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The non-transactional consequences of browsing behavior: A quantitative study in the Tunisian context

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Abstract

The objective of this investigation is to understand browsing behavior and to identify the factors that influence it. Based on a review of the literature and a quantitative study carried out by the method of structural equations (SEM) implemented by the Smart PLS.3 software, among 202 Tunisians, we have revealed the non-transactional consequences of browsing. Managerial implications are proposed in order to develop this behavior as it should.

Keywords: browsing behavior; quantitative study; consequences; structural equations; Tunisians.

Introduction

Stores were primarily viewed by consumers as places of supply that allowed them to purchase the products and/or services they needed. Thus, the primary objective of the frequentation of points of sale by individuals was purchase, this contributes to the modification of their frequentation habits (Djeumene and Monglo, 2014; Monglo, 2016).

However, research on consumer behavior in stores has shown that stores can be considered as places of leisure and rewarding experiences. Indeed, the experience of pleasure and the strong emotions felt, make that consumers are more incited to visit the stores to have fun or to enjoy the atmosphere than to make purchases. These sales areas must be enhanced to gain real legitimacy over competitors (Lombart and Labbé-Pinlon, 2015).

As a result, frequenting sales points is no longer limited to a simple economic act. Tauber (1972) was the first author to point out that some consumers may visit stores without the aim of buying, but just to discover new products, exchange ideas with people who share the same interests, or even to please themselves, have fun and seek sensory stimulation. This is called browsing behavior.

Ultimately, it seems that many consumers enjoy engaging in "browsing" behavior which can be considered as a distraction activity in stores, carried out by customers without the intention of buying, therefore the motivations are generally recreational. (Lombard, 2004). Research relating to the behavior of frequenting points of sale is mainly oriented towards the purchasing behavior of consumers; little work has been done so far on the particular behavior of browsing.

We have therefore tried to understand this point of sale frequentation behavior, focusing on the non-transactional consequences of browsing behavior at points of sale. But little research has focused on the long-term consequences of browsing. We have therefore tried during this work to know "What are the non-transactional consequences of browsing behavior at points of sale? ".

If consequences such as lasting involvement, subjective expertise, opinion leadership, and word-of-mouth were designed in the model of Lombart and Labbé-Pinlon (2005), other consequences such as experience, satisfaction and intention to return have not yet been studied. Therefore, they are the subject of our research.

To fully understand browsing behavior, we will first attempt to clarify browsing activity. Then, we will expose the hypotheses of our model in the Tunisian context then we will present the research methodology used to validate this model and we will end, by the presentation of the results and their discussions.

1. Understand Browsing Behavior

The behavior of consumers in stores is an aspect that has been studied in depth in recent years by both researchers and distributors.

Consumers who "watch just to watch" are numerous. Similarly, these consumers may "go for a walk" in certain stores (department stores, hypermarkets, specialized stores, boutiques, etc.) not because they have a specific purchase intention, but because they want to know what's new, to have contact with people who share the same interests, or to have fun, etc. (Tauber 1972).

Bloch and Richins (1983) define browsing as "the examination of products in a store, for recreational or informational purposes, without the specific intention of purchase.

According to Lombart (2004) "browsing is a form of leisure activity whose motivations are primarily recreational. During this activity, consumers seek to experience pleasure at the point of sale thanks to the products and/or services offered the atmosphere of the store, its staging and the other consumers present in the point of sale, without any intention to purchase".

In conclusion, we can consider browsing activity as a form of leisure and a form of external information seeking.

2. The Hypotheses and the Research Model

2.1 The relationship between sustained involvement, opinion leadership, word-of-mouth, and subjective expertise

Richins and Root-Schäfer (1988) integrated sustained involvement, opinion leadership, and word-of-mouth into a single model. Their model shows the importance of sustained involvement as a determinant of opinion leadership (Cristau and Strazzieri, 1996). In addition, this model links opinion leadership to word-of-mouth and also confirms the link suggested by Dischter (1966) between sustained involvement with a product category and word-of-mouth activity of that same product category. Based on these various research studies, we propose the following three hypotheses:

H1: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on opinion leadership.
H2: Opinion leadership has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.
H3: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.

