



## Materialism and brand engagement as shopping motivations

Ronald E. Goldsmith<sup>a,\*</sup>, Leisa R. Flynn<sup>b</sup>, Ronald A. Clark<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> College of Business, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA

<sup>b</sup> College of Business, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, USA

<sup>c</sup> College of Business Administration, Missouri State University, Springfield, MO 65897, USA

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of these two studies was to test hypothesized motivations thought to influence shopping activity. Surveys of U.S. student consumers ( $n$ 's=258 and 256) provided the data. The findings show that liking to shop is positively related to brand engagement in self-concept and to material values. Different dimensions of materialism appear to motivate shopping to different degrees and apparently account for the positive relationship between brand engagement and shopping. Separate analyses for men and women suggest that the genders are differently motivated to shop.

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### 1. Introduction

As long as there have been markets, people have shopped. Shopping is necessary for most consumers, but also serves as a major recreational activity for many (Danzinger, 2006; Eisenberg, 2009; Hine, 2002). Although the American Marketing Association website does not define shopping, the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, a good surrogate for the general consensus, explains that "Shopping is the examining of goods or services from retailers with the intent to purchase at that time. Shopping is an activity of selection and/or purchase. In some contexts it is considered a leisure activity as well as an economic one." This definition is highly consistent with that in other dictionaries and is probably close to the meaning assigned to it by most consumers, who are also "shoppers." Shopping goods are defined by Kotler and Keller (2009, p. 320) as "goods that the consumer characteristically compares on such bases as suitability, quality, price, and style". Moreover, shopping is not restricted to visiting physical stores, but also includes non-store activities such as browsing through catalogs, on-line buying, and even m-commerce (Goldsmith and Flynn, 2005). We would propose that shopping is the intentional self-exposure of a consumer to products available for purchase.

Because the activity of shopping is so important to marketers and retailers of every stripe, shopping plays an important role in many theories of consumer behavior. Consequently, researchers have studied shopping behavior from a variety of perspectives, so there is a large body of scholarly literature on the topic. Much of this research is devoted to shopping from the perspectives of

information acquisition, decision making, and the influence of marketer controlled elements on the outcome. New research even examines the neurophysiology of shopping (Tan, 2008). Another topic in this field is the examination of individual differences in needs, wants, and motives for shopping. For example, Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) describe differences in specific *shopping styles* that influence shopping behavior, and Arnold and Reynolds (2003) describe different hedonic shopping motivations. Shopping enjoyment has received a good deal of attention in the literature. Recent work in that vein demonstrates that "bargain hunters" and "browsers" both may enjoy shopping but the browsers receive more hedonic rewards for their actions (Kim and Kim, 2008). Motivations for shopping can even be studied at the level of a type of product, medium, or segment (e.g., Cowart and Goldsmith, 2007). Studies of this sort show that shopping motives can be generally categorized as utilitarian, social, hedonic, experiential, and cognitive (Babin et al., 1994). The cognitive and emotional aspects of shopping have been combined into a theory of shopping stated as  $P=(N+F+A) \times E^2$ , where "P" is propensity to buy, "N" is need, "F" is features, "A" is affordability and "E" is emotions (Danzinger, 2006). While economic necessity forces nearly everyone to shop, for different consumers shopping portends anything from dreadful boredom to gleeful anticipation. It is thus advantageous for retailers in particular to gain insight into what drives the variation in attitudes toward shopping.

Explanations of shopping like the above describe largely conscious motivations. Most of these approaches assume that consumers are aware of and can describe why they shop. However, consumers shop for reasons of which they are probably not aware (Dichter, 1964; Miller, 1998; Tan, 2008). Some of these motivating factors are individual difference variables that can be described as personality trait-like concepts. In particular, two of these variables, brand engagement and materialism, which

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 850 644 4401; fax: +1 850 644 4098.  
E-mail address: [rgoldsmith@cob.fsu.edu](mailto:rgoldsmith@cob.fsu.edu) (R.E. Goldsmith).

influence a variety of consumer behaviors, can be proposed to motivate consumers to shop.

Consumers sometimes incorporate brand images into their own self-concepts (Schembri et al., 2010; Walker, 2008), so that the brand unconsciously helps them become and express who they are and who they show to the world (Sprott et al., 2009). This concept of *Brand Engagement in Self-Concept* can be operationalized so that its role in influencing consumer behavior can be made explicit. *Materialism* is defined as a general focus on attaining material possessions and social renown, reflecting Kasser's (2002, p. 1) description. Wanting material goods is an obvious motivation for shopping, as this activity is inherent in acquiring such goods.

