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The thrill of victory: Women and sport shopping

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ABSTRACT

This study explores a new shopper type, 'Sport Shoppers', who are unique in their actions, attitudes and behaviors. We present evidence that these shoppers exhibit behavior similar to that of competitive athletes in that they view bargain shopping as an achievement domain. Data were collected through open-ended surveys, in-depth interviews and closet inventories. Thematic analysis of transcripts was undertaken based on three achievement goal categories; task-oriented, ego-oriented and social approval-oriented. Achievement goal theory is employed to offer an explanation of the Sport Shoppers' behaviors and motivations. We argue the Sport Shopper is an economically viable and important shopper for fashion retailers to target.

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1. Introduction

Shopping is an important component of consumer culture (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Since the beginning of shopper research, distinctions have been made between the various motivations for and outcomes of shopping (for review, see Lee (2013)). These distinctions have led to the identification of unique shopper types that help retailers segment, target and position themselves to better meet the needs of consumers, beginning with the fundamental categorization based on utilitarian versus hedonic outcomes (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Bain et al., 1994). Subsequent investigation into hedonic shopping has revealed a further distinction between recreational shoppers who enjoy shopping as a leisure activity (Prus and Dawson, 1991; Westbrook and Black, 1985) and thrift shoppers who bargain shop out of economic necessity (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005). Additionally, differences in the nature and duration of the hedonic shopper outcomes suggest that a further distinction exists between those who experience situational or temporary outcomes such as enjoyment (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Westbrook and Black, 1985) or smart shopper feelings (Schindler, 1989, 1998), and those for whom shopping outcomes are more long lasting. For example, individuals with high degrees of recreational shopper identity define themselves in terms of their enjoyment of shopping and consider it an important facet of their self-concept (Guiry et al., 2006).

The present study examines a unique type of bargain shopper whose motivation for, and outcomes from, shopping set them apart from previously reported shopper types and shopping outcomes. We propose that these shoppers, 'Sport Shoppers', are unique in their actions, attitudes and behaviors. We present evidence that these shoppers exhibit behavior similar to that of athletes in that they view shopping as an achievement domain in which their shopping skills result not only in economic benefits, but also pride, pleasure from their shopping achievement, and positive self-esteem, which in turn leads to a desire to continue shopping (Williams and DeSteno, 2008). While we believe sport shopping may not be a gender specific shopping type; finding that men may also apply goal setting to shopping in a way similar to that found in competitive sports (Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Croson and Gneezy, 2009), what remains missing from these literatures, and addressed through achievement goal theory, is the notion of the athlete's attributes of intensity, focus, competitive drive and a strong sense of self-identity demonstrated by women in a shopping context (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007). This research demonstrates that women who participate in shopping as an achievement domain have incorporated the thrill of competition with the more functional task of finding desirable apparel. Understanding how Sport Shoppers engage in the retail environment, their expertise, behaviors and motivations could provide a wealth of insight for both traditional department stores and discount retailers (Clark and Goldsmith, 2005; Fox and Hoch, 2005, Christiansen and Snepenger, 2005).

While sharing aspects of a number of previously defined shopper types, we find Sport Shoppers differ in some important ways. Unlike recreational shoppers (Prus and Dawson, 1991), Sport

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Shoppers do not enjoy all shopping, just shopping for exceptional bargains on specifically desired items. Unlike compulsive shoppers, they are not compelled to make a purchase on each outing, and they are able to rationalize an unsuccessful trip as an information gathering opportunity or practice for future shopping expeditions (Faber and O'Guinn, 1992; O'Guinn, Faber, 1989). While thrift shoppers enjoy the fantasy aspects of bargain hunting, they do so out of economic necessity (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005). By contrast, we find the Sport Shopper is motivated to save the most on the desired product, rather than to spend the least on something less desirable, even when he or she has the economic resources to pay full price. For example, the exhilaration of sport shopping is not created by finding the cheapest handbag for \$12 (spending the least), but by finding a \$1200 handbag for \$350 (saving the most). The amount saved on the desirable object serves as a type of score, indicating the Sport Shopper's level of mastery and skill. This positive feeling is further amplified by the retelling of the details of the deal to interested-others.

