INVESTIGATING THE MODERATING ROLE OF TRANSPORT MODE FACTORS ON THE ENTERTAINING SHOPPING EXPERIENCE OF THE MATURE CONSUMER

ABSTRACT

Previous research provides evidence that the ‘entertaining shopping experience’ is influenced by dependent variables of retailer factors and customer factors. Yet few studies have investigated the moderating effect of transportation mode factors upon retailer factors and customer factors. This paper addresses these issues in context of the looming mobility concerns that accompany Australia’s fastest-growing consumer segment, the mature consumer. Managerial implications are impressive. Retailers need to take into account the remarkable changes in the lifestyle of mature consumers facilitated by growing dependence on automobiles. A more sophisticated understanding of gerontographic segments allows retailers to position and promote themselves better to enhance the entertaining shopping experience.
INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the growth in multi-channel retail landscape facilitated by the forces of modernisation and technology has been significant. “There is hardly an industry that is not undergoing an upheaval in how it deals with its customers” (Hof, 1999, 86). Retailers are rapidly examining factors that influence shoppers’ preferences for patronage modes as technological interfaces expand channel options (Lovelock, 1995; Parasuraman 2000). Researchers acknowledge that implicit convenience of ‘self-service technologies’ such as automatic teller machines and services over the internet, (Meuter et al., 2000) threaten traditional store-centric value equations of the ‘brick-and-mortar’ retailer (Baker et al., 2002). Many retailers have responded to these challenges by building competitive strategies that draw upon in-store stimuli and rewards to attract and retain customers (Burns and Homer, 1995). Only recently though, have researchers constructed a theory of the enjoyment gain promoted through the entertaining shopping experience, developed a valid model of the construct and tested its effect on shoppers’ patronage (Ibrahim and Ng, 2002a).

The general model of the entertaining shopping experience (ESE) developed by Jones (1999) explores the dynamics of retailer and customer factors characteristic of entertaining shopping experiences. Retailer factors include shopping center features, atmosphere and value-added features. Customer factors include social, task, time, involvement and financial resources. These can be hedonic and utilitarian oriented. Transport mode factors represent the most recent addition to the general model of the ESE. Transport mode factors, such as travel time, travel cost, comfort and reliability often feature in models of shopper choice behaviour (Gautschi, 1981). Ibrahim and Ng (2002a) provide empirical support for the direct role of transport in inducing shoppers’ entertaining experiences.

Despite increasing interest in the ESE, no known study has addressed the moderating effect of transport mode factors on retailer and customer factors. The extant literature also lacks research on the relationship between transport mode factors and the ESE in the specific context of mobility concerns facing the mature consumer. Given the world’s elderly population is set to double between 1998 and 2025 (McDevitt, 1999), it is somewhat surprising to find an absence of research examining the impact of transport mode factors on mature consumers’ ESE and subsequent store patronage intention. To enable the ‘brick-and-mortar’ retailer to improve the ESE and differentiate itself from self-service technologies, it is important to understand how transport mode factors facing this expanding consumer segment affect the relationship between retailer and customer factors and the ESE.

This study aims to address the preceding gap in the literature by conceptually extending the exploratory research carried out by Jones (1999) and Ibrahim and Ng (2002b). Specifically, it proposes a conceptual framework of the ESE that incorporates the moderating effect of four distinct transport mode factors: effort, protection, comfort and enjoyment (Ibrahim and Ng, 2002a). The study then proposes the strength of the moderating effect will vary across gerontographic segments of the mature consumer market.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, a literature review is provided that discusses the extant research pertaining to retail patronage and motives that influence preference for retail mode. Next, the paper considers consumer motivations for specific shopping trips and the potential to be predisposed towards shopping as a form of entertainment. Finally, it addresses the mature consumers’ shopping behaviour, gerontographic segmentation and the impact of mobility issues on selection of retail patronage mode.

Retail Patronage
Marketing scholars have developed various definitions of retail patronage. As behaviour, it may be operationalised to accommodate two different concepts: one is the proportional use of the store in the shopper’s store portfolio, and the second is the duration of patronage (East, 1997). Retail patronage is identified as a major objective of retail channel strategy as it can develop value for a customer, word-of-mouth communication and loyalty ripple effect (Gremler and Brown, 1999). Building retail patronage necessitates an understanding of the consumer. This understanding also enables a retailer to work towards the fulfillment of a shopper’s requirements (Bellenger and Korgaonkar 1980).

