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An Examination of the Uses and Gratifications of Utilitarian and Experiential Online Shoppers

Michelle Spang
mxs5233@rit.edu

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Rochester Institute of Technology

School of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

An Examination of the Uses and Gratifications of Utilitarian and Experiential Online Shoppers

by

Michelle Spang

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in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Michelle Spang presented on December 9, 2016.

Andrea Hickerson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and Director
School of Communication

Grant Cos, Ph.D.
Associate Professor and
Director of Graduate Programs
Communication & Media Technologies

Tracy R. Worrell, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
School of Communication
Thesis Advisor

Neil Hair, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Innovative Learning Institute
and Associate Professor of Marketing
Saunders College of Business
Thesis Advisor

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Term Degree Awarded: Intersession 2017 (2163)

Abstract

As money being spent on e-commerce continues to rise, marketers and retailers are interested in what motivates people to shop online. In the past shoppers have been broken up into two categories, utilitarian or experiential (e.g., O'Brien, 2010; Overby & Lee, 2006; To, Liao, & Lin, 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). The purpose of this study is to evaluate both categories of shoppers by utilizing a uses and gratifications theory framework. Online survey method is utilized to determine if there are differences between the utilitarian and experiential online shoppers in terms of uses sought. As a result, of the five variables that were tested, information, social interaction, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism are all found to be gratifications that both utilitarian and experiential online shoppers desire, however the data for the entertainment variable was inconclusive. This information can be used to inform future e-commerce marketplaces and marketers of how to best target shoppers in an online setting.

Keywords: uses and gratifications theory, experiential shoppers, utilitarian shoppers, online shopping, e-commerce

AN EXAMINATION OF THE USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF UTILITARIAN AND EXPERIENTIAL ONLINE SHOPPERS

The percent of retail sales from e-commerce websites has been steadily rising since 2006. The vast majority of U.S. consumers have shopped online at one point in the past ten years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), e-commerce sales in the second quarter of 2016 accounted for 8.1% of total U.S. retail sales, compared to 3% in 2006. It is estimated that the second quarter 2016 U.S. retail e-commerce sales will be about \$97.3 billion dollars, an increase of 4.5% from the first quarter 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Internet shopping is a growing trend with massive potential for retailers. Past scholars have extensively studied shoppers falling into two distinct categories; utilitarian and experiential (e.g., O'Brien, 2010; Overby & Lee, 2006; To, Liao, & Lin, 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Utilitarian shoppers are consumers who shop with a goal in mind, and are often tactical with their online shopping habits (e.g., O'Brien, 2010; Overby & Lee, 2006; To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Experiential shoppers typically shop online for fun and excitement, with a higher likelihood of impulse purchases (e.g., Lim & Ting, 2012; Sharma, & Crossler, 2014; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). With a continued understanding of what motivates people to shop online, improvements can be made to strategy, technology, and marketing decisions to reach consumers in a way they would prefer to be reached.

Past studies of online consumerism have either focused on the different types of shoppers, utilitarian and experiential, (e.g., O'Brien, 2010; Overby & Lee, 2006; To et al., 2007; Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001), or shoppers' motivations through a uses and gratifications theory (UGT) framework (e.g., Lim & Ting, 2012; Sharma & Crossler, 2014; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001), however there is a lack of research on the actual

uses and gratifications of utilitarian and experiential shoppers. The UGT is a communication theory that is commonly used to examine how and why people use different media in their everyday lives (Liu, 2015). From the adoption of the radio to TV and movies, and more recently the Internet, the UGT has been used to analyze new media adoption due to its focus on an active audience (Lim & Ting, 2012). Through the UGT, five specific gratifications have been identified as points of interest to study, including information, entertainment, social interaction, identification, and escapism (Liu, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000).

With an increase in the number of online shopping websites and volume of money being spent online, marketers are interested in how and why consumers shop online in order to increase traffic to their websites. By understanding the uses and gratifications perceived by utilitarian shoppers and experiential shoppers in an online environment, marketers will be able to utilize or leverage marketing efforts to reach their target markets. A thorough understanding of what motivates different types of shoppers to purchase items online will inform online retailers of how to better meet the needs of consumers and essentially increase the amount of money spent on e-commerce marketplaces.