As with the recreational shoppers identified by Guiry et al. (2006), we believe Sport Shoppers' love and mastery of competitive shopping is an integral component of their self-identity. They may, as do many types of shoppers, use the apparel they have found, especially the particularly prized possessions, as an extension of their self-concept, using the items worn to express their self-identity, social contradistinction and boundaries (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). What differentiates these shoppers from all other previously examined shopper types is the context within which these items are acquired. These shoppers view themselves as competitive athletes in the retail environment. Similar to traits expressed by athletes, the essential component of a Sport Shopper's self-identity is the pride they experience when achieving a personal shopping best and the thrill they enjoy in the retelling the steps they took to accomplish the bargain shopping feat. This study demonstrates the importance of this type of shopper to fashion retailers due to the influence they wield as market mavens in the area of bargain shopping and their enthusiasm for espousing their achievements in this domain with others who express an interest.

The paper begins with a brief overview of achievement goal theory and its application to sport. After this, the connection of the achievement goal perspective to the motivations in the shopping context is described. Extending this discussion, we present a rationale as to why women's application of an achievement domain to shopping is motivated by more than a love of shopping and competition. Next, the methodology is discussed and the results from this study are presented. After providing an interpretation of the goals, motivations, and self-identity described by these bargain shoppers, implications for fashion retailers are presented.

2. Literature review

2.1. Achievement goal theory

An achievement goal theory provides a framework for understanding how achievement goals determine motivated behavior (Ames, 1992; Nicholls, 1984; Dweck, 1986). Within achievement contexts, such as education or sport, this perspective demonstrates in what way individuals' perception of their ability, social and environmental factors and the structure of goals can explain a difference in achievement behavior (for review, see Weiss and Ferrer-Caja (2002)). According to this theory, differences in achievement behavior are an expression of the type of goals employed by individuals. Researchers in sport psychology have used achievement goal theory to help explain the wide variation of motivated behavior from professional athletes to amateur sport

enthusiasts. This theory delineates goal orientations associated with achievement behavior into three overarching categories; *ego-orientated* goals are employed when individuals seek to succeed at difficult tasks in relation to a normative reference group, *task-orientated* goals are characterized by intrapersonal-based measures or perceptions and *social approval-orientated* goals are defined by individuals' desire for social validation through recognition by significant others (Maehr and Nicholls, 1980; Urdan and Maehr, 1995; Stuntz and Weiss, 2009).

2.2. Shopping as an achievement domain

The most fundamental difference between Sport Shoppers and other previously defined shopper types is that Sport Shoppers view bargain shopping as an achievement domain (Duda, 1993, 2010), in which their success is internalized into an enduring motivator and a positive facet of self-concept. Achievement in the bargain shopping domain is to develop or demonstrate, to oneself or others, high ability obtaining bargains or to avoid demonstrating low ability, i.e., purchasing an item at list price. Success at task oriented goals, such as securing an exclusive brand at a highly discounted price, is measured using self-referent criteria. Obtained bargains are score cards and Sport Shoppers are motivated to continually beat their own personal best. Success achieving difficult tasks indicates to the Sport Shopper mastery, effort, self-improvement and provides enjoyment. Ability or ego oriented goals employ a self-reflective judgment of the shopper's own ability in relation to the performance of other shoppers and the demonstration of high ability on tasks where others are expected to fail. Simply put, Sport Shoppers attain ego-orientated goals if they beat other shoppers or the retail system in attaining elusive bargains or bigger discounts. Finally, for the Sport Shopper that views bargain shopping as an achievement domain, social-approval orientated goals are accomplished when they earn approval from recounting and demonstrating to others, such as family and friends, the effort they have expended in order to attain a great buy.

2.3. Task-orientated goals

Task-oriented goals are those that provide self-referenced motivation for action that is focused on the process rather than the outcome. Success is measured by performing a task well over time, using criteria such as effort, problem-solving, learning and enjoyment during the process. Satisfaction is achieved when the individual uses mastery and competence to successfully accomplish the goal. In the sport shopping context, task-oriented achievement goals may be accomplished through effort, a sense of self-improvement, personal mastery and the enjoyment of the process of bargain shopping (Backstrom, 2011; Cox et al., 2005). Mastery is demonstrated by a Sport Shopper's ability to continually improve their shopping performance by purchasing desired items for significantly less than the item's reference price (Im and Ha, 2011). The ability to demonstrate mastery to oneself in the shopping domain is an important component of Sport Shoppers' motivation to hunt for bargain. The task-oriented motivation for a Sport Shopper results in an ongoing level of persistence that is similar to an athlete's training program (Allen, 2003; Kang et al., 2011). A Sport Shopper is continuously motivated to match or surpass their 'personal best' by finding unique or coveted items that are extremely discounted. Enjoyment for the Sport Shopper is attained by both browsing through racks of clothing, undertaking multiple visitations to the same retailer, as well as actively engaging in bargain hunting (Cox et al., 2005; Kim and Kim, 2008).

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