Modes of retail patronage expand as self-service technologies transform the retail environment. Consumers' selection of retail patronage mode has been investigated in numerous contexts (e.g., Prasad, 1975; Schmidt et al., 1994; Comer et al., 1998). Psychographic descriptions are useful in examining patronage preferences for retail channel attributes and in examining behaviour of the generalised store-loyal consumer (Darden, Erdem and Darden, 1983). Sheth (1983) notes that individuals select shopping mode preference based on rules or heuristics formed by matching their functional and non-functional shopping motivations against retailer attributes. Functional motives relate to time, place, and possession needs while non-functional motives relate to social and emotional needs (Sheth, 1983). Motivational typology delineates the dynamics of functional and non-functional shopping motivations.

Motivational Typology
Retailing literature presents a variety of shopping motives (e.g., Tauber, 1972). These are summarised by Westbrook and Black (1985) into three categories: product-oriented, experiential and a combination of product and experiential. Product-oriented consumers tend to be motivated by utilitarian purchase needs or the desire to acquire product information. In contrast, experiential motivation can be hedonic or recreation orientated and relates to the pleasure inherent in visiting a store itself (Dawson et al., 1990). Researchers acknowledge that positive mood can result from people who shop for hedonic or recreational shopping outcomes (Martineua, 1958; Baker et al., 2002).

Experiential value derives from the “appreciation of an experience for its own sake, apart from any other consequence that may result” (Holbrook, 1994, 40). Bloch et al. (1994) for example found that some consumers’ view shopping locations as places for entertainment, socialising with friends and browsing with no intention to buy. In the retail context, consumers that shop with experiential motives warrant attention because of their potential for large amounts of impulse purchasing (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980). Further, Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) conclude that habit patterns and store perceptions formed during recreational shopping can have an impact on later store-choice decisions.

An important conclusion to draw from these findings is that the levels of pleasure and arousal experienced by experiential motivated consumers during a shopping trip can affect their
emotional state and thus overall perceptions of the retail environment and shopping experience. This is particularly important to ‘brick-and-mortar’ retailers in their efforts to redefine themselves as a source of memories, rather than goods (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

The Mature Consumer

The shopping experience of mature consumers is set to increase in importance, as the elderly population becomes the fastest growing demographic segment and largest retail growth market. Over the next three decades, the maturation of the ‘baby boom’ generation combined with increased longevity and declining birth rates, will markedly transform the developed world’s demographics (United Nations, 2000). Responding to this demographic shift requires an understanding of the overall trends taking place and growing diversity within the older population.

There is little consensus among researchers as to the chronological age at which a consumer becomes part of the ‘mature’ market (Tongren, 1988). In this paper, consistent with international standards the mature market is defined as individuals aged 65 and above (ABS, 2000). In Australia, spending by mature consumers over the next ten years will, even after allowance for inflation, grow by a marked 61%, more than double the national average (Vic Govt. Health Info, 2000). From a retail standpoint, these consumers tend to be more store-loyal than younger age groups (Lumpkin and Greenberg, 1982; Lipke, 2000). They are also more likely to have a license, to take more trips and to do so more often as the driver of a car than older people just a decade ago (Rosenbloom, 2001). Research suggests that future consumers will be even less likely to give up driving, having made so many lifestyle choices based on the flexibility and access offered by the private car (e.g., Ariel and Yuko, 1992; Rosenbloom, 2001). For the mature consumer without use of a car, availability of alternate transport means is one of the most important ways to maintain mobility and access facilities (OECD, 2001).

The use of self-service technologies by mature consumers is on the increase (Eastman and Iyer, 2004). By transforming spatial aspects of shopping (McMellon and Schiffman, 2000), electronic media facilitates new retail patronage modes that can cater for consumers who lack mobility or the transport means to access facilities. Brown et al. (2003) however demonstrate that self-service technologies can not replace participation in activities with other people and the variety of social contacts and personal interaction encompassed within the traditional retail shopping experience.