The work of Flynn and Goldsmith (1999) has also highlighted a link between sustainable involvement and subjective expertise; in this research only subjective expertise will be considered; some research (Bloch and Richins, 1983; Bloch and al., 1989) has only looked at the level of subjective knowledge whereas researchers in the field of information retrieval generally take into account the objective knowledge of consumers (Brucks, 1985). Therefore, we postulate these two hypotheses:

H4: Subjective expertise has a positive influence on opinion leadership.
H5: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on subjective expertise.

2.1.1 The relationship between browsing, subjective expertise, opinion leadership, word-of-mouth, and sustained involvement

Bloch and Richins (1983) and Bloch and al., (1989) pointed out that the level of perceived knowledge of a consumer could increase with his level of browsing activity. Repeated store visits could thus increase the level of subjective expertise of browsers.

Thus, browsing behavior could be considered as an explanatory variable of subjective expertise. At this point, we emphasize this hypothesis:

H6: Browsing has a positive influence on subjective expertise.

Bloch and al., (1989) suggested that repeated browsing behaviors could induce high levels of opinion leadership. Therefore, browsing could be looked for as an antecedent of opinion leadership. Based on this insight, we find the following hypothesis:

H7: Browsing has a positive influence on opinion leadership.

Bloch and Richins (1983) showed that a consumer's word-of-mouth activity can increase with his or her level of browsing. According to these researchers, browsing behavior could then be considered as an explanatory factor of word-of-mouth, hence the following hypothesis:

H8: Browsing has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.

Therefore, the influence of browsing behavior on word-of-mouth intention will be stronger for consumers who have a positive experience during the leisure activity. Thus, consumers' experience during the browsing activity may play a moderating role of the experience on the relationship between browsing behavior and word-of-mouth intention (Sahli and Mezghenni, 2014).

H8.1: Really lived experience has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between a consumer's in-store browsing behavior and word-of-mouth intention.

Lombart and Labbé-Pinlon (2008) suggested that a positive browsing experience can have a favorable long-term influence on favorable store word-of-mouth. Several authors Bloch and Bruce (1984); Bloch and al. (1986) have shown that a consumer can have high levels of involvement with one or more product categories. The consumer's interest in a product category can then be transformed into a real form of leisure such as browsing. In the conceptual framework, the authors will therefore consider the link between sustainable involvement and browsing. Based on this theoretical reflection, we announce this hypothesis:

H9: Sustainable involvement has a positive influence on browsing.

2.1.2 The relationship between browsing, satisfaction, intention to return, and word-of-mouth:

Consumer satisfaction with their visit to a sales site can also be considered as a consequence of browsing behavior in stores. Jarboe and McDaniel (1987) were the first

researchers to find a direct link between browsing behavior in a sales space and consumer satisfaction with their visit to that sales area.

Dawson and al (2002) have been interested in the clarification of browsing behavior. Generally, their work is based on the importance given to consumer satisfaction, on the study of the satisfaction of the browser which takes all its meaning today. Indeed, it is essential for browsers to satisfy both their recreational and informational needs (Sahli and Mezghenni, 2014). Accordingly, we posit the following hypothesis:

H10: The adoption of a browsing behavior by a consumer within a point of sale has a positive influence on the satisfaction of the visit made in this same point of sale.

H10.1: A consumer's satisfaction during a visit to a point of sale has a positive influence on his or her intention to return to that same point of sale.

Bloch and Richins (1983) and Bloch and al. (1989) have suggested a direct link between browsing behavior in a point of sale and one of the postulated consequences of satisfaction: the intention to return to the point of sale visited. Indeed, although browsers visit stores without any specific purchase intention, these consumers may return to the same outlet and sometimes make purchases, such as impulse purchases or postponed purchases.

Thus, in some cases, the purchases made may be distant from the visit and thus from the browsing behavior that generated them. The information obtained, intentionally or not, during the browsing activity can then be stored in memory, and ultimately result in purchases (Sahli and Mezghenni, 2014). This leads us to the following hypothesis:

H11: The adoption of browsing behavior by a consumer within a point of sale has a positive influence on his or her intention to return to the same point of sale.

The founding works on satisfaction have all recognized the effect of satisfaction on the propensity to engage in favorable word-of-mouth. According to Yi (1990), consumer satisfaction is considered an important determinant of the word-of-mouth process. This importance is primarily related to the affective dimension of satisfaction (Westbrook, 1985).