The purpose of this paper is to explore online shopping motivations from a uses and gratifications perspective and determine if there are differences in gratifications sought by utilitarian and experiential shoppers. It is hypothesized that individuals perceive online shopping to strongly fulfill certain gratifications, including access to product information, high levels of entertainment, control over social interactions, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism from traditional/conventional shopping methods. These five gratifications will then be analyzed to determine if there are differences between utilitarian and experiential shoppers and their perceived uses of online shopping. In order to do this, a thorough understanding of each

variable is needed in the context of this study. After reviewing past research on utilitarian and experiential shoppers and the UGT, development of the uses and gratification variables will be presented, forming the hypotheses and research question. Survey method is utilized to analyze consumer's self-reported motivations for shopping online through a series of statements. Reactions will then be analyzed and conclusions will be drawn to either support or reject the proposed hypotheses and draw conclusions on the research question.

Literature Review

It has been established by previous scholars that traditional consumers can be broken into two categories: utilitarian shoppers and experiential shoppers (O'Brien, 2010; Overby & Lee, 2006; To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Previous research of online shopping motivations has fundamentally sought to understand why people shop online and to further understand what motivates return business. Knowledge of this information can help marketers and e-retailers to determine how to increase consumer spending on their website. One way to understand these interactions has been to examine what needs are being met and/or not met in different shopping situations. Traditionally, consumers have been known to shop in different ways depending on their motivations. If they are shopping with a purpose or a goal in mind, their habits and expectations will be different from those shopping for fun and escapism. According to Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001), the same is true for online consumers. Different online environments have an impact or effect on the consumer, encouraging them to purchase products or services, similar to in-store experiences with the hope of return business. Both utilitarian and experiential shoppers have motivations that drive their purchase decisions. It is important to first understand the distinction between the two in order to accommodate both types of shoppers in the online environment.

Utilitarian Shoppers

Utilitarian shoppers are those who shop with a goal in mind. These shoppers view their online shopping sessions as “work” where the task is to purchase the desired product as quickly and efficiently as possible (O’Brien, 2010; To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001).

Utilitarian shopping motivations include procuring the product in order to complete their mission and continue on with their day (To et al., 2007). This process of shopping has been described as rational, goal-oriented, efficient, and deliberate with a desired goal of shopping without distraction (To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001).

Utilitarian shoppers prefer to shop online over in-store for several specific reasons including convenience, availability of information, and lack of social interactions (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Wolfinbarger and Gilly performed one of the very first studies examining online habits of utilitarian shoppers in 2001, where researchers hypothesized that more “e-tailing customers” would be of utilitarian nature. The reasoning behind this assertion was due to the fact that utilitarian shoppers tended to be time starved, and early heavy users of the Internet (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). This study was performed at the very beginning of the e-commerce revolution when utilizing the Internet for shopping was still in its infancy. At this time, those who shopped online were early adopters and may have been more of a utilitarian mindset than today’s everyday users.

In more recent studies, characteristics of online utilitarian shoppers have been identified as those who use narrowly defined searches for exact products, having price saving expectations, and looking for a larger selection of online products (O’Brien, 2007; Overby & Lee, 2004). Utilitarian shoppers desire quick and easy product information and price comparison options, valuing efficiency and cost (O’Brien, 2007; Overby & Lee, 2004). The ability to compare

product information and prices are key uses of shopping online for utilitarian shoppers. Time saving and merchandise selection have also been indicated as important factors (Overby & Lee, 2004).

Experiential Shoppers

Past studies have sometimes referred to experiential shoppers as “hedonic” and described the pleasant sensations acquired from online shopping experiences (O’Brien, 2010; To et al., 2007; Voss et al., 2003). This paper combines the term hedonic with experiential to describe a type of consumer, not just their sensations. Experiential shoppers desire a fun and entertaining shopping experience while browsing e-marketplaces (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). The excitement of online shopping is just as valuable to them as the actual purchase of a product, with a potential to spend hours online searching for an item they did not originally know they wanted and/or needed. Experiential shoppers are motivated by sensual and emotional satisfactions and are often times identified as individuals with on-going hobby type interests (To et al., 2007; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). People who shop for fun and entertainment see shopping online as a way of relaxing and escaping their everyday lives. They are free to dream of products they may never purchase and live vicariously through the browsing experience.

