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IN-PERSON VS. ONLINE: ANALYSIS OF SHOPPING MOTIVATIONS DURING COVID-19

ABSTRACT

The novel coronavirus of 2020 drastically affected shopping behavior. Mandated store closures forced retailers to adopt an online presence or forgo sales. The study purpose was to understand online vs. in-store (in-person) shopping motivations during COVID-19 for individuals buying live plants. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory and Wagner and Rudolph [49] motivation hierarchy, we investigated purpose-specific, activity specific, demand specific motivations, and purchase satisfaction. Results showed that online shoppers experienced greater boredom proneness, educational, social, physiological motivations, greater food insecurity and shopping anxiety. Our findings support a basis for distinct marketing communication messages to target shopping mode differences.

KEYWORDS

In-store shopping, online shopping, COVID-19, motivation, satisfaction

COVID IMPACT ON SHOPPING MODE

The novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 emerged in 2019 leading to a global pandemic [9]. To combat the spread of this infectious virus, restrictions on consumer movements were quickly implemented [7]. Forced retail closures brought about a sea change in consumer shopping behavior. Forced closure of these non-essential businesses led to monumental changes on consumer behavior, including a massive shift to online shopping and delivery. In 2020, online sales accounted for 21% of total sales [5]. This statistic suggests that not all consumers prefer shopping online. Further evidence of this is the 43% increase in store traffic in May 2021 over 2020 [5]. The product focus of this study is live plants. In 2017, 30% of American households purchased flowering plants, 28% purchased vegetable transplants, and 30% purchased houseplants but only 5% of those sales were made online [4].

The purpose of this paper is to compare consumer motivations for purchasing a live plant in an in-person (brick and mortar) versus online shopping mode and satisfaction with each shopping mode.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We developed an online survey, using the Qualtrics platform, that measured motivations for plant purchases [1]; boredom proneness [8]; food insecurity [2]; and shopping anxiety [3] and shopping mode (on-line vs. in-store). The 1211 participants included Baby Boomers, Millennials and Gen Z. Data were collected summer 2020. Motivation scales (leisure motivations, boredom proneness, food insecurity, and shopping anxiety) were analyzed using principal component analysis with varimax rotation to determine the number of components. Comparisons of mean component scores for in-store vs. online shopping were

conducted with one-way ANOVAs ($p=0.05$). Shopping motivations and satisfaction were DVs and shopping context (in-person vs. online) was the IV.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Boredom proneness was higher for online vs. in-person shoppers ($M=-.0738$ in-person vs. $M=1.02$ online, $p<.001$). In-store vs. online shoppers exhibited higher food insecurity ($M=.112$ in-person vs. $M=-.835$ online, $p<.001$). Educational motivation was higher for online vs. in-store shoppers ($M=-.053$ in-person vs. $M=.25$ online, $p=.032$). Online vs. in-person shoppers showed higher shopping anxiety ($M=-.072$ in-person vs. $M=.457$ online, $p<.0001$). There were two unexpected findings: social motivation was higher for online shoppers vs. in-person shoppers ($M=-.0107$ in-person vs. $M=.389$ online, $p<.0001$) and online vs. in-person shoppers had a higher physiological motivation ($M=-.0887$ in-person vs. $M=.237$ online, $p=.022$). Also, online shoppers (vs. in-person) showed higher shopping anxiety ($M=-.072$ in-person vs. $M=.457$ online, $p<.0001$).

Our study findings on store satisfaction showed that customers were equally satisfied with on-line vs. in-store shopping. The fact that satisfaction was similar for both in-store and online shopping contexts is good news for retailers. These results should provide encouragement and impetus for retailers who currently do not have an online presence to pursue and develop this mechanism for shopping with little concern about the impact on customer satisfaction. While we expected in-store shoppers to be more boredom prone and have higher educational, social, and physiological motivations than online shoppers the opposite was true. As expected, online shoppers had higher shopping anxiety and in-store shoppers had higher food insecurity. These findings have implications for how retailers communicate with their customers and the messages they send. To encourage in-store shopping retailers can, and should, promote the relative safety of in-store shopping, emphasizing safety procedures and how they care for their employees' safety.

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