Towards a theory of shopping: A holistic framework

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Abstract

One criticism (Arnould, 2000) of Miller's 1998 book, A Theory of Shopping and the jointly authored Shopping, Place and Identity (Miller et al., 1998) is that the authors fail to incorporate or even acknowledge the body of literature which exists within marketing and consumer research. Thus, as Arnould states, `the authors rediscover some of the findings of theoretical marketing literature about shopping venues, shopping and customer- store and service relationships' (Arnould, 2000, p. 106). This paper attempts to redress the balance by proposing a conceptual framework for shopping which incorporates relevant marketing and consumer research literature and which also draws on the wider literature in the social sciences to set the context for progress towards a theory of shopping.

Introduction

The subject of shopping in its many guises has been the focus of substantial attention and debate within the literature over many years (eg, Frederick, 1929; Tauber, 1972; Lane Benson, 2000) and links can be traced back to the work on consumption of writers such as Veblen (1899). Retailing strategy (eg, Davies and Brooks, 1989; Brown, 1988; McGoldrick, 1990) has developed as a distinctive area within marketing and much consumer behaviour research (eg, Elliott, 1994; Hirschman, 1992; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Eccles, 2000) is devoted to aspects of the shopping experience, while the wider marketing literature encompasses many aspects of shopping and retailing (eg, Kotler, 1973; Hutcheson and Moutinho, 1998; Hart et al., 1999). This paper examines shopping from a number of different perspectives (including historical, sociological, feminist and marketing) in order to develop a conceptual framework which builds on three main dimensions to provide a holistic view of shopping and shopping behaviour: the shopping environment: the changing landscape of shopping from the first department store to the present-day shopping mall andvirtual shopping; shopping in socio-cultural context: shopping as leisure, malldom, consumer habitats, feminism and shopping, the role of shopping in women's lives; and

shopping and the individual: roles, motivations and behaviour.

This exploration of shopping draws on a broad review of the literature from a number of fields. At this stage, it should be pointed out, retailing strategy and marketing strategy rest outside this conceptual framework, they are regarded as external infuences which impact on the shopping model. Their infuence on, and relationship with, the elements within the model is to be the subject of further study.

The shopping environment in historical context: shopping places, shopping spaces

The importance of shopping from the consumer's point of view in the UK and the USA emerged towards the end of the 19th century, primarily through the introduction and expansion of department stores (Nava, 1996).
Subsequently, the growth in the economy, together with developments in public transport and new forms of mass production all contributed to the expansion of shops and shopping during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Of equal importance was the growing demand from an increasingly affluent, and socially and geographically mobile, urban population. For the first time, consumers (especially women) were able to enjoy, through the development of the department store, purpose-built public space for activities that satis®ed their functional, social and aspirational needs.

Many department stores during this period became luxurious, purpose-built fantasy palaces (Nava, 1996, p. 48) which provided a range of entertainment: musical, visual, theatrical and oriental. Further facilities for the comfort and convenience of the department store shopper included: `supervised children's areas, toilets and powder rooms, hairdressing courts, ladies' and gentlemen's clubs and writing rooms, restaurants and tea-rooms, roof gardens with pergolas, zoos and ice rinks, picture galleries, banks, ticket and travel agencies, grocery provision and delivery service' (Nava, 1996, p. 50).

Arguably, it is the shopping mall which represents the fantasy palace for today's consumer. Miles (1998) considers the emergence of the shopping mall culture and suggests that the evolution of UK cities as `centres of consumption' (p. 57) mirrors the historical emergence of a consumer ethic which has been in¯uenced by developments in the USA and the move towards out-of-town shopping centres which has accompanied growth in car ownership and the expansion of the suburbs. This growth has been far from universally welcomed, however. Thrift (1997), considers shopping malls to be placeless, rather than places:
`The rise of the shopping malls is often taken as the most visible sign of the landscape as simply a moment in the circulation of commodities. The landscape is increasingly constructed in the image of the commodities' (p. 176).
Thrift goes on to suggest that `placelessness' characterises sites such as shopping malls and he quotes Casey (1993): `We are in the midst of a desert of shops, a wasteland of services, a chaos of commerce. If not nowhere, we are in an extremely shallow somewhere' (Casey (1993) pp. 268±9, cited in Thrift (1997) p. 176)

The advent of electronic home shopping via the Internet has attracted substantial attention (eg, Rosenberg and Hirschman, 1980; Balabanis and Vassileiou, 1999). Gumpert and Drucker (1992) suggest that electronic home shopping (particularly as offered via television shopping channels) represents: `a further de-emphasis of time and space, eliminating the walls of the ``agora'' and transforming it into a timeless and spaceless opportunity to acquire . . . purchase and transfer have become divorced functions, with procurement being a-spatial and acquisition linked to delivery services' (p. 189).

