Shopping Motives and the Hedonic/Utilitarian Shopping Value: a Preliminary Study

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This paper presents a study, conducted on a sample of roughly 700 customers of two different shopping centers, which examines the latent dimensions of shopping motives. It shows the existence of two meta-traits underlying shoppers' individual differences: a hedonic one, which can be referred, among the Big Five factors, to Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness; and an utilitarian one, which can be referred to Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Extroversion. These meta-traits distinguish, respectively, the rational and cognitive shopping value from the ludic and recreational one. Theoretical and marketing implications are then discussed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The present study aims at verifying the existence of two high-order dimensions (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian meta-traits) over the Big Five factors of human personality, which can be extracted from the enduring individual differences in shopping motives indicated in the seminal work by Tauber (1972).

In 1996, Mooradian and Olver demonstrated a correlation between the 11 shopping motives of Tauber’s (1972) taxonomy (namely, Diversion, Sensory stimulation, Self-gratification, Learning about new trends, Physical activity, Social experiences outside the home, Communication with others having similar interest, Peer group attraction, Status and authority, Pleasure in bargaining, and Pleasure in bargains), and the Big Five factors of human personality (see Digman 1990, for a review). Though admitting that motives may be organized hierarchically by means of broad higher-order categories encompassing multiple specific motives, they did not verify on the field the existence of meta-traits higher than five, which would relate the specific individual differences to the essential broader outcomes pursued by people when shopping.

Indeed, a consistent stream of research in consumer literature indicates in the utilitarian and/or hedonic shopping value the final aims of shopping activities carried out by consumers. In accordance with this view, Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) developed a scale for assessing the utilitarian (i.e., functional, task-related, and rational) and the hedonic (i.e., ludic, aesthetic, and epicurean) values of shopping experiences. From the findings of that study, it seems likely to hypothesize that these two basic dimensions (utilitarian vs. hedonic) can be considered as stable meta-traits to which it is possible to relate the individual differences traced by shopping motives.

To test empirically this hypothesis, two retailers were chosen, Carrefour and Ipercoop, whose respective hypermarkets were recently opened in the suburban area of Lecce, a medium town in Southern Italy. A main questionnaire, containing 63 close-ended questions on a seven-point Likert scale, was administered to a sample of 600 customers (300 per shopping center), to assess Tauber’s (1972) list of shopping motives, together with 19 new specific items from the Babin, Darden and Griffin’s (1994) scale and from the respondents’ answers to a pilot study.

Several factorial analyses were conducted, with the principal component method and Varimax rotation, and five- and two-factor solutions were considered, together with a 12-factor solution able to explain individual shopping motives. Following the Mooradian and Olver’s (1996) methodology, two correlation analyses were carried out between the 12-factor solution and the 5-factor solution, and between the 5-factor solution and the 2-factor solution. Results confirmed that the individual differences in shopping motives as indicated by Tauber (1972) can be related, with few exceptions, to the Big Five factors (cf. Digman 1990) and these, in turn, to the two main outcomes pursued with shopping—that is, hedonic and utilitarian ones, as it was hypothesized.

Specifically, results showed that, Openness to Experience ($r=.694, p<.000$), Agreeableness ($r=.535, p<.000$), and Extroversion ($r=.346, p<.000$) traits are correlated to the hedonic shopping value; whereas, Emotional Stability ($r=.897, p<.000$), and Conscientiousness ($r=.185, p<.000$) traits are correlated to the utilitarian shopping value.

These findings confirm the existence of two high-order factors among the Big Fives, as maintained by Digman (1997) in his meta-analysis of social psychology studies, but it advances two aggregations which are different from those found in the field of “global” human personality (as opposed to the domain-specific level of shopping motives), because of the transfer of the Agreeableness factor from one meta-dimension to the other. These two meta-dimensions in the shopping field could be interpreted as the antecedents of shopping behaviors (conations), connected with, respectively, the rational motives behind logic cognitive processes, and the affective motives regarding the sphere of feelings and personal goals. This should urge firms to classify their key customers mainly on searched shopping goals, thus setting, in turn, satisfactory communication strategies able to influence customers’ perception of the shopping-center image and, in general, of their purchasing experience.

Beyond the marketing consequences of these findings, there are especially remarkable theoretical implications which should prompt researchers to reconsider categories of shopping motives indicated by Tauber (1972)—which he never directly tested empirically—that result from the analysis carried out on 12 factors. In particular, there are three main differences with respect to past categories: the first difference is the dissolving of class A of motives (that is, shopping as a Diversion), which can be explained with the vagueness of item statements, given that the same subjects, in a different motivational status, could feel as a diversion either the search for excitement aroused by a shopping situation or a relaxing mood when shopping, according to their hedonic tone and level of stimulation (Apter 1989). The second difference with respect to the shopping motives originally indicated by Tauber (1972) is in the collapsing of Factor G (Communication with others having similar interests) and Factor F (Social experience outside the home) in one dimension (G/F) which represents Communication in general, coming from any shopping activity. Finally, the third difference comes from the proved existence of other classes of motives which prompt people to shop, two of them based on new items, added after the pilot study conducted by means of open-ended questions, and one of them based on the re-aggregation of past items. Apart from the External reasons class (Factor 12), due to events which are not dependent on the subject, it was possible to find a class of shopping motives, which we defined as Enjoying being on one’s own (Y), where all its items (There is no pressure to buy; I can mind my business; and I enjoy anonymity), characterize it and distinguish it from mere Self-gratification (C). Also the third new factor, constituted by items previously considered in association with other classes of motives, emphasizes the shoppers’ willingness to make their point of view prevail. Therefore, it was called Freedom to decide (X), to stress the fact that customers would like to make smart purchases, without the pressure put on them by salespeople, that they would rather prefer less intrusive, as consumers consider as their own right to be able to give a glance to the offerings without being forced to buy.

REFERENCES


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