Influence of Shopping Goal Fulfillment Behaviors of Companions on Consumers' Affective and Behavioral Responses

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Abstract

This study applies the retail environment model to a shopping with a companion(s) context by considering how much a companion(s) engages in a shopping process to fulfill utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goals and examines the influence of retail atmospherics and companions on consumers' emotions and behavioral responses. This study reconfirms the findings of previous retail environment studies and purchase-pal studies in that consumers experience pleasant feelings and enjoy a shopping process when they are surrounded by attractive retail atmospherics and companions actively share purchase-related information and help them to acquire products. However, unlike previous retail studies, neither retail atmospherics nor purchase-related behaviors (utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions) directly influence consumer's re-patronage intention. Both hedonic and social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions directly affect shopping pleasure and re-patronage intention.

Keywords: shopping companions, social shopping goals, shopping goal fulfillment behaviors

1. Introduction

Many U.S. consumers have chosen e-retailers to acquire products over traditional brick-and-mortar-retailers. U.S. e-retail sales reached $ 596 billion in 2019, according to the Census Bureau e-commerce report published on May 19, 2020, and e-retail sales have steadily been rising. In the highly competitive retail markets, recognizing that aesthetically appealing shopping environments positively influence consumers' emotions and shopping behaviors, brick-and-mortar retailers have put considerable effort into redesigning their stores to provide pleasant shopping experiences to consumers. Academic researchers, not surprisingly, have explored the impact of retail environment elements or characteristics of consumers on emotions and shopping behaviors on the basis of the retail environment models proposed by Donovan and Rossiter (1982) and Baker, Levy, and Grewal (1992).

Existing studies, for instance, investigated how in-store ambient light, music, and scent influence consumers' emotions (Sweeney and Wyber, 2002), perception of stores and merchandise (Babin, Hardesty and Suter 2003; Zielke and Schielke, 2016), store browsing behaviors (Milliman, 1982), and in-store behavioral responses (Babin and Babin 2001). Previous studies also explored how the reasons for shopping - shopping goals are related to consumers' in-store browsing behaviors and perception of in-store elements (Babin, Darden, Griffin, 1994). Most of the existing retail studies have addressed the impact of store atmospherics and shopping goals on an individual consumer's emotions and shopping behaviors, assuming that consumers shop alone to acquire products and accomplish their shopping goals. Shopping would be a social activity, and consumers would like to have positive and active social interactions when they shop with companions (e.g., siblings, parents, friends, or peers). Social shopping goals, in addition to utilitarian and hedonic shopping goals, have been identified as an important shopping motivator (Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Borges, Chebat, and Babin, 2010). Retail atmospherics researchers, however, have paid little attention to how retail atmospherics and companions influence consumers' emotions and shopping behaviors. This study attempts to explore how consumers' perception of retail environment elements and behaviors of companions influences their shopping experience when they shop with companions at a brick-and-mortar shopping mall.

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This study, more specifically, applies the retail environment model (the S-O-R framework) to a shopping with a companion(s) context and tries to expand the model by considering a companion(s) (i.e., how much a companion(s) engages in a shopping process to fulfill utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goals) to understand the influence of retail atmospherics and companions on consumers' emotions and behavioral responses.

To achieve the research objectives, this paper reviews retail atmospherics and shopping goal literature and proposes hypotheses based on the findings of previous studies and relevant theories, such as role theory and functional theory of attitudes. Then the paper describes the research method and the results of the analysis and presents the findings and limitations of the study.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Considerable retail studies have investigated the influence of retail environment elements on consumer's emotions and shopping behaviors with the stimulus-organism-response framework. The organism is an individual's emotional reactions to stimulus, which is an external factor inciting an individual's actions or responses, and the response is an individual's approach or avoidance behaviors (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). When consumers shop at a shopping mall, they are exposed to sensory stimuli, such as light, music, scent, color scheme, and merchandise display, in retail settings. They may experience certain emotions elicited by interpreting the sensory information and also make inferences about stores and merchandise. Retail atmospherics researchers have identified various retail environment factors (stimuli) and categorized them to study the influence of specific retail elements on shopping behaviors (organism and response). For instance, Baker et al. (1992) proposes that retail environment elements would be categorized into ambient factors (i.e., background conditions such as lighting, music, scent, and temperature), aesthetic interior/exterior design factors, and social factors (i.e., people present in a retail environment).

