Shopping Behavior in 'Health-Food Stores': Does It Have a Hedonic Aspect?

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Abstract

Individuals are changing their approach to food and this phenomenon does not affect only consumption of good food, but also purchasing behaviour. The presence of products that support a healthy lifestyle is one of the main factors people take into account when choosing a retailer. As a consequence, the market is characterized by the proliferation of healthy store formats. However, very few studies have tried to analyze shopping experience inside these stores and its antecedents. Moreover, no studies have tried to investigate how the healthiness of the assortment impact on shopping experience. Thus, the present work aims to understand the impact of healthy assortment, healthy in-store communication and atmosphere on shopping value (both utilitarian and hedonic) and the effect of shopping value on customer's satisfaction and loyalty to the store. For the purpose of the present study, a total sample of 101 shoppers was interviewed inside a new healthy store format developed in Milan by a leading French retailing company in 2017. Data were analysed using SmartPLS package. Our findings suggest that hedonic attitudes, formed favourably by perceptions of the healthiness of the assortment and products value, have a positive impact on satisfaction and loyalty to the store.

Keywords: shopping value, specialty grocery stores, products nutritiousness

1. Introduction

Nutrition is one of the most critical topics of our time since it has been demonstrated that good nutrition is essential for health (Povey et al., 1998). The importance of this theme is supported by the fact that individuals are now aware that a proper nutrition is the most appropriate tool to prevent and manage physical dysfunctions. Therefore, they are changing their approach to food, based on a greater focus on healthy diets and healthy aspects of food. The increasing attention to the healthy aspects of food is highlighted by several surveys (Nielsen, 2016, 2017), according to which the majority of the sample interviewed worldwide (two-thirds) say they follow a diet that limits or prohibits consumption of some foods or ingredients. If we focus on Europe, it emerges that 20% of customers try to avoid the consumption of fat, 22% sugar, 8% salt, 11% carbohydrate. At the same time, Europeans try to avoid products containing antibiotics (65%), artificial preservative (61%), artificial flavours (60%), artificial colours (60%) and GMO (59%). This research pinpoint that customers try to preserve their health by avoiding 'dangerous substances', not necessarily because they are affected by diseases. However, the increasing importance of health does not affect only consumption of good food but also purchasing behaviour and, in particular, the selection of the point of sales in which consumers carry out the shopping expedition. In fact, a recent survey conducted by Nielsen in 2016, with the aim to understand purchasing behaviour in the grocery sector, has highlighted that the presence of organic and natural products and, more in general, of products that support a healthy lifestyle, is one of the main factors people take into account when choosing a retailer (71% of Italians respondents). This phenomenon has led to the proliferation of healthy store formats that offer 'healthy products' (Cardinali, 2018). According to IRI 'healthy food' refers to whole grain products and products without salt and sugar and with low amount of fat and calories, organic products, vegetarian food and food intolerance, such as lactose and gluten free products (IRI, 2017). The authors will consider those categories for the purpose of the present study. In literature, 'healthy stores' can be considered 'specialty stores' compared to 'conventional one'. Several authors (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee, 2009) reported that 'conventional grocery stores operate under a traditional supermarket format offering a full line of groceries, meat and produce, with some operators offering a mix of general merchandise items'. Furthermore, they are typically 'located as an

anchor in a strip center or in a stand-alone location'. Products sold may include national manufacturer brands as well as private label items. Promotion typically involves traditional methods, such as newspaper advertising, coupons, store events and the target is the mass-market customers. On the other hand, specialty grocery stores 'engage in selling special types of food products (e.g. natural/organic, gourmet and ethnic)' and target specific segments who often are willing to pay premium prices (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee, 2009). Several researchers has investigated customers' satisfaction and loyalty (and their antecedents) inside conventional stores, while very few studies have tried to do the same analysis inside specialty stores (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee, 2009). Furthermore, in the same way, few studies tried to understand the dimensions of shopping experience (utilitarian versus hedonistic) inside specialty stores (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee, 2009), while no studies have focused their attention on analyzing the impact of products nutritiousness on shopping experience. What is the level of satisfaction of specialty store? The shopping experience is more utilitarian or hedonistic? Which factors influence the shopping experience the most? These questions come spontaneous since for decades healthy behaviour have been considered as the result of cognitive, reasoned and conscious processes (Hofmann, Friese, and Wiers 2008). However, recently, the increasing interest towards healthy aspects of food has become a trend, a lifestyle (Cardinali, 2018) and more than ever involves aspect that are not only functional (Nielsen, 2016, 2017, 2018). Therefore, it is reasonable to wonder if the selection of healthy stores and products is more rational or emotional, utilitarian or hedonistic. In order to understand the shopping behaviour in healthy store formats, the present work is organized as follow. First, we provide an overview of the literature about store satisfaction, shopping value and its dimensions and antecedents. Then, we develop the hypothesis. Second, we present our methodology and the main results obtained. Third, we discuss the results and the implications for retail managers, and we address the limitations and suggest interesting areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