The rise of the Internet and other remote shopping possibilities such as interactive television ensures that this aspect of shopping is increasing. It is interesting to note that Gumpert and Drucker (1992) see electronic shopping as offering `an alternative to anxiety producing shopping situations' which provides convenience, enjoyment, trust, ease and social interaction : `all without opening the front door' (p. 192). They also suggest that television shopping can create the illusion of intimacy, of personal relations between the seller (the television presenter) and the consumer; it fosters the illusion of sociability as an integral part of the consumer experience with the intention of developing repeat customers, to make them part of an extended family.

Thus many of the experiential aspects of shopping behaviour are not, as may be assumed, negated through the adoption of remote retailing channels they could, in fact, be made more personal and more individual through the encouragement offered to viewers to `participate' in the show, to `engage' with the on-air personality. However, alongside developments in home shopping, the shopping mall and shopping mall culture is now here and seems here to stay. The development of large, enclosed, shopping malls, `arguably the most common site for recreational or hedonic consumption' (Bloch et al., 1991, p. 445) is epitomised in the UK by the springing up of new malls, usually on sites of industrial wasteland, over the last 20 years (eg, Meadowhall, Merryhill, the Metro Centre, the Trafford Centre). The very creation of such sites, these consumer `habitats' (Bloch et al., 1994), this `Utopian modern day equivalent to the ancient marketplace serving our civil, cultural and social needs as well as our needs as consumers' (Miles, 1998, p. 60), the `surrogate town square' (Shields, 1992, p. 5) has served to further blur the distinction between shopping as `work' and shopping as `leisure'. Belk (1997) suggests that shopping has supplanted religion, with `consumer goods enshrined in the local equivalent of the shopping mall or the department store' (p. 30) which he likens to the great temples of sacred pilgrimage. O'Guinn and Belk (1989) refer to the shopping mall as `sacred space' and time spent there as `sacred time' (p. 231).

The socialisation of shopping.
Shopping is increasingly seen as a leisure activity (Martin and Mason, 1987; Jansen-Verbeke, 1987) and, as such, fulfils a role in family and social life which goes beyond the traditional shopping activities (`provisioning', Miller, 1998, p. 11) of buying in provisions and other goods when required. Women, in particular, have often not had the financial resources to indulge in specific leisure activities but they have had personal control over spending for the family's consumption and housekeeping as the `business executive of the home' (Nava, 1995). It was primarily the woman who orchestrated domestic

consumption; `not only was she manipulated by advertising, but, in the act of shopping, she found an opportunity for social expression' (Cross, 1993). Shopping is an activity seen as complementary to female roles (Kelly, 1991) and, as Thompson (1996) points out, `researchers have documented that married working women retain the vast majority of traditional responsibilities for care of the household (which includes most forms of shopping), childcare and routine financial activities' (p. 388) and this forms part of the `culturally prominent lifestyle known as juggling' (p. 388) for professional working mothers.

