

Finding In-Store Help: The Role of Recommendation Agents on Shoppers' Mobile Devices

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Abstract

Product information-seeking and evaluation of alternatives are two important consumer processing stages between the initial recognition of product need and final purchase (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993). In both of these stages, consumers may spend significant time on various media seeking out a wide range of product information to aid in decision-making. When consumers are at stores, there are many different physical information channels available, including packaging, in-store signage, and sales representatives, to provide product information that will aid them in making purchasing decisions. In-store mobile media use adds a rich layer of product information for consumers by providing access to two kinds of RAs: 1) mobile sites and apps; and 2) family and friends.

Mobile media allow users to bring their network with them anywhere, fulfilling their everyday information-seeking and socialization needs (Ling, 2004, 2012). This, of course, includes shopping experiences. Shoppers now utilize their mobile media to seek information from other people, from embedded information at the location, from mobile web websites, and from apps while they are at stores (Spaid & Flint, 2014). Karaatli, Ma, and Suntornpithug (2010) found that consumers believe mobile media improve their overall shopping experience and, specifically, their ability to make smart purchase decisions. Kowatsch and Maass (2010) found that positive perceptions of the usefulness of mobile RAs in in-store shopping predicts stronger intentions to shop at the stores that permit consumers to use RAs to access product information, and stronger intention to purchase products. Lee and Benbasat (2010) find mobile RA reduces users' perception of effort and increases their accuracy of decisions at stores.

While previous research has investigated how consumers access mobile sites and apps to make in-store shopping decisions, there has been little research on how they access friends and family while in-store to help them make wise shopping decisions. Thus, this paper investigates two in-store recommendation agents: 1) mobile sites and apps; and 2) mobile communication with family and friends. Following the theory of planned behavior (Fishbein and Azjen, 2010) as a guide, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews to identify direct measures of attitudes,

norms and perceived behavioral control. We then conducted in-depth interviews to identify relevant survey items, and then conducted a survey with 293 participants.

The results of this exploratory study show how this theory can help us better understand factors that determine how consumers behave regarding mobile recommendation agents. As predicted by the theory, intentions to engage in these behaviors was predicted by overall and specific attitudes towards the behaviors and perceived behavioral control. While shopping in-stores, participants were likely to use their phones to look at mobile apps and sites to compare prices, and to text friends and families to get their opinions on purchases and confirm with family and friends that correct purchases were going to be made. The influence of perceived norms was not significant. Limitations, implications and areas of future research are discussed.

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Relevance to Marketing, Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

Our research suggests that families and friends play two important roles in in-store micro-moments: providing opinions via texts, and providing confirmation that what is about to be purchased is correct. Brands need to consider now how new technologies like AR and VR will

enhance what currently takes place through texting. Brands that master these technologies now will be able to provide product-centric experiences that accommodate sharing in new ways.

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