Methods recommended for segmenting the mature market vary (e.g. Towle and Martin, 1973; Lumpkin, 1985; Sorce et al., 1989). While demographic and lifestyle characteristics such as age and income are easy to identify, they offer weak explanations of actual consumer behaviour (Moschis, 1996). ‘Gerontographics’ is a more complex segmentation method based on the premise that the factors that make older consumers more or less receptive to marketing offerings are directly related to their needs and lifestyles, which in turn are influenced by changing life conditions (Moschis and Mathur, 1993). Using this approach mature consumers are grouped into four descriptive segments; healthy hermits, ailing outgoers, frail reclusives and healthy indulgers.

- Healthy hermits: Individuals in relatively good health, yet somewhat withdrawn socially.
- Ailing outgoers: Individuals in relatively poor health, yet determined to remain socially active.
- Frail reclusives: Inactive individuals usually burdened with health problems.
- Healthy indulgers: Relatively wealthy individuals focused on making the most of their life.
Segmentation analysis reveals the large extent of heterogeneity among mature consumers (Towle and Martin, 1973). These multiple segments clearly indicate the diversity of life circumstance and ageing factors inherent within the mature market and likely variance in selection of retail patronage mode and shopping experience.

**An Entertaining Shopping Experience**

Entertaining shopping experiences can be defined as fun and pleasurable shopping experiences. They are similar to leisure or recreational experiences in that both are characterized by intrinsic satisfaction, perceived freedom and involvement (Gunter and Gunter, 1980; Unger and Kernan, 1983; Bloch et al., 1986). These shopping experiences provide hedonic value to shoppers (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The purchase of a product is not a prerequisite when engaging in an ESE (Babin, Darden and Griffin, 1994). Bellenger et al. (1976) notes that shopping enjoyment derives from the degree to which individuals enjoy the shopping process.

Four central factors characterise the ESE. These include the retail environment, bargains, browsing and social interactions (Kolter, 1973; Schindler, 1989; Bloch et al., 1989; Bloch et al., 1994). Jones (1999) presents a framework for investigating factors that create the ESE. Retailer factors and customer factors form two sets of antecedents. Retail factors are those attributes, which retailers may use in influencing shoppers’ experiences. Jones (1999) reduces retail factors to four broad categories; retail prices, selection, store environment and salespeople. Customer factors are characteristics associated with the customers. Jones (1999) identifies five broad categories; social, task, time, product involvement and financial resources.

Ibrahim and Ng (2002a) introduce transport mode factors to Jones’ (1999) model of the ESE. Fifteen transport mode attributes were found to influence the ESE; travelling time, waiting time, walking distance, protection from weather, temperature comfort, cost, transfer, safety of travel, enjoyment of travel, traffic congestion, smoothness of travel, cleanliness of transport mode/travel surroundings, crowd in transport mode, stress and reliability of transport. Ibrahim and Ng (2002b) used factor analysis, to reduce these into four factors namely effort, protection, comfort and enjoyment. While transport mode factors are analyzed as an antecedent to the ESE, there is no investigation of the moderating role it may have upon customer factors or perceptions of retailer factors. Moderators allow understanding of variables that impact strength or form of relationship between an independent and dependent variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Understanding such potential moderating effects is particularly important for understanding the relationship between transport mode factors and the ESE in the context of mobility concerns of mature consumers.

**CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

In this paper, Ibrahim and Ng’s (2002b) research regarding transport mode factors provides a foundation for hypotheses on the moderator effects of transport mode factors. The conceptual model guiding this research is depicted in Figure 1. Based on the literature, the proposed model incorporates customer factors and retailer factors as antecedents to the ESE. These factors are considered predictor variables on the criterion variable of the ESE. Effort, protection, comfort and enjoyment of transport mode are introduced as moderating variables on the relationship between the predictor variable and the criterion variable. The strength of the moderating effect is proposed to vary across gerontographic segments. Due to space constraints, the hypothesised relationships depicted in Figure 1 are briefly stated.
**FIGURE 1**

Model of an Entertaining Shopping Experience: Moderating Effects of Transport Mode Factors