Researchers have found that retail environment stimuli directly influence individual consumers' shopping pleasure and behavioral intentions. Zielke and Schielke (2016) explores if brightness and color temperature of store light influence consumers' shopping pleasure and shopping intention and finds that light brightness positively affects shopping pleasure and shopping intension. Millman (1982) investigates the impacts of music tempo on shopping behaviors and purchases and finds that consumers stay longer in a store and purchase more items (slower in-store traffic and increased sale volume) when they are exposed to backboard music in a slow tempo. Madzharov, Block, and Morrin (2015) finds that when consumers are in a warm scent condition, they tend to purchase more items during a single shopping trip.

Existing retail environment studies have focused on an individual consumer and haven't provided a clear explanation on how retail environment elements would be perceived and processed by consumers shopping with companions. Consumers will consistently interact with companions to achieve their shopping goals during a shopping process (Lindsey-Mullikin, and Munger, 2011). Therefore, most of their mental resources would be allocated to process information from companions rather than from retail external stimuli. Even though they would still be aware of retail external stimuli, such as backboard music and ambient lighting, fewer amounts of mental recourses might be assigned to process sensory information from retail external stimuli. This paper suggests that consumers' subtle perception of retail external stimuli would have different influence on affective (shopping pleasure) and behavioral response (re-patronage intention). The overall perception of retail elements, which is consumers' perception regarding the extent to which they favorably evaluate retail elements, would directly affect their shopping pleasure, which refers to perceived pleasure during a shopping trip. However, the perception of retail elements might not directly influence re-patronage intention since consumers' willingness to revisit a shopping mall with companions (re-patronage intention) would be derived from experienced shopping pleasure and interactions between consumers and companions.

Hypothesis 1a: Favorable perception of retail atmospherics positively influences shopping pleasure.
Hypothesis 1b: Favorable perception of retail atmospherics positively influences re-patronage intention through shopping pleasure.
Hypothesis 2: Shopping pleasure positively influences re-patronage intension.

Retail studies have proposed that retail environments consist of retail atmospherics factors (ambient and design factors) and social factors (Baker et al., 1992). Research on the retail social factors has investigated the effects of other customers, such as retail crowding and density, on emotions and patronage intention (Eroglu, Machleit, and Barr, 2005; Kim and Runyan, 2011), but has not examined the influence of companions on consumers' shopping experiences. Studies on purchase-pals provide an explanation on why consumers shop with others and how consumers perceive behaviors of companions.

According to purchase-pal studies, consumers, who are uncertain about a purchase, are motivated to reduce perceived risks and tend to seek help from purchase pals who can assist consumers during a shopping trip by providing purchase-related information (e.g., price, product features, and retail outlets) and supportive communications to increase consumers' confidence in a purchase decision-making (Kiecker and Hartman, 1994; Mangleburg, Doney, and Bristol, 2004). Studies on purchase-pals assume that individual consumers shop only to acquire a product and are more likely to shop with companions who have relevant knowledge and can reduce purchase risks and uncertainty.

However, shopping goal studies state that consumers shop with various shopping goals and have identified two primary shopping goals: utilitarian and hedonic shopping goals (Babin et al., 1994). Consumers may shop to obtain specific products efficiently (utilitarian shopping goal), or they may engage in a shopping process to gain positive emotions from a shopping activity itself. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) finds that social shopping is also one of the important shopping goals since consumers shop with friends or family members to have pleasant social interactions with them.

Therefore, consumers would try to accomplish utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goals when they shop with companions, and their shopping goals would affect how they observe and perceive the behaviors of companions. Functional theory of attitudes states that an attitude objective itself may activate specific types of motivational concerns, and the activated motivational concerns influence individuals' perceptual attention and interpretation (Shavitt, 1990). Functional theory of attitudes implies that shopping with companions (an attitude objective) would activate utilitarian, hedonic, and social motivational concerns (i.e., if they can successfully obtain the shopping goals with companions), and consumers observe whether companions behave to fulfill the shopping goals (perceptual attention and interpretation). Role theory states that each member of a group takes a role to accomplish the goals established a group, develops role expectations, and observes others' behaviors during the social interactions with other members (Broderick 1998). Based on the observation, a member will make a subjective judgment on the behaviors of others (i.e., whether or not other members fulfill the expected roles), which influences the affective and behavioral responses of a member during the social intentions with other members (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel and Gutman, 1985).