Understanding what influences consumers satisfaction is a crucial point for retailers, since from satisfaction depends their success (Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000). This because satisfaction influences profit (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann, 1994) and leads to customer loyalty (Huddleston et al., 2009). There is a wide literature about customer satisfaction but not a single definition. The most common one is given by Blanco, Peluso and Williams in 2011, who defined satisfaction as 'a response (cognitive or affective) that pertains to a particular focus (i.e. a purchase experience and/or the associated product) and occurs at a certain time (i.e. post-purchase, post-consumption). In addition, Grewal, Levy and Kumar in 2009 defined satisfaction as 'customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer'. Therefore, customers' satisfaction may be the result of the value provided by the shopping experience (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee, 2009). According to the extant literature, the value refers to "all factors, both qualitative and quantitative, subjective and objective, that make up the complete shopping experience" (Zeithaml, 1988). This definition underlines the subjective nature of value and its wide perspective. However, the shopping value does not deal with just the acquisition of products, but also with the overall experience. Thus, shopping value has two dimensions: utilitarian and hedonic (Babin, Darden and Griffin, 1994; Babin, 1995). The utilitarian value refers to the necessity of finding the products consumers are looking for, while hedonic value has to do with the enjoyment of the shopping experience itself and reflects the emotional or psychological worth of the purchase (Carpenter and Moore, 2009), or the degree to which consumers perceive emotional benefits through the experience of shopping. Consumers can experience both utilitarian and hedonic shopping value at the same time while shopping (Jin, Sternquist & Koh, 2003). Furthermore, several researchers have demonstrated that both utilitarian and hedonic value can be provided by the retailer during the shopping experience (Belk, 1975; Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Sherry, 1990). Several studies suggest that the formation of consumer's hedonic and utilitarian evaluation of their shopping value is formed by their evaluation of some attributes importance, which are considered as the antecedents of a consumer general evaluation of shopping (Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Wang, Chan, & Zheng, 2000). These attributes are those factors that the retailer can control (retail atmosphere, assortment, price, in-store communication) (Grewal, Levy, & Kumar, 2009). Given these considerations, the present work aims to investigate the relationship between store attributes and consumers' shopping value in a healthy store format. The possible relationship between stores' attribute's beliefs and personal shopping values in the grocery setting, in fact, has received limited attention in the literature (Olsen & Skallerud, 2011). The majority of contributions focus their attention on the link between shopping value and store attributes in sectors other than grocery, such as fashion (Carpenter & Fairhurst, 2005), shopping in malls and department stores (Stoel, Wickliffe, & Lee, 2004; Rintama̋ki et al., 2006), restaurants (Ryu, Han, & Jang, 2010) and online shopping (Overby & Lee, 2006). The focus of this research will be the understanding of the impact of healthy assortment, healthy in-store communication and atmosphere on shopping value (both utilitarian and hedonic) and the effect of shopping value on customer's satisfaction and loyalty to the store. Thanks to the relevance of the topic, many authors have