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**Transport Mode Effort**

The transport mode factor that Ibrahim and Ng (2002a) label ‘Effort’ comprises variables relating to the physical and mental efforts which shoppers need to make during the shopping trip. These include travelling time to shopping centre, directness of travel to shopping centre, absence of waiting time, shortness of walking distance, low-cost travelling, absence of congestion, absence of crowd and smoothness of travel. Ibrahim and Ng (2002b) show that the effort factor detracts from the ESE and accounts for 11.4% of the variance within the original set of variables. This paper posits that the lower level of effort exerted during travel to a retail venue, the more a customer can focus on socialising with others and planning to accomplish their task within desired timeframe. As a result, lower levels of transport effort can improve customer factors that relate to social, task, time and financial resources. This leads to the first hypotheses:

**H1a:** The lesser the degree of transport mode effort, the greater the positive impact of customer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

Further, it is proposed that lower amounts of effort exerted when travelling to a retail venue will more positively predispose a customer towards retailer factors. Consequently:

**H1b:** The lesser the degree of transport mode effort, the greater the positive impact of retailer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

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**Transport Mode Protection**

The ‘Protection’ factor consists of variables that are related to the degree of protection of the shoppers from undesirable elements during the shopping trip. This specifically considers safety of travel, reliability of travel, reliability of transport, transport mode/travel protection from the weather and absence of stress (Ibrahim and Ng, 2002a). Ibrahim and Ng (2002b) show that the
protection factor positively relates to the ESE and accounts for 12.56% of the variance within the original set of variables. This paper posits that the presence of greater protection during travel to a retail venue helps satisfy a customer’s hedonic motives, which in turn can contribute towards a positive emotional state. Thus, it is proposed that the degree of protection will influence customer factors and the ESE in the following manner:

**H2a:** The greater the degree of transport mode protection, the greater the positive impact of customer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

In addition, it is proposed that greater protection during travel to a retail venue will more positively predispose a customer towards retailer factors. It is therefore predicted:

**H2b:** The greater the degree of transport mode protection, the greater the positive impact of retailer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

**Transport Mode Comfort**
The transport mode factor that Ibrahim and Ng (2002a) label ‘Comfort’ incorporates variables that affect the level of comfort of the shopper in their shopping trip. This consists of two variables namely cleanliness of transport mode/travel surrounding and temperature comfort of transport mode. Ibrahim and Ng (2002b) show that the comfort factor positively relates to the ESE and accounts for 12.19% of the variance within the original set of variables. This paper posits that greater comfort during travel to a retail venue helps satisfy a customer’s hedonic motives, which in turn can contribute towards a positive emotional state and influence other customer factors. Therefore the following hypotheses is proposed:

**H3a:** The greater the degree of transport mode comfort, the greater the positive impact of customer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

Further, it is proposed that greater comfort in travelling to a retail venue will more positively predispose a customer towards retailer factors. Consequently:

**H3b:** The greater the degree of transport mode comfort, the greater the positive impact of retailer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

**Transport Mode Enjoyment**
Ibrahim and Ng’s (2002a) ‘Enjoyment’ factor consists of variables that influence shopper’s enjoyment level in the shopping trip. These include enjoyment of travel, smoothness of travel, absence of crowd in transport mode and absence of stress. Ibrahim and Ng (2002b) show that the enjoyment factor positively relates to the ESE and accounts for 11.4% of the variance within the original set of variables. This paper posits that enjoyment in travelling to a retail venue helps satisfy a customer’s hedonic motives, which in turn can contribute towards a positive emotional state. It is therefore predicted to influence customer factors and the ESE in the following manner:

**H4a:** The greater the degree of transport mode enjoyment, the greater the positive impact of customer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.

In addition, it is proposed that greater enjoyment in travelling to a retail venue will more positively predispose a customer towards retailer factors. It is therefore predicted:

**H4b:** The greater the degree of transport mode enjoyment, the greater the positive impact of retailer factors on the entertaining shopping experience.
PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

While this particular study conceptually examines the moderating role of transport mode factors, future studies could empirically evaluate the plausibility of these relationships. Both qualitative and quantitative avenues of research would enable improvement in understanding of the key factors that influence the ESE for the mature consumer.