Experiential shoppers enjoy the thrill of the chase and are always on the lookout for deals, discounts, and auctions (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). Obtaining products at a discount or auction price can evoke emotions of excitement and intrigue that allow them to feel fulfilled in their shopping experience. Benefits associated with experiential shoppers include surprise, uniqueness, positive sociality, fantasy, sensuality, and involvement with a product class (To et al., 2007; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). In a similar sense, needs being met include social interaction, entertainment, and feeling involved in the interaction (O’Brien, 2007). Experiential

shoppers are emotional shoppers and can be motivated by enhanced shopping situations. It can be speculated that experiential shoppers are especially engaged on shopping holidays including Black Friday and Cyber Monday, as these days especially evoke thrilling and exciting emotions.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is one of the most widely used theoretical communication theories linking needs and gratifications with media choices (Liu, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). While other scholars were focusing on media effects theory in the 1970s, Elihu Katz was interested in the audience's active role in choosing media. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) it is evident that people are aware of their media choices and why they actively chose certain media over others. Moreover, Katz et al. (1973) realized that there was a difference between uses and gratifications sought versus uses and gratifications obtained. Media, however, cannot solve all of our needs and therefore competes with other gratifiers. Katz et al. (1973) mention that there are numerous human and societal needs and had an interest in systematizing these needs through UGT in order to understand them better.

UGT was researched heavily in the 1970s, focusing on gratifications sought regardless of outcomes or gratifications obtained (Ruggiero, 2000). The interest at this time was on the audience's social and psychological needs, with attempts to narrow down media gratifications into specific categories. By the 1980s a clear distinction was made between media effects theory and the UGT, as the media effects researchers study mass communication from the perspective of the communicator versus UGT researchers focusing on the perspective of the audience (Liu, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000).

Throughout the 1980s and 90s researchers continued to develop theoretical grounding for UGT, refining and testing the theory. Although other communication theories began to dominate

the communications research field, UGT was utilized to examine why audiences adopted each new media. A major turning point for UGT research emerged with the advent and adoption of new media and more specifically the Internet. Researchers like Ruggiero (2000) recognized the enormous differences between old media and new media including interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity. The idea of active audiences interacting through the Internet strengthened the core concepts of UGT (Liu, 2015). Interactivity was found to strongly fulfill both entertainment needs and information needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Demassification has been defined as the ability of users to choose the messages they want to receive, out of many options (Liu, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). By choosing the media messages that suit individual audiences, demassification fulfills the active audiences' needs to avoid the messages and social situations they are not interested in obtaining and in essence helping them to find people with like-minded thoughts within an online community. Lastly, asynchronicity refers to the absence of time and space restraints (Liu, 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). Messages can now be sent at any time of day from anywhere in the world, and in the same sense can be received at times that are convenient to the audience. Essentially messages can now reach more audiences because they do not have to be active at a very specific time and place to obtain them. These differences from old media and new media have further strengthened UGT assumptions and allow for more rigorous research within these new parameters.

With an increase in Internet usage as a means of obtaining products, researchers in the 21st century have investigated the motivations behind shopping online (e.g., Lim & Ting, 2012; Sharma & Crossler, 2014; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Variables based on interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity have been developed to include the following five dimensions: information search, entertainment gratifications, social interactions,

identification/usability, and escapism. By applying these five variables to consumers' preference to shop online, a further understanding of the benefits that shopping online provides for both utilitarian and experiential shoppers can be obtained.

Information Search

The availability of reliable product information is essential to the decision making process for online purchases. Often times online shoppers' value access to product information without the help of sales personnel, providing more freedom and control over their interactions on e-commerce websites (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). In almost all studies evaluating consumers' use of shopping, information search is mentioned as an important variable (e.g., Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; To et al., 2007; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). It has even been stated that the Internet provides the most efficient means for consumers to access valuable product information they may otherwise not have access to (To et al., 2007).

Past studies have revealed that utilitarian shoppers rely heavily on product information including price, product reviews, and product specs (Babin et al., 1994; To et al., 2007; Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001). Closely related to electronic word of mouth (eWOM), customer reviews in most cases provide a reliable indication of how well the product has met other consumers' needs. With the help of product reviews written by other online consumers and the ability to compare products side by side in different browser windows, consumers are able to make more informed shopping decisions online. This type of intensive product search is not possible in the traditional store setting, and further helps to solidify the product's features (Katawetawaraks & Wang, 2011). The availability of information helps the consumer to ultimately make their purchase decision and therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: Individuals perceive high access to product information when online shopping.

