THE MEANING OF SHOPPING EXPERIENCES AUGMENTED BY MOBILE INTERNET DEVICES

Brian I. Spaid and Daniel J. Flint

The present study is a qualitative investigation of the lived experiences of shoppers who incorporate mobile Internet devices (MIDs) into shopping activities. Shoppers were found to utilize MIDs as tools to assist with shopping management and social management behaviors, which combined to provide hedonic shopping experiences with emotional benefit to the shopper. A framework is presented that describes extrinsic (product information, trust, and economics) and intrinsic (security and empowerment) motivators.

Mobile Internet devices (MIDs) are everywhere. These devices, which include smartphones and tablet computers, constitute nearly 80 percent of computing devices sold worldwide (IDC 2013). In addition, the growth rate of mobile Internet usage far outstrips Internet usage on traditional personal computers (PCs), and in some countries total mobile Internet usage already surpasses PCs (Meeker and Wu 2013). These hardware innovations are cultivating a fundamental shift in the lives of consumers as they integrate and bond with their devices (Rader 2009).

The effects of MIDs can also be seen on societal levels. The rapid adoption and use of these devices has driven many cultural changes, including how consumers communicate (Fortunati 2002), manage relationships (Licoppe 2004; Palen 2002), express themselves (Katz and Sugiyama 2005), and negotiate public spaces (Paragas 2005). These devices are also beginning to affect how consumers manage the shopping task and negotiate retail environments (Shankar et al. 2010). The objective of this study is to explore more deeply what it means to shop with MIDs.

Changes to consumers' shopping patterns and their navigation in retail environments have been fostered by a dramatic increase in the number of software applications that developers have created to assist shoppers with a wide variety of shopping-related tasks. Examples include applications that provide competitor pricing from bar code scan or product recognition, manage digital coupons, track product pricing between multiple retailers, leverage crowd sourcing for product recommendations, and others. Beyond applications, the presence of MIDs in the retail environment is also motivating changes to point-of-purchase displays. Quick response (QR) codes and their ilk have been embraced by manufacturers and retailers as a way of connecting shoppers to detailed product information or promotions online based entirely on the proliferation of MIDs. Shoppers also turn to MIDs for economic reasons.

This proliferation of MID use has accompanied the worst U.S. economic downturn since the Great Depression. The recent recession has had dramatic effects on consumer shopping behavior. A recent study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers found that "seventy-two percent of all shoppers recently indicated that their shopping behavior has changed significantly or somewhat as a result of the economic environment, and only 7% have made no changes at all" (2010, p. 1). These new behaviors come in the form of deal-seeking (buying products at discount) and limiting (focusing on needs over wants) behaviors (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2010). Within this economic environment, consumers have readily adopted MIDs and their accompanying software applications as tools to enhance their shopping experiences. "Shoppers' experience with these tools and techniques taught them that the time invested in incorporating the tools into the shopping experience . . . yielded a significant return (ROI [return on investment]) in terms of both dollar and time savings" (PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2010, p. 2). In other words, the efforts consumers invest into utilizing new technologies while shopping are repaid with efficiency and cost-savings.

These simultaneous trends—the growth in adoption of MIDs, the expansion of shopping-specific software applications, and a challenging economic environment driv-

Brian I. Spaid (MBA, University of Tennessee), Ph.D. candidate in Marketing, College of Business Administration, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, bspaid@utk.edu.

Daniel J. Flint (Ph.D., University of Tennessee), Regal Entertainment Group Professor of Business, College of Business Administration, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, dflint@utk.edu.

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