A two-phase sequential design that starts with qualitative data collection and analysis followed by a quantitative phase is proposed. First, focus groups and interviews can generate a rich body of discussion about factors that influence the shopping experience of each gerontographic segment. These procedures must meet distinctive ethical and methodological requirements applicable to qualitative research that involves vulnerable social groups (Russell, 1999). As such, a longitudinal approach to data collection appears more appropriate. In the second phase, moderated regression analysis can be used to test for pure moderators (Schoonhoven, 1981; Sharma, Durand and Gur-Arie, 1981). Broadly, this involves creating multiplicative interaction terms by multiplying values for customer factors and retailer factors, by the values for hypothesised transport factor moderators; effort, protection, comfort and enjoyment. The ESE would simultaneously need to be regressed on customer factors and retailer factors in addition to control variables that can affect the ESE. Furthermore, partial correlation analysis within subgroups could test for a homologizer effect. A ‘homologizer’ is a type of moderator that influences the strength of the relationship between the predictor and the criterion variables but will not interact with the predictor (Sharma, Durand and Gur-Arie, 1981). In this case, customer factors for example might explain more of the ESE variation for healthy hermits than ailing outgoers with reference to transport effort. The presence of a holomogizer is indicated by a significant difference between partial correlation coefficients for the predictor and criterion variables in the subgroups after entering control variables (e.g. Hambrick and Lei, 1985).

PROPOSED IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

From a theoretical perspective, this research endeavours to broaden the literature by demonstrating that transport mode factors have a moderating effect on predictor variables of the ESE and that this moderating effect varies across gerontographic segments. This work can be extended in several directions.

Future studies may review the conceptual framework in the context of evening transit. Alternatively, the moderating effect of other variables on the ESE of mature consumers can be explored. Additional research should also investigate whether and how the tendency towards an ESE varies across patronage mode and gerontographic segment. For example, can the inherent convenience of self-service technology enhance the ESE beyond that staged in a traditional retail setting despite reductions in conventional store dynamics and social interaction? Further, will the extent to which this is possible differ for healthy hermits, ailing outgoers, healthy indulgers and frail reclusives?

From a managerial perspective, this study holds three central implications. First, mobility concerns facing the expanding mature consumer market underscores the need for retailers to give careful consideration to transport mode factors to and from the store. These factors have great potential to influence predictor variables of the ESE and therefore their shopping experience and store patronage behavior. Various avenues to improve transport comfort, protection and enjoyment while reducing effort can be pursued. For example, retailers may provide; access ramps, hand rails, seating facilities, automatic doors, travel route information
and shelter around the venue as well as improved sidewalk, path and surface conditions (Stewart, 2004). More elaborate initiatives could include angled parking, colour-contrast signage in the parking lot and preferred parking for the 50-plus consumer (Rouland, 1994).

Second, retailers should consider the viability of investing in strategies to circumvent transportation deficiencies. Corporate programs developed to expand coverage and increase frequency of patronage may include plans for shuttle services or contracting with existing mobility providers to extend transit routes (Office of Seniors Interests, 2000). These initiatives present a mutual advantage. The mature consumer benefits from the injection of in-kind resources, while the retailer gains wider marketing opportunity and the potential to build community profile. An extension of this concept involves updated home delivery services. This is an important concern given difficulties that face mature consumers when attempting to carry goods while walking and riding transit (Victoria Transport Policy Institute, 2003).

Finally, retailers may avoid the impact of transport mode factors on shopping experience by eliminating them. Trends suggest employment of representatives to promote goods and services to the mature consumer are set to increase (Greene, 2004). Moreover, linkages between shopping experience and consumer residence are taking on new dimensions that management must consider. For example, Stockland and Coles Myer await approval for a landmark development to build an apartment complex in a Melbourne suburban shopping centre (Leyden, 2004).

Managers should bear in mind some caveats when interpreting the implications of this study. The primary emphasis being corporate social responsibility and marketplace encroachment on what is assumed to be a vulnerable market.

Overall, this research will hopefully stimulate future research that will provide a better understanding of factors that affect the entertaining shopping experience of mature consumers.
REFERENCES