tried to understand the mechanisms supporting healthy choices and to point out the variables able to explain and predict healthy behaviours. All the theories developed (Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Health Belief Model, Social Cognitive Theory, the Action Theory Alternative, the Transtheoretical Model and the Stage Theory) posit that 'healthy behaviours' (included the consumption and the purchase of 'healthy products') are the result of cognitive, reasoned and conscious processes (Hofmann, Friese, and Wiers 2008) and assumed that health related behaviours take place only when individuals exert cognitive resources (Ajzen 2004; Abratt and Goodey 1990; Bogers et al. 2004; Conner, Norman, and Bell 2002). According to this perspective, one can assume that the quality of healthy assortment (products nutritiousness) may have a positive and greater impact on utilitarian shopping value ('I shop healthy products because they are useful for my health status and because I have to do it') than on hedonic shopping value. Very few studies have tried to link products nutritiousness to shopping values (Lee and Yun, 2014). Authors, in general, consider assortment variety as an antecedent of shopping value (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Olsen and Skallerud, 2011). Coherently with the theory developed so far and previously presented, some studies about consumers' values and motivations for 'healthy' products purchase behavior have found that health attributes are linked to functional consequences (Fotopoulos, Krystallis, & Ness, 2003), but at the same time such attributes can also drive consumers to feel good or experience pleasure (Padel & Foster, 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that perceived products nutritiusness can be related to hedonic attitudes as well as utilitarian attitudes (Lee and Yun, 2014; Apaolaza, Hartmann, D'Souza and Lopez, 2018). For these reasons, the first hypothesis posits that:

H1a: The shopper's evaluation of the quality of the assortment (in terms of assortment Nutritiousness) is positively related to both utilitarian and hedonic shopping value.

H1b: The impact of perceived healthiness of the assortment on hedonic shopping value is greater than its impact on utilitarian shopping value.

Another key attribute controlled by the retailer is the product value, which is the trade‐off between quality and price (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Some authors stated that customers receive more 'utility' when they find quality products at a relatively competitive prices (Bettman, 1979; Sinha and Banerjee, 2004; Chandon, Wansink & Laurent, 2000). Thus, utilitarian shopping value will increase when customers perceive product assortment having a good value-for-money (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Babin,1995). In literature, when considering healthy products, several researches have demonstrated that the higher price of healthier alternative is considered a barrier that prevent shoppers buying them (Padel & Foster, 2005). However, people who shop in healthy stores are aware of the higher prices but they are also willing to pay a premium price for the products they want. Some authors state that paying a high price, or having the ability to pay a high price, could be a source of ostentation or pleasure, which gives shoppers a sense of hedonic feeling (Jin, Sternquist, & Koh, 2003; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). This also because they associate high price with high quality. Therefore, we posit the following linkages between perceived product value and shopping value:

H2a: The shopper's evaluation of the product value is positively related to bothutilitarian and hedonic shopping value.

H2b: The impact of perceived value-for-money of the assortment on hedonic shopping value is greater than its impact on utilitarian shopping value.

Finally, another important store attribute that contributes to the creation of the shopping experience is the physical environment, which includes the layout and product shelf positions. In these terms, physical environment refers to the ability of the store to simplify the shopping process by helping customers easily identify the products that they are looking for or the products that they want and like (Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz, 1996; Vázquez et al., 2001). On one hand physical environment has a positive impact on utilitarian shopping value since it helps costumers saving time and effort during the shopping trip, while at the same time it has a positive impact on hedonic shopping value since it helps creating a relaxing and pleasant trip (Jackson, Stoel and Brantley, 2011). Healthy store format focuses their attention on the delivery of an emotional and experiential shopping expedition (Cardinali, 2018). Thus, the following hypothesis are considered:

H3a: The shopper's evaluation of the physical environment is positively related to both utilitarian and hedonic shopping value.

H3b: The impact of shopper's evaluation of the physical environment on hedonic shopping value is greater than its impact on utilitarian shopping value.

Given the considerations posit by several authors, and cited at the beginning of the 'Literature Review' section of the present work, regarding the definition of shopping value (Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick, & Lee, 2009;

Zeithaml, 1988; Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Babin, 1995; Blackwell et al., 2000; Carpenter & Moore, 2009) and the impact of shopping value on customers' satisfaction and loyalty to the store (Oliver, 1997; Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick, & Lee, 2009), we posit that:

H4: Hedonic shopping value has a positive and direct impact on satisfaction to the store.

H5: Utilitarian shopping value has a positive and direct impact on satisfaction to the store.

