Chapter 10

Understanding On-Line Fashion Buying Behavior on Impulse: Feelings Nothing More Than Feelings

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contributes to the understanding of the impulsive fashion consumer online in a digitalized retail and consumer world. It also questions the notions of impulsive consumption in general. The description of the impulsive fashion consumer as guided by emotional irrationality is questioned and disputed, as the digitalization transforms the retailing concept, alters consumer’s way of thinking, and changes buying behavior. The results from a study of young Swedish consumers show that the fashion consumer online wants to be rational and in control of their buying behavior, even when acting under the influence of emotions. Results also indicate that shopping fashion for fun might be better suited for the online environment compared to the mall environment, as supply is richer and inspirational tools are easier to provide on the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

The Digital Age encompasses many elements of business and everyday life, and it is important for the retail fashion sector to adjust to its consequences and learn how to adapt. The emergence of the Internet has specifically impacted retailing by new forms and formats (Gloor, 2000; Williams, 2014), shifted purchasing processes in several areas (Grewal et al., 2013), and affected customer relations (Pantano & Migliarese, 2014). Fixed store settings and online channels are merging and blur the customer perceived boundaries between what is seen as retail and what is seen as e-commerce: the most evident proof of this is the format click-and-collect. The customers are now shopping on their smartphones at the same time as they are browsing a physical store or the other way around. The retailing industry thus develops

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toward a seamless “omnichannel retailing” experience where the distinctions between physical and online disappear and instead the channels become intertwined. This development is a shift towards helping consumers making buying decisions rather than focusing only on transactions and deliveries (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Rahman, 2013). The physical store becomes, in this sense, a showroom that displays items and the digital store is where the customers lay their orders. Other consumer behaviors formed historically by attitudes also transforms and changes in line with a connected world where everything is just a click away.

In a society where supply is gigantic, the lifestyle is juggling and the hunt for saving time and/or money is important, the attitudes towards consumption and purchase are about to change. Thus, digitalization encompasses new perspectives on how consumers make purchasing decisions, where the decisions are taking place, how long it takes, where the delivery takes place, and how consumers feel about making purchases. Research studies on consumer buying behavior together with empirical evidence suggest that consumers in general are not rational in their behavior (Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982), and they do not attempt to maximize their satisfaction in exchanges (Belk et al., 1989). However, consumers in the Digital Age have almost complete information on alternatives available to them in exchanges due to the Internet and Google, and these exchanges are relatively free from external influence. We also know that impulse buying behavior is becoming more common (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2016). Some research estimates 5.8% of U.S. consumers to be compulsive buyers (Koran, Faber, Aboujaoude, Large, & Serpe, 2006), and there appears to be an increasing tendency for compulsive or impulsive buying behavior in many developed countries (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney & Monroe, 2011). Thereby it is not surprising that these consumers attract the interest of retailers, and in particular, fashion retailers. Fashion is identified as a typical commodity that is bought under the influence of hedonic emotions and desires and thereby fashion companies are likely to be interested in how the impulsively buying consumer acts online (Dawson & Kim, 2009). However, in this chapter we argue that existing literature has no consideration of the fact that consumers have changed their buying behavior and attitudes, and that time as a limited construct, affects the way we decide on shopping, and how we feel about unplanned shopping decisions.

Consumers tend to be more impatient in a digitalized retailing context, which in turn also affects how consumers engage in brands, brand communities, and experiences. Fashion consumers in modern times will most likely think differently regarding unplanned buying behavior and how relations between customer and firm/brand should be built. Overall we know too little about fashion consumers and their buying behavior regarding fashion, and our aim is to question traditional market logic and purchasing models built on the logic of the symbolic “Economic Man” and utilitarian exchange theory, where consumers are made to fit the economic models instead of the other way around (Bagozzi, 1975; Schneider, 1974). The idea about the perfect rational economic man who makes choices out of utilitarian needs alone and not out of pure desire, anguish, joy or any other feeling is not considered credible (Polanyi, 1944; Simon, 1976).

DEFINITIONS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The fashion consumer’s desires and shopping behavior is studied in various ways which describe the personal traits of a customer (e.g. Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Domina & Koch, 1998; Grant & Stephen, 2005; Prendergast and Wong, 2003). In the literature on planned buying behavior these consumers are described as rational and with high demands on quality (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Niu, 2013). Thereby these customers with a rational buying behavior are usually referred to as slow fashion consumers (Watson
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