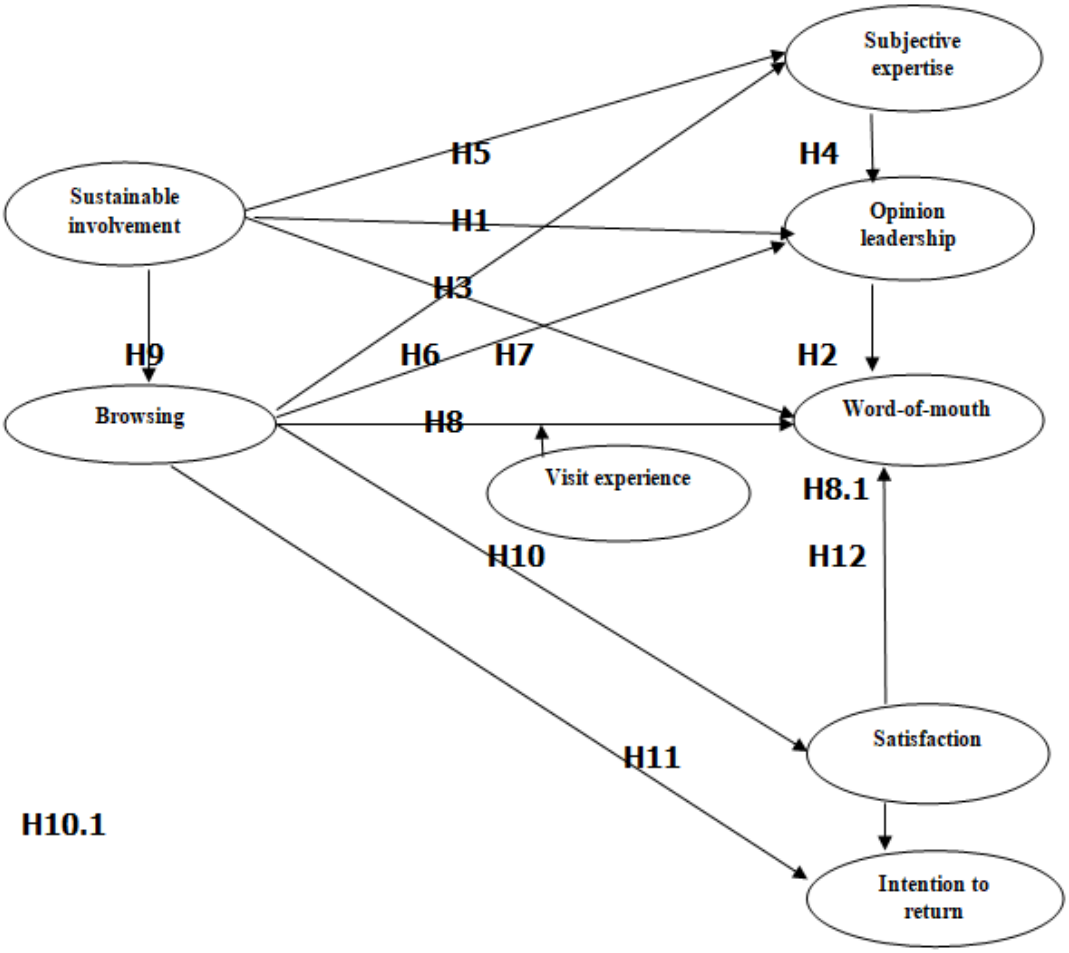
Satisfaction can have an effect on the two components of word-of-mouth, namely the fact of relating positive information about the product or the brand and the fact of recommending the object of satisfaction to others. Reynolds and Beatty (1999) adopt the latter perspective by showing that there is a positive effect of satisfaction on the intention to recommend.

Bone (1992) verified the hypothesis that the frequency of word-of-mouth increases when the number of people with a highly satisfying experience increases. Similarly, Valle and Wallendorf (1977); Sahli and Mezghenni (2014) point out that although satisfied consumers are not able to share their satisfaction with managers, they are more likely to talk about it with their friends and influence them. At this point, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H12: Browser satisfaction has a positive influence on intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth.