Entertainment

Shopping online is no longer just about purchasing a product, but rather the experience of joy and exploration during the shopping process (To et al., 2007). Within the majority of the past studies regarding online shopping motivations, entertainment has been closely associated with experiential shoppers (Lee & Overby, 2004; To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). This should come as no surprise as experiential shoppers are those who shop for fun and entertainment. In today's society, online retailers do not just sell products anymore, but rather are required to entertain their audiences in order to increase sales (Overby & Lee, 2006). E-commerce marketplaces have begun to recognize the desire for a fun and entertaining experience, and have redeveloped websites to create additional aesthetic appeal (Overby & Lee, 2006). This visual appeal helps to engage customers and encourage repeat visits as consumers desire to be immersed in the exciting environment.

One specific way e-commerce websites have increased the excitement factor on their websites is through online auctions. According to Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001) experiential shoppers are oftentimes engaged in online auctions, hobbies, and searching for bargains. When participating in online auctions and bargain hunting, online consumers do not just "buy" products they "win" products (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). The thrill of the chase to some shoppers is equally as important as obtaining the product, and return visits are encouraged to see the progress of the auctions they are involved with. With so much emphasis of entertainment gratification and online consumerism in past studies the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1b: Individuals perceive high levels of entertainment through online shopping

Social Interactions

One benefit previously explored by researchers of shopping online versus off line is the absence of certain social interactions (To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). The primary relationship of an online purchase is between the buyer and the mediated environment instead of a buyer and a seller (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Often times, consumers will actively avoid sales personnel in brick and mortar businesses, as they feel pressured or annoyed to make a purchase. Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2001) found that the lack of social interactions encouraged utilitarian shoppers to shop online. The purpose of shopping online for these types of shoppers is to not be bothered during their shopping sessions. Employees in traditional retail environments are often thought of as annoying and/or inefficient, lacking the knowledge desired by consumers. The online shopping environment is free of nuisance sales personnel and other noise that may distract or deter a sales transaction.

Not only is the online shopping environment free of sales personnel, it is also free of crowds, spouses, and lines making it ideal for people to make quick decisive purchases. This allows shoppers to focus on their purchase decisions without inconveniencing their significant others, worrying about extra time spent in lines, or having to interact with sales personnel. Consumers also feel more comfortable shopping for intimate or private items including underwear, in the comfort of their own home to avoid uncomfortable situations (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). It is much easier to be discreet while shopping online as it can be done completely anonymously, without the fear of running into a friend or co-worker.

If customers do have issues or questions during the online shopping process, email and chat are emerging ways of inquiring for more information. Control over their environment and social interactions will allow consumers to focus on their purchase decision and ultimately foster in the intent to purchase. For these reasons the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1c: Individuals perceived high levels of control over social interactions when online shopping.

Identification with E-commerce Community

For the purposes of this study identification is in reference to the consumer's identification with the specific e-commerce community. With an increased use in e-commerce, a new subculture or community has emerged with it. Consumers decide to utilize certain e-commerce websites over others for its increased sense of belonging to a community of people. In Wolfinbarger and Gilly's (2001) study, respondents expressed their desire to read reviews written by other consumers on Amazon.com and friendships that have been made with fellow eBay users.

If the consumer is able to identify with the e-commerce community of the marketplace they are shopping on, they will feel more comfortable in their purchase decisions (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). Website communities have been an increasingly important aspect for consumers to follow trends, get advice, and support from fellow buyers as they shop online. If users are unable to identify with the website e-commerce community, they could potentially abandon it for an alternative solution. Perceived identification is therefore a crucial variable in understanding consumers' intention to shop online, and therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1d: Individuals perceive high levels of identification with e-commerce community.

Escapism

Up until this point, little research has focused on escapism as a gratification sought of online shopping. There does, however, appear to be a connection between online shopping and escaping the norms or traditional process of shopping. Experiential shoppers desired fun and entertainment, which could be a form of escaping from reality through online shopping; the

utilitarian shoppers appreciated escaping the traditional norms associated with shopping. For these consumers, the ability to shop in their own environment, at the times they desired, with or without pants were key factors in selecting to shop online (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2001).

