and shopping associated with the consumption of personally meaningful and socially expressive products, there is sparse research on self-expressiveness in shopping. Specifically, we have a limited understanding on how self-expressiveness in shopping influence consumers' overall life satisfaction. The current study is an attempt to fill this gap. Specifically, the study examines the antecedents and consequences of self-expressiveness in shopping.

Knowing more about self-expressiveness in shopping (e.g., how it is formed and how it affects consumers) can help us better understand the well-being implications of shopping activities (cf. El-Hedhli et al., 2013; Wagner, 2007). Knowing more about feelings of self-expressiveness in shopping should help retailers develop shopping environments that could help form and reinforce self-expressiveness in shopping and, hence, the well-being of consumers.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to better understand the social psychological mechanics underlying self-expressiveness in shopping. More specifically, we will examine antecedents and consequences of self-expressiveness in shopping in a nomological network. In other words, the study will examine factors affecting formation of self-expressiveness in shopping such as shopping flow, self-realizing through shopping, and effort expended in shopping. Additionally, the study will examine the impact of self-expressiveness in shopping on perceived impact of shopping on life satisfaction and overall life satisfaction.

## 2. Conceptual development

We start this section by discussing eudaimonistic identity theory and how the theory is used to articulate the concept of self-expressiveness in shopping. We then discuss antecedents and consequences of self-expressiveness in shopping.

### 2.1. Eudaimonistic identity theory

Eudaimonistic identity theory argues that engaging in activities that induce self-expressiveness are likely to increase overall life satisfaction and happiness (Waterman, 1990, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008; p. 6). Based on this theory, there are two types of activities that may contribute to subjective well-being: activities that lead to hedonic enjoyment alone and activities that lead to both hedonic enjoyment and self-expressiveness. The former is referred to as “hedonically enjoyable activities,” while the latter is “self-expressive activities” (Waterman, 1990; Waterman et al., 2008).

People engaging in self-expressive activities are likely to experience a higher level of life satisfaction and happiness than those who do not engage in such activities. They are likely to experience strong feelings of being alive and being fulfilled while engaging in self-expressive activities because these activities are meaningful and intrinsically rewarding for their personal development. While engaging in self-expressive activities, individuals experience satisfaction of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which in turn contributes to one's life satisfaction and happiness (cf. Deci et al., 2001). Thus, engaging in self-expressive activities contributes to life satisfaction and happiness. Past research have shown that self-expressiveness is highly correlated with concepts such as flow, intrinsic motivation, and realization of one's potential (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008).

### 2.2. Self-expressiveness in shopping

The notion of self-expressiveness can be discussed in terms of activity characteristics such as self-expressive activities vs. hedonic activities, or the degree to which an individual experience feelings of self-expressiveness while engaging in the activity. In this study, we focus on self-expressiveness consumers experience while engaging in shopping.

Self-expressiveness is a subjective state associated with engaging in intrinsically motivated, identity-related activities (Waterman, 1990). Specifically, *self-expressiveness in shopping* is defined as the degree to which consumers think shopping activity is an important part of their self-concept perceiving themselves as making progress towards the realization of their best potential through shopping. In generic terms, individuals experience self-expressiveness when they engage in meaningful and self-defining activities that lead to actualization of one's potentials (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008).

It is important to make a conceptual distinction between *self-expressiveness* and *hedonic enjoyment* (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008). Self-expressiveness and hedonic enjoyment are considered as two distinct concepts of happiness (Waterman, 1993). Hedonic enjoyment is positive affect that accompanies getting or having the material object and action opportunity one wishes to possess or to experience. That is, it is a pleasant feeling that goes with the belief that one is getting important things one wants (Waterman et al., 2008). Activities that induce self-expressiveness also provide hedonic enjoyment. It should be noted that self-expressiveness is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for hedonic enjoyment (Telfer, 1980). Activities that provide hedonic enjoyment do not always induce self-expressiveness. In other words, there are many activities that give rise to hedonic enjoyment, but not self-expressiveness (Waterman, 2008). Research has shown that self-expressiveness have an enduring effect on one's life satisfaction while feeling of hedonic enjoyment has an ephemeral, temporary effect on one's life satisfaction.

### 2.3. A model of self-expressiveness in shopping

Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model of this study. Guided by eudaimonistic identity theory, the model posits that self-expressiveness in shopping is mostly determined by consumers' flow experience in shopping, self-realization through shopping, and effort expended in shopping (cf. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). The model also posits that self-expressiveness in shopping has a positive influence on perceived impact of shopping on life satisfaction and overall life satisfaction.

#### 2.3.1. Flow experience in shopping and self-expressiveness in shopping

Flow is defined as the “process of optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi and LaFevre, 1989; p. 816). People who experience the

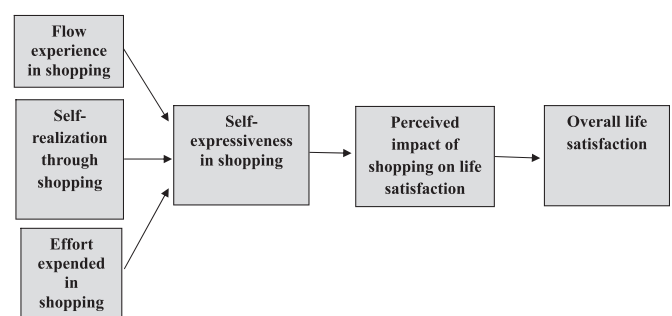


Fig. 1. A model of self-expressiveness in shopping.

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