



Understanding Smart Shopper Feeling From Consumers' Perspective

Jongeeun Rhee, University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA

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Smart shoppers in marketing literature are often connoted with deal-prone consumers (Schindler, 1998). They tend to invest considerable time and effort to seek for promotion-related information and participate in price promotions for economic value (Mano and Elliot, 1997). However, it is unclear how consumers perceive “smart shoppers” as their lived experiences in everyday life. Almost no research has examined what smart shopper means from the consumers’ perspective. The purpose of this study is to understand what a smart shopper feeling is like.

The phenomenological interview method was used. “Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings” (Van Manen, 1997, p.11). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is appropriate since phenomenology examines common lived experiences and consumption is one obvious human existential experience in everyday life. In addition, phenomenological method allows to understand what smart shopper feeling is like because individuals have difficulty in articulating exactly what the meaning of their consumption practices and they tend to rationalize their consumption decisions (Hong & Chang, 2015).

Texts came from eight phenomenological interviews were analyzed following Van Manen’s thematic analysis approach (1997). The phenomenological approach encourages interviewees to tell their experiences as a form of story. Anecdotes allow the uncovering of hidden meanings and understanding of their lived experiences. The narratives were transcribed, analyzed, and grouped together by essential themes as they emerged from the researcher’s reflections on them.

Three themes of feeling smart shoppers were emerged: achieving the lowest price, making value-conscious consumption decision, and utilizing a product category-specific knowledge. Respondents who purchased products at the lowest price possible felt smart when they actively participated in elaborate pre-purchase behaviors (e.g., searching discount information) and obtain products at a deeply discounted price (e.g., redeeming coupons, waiting for promotion). These respondents who made vigorous efforts toward a discounted price tend to be more enthusiastic, proud of self, and feel accomplished. One respondent described that, “after shopping, I called my friend [to tell her] how much I saved...I used coupons for everything that I bought on that day.” She even gave her remaining unused coupons to a woman at the store. These respondents were market maven, who know promotion information and right places to shop and communicate with

others (Feick & Price, 1987). They were to be determined to get a product at the lowest price possible in almost all product categories, “taking an advantage of [a system]”.

Respondents who carefully watched their consumption choices felt smart when they found a high quality product at a discounted price. They were involved in searching for a better price and waiting for sales when they purchase a relatively high priced product. One respondent shared that “my mom is a real smart shopper...she always use coupons...but I thought...do you need all of these...in the first place?” These respondents also expressed their excitement when they found a discounted price, which was not initiated by them, by chance.

Category specific smart shoppers shared that they felt smart when they purchased any products from a certain product category that they had an expertise in, regardless of price discount. They carefully researched product information and compare products based on their functions and qualities. A respondent who worked in IT industries told that he felt smart when buying computers and electronics by saying this, “People buy an Apple brand but I buy a quality.”

Similar to common perception in marketplace, smart shopper feelings are associated with saving economic values. However, various non-economic values are also associated with smart shopper feelings and this can be seen with the respondents who used their time, skills, and knowledge and accomplished both utilitarian and hedonic goals (Holbrook et al. 1984). Smart shopper feelings provide a variety of psychological benefits (e.g., excitement, self-confidence, satisfaction). The qualitative results of this study suggest that there are different salience of smart shopper feelings depending on the level of consumers’ involvement in the purchasing process. Future research could elaborate and generalize the results.

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