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# “Shopping as leisure: An exploration of manifoldness and dynamics in consumers shopping experiences”

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## ABSTRACT

In retailing literature, shopping as a leisure-time enjoyment has typically been examined by the use of economic or psychological approaches. Consumers engaged in this activity have commonly been portrayed as one homogenous segment. Drawing upon a sociocultural approach, this study seeks to improve our understanding of leisure shopping as subjectively experienced. The article illustrates that leisure shopping activities embrace a plethora of meanings and an inherent dynamic, evident for instance in shifts and nuances in consumers ways of experiencing and practising such activities. The results also provide some insights into the interrelation between hedonic and utilitarian aspects of shopping and emphasize that there is a complex relationship between various shopping orientations.

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of receiving pleasure or enjoyment from shopping has since long been acknowledged, both within and outside of the academic arena (e.g., Stone, 1954; Bellenger et al., 1977; Williams et al., 1985). This phenomenon has been studied within a wide range of academic disciplines and referred to using diverse terms such as *leisure shopping* (Martin and Mason, 1987; Howard, 2007), *hedonic shopping* (Babin et al., 1994; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003), and *pleasurable shopping* (Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1997; Cox et al., 2005). Within the domain of marketing, and particularly within the stream of research concerned with retailing where the canon of literature on this form of shopping resides, researchers have typically used economic and psychological approaches to understand such activities (e.g., Bellenger et al., 1977; Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Williams et al., 1985; Ohanian and Tashchian, 1992). While this literature has been useful, for instance in terms of identifying various kinds of motives that such shopping is likely to reflect, it has fallen short of more thorough explorations of how consumers experience and practice such shopping. In addition, research on this field has only seldom examined variations in consumers' ways of experiencing and practising such activities. Instead, consumers engaged in shopping as a form of enjoyment have typically been referred to as *one* certain type of shoppers who visit stores and malls to behave in fairly predictable ways. Hence, the aim of this article is twofold; first it seeks to improve our understanding of consumers shopping activities as subjectively experienced by delving further into questions of how and why consumers derive enjoyment from

shopping as a leisure activity. Secondly, it aims to improve our insights into variations in consumers' ways of experiencing and practicing such shopping.

Whereas retailing literature has been dominated by economic and psychological approaches to understand shopping behaviours, the present study employs an alternative way of seeking knowledge of shopping as leisure.<sup>1</sup> This article draws on consumer culture oriented research such as *Consumer Culture Theory* (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) to improve our understanding of the multitude of meanings that consumers shopping experiences may unfold. Informed by perspectives found in sociology or within cultural disciplines (e.g., Simmel, [1904] 1957; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984), researchers within this stream of research typically regard shopping a consumption activity which is experienced and practised in different ways by different consumers (cf. Thompson et al., 1994; Bardhi and Arnould, 2005). Nevertheless, researchers within CCT are concerned with consumption activities from a broad point of view and shopping as a leisure activity has only seldom been the focal point of analysis. Hence, inspired by a sociocultural<sup>2</sup> approach to shopping, this study intends to

<sup>1</sup> Definitions of '*leisure*' often focus on its contrast to work/and or its relation to recreation (Torkildsen, 2005). As regards the connection between the concepts 'shopping' and 'leisure', as referred to here, the term leisure primarily serves to denote the free choice of activity associated to this form of shopping (cf. Howard, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The use of a '*sociocultural*' approach here thus primarily relates to my view of shopping as a consumption activity that is consumed in a variety of ways depending on the individual consumer and the unique context. However, it also denotes an ambition to take a wider context into consideration when exploring consumers shopping experiences, particularly as regards aspects that relate to consumers personal background or to social issues (e.g., family, friends and other

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improve our insights into how leisure shopping is experienced and practised, as described by the subjects. This also involves an ambition to move beyond simplistic notions of shopper typologies and thus; explore consumers shopping practices as experienced and lived in their unique context (cf. Wenger, 1998; Schatzki, 2001; Shove et al., 2007).

In this article I conceive of the form of shopping that consumers receive enjoyment from in a broad sense of understanding. This implies that rather than taking certain concepts and definitions as point of departure, I set out to explore shopping as a leisure pursuit focusing on the subjects' view of what constitutes this activity. Nevertheless, this study focuses on the pleasurable sides of shopping, rather than on the dark aspects of such consumption (e.g., in terms of overspending and compulsive buying behaviours). In addition, while there are many arenas for shopping these days (e.g., internet, catalogues, home parties, etc.), this study focuses particularly on the form of leisure shopping that takes place in *retail store settings*.

