

Consumer decision-making styles and mall shopping behavior: Building theory using exploratory data analysis and the comparative method

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Abstract

This article assesses how consumers' decision-making styles relate to their shopping mall behavior and their global evaluations of shopping malls. Based on exploratory data analysis including the use of the comparative method, the article provides a theoretical model of antecedents and consequences of consumer-decision making styles. Data for this report come from personal face-to-face mall intercepts of shoppers ($n=527$) in two super-regional (West Edmonton Mall and Mall of America in Bloomington) and two regional (Pier 39 in San Francisco and Forum Shops in Las Vegas) malls. The EDA results support a complex view of the antecedents and consequences of consumer decision-making styles. The article concludes with specific suggestions for extending psychological theory of shopping behavior and advancing strategic mall-retailing strategies.

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1. Introduction: toward a theory of CDM styles

Similar to the work on cognitive styles in psychology (e.g., see Sternberg and Grigorenko, 1997) and beginning with the seminal work of Stone (1954), the literature consumer decision-making (CDM) styles have a fairly long but varied history in the context of theory and research in retailing. Sproles and Kendall (1986) define a CDM style as “a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making choices.” The work of Westbrook and Black (1985) and Hiu, Siu, Wang, and Chang (2001) include CDM styles literature reviews from 1954 to 1985 and 1986 to 2001, respectively. The substantial majority of studies in both these early and later research streams focus on confirming the existence of

styles of thinking applied to consumer shopping cognitions and that segmenting consumers (e.g., clustered) into a limited number of meaningful groups by their responses to CDM style inventories is possible and useful. Few studies attempt to thoroughly explore the antecedents and consequences of CDM styles (Hiu et al., 2001 is an exception to this observation).

This article proposes and illustrates the use of an exploratory data analysis (EDA) approach for developing a theory of antecedents and consequences of CDM styles. The research includes examining the propositions that (1) shopping contexts (e.g., shopping in regional versus local area malls) theoretically should not affect the structure of CDM styles; (2) at least some CDM styles moderately relate with each other; (3) most shoppers identify themselves as applying more than one but less than most CDM styles (i.e., shoppers recognize that some specific styles do not apply to their shopping orientations); (4) demographic variables affect CDM styles; (5) CDM styles relate with shoppers' planned expenditure levels; (6) CDM styles relate directly to global satisfaction with mall shopping;

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and (7) CDM styles affect the activities shoppers engage in. Findings from the EDA of survey responses from samples of shoppers in four North American malls support the first six but not the sixth proposition. The results of the study supports a complex view that consumers are capable and prone to applying more than one CDM style when shopping and that the impact of CDM styles on shopping activities is more indirect than direct.

The findings from the present study confirm and extend Sproles and Kendall's (1986, p. 268) previously unexplored speculation that a person does not follow one CDM style in all shopping decisions. The most useful view regarding CDM styles may be that many consumers adopt two to three approaches to making choices and rarely apply all styles proposed theoretically and found in shopping research; the present article confirms the possibility that a substantial share of consumers are not oriented strongly to any one CDM style. Thus, a substantial share of shoppers exists that rarely use each of the eight to ten CDM styles (e.g., Sproles and Kendall, 1986; Tai, 2005).

This article includes the following sections. Following this introduction, Section two proposes a theory of CDM styles including antecedents and consequences relating to styles. Section three briefly summarizes the empirical method and approach to analyzing the data for probing the theory. The research method includes a survey data collection instrument and the use of a mall-intercept face-to-face interview method; the analyses include exploratory data analysis (EDA) including a comparative method approach to survey data. Section four presents findings. Section five discusses conclusions and implications for further theory development and retail management practice. Section six closes the article with limitations, and suggestions for further research.

2. Theory of CDM styles

Retailers and shopping mall developers often seek to learn how and why people shop. This search results in several paradigm proposals of different shopping typologies (e.g., Bellenger and Korgaonker, 1980; Darden and Reynolds, 1971; McDonald, 1993; Sharma and Levy, 1995; Stone, 1954; Walsh et al., 2001a,b; Wang et al., 2004; Westbrook and Black, 1985). These studies are successful in increasing knowledge of the shopping orientations of consumers. Sproles (1985) and Sproles and Kendall (1986) provide the Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI), which is an early attempt to systematically measure shopping orientations using decision-making orientations. Sproles (1985) provides eight central decision-making dimensions to explain why shoppers behave in certain ways. One of the most important assumptions of this approach is that each individual consumer has a specific decision-making style resulting from a combination of their individual decision-making dimensions.

The theoretical assumption behind Sproles and Kendall's (1986) ideas about CDM styles is that consumers have eight different decision-making dimensions that determine the shopping decisions they make. Sproles and Kendall (1986)

identify and validate eight different dimensions from a sample of 482 U.S. high school students. The participants were asked closed-end questions to assess their decision-making style for personal products (i.e., clothing, cosmetics and hairdryers). In total 40 items pertaining to affective and cognitive orientations in decision-making was the basis from which eight potential styles affecting behavior were identified (see Table 1).

Fig. 1 visualizes theoretical proposals of antecedents and consequences of CDM styles. For brevity Fig. 1 also summarizes the test results of hypotheses that this article describes in the Findings Section below. Fig. 1 includes the following hypotheses relating CDM styles and mall shopping behavior.

H₁. Type of mall (super or mega mall versus smaller regional or neighborhood mall) does not affect CDM styles—the prediction is that findings will support a null relationship. Rationale: CDM styles are thinking styles that are preferred ways of using the abilities that an individual develops over several years, that is, CDM styles serve to bridge personality and consumers' use of rules or heuristics stored in memory (cf. Bettman and Zins, 1977; Sternberg and Grigorenko, 1997). Consequently, the expectation is that type of shopping mall does not affect the structure of CDM styles.

H₂. Demographics affect CDM styles. Rationale: findings from prior research support the view that gender, age, and income influence the adoption of specific CDM styles (e.g., see Kamaruddin and Mokhlis, 2003; Walsh et al., 2001a,b). For example, consumers 18- to 24-years-old are “more likely than other consumers to buy a product on the spur of the moment and change brands if the mood strikes” (Weiss, 2003, p. 31), whereas consumers 27- to 39-years old are “looking for products that seem less mass-marketed and more retro, while also being affordable” (Wiggins, 2004, p. 37).

Table 1
Characteristics of eight consumer decision-making styles

Decision style
1. <i>Perfectionist/high quality-conscious consumer</i> : decision style of consumers who systematically search for the best quality products possible.
2. <i>Brand consciousness/price equals quality</i> : decision style of consumers concerned with getting the most expensive, well-known brands.
3. <i>Novelty and fashion conscious</i> : decision style of consumers who like new and innovative products and who gain excitement from seeking out new things.
4. <i>Recreational and shopping conscious</i> : decision style of consumers who take pleasure in shopping and who shop just for the fun of it.
5. <i>Price conscious/value for the money</i> : decision style of consumers who are concerned with getting lower prices.
6. <i>Impulsiveness/careless</i> : decision style of consumers who tend to buy spontaneously and who are unconcerned about how much money they spend.
7. <i>Confused by overchoice</i> : decision style of consumers who feel they have too many brands and stores to choose from and who likely experience information overload in the market.
8. <i>Habitual/brand loyal</i> : decision style of consumers who shop at the same stores and tend to buy the same brands each time.

Source: Adapted from Sproles and Kendall (1986).

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