H6: Satisfaction to stores positively influences loyalty to the store.

3. Method

3.1 The Sample

For the purpose of the present study, the total sample considered was composed by 101 shoppers, interviewed inside the new healthy store format developed in Milan (Italy) by a leading French retailing company in 2017 (62.6% female, 37.4% male; 21.4% belonging to the 18-24 age group, 32.1% to the 25-34, 29.8% to the 35-54 age group and 16.7% over 55).

Inside this 250 square metres convenience store, shoppers can find organic drinks (beers and wines), free-from products (salt, gluten, eggs, milk, and yeast), vegan products and eco-friendly home detergents and perfumery.

3.2 Measures

Nutritiousness of the assortment was measured by three 7-points items ('I think the nutrition level of this assortment is good'; 'I think that these products are good for my health'; 'Overall, the level of nutritiousness of the assortment is good') and participant were asked to indicate how much they agreed with the statements proposed (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The scale was based on the one developed by Kozup, Creyer and Burton in 2003 and adapted for the purpose of the study. In the same way, Product Value was measured through two 7-points items ('I am satisfied with the price/quality ratio offered at the store'; The store provides a good value for the money'). This scale comes from the one developed by Huddleston, Whipple, Mattick and Lee in 2009. Physical aspect was measured by two 7-points items scale ('The store layout makes it easy to find what I need'; 'The store layout makes it easy to move around') developed by Olsen and Skallerud in 2011. Hedonic shopping value was measured through a three 7-points items scale already tested by Olsen and Skallerud in 2011 ('Doing grocery shopping in this store is something I do to feel better'; 'Shopping in this store releases stress'; 'Shopping here is like an escape from daily routines') as well as Utilitarian Shopping value ('The purpose of the grocery-shopping trip I do in this store is to find exactly the groceries I am looking for'). Finally, Satisfaction to the store was assessed through three 7-point items scale ('Compared to other stores, I am very satisfied with this store', 'Based on all my experiences with this store, I am very satisfied', 'In general, I am satisfied with the store') (Olsen and Skallerud, 2011), while Loyalty to the store was measured through three 7-points items ('I prefer to always shop at this grocery store', 'I am willing to make an effort to shop at my favourite grocery store', 'This point of sales is my first choice'). This last scale comes from the one developed by Ailawadi, Neslin, and Gedenk in 2001. Data were analyzed using SmartPLS package.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement Model

Firstly, the measurement model was run in order to check the convergent and discriminant validity. Convergent validity requirement is met when cross loadings are higher than .70, when Cronbach's alpha exceeds .70 and when average variance extracted is higher than .70. The results show that for each construct the factor loading were higher than the minimum acceptable value and that Cronbach's alpha and AVE criteria were met. Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the convergent validity.

Table 1. Convergent validity of the measurement model– AVE and Cronbach's alpha

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Loyalty to the store	0.802	0.884	0.718
Hedonic Shopping Value	0.928	0.954	0.874
Products Nutritiousness	0.909	0.942	0.845
Product value	0.898	0.951	0.907
Store Satisfaction	0.971	0.981	0.946
Utilitarian Shopping Value	1.000	1.000	1.000
Physical Aspect	0.750	0.883	0.791

Table 2. Convergent validity of the measurement model – Cross loadings

	Loyalty to the store	Hedonic Shopping Value	Products Nutritiousness	Product value	Store Satisfaction	Utilitarian Shopping Value	Physical Aspect
Loyalty to the store_1	0.868						
Loyalty to the store_2	0.896						
Loyalty to the store_3	0.774						
Hedonic Shopping Value_1		0.928					
Hedonic Shopping Value_2		0.955					
Hedonic Shopping Value_3		0.921					
Products Nutritiousness_1			0.941				
Products Nutritiousness_2			0.931				
Products Nutritiousness_3			0.885				
Product value_1				0.942			
Product value_2				0.962			
Store Satisfaction_1					0.955		
Store Satisfaction_2					0.986		
Store Satisfaction_3					0.977		
Utilitarian Shopping Value						1.000	
Physical Aspect_1							0.943
Physical Aspect_2							0.832

Table 3 shows that the criteria for the discriminant validity were met.

