Do “Possessors” Really Have a Stronger Desire to Possess Than “Non Possessors”? A Study of Consumer Desires of Visitors and Collectors of Contemporary Art Vis-À-Vis Two Modes of Consumption- Access and Possession

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Do “possessors” really have a stronger desire to possess than “accessors”? A Study of consumer desire of visitors and collectors of contemporary art vis-à-vis two modes of consumption- access and possession. Yu CHENHEC School of Management, Paris, France.

Abstract: Few consumer studies have been done regarding the situation where both “possession” and “access”- as two possible available means to “consume” the wanted goods- can occur depending on the consumers’ desires and choices. Results in this study show that consumers have some contradictory desires vis-à-vis their behaviours. Regarding the desire for “possession”, collectors (possessors) have a weaker possessive desire compared to museum visitors (accessors). They also have weaker desires for accomplishment, for keeping family traditions and for intellectual enrichment than visitors, while having a stronger philanthropic desire and desire for sociality. Regarding the desire for “access”, visitors have a weaker desire for a simple visit than collectors while having stronger desires for sociality and for freedom.

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often regress to their original purchase habits because the original drawbacks of sustainable products re-gain salience over time. We propose that ‘labeling’ the consumer might lead to better results. The labeling technique (Kraut, 1973; Miller, Brickman, & Bolen, 1975) exists of providing people with a self-defining label after an external stimulant has provoked a certain behavior. We will focus on ecological behavior. Consumers might, for example, be tempted to buy an ecological product by offering a price promotion. After this externally motivated purchase, a message is communicated which labels the consumer as an ecologically responsible person. When people accept this label as self-descriptive, their future ecological behavior might be internally motivated and hence be more robust to regression to the original purchase habits. We expect that imposing a mental load while receiving this label will result in increased acceptance of the label, and increased compliance.

Experiment

Two hundred forty-four students participated in the study for course credit. In a first phase, we provoked an ecological purchase decision. In order to do this, we provided the participants with a list of seven identically priced TV-sets, which were rated on several dimensions (Image quality, image quality in sunlight, sound quality, remote control, ecological aspects, ease of programming and quality of the manual). One of the TV-sets was superior on both image and sound quality, pretested as the most important features in the choice for a TV-set, and most participants (92.6 %) therefore chose this option. The others were discarded from the analysis. Importantly, the chosen TV set was also rated highest on ‘ecological aspects’.

Following this initial choice, participants were assigned to one of three conditions in the second phase of the experiment. Those in the ‘labeling’ group received feedback on the personality traits of the typical customer choosing this TV-set. The subjects who chose the superior TV-set learned that the people making this choice were typically ‘very concerned with the environment, and ecologically conscious’. A second group got to read an explicit plea in favor of ecologically conscious consumer behavior. These two groups read this information either when imposed to a cognitive load manipulation or not. A third, control group merely received the mental load manipulation, but did not get any information.

In the third stage of the experiment, the participants made three consecutive decisions in a social dilemma, framed as an ecological task. They were asked to imagine that they needed to buy 10 bags of potato chips for a party. The available potato chip alternatives were either packed in conventional or in bio-degradable bags. The bio-degradable bags were more expensive because they were bought less often. If enough people would buy the bio-degradable bag, its associated price could go down. After making a first decision, all participants received bogus feedback, saying that among the eight people present in the lab not enough bio-degradable bags had been bought to achieve a price decrease. They then proceeded to identical second and third rounds.

We also measured participants’ social value orientation, and asked on a seven point scale to which degree they took ecological aspects into account when making a purchase decision. Answers to the latter question demonstrated that the manipulation was successful.

Labeling had an effect on how many biodegradable bags were chosen. We assessed the effect both within and between subjects.

Within subjects, we compared behavior on choice 1 and choice 3. The choice position by communication (labeling vs explicit vs control) interaction was significant \(F(2,213)=6.27, p<.01\). In the explicit plea group the number of ecological choices increased, on average, from \(M=5.30 (SD=.38)\) to \(M=7.80 (SD=.38)\), in the control group it increased from \(M=5.31 (SD=.56)\) to \(M=7.57 (SD=.57)\). In the labeling group we observed the steepest increase from \(M=5.07 (SD=.40)\) to \(M=8.59 (SD=.41)\).

The means for the three groups differed significantly in round 3 \(F(2,213)=6.63; p<.01\). To examine the differential impact of the persuasion tools we tested how choice order interacted with the contrasts among the communication conditions. The contrasts between the labeling and the control condition and between the labeling and the explicit plea condition interacted with choice order \(F(1,142)=8.15; p<.01\) and \(F(1,138)=12.17; p<.01\), respectively. The interaction of choice order with the contrast between the control and the explicit plea conditions, on the other hand was not significant \(F<1, NS\).