In some instances, online shopping can be a way for people to unwind from the day, forgetting about their personal problems and becoming immersed in the online shopping experience (Overby & Lee, 2006). It is common for experiential shoppers to value escapism as it refers to consumers' out of routine experiences on the Internet, allowing them to "get away from it all" (Overby & Lee, 2006) and therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1e: Individuals perceive online shopping as an escape from traditional/conventional shopping methods.

Understanding the differences between utilitarian and experiential motivations of online shoppers is important and has been explored in numerous studies (e.g., Babin et al., 1994; Lee & O'Brien, 2010; Overby, 2004; Sarkar, 2011). There is, however, a lack of investigation in recent studies to determine the importance of specific uses and gratifications in regards to whether a consumer is considered a utilitarian shopper or an experiential shopper. Wolfenbarger and Gilly's (2000) study was one the first studies to connect offline and online shoppers based on their motivations, however, it is now over 16 years outdated. Overby and Lee (2004) determined that in online shoppers, utilitarian value is more important than experiential value, however they do not break down how strong each gratification sought is to the type of shopper analyzed. It is important to not only understand the uses and gratifications that motivate people to shop online, but also equally as important to solidify which uses are associated with which type of shopper in order to better inform online marketers on how best to convey their marketing messages. As the amount of spending online continues to rise and the number of online competitors increases, it is

becoming more important to understand the differences between utilitarian shoppers and experiential shoppers from a marketing standpoint. Marketplace owners want to make sure each group is being engaged properly and not abandoning one online marketplace in favor of a competitor, resulting in the following research question:

RQ1: Are there differences between utilitarian and experiential shoppers on these five perceived uses of online shopping?

Methods

Procedure

The participants of this study represented a convenience sample, and were obtained through social media (Facebook and LinkedIn), as well as through personal emails to colleagues and other professional contacts. Participants were asked to fill out a survey created on Google forms. The first section asked participants to consent to the survey, with details on the expected risks that may arise from taking this survey (very minimal risks). The next section simply asked participants if they have ever shopped online. Depending on their answer they would either move forward (if yes) or be directed to the demographic information (if no). The third section of the survey represented the bulk of data being collected. Respondents were asked to rate 30 statements based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Statements were based off of utilitarian and experiential traits along with traits of the five variables including information, entertainment, control over social interactions, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism. Three statements were presented for each variable in order to judge the reliability of the answers during analysis.

Measures

This study consists of examining two independent variables, utilitarian shoppers and experiential shoppers and the relationships between online shoppers and the dependent variables of access to product information, entertainment, control over social interaction, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism from traditional/conventional shopping methods. In order to examine each variable a survey consisting of 30 items was used. Survey items were developed utilizing previous research to ascertain measurable definitions of each variable. Demographic questions were also included at the end of the survey.

The first independent variable, utilitarian shopper, is defined as a shopper meeting the criteria of three items used to ascertain the level of utilitarianism for each shopper. Items included specific purchase intentions such as, "I shop with a specific item in mind." These items were examined and combined into one utilitarian shopper variable ($\alpha = .85$).

An experiential shopper is defined as a shopper who meets the specific criteria put forth including shopping intention and goals. Items included specific shopping preferences and habits, such as "I shop online for fun" and "I shop online for entertainment." Items such as shopping online for fun, entertainment, and bargains were examined and combined into one experiential shopper variable ($\alpha = .74$).

The dependent variables were examined in a similar fashion. The first dependent variable, information search, was determined by a shopper's interest in access to product information, opinions on product information available, and how reliable they believed the product information found online could be. Statements involved items specific to product information online and included statements such as "I shop online to access information." With a reliable alpha ($\alpha = .81$), statements regarding product information were combined to make one information variable.

The entertainment variable proved hard to assess as the statements associated with entertainment gratifications were too similar to those assessing experiential shoppers. Statements assessing entertainment included “Shopping online provides an entertaining experience” which was very similar to “I shop online for entertainment.” These statements were examined and combined into the variable of entertainment ($\alpha = .74$).

When assessing consumers’ desire to control social situations, statements included criteria of shopping online to avoid social interactions and shopping online to control social interactions. As a result of the three statements regarding avoiding and controlling social interactions, responses were combined to create one variable for social interactions ($\alpha = .75$).

The variable of identification with the e-commerce community was determined by respondents’ desire to compare products side by side and their reliance on customer reviews. Statements regarding identification included “I shop online to read product reviews” and “I shop online so that I can compare products” to assess how invested they are in the online e-commerce community. As a result of the alpha ($\alpha = .7$), statements were combined to create one identification variable.