Functional theory of attitudes and role theory suggest that to accomplish shopping goals, consumers develop their shopping roles as well as shopping role expectations for companions, observe the shopping behaviors of companions, and make a judgment on the behaviors of companions - whether or not companions are fulfilling shopping goals during a shopping trip. The paper proposes that 'shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions' has three dimensions: utilitarian shopping goal filament behavers of companions (the extent to which a consumer perceives that a companion(s) deliberately and efficiently behaves to acquire needed products), hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions (the extent to which a consumer perceives that a companion(s) behaves to make a shopping trip to be fun and pleasurable), and social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions (the extent to which a consumer perceives that a companion(s) actively interacts and socializes during a shopping trip). When consumers perceive that their companions behave to fulfill the shopping goals, they are more likely to enjoy the shopping processes (shopping pleasure) and shop with the companions again (re-patronage intention).

Hypothesis 3a: perceived utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influences shopping pleasure.
Hypothesis 3b: perceived hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influences shopping pleasure.
Hypothesis 3c: perceived social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influence shopping pleasure.
Hypothesis 4a: perceived utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influences re-patronage intension.
Hypothesis 4b: perceived hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influences re-patronage intension.
Hypothesis 4c: perceived social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companies positively influences re-patronage intension.

3. Research Method

This study tries to apply the S-O-R model to a shopping with companion context and investigate how store atmospherics and companions influence consumers' shopping pleasure and re-patronage intention. Based on shopping goal literature and two theories --role theory and functional attitude theory, this study proposed that consumers perceive three different types of shopping goal-related behaviors of companions –

Utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions. This concept has not been empirically measured by academic researchers. This paper modified Arnold and Reynolds's (2003) shopping value scales to measure the shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions – 3 items for each type of shopping goal fulfillment behaviors. In order to assess the overall perception of retail atmospherics, this paper rewarded five items from Stoel, Wickliffe, and Lee's (2002) mall attribute brief scale. Mangleburg et al. (2004) developed a scale to measure shopping enjoyment with friends. Their four items were positively reworded to avoid the reversal bias problem and used to assess shopping pleasure. Re-patronage intention was assessed with three items of Wakefield and Baker's (1998) re-patronage intention scale.

This paper considered time pressure as a covariate to more preciously capture the influence of retail atmospherics and companions on consumers' shopping pleasure and re-patronage intention. Time pressure, which is a consumer's perceived time constriction during a shopping trip, was measured with three items of Vermeir and Kenhove's (2005) time pressure scale. This paper used a five-point scale to measure all the items.

Undergraduate business students from a state university in U.S. voluntarily participated in the data collection processes as respondent recruiters. Students were asked to contact individuals who visit a local shopping mall with a companion(s) to purchase a personal item(s), such as clothing, or shoes, or fashion accessories, and recruited respondents of online surveys. The questions asking where they shopped, what they purchased, and whom they shopped with were included in the survey to help respondents recall a recent shopping trip with companions. After the data collection the researcher examined the responses of the questions to confirm that each respondent recalled a shopping trip suitable to the research purpose. Four hundred and nine respondents completed the surveys, and nineteen responses that did not meet the requirements or were incomplete were excluded. Three hundred and ninety responses were used to verify the proposed hypotheses.