Engagement with, and responsibility for, shopping has impacted on the traditional woman's role (as wife, mother, lady) which has undergone change due to the revolution in shopping heralded by the development of the department store as discussed previously. According to Laermans (1993), women's performance of their traditional roles was redefined in terms of commodities and women were seen to be professional shoppers or consumers. There is evidence that women take their role as shoppers seriously; in their study of gender roles and Christmas gift shopping, Fischer and Arnold (1990) noted that women appeared to be more socialised to take it quite seriously as real and important work, unlike men who saw Christmas gift shopping as `play'. Nava (1996) refers to the substantial levels of skill and expertise required by the work women were doing as consumers and notes `the ambiguous position of shopping as an activity which was clearly neither work nor leisure' (p. 57). Jansen-Verbeke (1987) issues a caveat to researchers that `shopping as a leisure activity for women could very well be an imposed and perhaps biased view on the part of the research worker on the actual experience of shopping' because shopping is often seen by women as a legitimate activity, belonging to their gender role and therefore not necessarily experienced as a leisure activity. Babin et al. (1994) specifically compared shopping's hedonic value with its utilitarian function and note that shopping value appears to combine the two elements of work and fun: `taken together, shopping value appears to be provided by ``the complete shopping experience'' not simply by products shopped for' (Babin et al., 1994, p. 654). Miller (1997) takes an alternative view when he asserts that most shopping is a highly routinised activity with a regular, usually weekly, visit to a large supermarket for purchasing food and household materials as its central focus and the most common consumer is a female who sees herself as bearing this responsibility of housewifery, whether or not she is in paid work. He criticises theories and models of modern consumption which portray a picture of consumers as self-seeking hedonists as `absurd' (p. 44) and suggests that most people: `don't feel that they have enough time to develop anything that might be called a ``lifestyle''. On the contrary, they regard themselves with much justification as largely self-sacrificial with a high moral sense of their responsibilities as expressed through the provisioning of families' (p. 45). It is worth mentioning again, however, that a key criticism (Arnould, 2000) of Miller's book, A Theory of Shopping (1998) and the jointly authored Shopping, Place and Identity (Miller et al., 1998) is that the authors fail to incorporate or even acknowledge the body of literature which exists within marketing and consumer research as mentioned earlier. In the context of this paper, it is clear that Miller's work has little to contribute to a wider understanding of shopping and shopping behaviour as his findings derive entirely from a year-long study of 76 households based mainly in one street of council houses in North London (Miller, 1998, p. 10) and the focus of the research is on what he

terms `provisioning' (Miller, 1998, p. 11) the regular buying of general groceries and household products. Moreover, Miller does acknowledge that `an ethnography provides a theory of shopping, but one which may be complemented by many other theories of shopping pertinent to other times and places' (1998, p. 155).

The nature of the shopping mall and its social impact on consumption and the experience of everyday life is examined by Miles (1998). He cites as an example, the Mall of America, which offers (he notes) dozens of bars and restaurants, 14 cinema screens and its own funfair, `a lifestyle experience where consumers can get married, hang out and feel safe doing it' (p. 59). To anyone who has visited any of the major UK shopping malls, this description will be familiar. However, Miles's take on what these malls represent in relation to consumers and their lives is an interesting one: `The problem here is that, far from being a mere monument to the freedom of consumer choice and to the market economy, the Mall of America could be seen to be actively constructing an image of what life ``should'' be all about, namely consumerism, regardless of the less savoury connotations of a consumerist lifestyle. The mall endows consumerism with almost religious-like qualities. It actively camoulages the inequalities that underlie it . . . consumerism has brought with it a whole new menu of social conduct: social conduct, most crucially, that is controlled by developers and retailers rather than the consumers themselves. The shopping mall appears to provide all the immediate gratifications of consumerism but at the same time shields that consumer from the social prescription that entails' (p. 59).

Bloch et al. (1994) draw on the ecological concept of `habitat' to study the behaviour of consumers (organisms) within the environmental context in which they are found, rather as a zoologist might study a particular species by visiting its native habitat. As they note: `consumers, like wildlife, are likely to gravitate to a setting offering a favourable climate, a high potential for social interaction and perceived freedom from safety concerns and a large selection of consumable goods and experiences' (pp. 23±4).

Their study examined behaviour within shopping malls with a focus on the benefits of being in the mall habitat and experiencing the mall and they discovered four categories of consumers, drawn from clusters relating to activity patterns within the mall: `enthusiasts' (who reported that the mall was a source of escape or boredom relief), `traditionalists' (whose emphasis is on obtaining goods available in the mall), `grazers' (who used the habitat to `kill' time browsing and eating) and `minimalists' (who may visit the mall to solve a highly specific purpose or to accompany a family member). Bloch et al. (1994) also note some negative infuences associated with shopping malls: the reinforcement of materialistic values as consumers are confronted, in one location, with a concentrated presentation of those products associated with the `good life'; and the possibility that a person prone to compulsive shopping may react in malls as the compulsive gambler would in a casino.

Shopping and feminism
Questions concerning politicisation of the nature of (and gendered roles within) consumption have attracted the attention of feminists within the social sciences.