The last variable, escaping from the constraints of time and space of traditional shopping was determined by respondents’ desire to have more freedom and control over their shopping experiences and included statements such as “I shop online for freedom from traditional shopping constructs of space and time.” Similar to the other variables, statements were combined to create one variable of escapism ($\alpha = .76$).

Results

A total of 171 participants reported themselves as online shoppers. Respondents ranged between 20 and 80 years old with a mean age of 47. There were more male respondents (55%)

than female respondents (45%), however only by 10%. The majority of respondents' educational background was a Bachelor's degree (41.6%), followed by Graduate degree (34.7%), Associates degree (9.8%), some college (8.1%), a Ph.D. (3.5%), and lastly high school degree or less (2.3%). The majority of respondents (31.9%) identified a household income of \$75,001-\$125,000, followed by: 24.7% in the \$125,001-\$250,000 range, 14.5% in the \$20,001-\$45,000 range, 13.9% in the \$45,001-\$75,000 range, 12% in the \$250,001+ range, and lastly only 3% identified the <\$20,000 range. This makeup of respondents displays a relatively diverse range of all educational backgrounds and economic wealth ranges.

Hypothesis one (a) predicted that individuals would perceive high access to information when online shopping. This hypothesis was supported as the access to information ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.23$) was significantly higher than the neutral four, $t(163) = 15.80$, $p < .01$. The majority of responses (78%) identified that they either somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they shop online to access product information.

Hypothesis one (b) predicted that individuals would perceive high levels of entertainment through online shopping. This hypothesis was not found to be supported as access to information ($M = 3.8$, $SD = 1.45$) which was lower than the neutral four, $t(167) = -2.17$, $p = .03$. The majority of responses (73.8%) identified they were either neutral, somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they shop online for perceived high levels of entertainment.

Hypothesis one (c) proposed that individuals perceived high levels of control over social interactions when shopping online. This hypothesis was also not found to be supported as the majority of respondents identified high levels of control over social interactions ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.39$) below the neutral four, $t(169) = -.28$, $p = .78$. With the majority of participants (68.7%) responding that they were either neutral, somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed to

the notion of shopping online for control over social interactions, the study found respondents do not appear to shop online for its perceived high levels of control over social interactions.

Hypothesis one (d) predicted that individuals perceive high levels of identification with the e-commerce community. This hypothesis was supported as the identification with the e-commerce community ($M = 5.7, SD = 1.22$) was significantly higher than the neutral four, $t(167) = 17.47, p < .01$. The majority of respondents (82.8%) identified that they either somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they shop online due to their perceived identification with the e-commerce community.

Hypothesis one (e) proposed that individuals perceive online shopping as an escape from traditional/conventional shopping methods. This hypothesis was supported ($M = 5.1, SD = 1.25$) as the mean score was higher than the neutral of four, $t(169) = 12.05, p < .01$. The majority of respondents (66.2%) identified that they either somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that they shop online as an escape from traditional/conventional shopping methods.

Research question one attempts to determine if there are differences between utilitarian and experiential shoppers on the five perceived uses of online shopping. In order to determine which shopping type may best predict the variance in each gratification a multiple regression analysis was conducted. This analysis was chosen to test if the utilitarian or experiential shoppers significantly predicted participants' gratifications of information, entertainment, control over social interactions, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism. If a significant prediction of both variables is discovered, further analysis of the betas from both variables is analyzed to tell if they can also predict "without the other."

The linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to an individual's perceived access to information: $F(2,157) = 54.68, p < .001$. The sample R^2 was .41,

which indicates that 41% of the variance of an individual's need to have access to information could be accounted for by the combination of utilitarian and experiential shopper traits. It was found that both utilitarian traits ($\beta = .59, p < .01$) and experiential traits ($\beta = .31, p < .01$) significantly predicted the fulfillment of using online shopping for access to information.

In a similar sense, the linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to an individual's perceived levels of entertainment, however the entertainment variable correlated perfectly with the experiential variable, and therefore the data was considered inconclusive. No further analysis of this variable was performed.

The linear combination of the independent variables was significantly related to the individual's perceived control over social interactions as well: $F(2,163) = 12.46, p < .001$. The sample R^2 was .13 indicating that 13% of the changes in level of social interaction can be predicted by the independent variables. It was found that both utilitarian traits ($\beta = .17, p < .02$) and experiential traits ($\beta = .31, p < .01$) significantly predicted the fulfillment of using online shopping for control over social interactions.