4. Results of Analysis

This study proposed that 'shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions' has three dimensions – utilitarian, hedonic, social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors since when consumers shop with companions, social aspects of a shopping trip would be one of the dominant shopping goals. However, most shopping goal literature suggests that consumers may have two primary shopping goals: utilitarian and hedonic shopping goals. Some researchers regarded social shopping goal as one of the hedonic shopping goals. This study, first, assessed the dimensionality of shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions by comparing two measurement models using confirmatory factor analysis. One model consists of two dimensions (utilitarian and hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behavers), and the social shopping goal fulfillment items were loaded to hedonic shopping goal fulfillment. The other model has three dimensions (utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goal fulfillment behavers). The two-dimension model had a much larger chi-square value ($x2(26) = 575.03$) than the three-dimension model ($x2(24) = 98.48$). The results of a chi-square difference test showed that the three-dimension model had a significantly better fit than the two-dimension model ($\Delta x2(2) = 476.60$, $p < .01$.). The model fit indices also indicated that thee three-dimension model had a better fit with data (NFI (.96 vs. .74), NNFI (.95 vs. .65), CFI (.97 vs. .75), and IFI (.97 vs. .75)). Thus, it can be concluded that the three-dimensional conceptualization of shopping goal fulfillment behaviors fits better the shopping with companions data.

Then this paper conducted a confirmatory factor analysis with LISREL to assess the validity and reliability of all the constructs shown in Table 1. The chi-square value of the measurement model was significant ($x2(231) = 670.33$, $p<.01$); however, the other model fit indices were acceptable (NFI = .94, NNFI = .95, CFI = .96, and IFI = .97). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis were reported in Table 1. The items that measure a construct were loaded together with high factor loading values, composite reliability values ranged from .84 to .95, and average variance explained ranged from .68 to .87.

Table1. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Items	Factor Loadings	Error	Composite Reliability	A.V.E
Retail atmospherics1	0.71	0.50	0.90	0.68
Retail atmospherics2	0.63	0.61		
Retail atmospherics3	0.89	0.21		
Retail atmospherics4	0.92	0.15		
Retail atmospherics5	0.80	0.36		
Utilitarian goal fulfillment of companions 1	0.71	0.38	0.84	0.69
Utilitarian goal fulfillment of companions 2	0.86	0.30		
Utilitarian goal fulfillment of companions 3	0.76	0.35		
Hedonic goal fulfillment of companions 1	0.85	0.28	0.88	0.74
Hedonic goal fulfillment of companions 2	0.82	0.33		
Hedonic goal fulfillment of companions 3	0.84	0.29		
Social goal fulfillment of companions 1	0.84	0.30	0.92	0.80
Social goal fulfillment of companions 2	0.94	0.12		
Social goal fulfillment of companions 3	0.88	0.23		
Shopping Pleasure1	0.70	0.51	0.92	0.76
Shopping Pleasure2	0.96	0.07		
Shopping Pleasure3	0.93	0.14		
Shopping Pleasure4	0.81	0.34		
Re-patronage Intention 1	0.91	0.17	0.95	0.87
Re-patronage Intention 2	0.97	0.05		
Re-patronage Intention 3	0.89	0.20		
Time Presure1	0.87	0.25	0.87	0.74
Time Presure2	0.93	0.14		
Time Presure3	0.70	0.51		

The results indicated that each construct is unidimensional with good reliability scores.

After assessing the validity and reliability of the construct with confirmatory factor analysis, the researcher used structural equation modeling to test the hypothesesempirically. The overall fit of the model was acceptable with NFI of .90, NNFI of .91, CFI of .91, and IFI of .91, even though the chi-square value was significant (x^2=1180.14, p<.01).

Table 2. Results of Analysis

	Shopping pleasure	Re-patronage Intention	
	Direct Effects		Indirect Effects
	Coefficient (t-value)	Coefficient (t-value)	Coefficient (t-value)
Retail atmospherics	**0.13*** **(2.42)**	0.01 (0.25)	**0.02*** **(1.96)**
Utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions	**0.13*** **(2.24)**	0.02 (0.41)	0.02 (1.87)
Hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions	**0.15**** **(2.62)**	0.06 (1.20)	**0.02*** **(1.96)**
Social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions	**0.18**** **(3.32)**	**0.43**** **(8.29)**	**0.03*** **(2.23)**
Shopping pleasure		**0.14**** **(2.85)**	