The article is organized as follows: first the key literature that has been concerned with shopping as a form of enjoyment within the field of retailing is briefly reviewed. After this a sociocultural approach to shopping is presented as an alternative way of understanding such consumption. This is followed by methodology and a presentation of the results from the empirical study. Finally, conclusions are drawn and future research is suggested.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Shopping as leisure — an economic perspective

Within the domain of marketing several have devoted attention to shopping as a form of leisure-time enjoyment (e.g., Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Williams et al., 1985; Guiry et al., 2006; Hart et al., 2007; Kim and Kim, 2008). Among these researchers, '*recreational shopping*' and/or the related definition in terms of '*shopping enjoyment*' has come to be the concepts most often used when referring to this phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Research on this field has for the most part been focused on outlining consumers reasons or motivations for engaging in shopping as a form of enjoyment (e.g., Williams et al., 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Cox et al., 2005; Kim and Kim, 2008) or on identifying factors in store environments that are likely to induce enjoyable or entertaining shopping experiences (Bellenger et al., 1977; Jones, 1999; Hart et al., 2007). Recreational shopping has for instance typically been related to social motives (e.g., Tatzel, 1982; Williams et al., 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003) and described as a browsing activity that is characterized by a quest for pleasurable experiences and stimulation of senses rather than an intent to buy something (e.g., Bloch et al., 1989; Ohanian and Tashchian, 1992; Sinha and Uniyal, 2005). While previous research has provided an extensive report on what sorts of dimensions that is likely to constitute enjoyable shopping experiences, it has however most often overlooked subjects own descriptions of how and why such shopping is considered a meaningful leisure pursuit.

(footnote continued)

relevant groups) which may influence consumption experiences and practices (cf. Holt, 1995; Mick and Buhl, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Scholars within this field have however also used concepts such as '*pleasurable shopping*', '*leisure shopping*', and '*hedonic shopping*' to denote this phenomenon (e.g. Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Cox et al., 2005; Howard, 2007).

In addition, while previous research concerned with shopping as a form of leisure has recognized multiple benefits of this activity, it has seldom explored variations in consumers' ways of experiencing or practising such shopping. As has been stated thus, individuals engaged in this form of shopping have typically been analyzed and described as one definite segment of shoppers, characterized by certain traits. The 'recreational shopper type' has for instance been described as being more sociable and seeking different benefits from shopping centers as compared to 'the economic shopper' (e.g., Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Williams et al., 1985; Nicholls et al., 2002; Sinha and Uniyal, 2005). In recent years, a couple of studies have however made some important progresses on this field. For instance, Guiry and his colleagues have accentuated recreational shopping as a multi-dimensional activity that extends far beyond just feelings of enjoyment (Guiry, 1999; Guiry et al., 2006). Moreover, in his dissertation Guiry (1999) identified three different types of recreational shopping trips (i.e., mission shopping, window shopping, mood shopping) and argued that the type of shopping trip influences the extent to which recreational shoppers experience different leisure dimensions (e.g., intrinsic satisfaction, spontaneity, fantasy). Guiry also argued that there are different 'subgroups' of recreational shoppers who vary in their sociability as well as in their level of involvement with shopping (e.g., 'low involvement' or 'high involvement' recreational shoppers). Other studies have improved our understanding of the enjoyment derived from this shopping by turning attention to the relative prevalence of various sources of enjoyment. For instance, Cox et al. (2005) found that bargain hunting seemed to be a major source of shopping enjoyment while few shoppers liked to mingle with other shoppers. Kim and Kim (2008), however, found that shopping enjoyment was more strongly related to browsing behaviour as compared to bargain hunting. Nevertheless, explorations of variations in consumers' ways of experiencing and pursuing leisure shopping are rare. Howard (2007) has recently argued that leisure shopping exists in a variety of circumstances and that the complexity of such shopping needs to be further considered. However, there is still a lack of more thorough empirical investigations of the multifaceted and varied nature of such shopping.

In the sections above, a brief review of previous research concerned with shopping as a leisure-time enjoyment has been presented and a number of deficiencies have been outlined. In the following sections, it is argued that a sociocultural approach may be useful when addressing these issues.

### 2.2. A sociocultural approach to shopping

While retailing literature has been dominated by economic and psychological approaches to examine shopping behaviours, there are also researchers within sociology and cultural disciplines who have explored the shopping phenomenon (e.g., Prus and Dawson, 1991; Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1997; Miller et al., 1998). In sociocultural literature, shopping is commonly regarded as an act of consumption which incorporates more facets than those present in the momentary store visit and thus must be understood in relation to its wider social and cultural context. Furthermore, in such literature, the many-sidedness and dynamic nature of shopping as leisure has been recognized. Inspired by such a view, I conceive of this form of consumption much in the same way as Lehtonen and Mäenpää (1997):

"Pleasurable shopping is understood as consumption-oriented movement in a space where one has the possibility of making purchases. This implies that the shopper relates to the environment from the point of view of consumption, even

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