

December 2003

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Recommended Citation

Guo, Yi, "New Jersey Institute of Technology Online Shopping Experience: A Conceptualization" (2003). *AMCIS 2003 Proceedings*. 276.

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ONLINE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE: A CONCEPTUALIZATION

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Abstract

The Internet has impacted how we shop. This article investigates consumer experience in an online retailing environment.

Based in consumer behavior research, this article proposes a model of the on-line shopping experience (OSE). Shopping experience defined as the episodes of interaction between a customer and shops forms the center of our model. Applying shopping experience to online environments, OSE is the interactions between customers and commercial web sites. OSE can be examined from different angles. The following attributes describe OSE: duration, breadth, depth, and intensity. Shopping is dynamic, ongoing, and situated. A lot happens when a shopper walks through aisles, touches products, thinks, and makes decision. Thus, a shopping experience consists of a range of activities, including:

- *Physical activities (navigating, orientating, browsing, consulting helpers, viewing products, making a purchase, and managing accounts);*
- *Cognitive activities (product information comprehension, product evaluation, product comparison, decision making, environmental cue perception and environmental cue evaluation);*
- *Affective activities such as emotional attribution,); and*
- *In-progress responses (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and behavioral intentions).*

This conceptualization of OSE addresses the dynamic and situated nature of shopping by using both processes (activities) and states (in-process responses).

Flow is a special shopping experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1988) defines flow as an optimal and intrinsically engrossing and enjoyable experience, which is so inwardly rewarding that people want to repeat it. People experience flow in a range of activities, including computer use and online activities. Flow is not a particular activity, but rather a state of mind a shopper goes through. High concentration, low self-awareness, high involvement, time distortion, and telepresence describe flow. Flow is an optimal experience that retailers, including e-tailers, strive to create for their customers. What factors lead to a flow in shopping? What are the physical/cognitive/affective characteristics of shoppers in flow compared to those who are not?

Several factors influence shopping including: store/site characteristics, shopper characteristics, and product/task. A shopping experience produces the following outcomes: actual spending, goal fulfillment, and return intention. These past experiences affect shoppers' future behavior. Studying OSE and flow will help build better online shopping environments and help realize the Internet's potential as a major and routine shopping source.

Investigating OSE and flow requires multiple methodological approaches. Qualitative techniques such as protocol analysis will provide rich contextual data to detail the processes and internal states of a customer when interacting with commercial web sites. Experiments will test relationships between influential factors and OSE components and between influential factors and flow.

Keywords: Shopping experience, B2C electronic commerce, online consumer behavior, flow

Reference

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1988) "The Flow Experience and its Significance for Human Psychology," in M. Csikszentmihalyi and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.) *Optimal experience: psychological studies of flow in consciousness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-35.