Although higher materialism is associated with spending and buying, how and whether it motivates shopping has not been ascertained, and neither has the association between brand engagement in self-concept and shopping been assessed. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between materialism and brand engagement in self-concept and overall consumer attitudes toward shopping. The two studies reported here are predicated on the hypotheses that positive attitudes toward shopping are related to increased levels of materialism and brand engagement in self-concept. The remainder of this paper presents a review of the relevant literature, hypotheses, the methods employed, and a discussion of the findings.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Shopping

The activity of shopping has many dimensions. Shopping varies in terms of who does the shopping, what people shop for, when they shop, where they shop, how they shop, and why they shop. Many studies offer answers to these questions. Our study concerns the last question. Because shopping as an activity has so many dimensions, a researcher must specify how it is being considered in order to limit the focus of any study. The current study focused on the relationships of unconscious motivations with shopping considered in the most general way, overall attitude toward shopping. There are several reasons for this choice. First, shoppers' choices of specific shopping venues or modes are influenced by different motives (such as involvement with a product category) that are limited to those venues or modes. Second, situational influences (e.g., shopping for self versus gift) affect specific shopping behaviors. Third, we focused on attitudes toward shopping instead of shopping behavior or frequency both because these would be difficult to measure reliably and validly and because many other variables influence actual shopping behavior (time, money, access, etc.) Finally, attitudes are good (but not perfect) predictors of behavior, but where behavior is molar, repeated, and aggregated, as it is with shopping, this relationship is stronger than if the behavior is a single instance (Epstein, 1979).

### 2.2. Brand engagement

Consumers can become engaged, that is, form emotional attachments to brands that they make part of their lives, with specific brands (Keller, 2001). Thus, brand engagement of this sort is highly desired by marketers as it leads to frequent consumption, loyalty, positive word-of-mouth. However, there is another sense in which we can talk about brand engagement. Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) describes the general tendency of consumers to use brands to shape their identities and to express them to others. This global disposition or trait is an

important individual difference variable characterizing consumers. This form of brand engagement is important because it allows researchers to study this phenomenon in a general sense that is not limited to engagement with a specific brand.

Sprott et al. (2009, p. 9) define BESC as consumer "tendencies to include important brands as part of their self-concept." BESC portrays consumers along a continuum ranging from the low end, where consumers do not see brands as important elements of self-concept, to the high end where they identify with brands and have special bonds with them. Brand Engagement in Self-concept is a new and different way to think about consumers' relationships with brands. It does not describe brand personalities or an attitude toward brands so much as an individual difference variable on par with other personality-like concepts that are often used to explicate consumer behavior. BESC exists conceptually below the Big Five personality traits, which exist at the highest level of generality, and above more domain-specific traits such as opinion leadership for a product category (see Mowen and Voss, 2008).

Although no previous study has investigated the relationship between BESC and shopping, the description of BESC strongly suggests that consumers highly motivated to use brands to express their self-concepts should spend time and energy learning about brands and what they mean. Shopping is a primary way in which consumers can acquire this knowledge, and so our first hypothesis is that BESC is positively related to attitude toward shopping.

### 2.3. Materialism

The term "materialism" refers to how important material goods are to a person's life with the implication that materialistic people have an excessive concern for material objects. Materialism is a prominent individual difference variable viewed by some as a personality characteristic (Belk, 1985) and by others as a unique set of values (Kasser, 2002; Richins, 2004). In this study, materialism is defined as a general focus on attaining material possessions and social renown, reflecting Kasser's (2002, p. 1) description. Consumer psychologists are interested in materialism because it influences specific aspects of consumer behavior (Graham, 1999).

Materialism leads consumers to put a disproportionate amount of their resources into acquiring goods. A growing body of literature delineates the origins, antecedents, and consequences of these materialist impulses (e.g., Chan and Prendergast, 2007).

Our second hypothesis is that materialism is positively related to attitude toward shopping because shopping intimately involves consumers with the material goods they aspire to own. Shopping is one way they learn about new products they might want to own, and the activity of shopping for material goods gives pleasure to consumers (Danzinger, 2006; Eisenberg, 2009; Hine, 2002). We surmise that the more interested consumers are in possessing material goods, the more they will want to shop for them and the more positive their attitude toward shopping.

### 2.4. Gender differences in shopping

Our interest in motives for shopping also addresses the moderating influence of gender. Women are much more likely than men are to be studied for their shopping behavior; in fact, "men are all but absent in studies of shopping behavior" (Otnes and McGrath, 2001, p. 112). This focus in the literature likely is an artifact of traditional gender roles (Otnes and McGrath, 2001). Despite the lack of research on men, it is apparent that women are more likely to shop than are men (Benson, 1994; Danzinger,

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