Table 3. Discriminant validity of the measurement model – impact of healthy checkout on CSR and loyalty to the store – AVE and Cronbach's alpha

	Loyalty to the store	Hedonic Shopping Value	Products Nutritiousness	Product value	Store Satisfaction	Utilitarian Shopping Value	Physical Aspect
Loyalty to the store	0.847						
Hedonic Shopping Value	0.409	0.935					
Products Nutritiousness	0.410	0.572	0.919				
Product value	0.527	0.414	0.259	0.952			
Store Satisfaction	0.588	0.426	0.345	0.394	0.973		
Utilitarian Shopping Value	0.079	-0.194	-0.108	0.333	0.239	1.000	
Physical Aspect	0.503	0.461	0.753	0.473	0.436	0.069	0.889

Discriminant validity, otherwise, indicates that the items actually measure their theoretical corresponding construct and not any other constructs. The square root of the AVE for each construct must be higher than its correlation with other constructs.

4.2 Path Coefficients

Then, correlations between constructs were measure. Table 4 shows the structural model and levels of significance (t-values). Bootstrapping resampling served to test the level of significance of the path coefficients.

Table 4. Path coefficient – structural model - impact of healthy checkout on CSR and loyalty to the store

	Path coefficients	T Statistics	P Values
Hedonic Shopping Value → Satisfaction to the store	0.490	5.859	0.000*
Products Nutritiousness → Hedonic Shopping Value	0.592	4.062	0.000*
Products Nutritiousness → Utilitarian Shopping Value	-0.292	1.435	0.152
Product value → Hedonic Shopping Value	0.326	3.131	0.002*
Product value → Utilitarian Shopping Value	0.350	2.462	0.014*
Store Satisfaction → Loyalty to the store	0.588	5.571	0.000*
Utilitarian Shopping Value → Store Satisfaction	0.334	3.121	0.001*
Physical Aspect → Hedonic Shopping Value	-0.139	0.804	0.422
Physical Aspect → Utilitarian Shopping Value	0.123	0.528	0.597

* Significant relation

5. Discussion

By looking at the output, we can assess that not all the hypothesis were met. We found a strong positive and significant effect of products nutritiousness on hedonic shopping value (p<.001) and a negative non-significant effect on utilitarian shopping value' (p=.152), supporting in part hypothesis 1. Second, we found that products value has a positive effect on both hedonic and utilitarian shopping value, and that the effect on utilitarian value is slightly higher than the one on hedonic shopping value, partially supporting hypothesis 2. Third, we found that physical aspects do not have an impact neither on utilitarian nor on hedonic shopping value (p>.10 in both cases), in contrast with hypothesis 3. Finally, supporting hypothesis 4, 5 and 6, we found that hedonic shopping value has a positive and significant impact on satisfaction to the store (p<.001), as well as utilitarian shopping value (p<.001), and that store satisfaction positively affects loyalty to the store (p<.001).

Our findings suggest that hedonic attitudes, formed favourably by perceptions of the healthiness of the assortment and products value, has a positive impact on satisfaction and loyalty to the store. Healthy products are no more seen as something 'useful but boring', but they provide a pleasant shopping experience. Thus, grocery retailers should communicate and promote their 'healthy' assortment both inside and outside the stores. For instance, retailers could create promotional display or stand in stores where consumers could test, taste, and sample healthy products. Therefore, a consumer's desire for direct sensory experience can also be satisfied by rich and elaborate descriptions of the key food sensory experience in advertising messages (Lee and Yun, 2015). In most Italian conventional stores, unhealthy food products are still promoted in prominent locations and well-advertised out of store (Cameron et al. 2016) in the believe that only junk food could lead shoppers to make impulsive purchases and, then, to experience a pleasant and emotional shopping trip (Chandon 2010; Wilson et al. 2016). In the light of the results of this work, retailers can act on the healthiness of their assortment by communicate it in order to enhance hedonic shopping experience.

The present work has some limitation, connected with the sample size and the way questions were asked. Furthermore, we interviewed only customers of a single store located in Milan. Further research could study the relationships in other specialty stores, with different strategies and characteristics, and in conventional stores.

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