*p<.05, **p<.01

The sign and significance of each relationship coefficient were examined to verify the proposed hypotheses. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis. Supporting hypothesis 1a, consumers' favorable perception of retail atmospherics was positively related to shopping pleasure (coefficient = .13, t-value = 2.42, p<.05). Consumers' favorable perception of retail atmospherics did not t have a direct impact on re-patronage intension (coefficient = .01, t-value = .25, p>.05), but indirectly influenced re-patronage intension (coefficient = .02, t-value = 1.96, p<.05); thus, hypothesis 1b was supported. As expected shopping pleasure had a positive effect on re-patronage intension (coefficient = .14, t-value = 2.85, p<.01), and hypothesis 2 was supported. Utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions was expected to positively influence shopping pleasure in hypothesis 3a and re-patronage intension in hypothesis 4a. Hypothesis 3a was supported (coefficient = .13, t-value = 2.24, p<.05) but hypothesis 4a wasn't supported (coefficient = .02, t-value = .41, p>.05). Hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions positively influenced shopping pleasure (coefficient = .15, t-value = 2.62, p<.01) and did not influence re-patronage intension (coefficient = .06, t-value = 1.20, p>.05). Hypothesis 3b was supported but Hypothesis 4b wasn't supported. As proposed, social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions was positively related to shopping pleasure (coefficient = .18, t-value = 3.32, p<.01) and re-patronage intension (coefficient = .43, t-value = 8.29, p<.01). Both Hypothesis 3c and 4c were supported. The indirect effects of shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions were assessed even though the relationships were not hypothesized. Both hedonic and social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions indirectly influenced re-patronage intention through shopping pleasure, but utilitarian shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions didn't have an indirect impact on re-patronage intention (coefficient = .02, t-value = 1.87, p>.05). Time pressure, a covariate, wasn't significantly related to neither shopping pleasure (coefficient = .08, t-value = 1.46, p>.05) nor re-patronage intension (coefficient = -.06, t-value = -1.29, p>.05).

5. Discussion

Existing retail studies have found that retail ambient environment factors influence consumers' perception of stores and merchandise and affective and behavioral responses. Previous studies have also found that shopping goals are related to consumers' perception of in-store elements and shopping behaviors. However, most of the existing retail studies have focused on an individual consumer on the premise that consumers shop alone to accomplish his or her shopping goals. Consumers regard shopping as a social activity and tend to shop with others (Borges, et al., 2010).

This study applied the retail environment model to a shopping with a companion(s) context by considering how much a companion(s) engages in a shopping process to fulfill utilitarian, hedonic, and social shopping goals and examined the influence of retail atmospherics and companions on consumers' emotions and behavioral responses.

This study reconfirms the findings of previous retail environment studies and purchase-pal studies in that consumers seem to have pleasant feelings and enjoy a shopping process when they are surrounded by attractive retail atmospherics and companions actively help them to acquire products and pleasantly shop with them. However, unlike previous retail studies, retail atmospherics and purchase/experience-oriented behaviors (utilitarian and hedonic shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions) do not directly influence consumer's re-patronage intention. On the other hand, social shopping goal fulfillment behaviors of companions directly affect shopping pleasure and re-patronage intention. Consumers tend to perceive that a shopping trip is pleasant and would like to revisit a shopping mall when their companions are delightfully involved in social interactions and actively communicate with consumers during a shopping trip. The findings imply that consumers regard shopping as an activity to build and maintain relationships with companions. These findings provide a managerial implication to a shopping mall developer. There is no doubt that providing aesthetically beautiful shopping environments and attractive merchandise makes consumers experience positive emotions and feelings. However, retail atmospherics and merchandise are not enough to make consumers come back to a shopping mall. Consumers would like to have more engaging shopping experiences with companions during a trip to a shopping mall; therefore, a shopping mall developer should re-evaluate their tenant mix to provide a shopping environment where consumers and companies can more actively socialize during their visit.

There are limitations of this study. The researcher attempted to explore the influence of companions on consumers' emotions and behavioral responses, but data were collected from an individual who shopped with others. The perception of an individual may not accurately represent his or her shopping experience with others; moreover, interactions between an individual and others were not considered in the study. Respondents of a survey were asked to recall a recent shopping trip with companions and completed a survey based on what they remembered. Their memory might be biased. Future research may collect data from a group of consumers at a shopping mall to investigate how interactions among consumers influence their shopping experiences. Types and quality of relationships among consumers and companions may affect their interactions during a shopping process. Future research may explore if consumers show different patterns of shopping behaviors and interpersonal interactions when they shop with different companions.

6. References

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