When examining the individual's perceived identification with the e-commerce community, the linear combination of independent variables was again significantly related to the e-commerce community: $F(2,161) = 42.62, p < .001$. The R^2 was .34 indicating that 34% of the changes in identification with the e-commerce community can be predicted by the independent variables. It was found that utilitarian traits significantly predicted identification with the e-commerce community ($\beta = .52, p = .005$), as did experiential traits ($\beta = .30, p < .01$).

Lastly, the linear combination of independent variables was found to be significantly related to the user's perceived escapism from traditional/conventional shopping methods: $F(2,162) = 31.68, p < .001$. The R^2 was .28 indicating that 28% of the variance of an

individual's need to escape traditional shopping methods could be accounted for by the combination of utilitarian and experiential shopper traits. It was found that both utilitarian traits ($\beta = .45, p < .01$), and experiential traits ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) could be used to predict escapism with utilitarian being the better predictor as it was closer to 1.

Discussion

Of the five hypotheses presented, three of five were supported individually. Respondents reported that they shopped online in order to fulfill certain gratifications including access to product information, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism. Therefore, H1a, H1d, and H1e were all supported. These results are in line with those of previous scholars (i.e., Babin et al., 1994; To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001). As a result of this study it was found that access to product information in the form of additional product information, descriptions, and price comparisons are all very important aspects to the online shopping process. Survey respondents also reported having a strong connection or identification with the e-commerce community; reading product reviews written by fellow shoppers, and comparing products online with others were qualifiers to help consumers make purchase decisions online. Lastly, it was found that consumers prefer to shop online in order to escape the conventional constraints of the traditional shopping experience. Respondents identified with shopping online for freedom and control, without the constructs of time and space interrupting their shopping experiences.

Entertainment gratifications and control over social interaction gratifications were not found to be gratifications sought while users shopped online, and therefore H1b and H1c were not supported. When asked if respondents shopped online for fun, the majority reported they "somewhat disagreed" with the statement. Similarly, respondents reported to "somewhat

disagree” when asked if they shopped online for entertainment. The respondents of this study did not recognize shopping online as being an entertaining experience. Statements regarding control over social interaction were overwhelmingly answered as “neutral.” Respondents did not seem to shop online for an increased control over social interactions, nor did they report shopping online to avoid social interactions.

As a result of analyzing utilitarian and experiential traits with regards to the five gratifications, it was found that there were no noticeable differences in terms of the gratifications sought by utilitarian shoppers compared to experiential shoppers. Shoppers who identified on the utilitarian and/or experiential scales were found to value four of the five gratifications, with insignificant data to prove or deny entertainment gratification for either type of shopper. It can therefore be stated that online shoppers of both utilitarian and experiential nature will respond positively to efforts of e-commerce websites to increase access to product information, control over social interactions, a greater emphasis on the e-commerce community, and escapism. By recognizing these traits e-marketplaces and marketers will be able to reach and engage people in their target market through an increased emphasis on certain gratifications.

There are several ways in which online e-retailers and marketers can utilize the results of this study to increase users’ desire to shop on their website. The most important gratification sought by those surveyed was access to product information. Online marketplaces should make sure that there is extensive and easy to find product information available for customers to analyze. Another approach to leverage product information would be to offer comparison charts or graphics, allowing consumers to choose several products on the same website and compare attributes and pricing side by side.

Another gratification online shoppers value according to this study is having increased control over social interactions. Some websites provide superior customer service while others fall flat, providing only limited options for customer service. Frequently asked questions sections are ideal for those customers who are interested in limited social interactions, and want to find information on their own. More recently, e-retailers have started to also implement chat bots on their websites, allowing customers the option to chat with a customer service representative or artificial intelligence bot. Customers can then choose their level of engagement depending on how much information they require to make a purchase decision.

The e-commerce community is a growing trend among online retailers. Top e-marketplaces, including Amazon and Ebay, currently allow customers to rate products and provide feedback of both positive and negative nature. This type of engagement provides a way for potential and actual customers to converse through the e-commerce community, providing product feedback and suggestions to future customers.