The effects of neither mental load nor social value orientation were significant.

The results suggest that providing people with a self-descriptive label is an effective means to achieve an internally motivated increase in sustainable consumer behavior, particularly in the longer term. Future research will deal with the generalizability of these findings to more involving situations, requiring actual personal sacrifices.

We will also investigate why mental load did not have the expected effect.

References


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Extended Abstract

Consumer behaviour studies seem to be separated into two different approaches: the “possession” behaviours-the classical modality of purchase- considered as “the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour” (Belk, 1988, 1992; Mehta and Belk, 1991; O’Guinn and Belk, 1989; Richins, 1994 etc.); the “access” behaviours- the experience within a service which permits the temporal or long-term
utilisation without purchase, initially linked to the “experiential products” in the field of consumer studies (Holbrook, 1980; Evrard et al., 2001; Pine II and Gilmore, 1999 etc.).

However, few studies have been done regarding on the situation where both “possession” and “access” -as two possible available means to “consume” the wanted goods- can occur depending on the consumers’ desires and choices.

From the literature, we find that 1) there is a lack of research that takes into account the two kinds of consumption behaviours concerning the same products and makes a comparison between them; 2) previous work puts emphasis on the objective of the consumption experience, but barely focused on “what consumers desire” vis-à-vis these two consumption modes. This paper will contribute to the comparison of consumer desires between two modes of consumption -access and possession- by developing scales measuring consumer desires.

In our study, we are interested in two questions:

1) Are consumer desires for “access” different for “possessors” and “non possessors”?
2) Are consumer desires for “possession” different for “possessors” and “non possessors”?

Proposed Methodology:

Field chosen:
The field of contemporary art has been chosen due to the pre-existing consumption modes -notably art museum visits and the purchases- as well as due to the continual new creation of artworks. Therefore, the access and possession situations in this study refer to visits and purchases; possessors correspond to the collectors and non possessors correspond to the visitors.

The qualitative part:
The part of qualitative study, based on more than 30 depth interviews, shows that the desires of visitors to contemporary art exhibitions include discovery; curiosity; emotion; pleasure; passion; understanding; cultural broadening; inspiration; the enjoyment of beauty; escape; meeting friends; pastime; social representation; stimulus; social obligation; extended-self; and freedom of imagination. The desires of collectors of contemporary art are found to be emotional; aesthetic; intellectual; social; utilitarian (decorative); symbolic; philanthropic; ostentatious, and financial.

The quantitative part:
A questionnaire containing 273 items, developed on the basis of the results of the qualitative study, was sent to 1000 people on the occasion of the FIAC (International Fair of Contemporary Art) and GMAC (Grand Marché d’Art Contemporain) in Paris. One hundred and ninety six complete responses (98 from collectors and 98 from visitors) were received and allowed us to obtain preliminary empirical results. The responses to the items were subjected to a principal components analysis. The items were divided into 7 different factors (consumer desires in access experience, those in possession experience, etc.) and the analyses are effected respectively by these categories. The empirical results of the final study will be presented in this paper.

Analysis of data:
Analysis of principal components (APC) and Structural equation modelling (AMOS) were used in this study.

We have followed logical steps to analyse the data:

1. Item purification (APC)
2. Scale validation (AMOS)
3. The test for invariant factorial structure (AMOS)-the application involving multiple samples. The central concern is whether or not components of the measurement model and/or the structural model are invariant across the multiple groups.

In our study, we use this method to first confirm the stability of the measurement model and then learn about the similarities or differences of the desires for “access” and for “possession” of visitors and collectors.

Empirical Results:
Results in this study show that consumers have some contradictory desires vis-à-vis their behaviours: regarding the desire for possession, collectors have a weaker possessive desire; desire for accomplishment; desire for keeping family traditions. and desire for intellectual enrichment than visitors, while having a stronger philanthropic desire and desire for sociality. Regarding the desire for access, visitors have a stronger desire for sociality and desire for freedom, and a weaker desire for a simple visit than collectors.

The Act of Giving: Involvement, Habitual Giving, and Motives of Volunteerism
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Charitable organizations are under constant pressure to increase both financial and non-financial contributions. The question of how and why people give is crucial in helping non-profit organizations attract and retain donors and volunteers. Although the literature is rich in studies on helping behavior (c.f. Bendapudi, Singh and Bendapudi, 1996), research in consumer behavior provides little guidance in helping us understand motives of volunteerism (Fisher and Ackerman, 1998). Given that the number of voluntary organizations has increased in recent years, marketing techniques are playing an ever more important role in helping organizations recruit and retain volunteers (Bussell and Forbes, 2002). Understanding the psychological and behavioral aspects of volunteerism helps charities to identify characteristics of those most likely to volunteer, as well as target volunteer recruiting campaigns more effectively.