`The significant part that consumption plays in so many women's lives' justifies its study by feminists, according to Andrews and Talbot, 2000 (p. 1), and the work of Nava (1995, 1996) has been in¯uential in this field. A further feminist writer, Winship (2000), identifies three theoretical approaches towards shopping which can be encapsulated, she suggests, by sketching out three motifs for shopping, each drawn from a particular theoretical approach; shopping as `empowerment', shopping as `¯aÃnerie' and shopping as `(self-)discipline': `The key terms of the first are ``resistance'' and ``sign wars'', of the second ``distraction'' and ``phantasmagoria'' and of the third ``routine'', ``repetition'' and ``reassurance''. If the ``guerrilla'' is the persona featuring in the first and the ``¯aÃneur/¯aÃneuse'' characterizes the second, the ``wo/man-with-toddler-inbuggy'' is the emblematic figure of the third' (p. 24).

`Shopping as empowerment', according to Winship (2000), grew out of the new-found intellectual interest in consumption which, she notes, came to the fore in the mid-1980s where consumption and shopping were envisaged as an active and creative engagement (as opposed to the previous notion of passive consumerism). `Shopping as ¯aÃnerie' emphasises shopping as a private pursuit, `involving the experience of wandering amidst an urban crowd and responding to disparate stimuli. It highlights shop window and mall environment as a spectacle to be gazed at and consumed' (p. 26), while `shopping as (self-) discipline' suggests different priorities of time, space and sight/site in Winship's discussion: `Rather than shopping as ``buying out'', as in the case of the guerrilla or ¯aÃneur, it poses shopping as ``buying into'' normative culture' (Winship, 2000, p. 27).

A further feminist writer (Langman, 1992) re¯ects on the phantasmagoria which Winship associates with shopping as `¯aÃnerie' and she sees the shop window and shopping mall environment as places where the ordinariness of everyday life has been transformed into a series of mass-mediated fragmented `spectacles' and carnivals that celebrate what she terms the `universalisation of consumption': `Malldom is seen as a modern ``panopticon'' in which the search for subjectivity locks people into ``neon cages'' of consumption, sentenced to lifetimes of shopping for subjectivity . . . the mall generations have now eaten almost 100 billion identical burgers and express their pseudo-individuality in the mass-produced fads and fashions of ``The Gap'' or ``Limited'' brand clothing. They experience not degradation but celebration. They ¯flock to the malls or other carnival sites to seek the surveillance, scrutiny and recognition by the Others who share their tastes. When they grow up . . . they will have been well socialized, malled, to deny any genuine individuality or any kind of critical consciousness' (Langman, 1992, p. 71).

Individual shopping motivations and shopping behaviour
Boundy's (2000) discussion of compulsive shoppers suggests that today's culture is spending addicted; people's identity has shifted from citizens to consumers; the mall has become a temple to be visited almost daily and shopping has developed into a comforting ritual: `If we aren't fulfilled, rather than question the premise that consumerism isn't the ticket to happiness, we assume that we simply don't have enough money or possessions yet to purchase that all important ticket' (p. 15). Shopping addiction (eg, Elliott, 1994; Eccles, 2000) and compulsive buying are topics which have attracted substantial research over a number of years (eg, Faber et al., 1987; O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Hirschman, 1992) and which must

be considered as important in attempts to theorise shopping behaviour. Nataraajan and Goff (1992) note that shopping may be viewed in the literature as: `hedonic recreation . . . as in-store planning . . . as errands or household obligations . . . as a type of consumer ritual that instils cultural meaning and personal relevance into goods . . . as an activity that enables information gathering . . . (it) can facilitate an individual to escape from the realities of his/her environment, and also allow a temporary alteration of the individual's self-concept toward a desired state. . . shopping is a means of satisfying many non-purchase motives as well as an instrumental means of purchase . . . in the broadest perspective, shopping is a type of consumption; the individual who shops is consuming the potential for shopping exhibited by the shopping arcade/area/arena' (Nataraajan and Goff, 1992, pp. 36±37).

Impulse purchasing has been the subject of study for many years (eg Bayley and Nancarrow, 1998) and is a familiar form of in-store behaviour, characterised by the trend towards unplanned consumer decision-making in the store environment (Cobb and Hoyer, 1986). A further aspect of consumer behaviour which has specifically focused on shopping is compensatory consumption (Woodruffe, 1997), when shopping activity (including browsing, window shopping and actual purchase) becomes a `prop' which is used strategically by individuals to make up for a perceived lack or deficiency in their lives.