Lastly, consumers need to be reminded of how shopping online allows them to escape the constraints of the traditional/conventional shopping methods. Successful online retailers have begun to publish advertisements reminding people that their online marketplaces allow consumers to shop at any time day or night and still receive timely service and shipping. Examples include advertisements stating “I only shop online because it’s frowned upon to be in a store in pajamas with a glass of wine.” Other more simplistic approaches include “Save time... Shop online” and “Avoid the lines. Shop online.” These types of reminders will allow online marketers to leverage the escape gratification.

This study was performed to determine if there were positive correlations between each of the five gratifications variables and the two different types of shoppers, however the degree to

which was not analyzed. Further research could also be done to determine the level of importance the variables are to each type of shopper. Further research could also investigate just the entertainment variable with regards to utilitarian and experiential shoppers, as the data for the entertainment variable was inconclusive. This study also had its limitations, mainly the limitation of sample size, as the sample was relatively small (173 respondents) and represented a convenience sample of the researcher's peers and contacts. A more representative sample of the online shopping population could help to strengthen the hypothesis proposed as well as the results of the research question.

Conclusion

With the percent of online retail sales on the rise, marketers and retailers recognize the immense potential for economic gain. In order to increase sales, researchers have an invested interest in understanding what motivates people to shop online. Past studies of consumers in general have found that shoppers can be broken up into two categories, utilitarian shoppers or experiential shoppers. Utilitarian shoppers were defined as those who shop with a goal in mind, while experiential shoppers were identified as those who shop for fun and entertainment.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate both categories of shoppers through a uses and gratifications theory framework. It was hypothesized that individuals perceive online shopping to strongly fulfill certain gratifications, including access to product information, high levels of entertainment, control over social interactions, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism from traditional/conventional shopping methods. The five gratifications were then analyzed to determine if there are differences between utilitarian and experiential shoppers and their perceived uses of online shopping. UGT was chosen for its focus on active audiences and its ability to examine the new media traits of interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity.

An online survey was utilized to assess individuals' feelings towards certain shopping statements in order to determine if there are differences between the utilitarian and experiential online shoppers in terms of the uses and gratifications sought.

As a result, of the five hypotheses proposed individually, H1a, H1d, and H1e were all supported while H1b and H1c were not supported. Upon examining how the five variables related to utilitarian and experiential shoppers, information, social interaction, identification with e-commerce community, and escapism were found to be relevant to both utilitarian and experiential online shoppers, whereas the data for the entertainment variable was inconclusive.

This information can be used to inform future e-commerce marketplaces and marketers of how to best target shoppers in an online setting. This study provided valuable information to online retailers and marketers on how to attract different types of shoppers, regardless if they identify more as a utilitarian shopper or an experiential shopper. Future research should focus more on the entertainment variable in order to conclude if there is in fact a significant relationship that could not be verified by this study.

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	I shop online for toys								
E	I shop online for bargains								
	I shop online for electronics and/or computers								
	I shop online for services								
	I shop online for home goods								
E	I shop online for clothing								
	I shop online for music and/or movies								
U	I shop online for automotive and/or industrial products								
H1a	I shop online to access additional product information.								
H1a	I believe shopping online provides superior product information compared to traditional shopping methods								
H1a	I shop online so that I can compare product price								
H1b	Shopping online provides an entertaining shopping experience.								
H1c	I shop online to avoid social interactions.								
H1c	Shopping online gives me control over social interactions while shopping.								
H1c	I have more control over social interactions shopping online compared to in a store.								

H1d	I shop online to read product reviews								
H1d	I shop online so that I can compare products								
H1e	I prefer to shop online.								
H1e	I shop online for freedom from traditional shopping constructs of space and time.								
U	I shop online with a product in mind that I need or want to purchase								
E	I shop online with no particular product in mind								
H1e	Shopping online gives me more freedom from conventional shopping constructs (time/place) than shopping in a store.								
H1d	I trust the online star rating system on products								

When shopping online what % of the time do you use (Should add up to 100%)

__Mobile

__PC-Home

__PC-Work

__Tablet

Demographic information

Male Female

Age: _____ years

Educational Background:

___ High School or Less ___ Some College ___ College Graduate

___ Graduate School

Household annual income

___ <\$20,000

___ \$20,001 - \$45,000

___ \$45,001 - \$75,000

___ \$75,001 - \$125,000

___ \$125,001 - \$250,000

___ > \$250,0000