It is recognised that mood can have a significant infuence on shopping behaviour (Swinyard, 1993). Consumers in bad moods may even choose to shop to cheer themselves up (Gardner, 1985) and respondents describe the kinds of feelings that accompany the buying as making them feel `good', `happy', `satisfied', `high' (Rook, 1987). However, the impulse to buy has been found to arouse both pleasure and guilt and the impulse takes on the nature of compulsion when it becomes a powerful urge which is `irresistible' (Rook, 1987) and which may be experienced by the consumer in conjunction with feelings of being out of control.

Self gift-giving (eg, Mick et al., 1992; Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Luomala, 1998) is another consumer behaviour topic which is clearly relevant to shopping. Mick et al. (1992) establish a variety of motivations and symbolic meanings in self-gift shopping that pervades the self gift retail experience; the outcomes of the experience ranged in intensity although were mostly positive (eg, `feeling better, beautiful, happier, pleased, special, proud etc', p. 135). Conspicuous consumption (Mason, 1984; LaBarbera, 1988) can also be seen to have significance in a study of shopping and shopping behaviour. LaBarbera (1988) observes that conspicuous consumption can take the form of buying products that may be viewed by others as obvious status symbols, from the perceived esteem of others as a result of their ability to shop at prestigious stores, and this may even explain `why some consumers willingly pay higher prices for products that are wrapped in boxes or shopping bags bearing the names of upscale stores' (p. 186).

LaBarbera notes that retailers, particularly on Rodeo Drive and Fifth Avenue, are remarkably well equipped to cater to the every whim and desire of the `nouveaux riches' who engage in conspicuous consumption, and frequently offer outstanding service, from valet parking to package pickup services, all designed to facilitate effortless shopping. Such consumers express and pursue their needs for

selfesteem and self-actualisation through the acquisition and use of material possessions in the creation of their lifestyle, according to LaBarbera (1988). Rook (1987) suggests that it might be useful to consider consumer impulsivity as a lifestyle trait which may be linked to materialism, sensation seeking and recreational aspects of shopping.

Recreational shoppers have been identified as long ago as 1972 (Tauber) and have been studied by Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) who found that recreational shoppers are less likely tohave an idea of what they are going to buy when they go shopping (which suggests greater levels of impulse purchasing) and spend more time shopping per trip on average. Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) also note that the recreational shopper tends to be less traditional, more innovative and more actively involved in information seeking and attaches more importance to store decor in choosing a place to shop and less importance to travel distance, being most likely to shop in department stores within shopping malls. Tauber (1972) hypothesised a number of personal motives for going shopping, including role playing (being a good housewife), diversion (recreation/ entertainment), self-grati®cation (to alleviate depression, boredom or loneliness, to buy `something nice' for oneself when depressed), learning about new trends (information seeking, getting ideas), and physical activity (a walk round the shops). He also hypothesised about what he termed `social motives' for shopping: social experience outside the home (as discussed earlier in this chapter), communication with others, peer group attraction (`hanging out'), status and authority (in the sense of being waited on by store personnel) and the pleasure of bargaining. Buttle and Coates (1996) undertook research in 1981 to test whether the motives hypothesised by Tauber `were significant in a different continent a decade later' (p. 206) and they derived an alternative categorisation based on their findings:to kill time; exercise/relaxation/stimulation; a reflection of temperament (mood); information acquisition; subordinate activity; shopping as social event; comparison shopping; and shopping as a special occasion (Buttle and Coates, 1996, pp. 207-211). In later work, Buttle (1996) examined shopping motives from a constructionist perspective and recorded some significant conclusions, among them the notion that shopping motives are contextualised within life script, lifestyle, relationships, gender and location, for example.

Conclusion

As has been shown, the literature on consumer behaviour covers a wide range of subjects which need to be considered in relation to a conceptualisation of `shopping', for example: hedonic shopping (Babin et al., 1994), impulse purchasing (Rook and Hoch, 1985; Rook, 1987; Gardner and Rook, 1988), compulsive consumption (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Hirschman, 1992), addictive consumption (Elliott, 1994; Eccles, 2000), compensatory consumption (Woodruffe, 1997), recreational shopping (Tauber, 1972), and self-gift giving (Mick and DeMoss, 1990; Mick et al., 1992; Luomala, 1998). When these individual factors are considered in connection with the sociocultural issues identified earlier and placed within the context of the shopping environment, a preliminary conceptual framework can be developed.

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