At the end of our literature review, we used a model to present the different relationships between the variables that are the subject of our research. This model presents all the explanatory and explained variables, as well as the research hypotheses to be tested.

Figure 1 : Conceptual framework



3. Research Model

Based on our review of the literature, we developed a quantitative study. The objective of this study is to verify the psychometric qualities of the measures and to validate the causal model. We opted for a non-probability sampling method, namely convenience sampling with a questionnaire administered face-to-face to 202 visitors of the "ZARA" store specialized in ready-to-wear clothing in Tunis (Appendix 1). We used the 5-point Likert semantic scale, ranging from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". According to Touzani and Bakini (2007), this scale is the most adapted to the Tunisian context.

For the operationalization of the different variables considered in our research model, we based ourselves on the literature review where the scales are already validated in previous studies. These scales have been adapted to the Tunisian context. In this sense, the results of our empirical work are issued from the combination of two methods of data analysis, namely the principal component analysis (PCA) carried out by the SPSS 20 software (Cronbach's alpha, KMO test and Bartlett's test) and the method of structural equations (SEM) implemented by the Smart PLS.3 software The procedure for evaluating the measurement model using the PLS approach is presented in the following table:

Table 1: Summary of the evaluation procedure for the measurement model

Criterion	***Indices***	***Acceptance standards***
Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	⩾ **0.7**
	CR	⩾ **0.7**
	Loadings	⩾ **0.7**
Convergent validity	AVE	⩾0.5
	Loading	> 0.5
Discriminant validity	√AVE	> R
	Cross-loadings	< Loadings
	Correlation ratio HTMT	< 0.90

Source: Henseler et al. (2017)

In order to validate the measurement models, it is imperative to evaluate the criteria of reliability, convergent validity and discriminate validity for each construct studied in this work.

Reliability is verified using the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's alpha indices, the threshold of acceptability for both indices is 0.7 (Chin and al., 2003). The coefficients of these two indices for each dimension are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha

	Cronbach's alpha
BAO	0,859525
Browsing duration	0,801811
Browsing duration* Enchantment	0,944064
Browsing duration* Exploration and conviviality	0,933171
Enchantment	0,873684
Subjective expertise	0,783224
Exploration and conviviality	0,850253
Dural Involvement	0,833434
Intention to return	1,000000
Opinion leadership	0,890640
Browsing leisure	0,624455
Browsing leisure* Enchantment	0,916950
Browsing leisure* Exploration and conviviality	0,882551
Satisfaction	0,841919

Table 3: Composite Reliability

	Composite Reliability
BAO	0,914466
Browsing duration	0,883290
Browsing duration * Enchantment	0,928500
Browsing duration * Exploration and conviviality	0,917271
Enchantment	0,901054
Subjective expertise	0,872675
Exploration and conviviality	0,897764
Dural Involvement	0,880459
Intention to return	1,000000
Opinion leadership	0,919936
Browsing leisure	0,838365
Browsing leisure * Enchantment	0,910655
Browsing leisure * Exploration and conviviality	0,711428
Satisfaction	0,904891

All the Cronbach's Alpha indices are higher than 0.7, they are thus considered as very satisfying except for the variable "Leisure related to browsing" (dimension of browsing) whose alpha index is equal to 0.62, we say then even that this measure is reliable since in term of reliability the indices of the Composite Reliability are more relevant (Chin and al., 2003) and they vary between 0.87 and 0.96 and they are satisfactory in our case, we can thus conclude of the reliability of the scales.

Convergent validity is achieved when statements from a scale that are intended to measure a particular construct are sufficiently correlated with each other and with the construct (Lacroux, 2009; Fernandes, 2012). Convergent validity is also assessed by examining the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. The required acceptability threshold for this criterion is that either AVE > 0.5 (Lacroux, 2009).

Table 4: Average variance extracted: AVE

	AVE
BAO	0,781091
Browsing duration	0,716326
Browsing duration * Enchantment	0,389396
Browsing duration * Exploration and conviviality	0,495128
Enchantment	0,574877
Subjective expertise	0,696154
Exploration and conviviality	0,687888
Dural Involvement	0,557858
Intention to return	1,000000
Opinion leadership	0,697297
Browsing leisure	0,722467
Browsing leisure * Enchantment	0,430831
Browsing leisure * Exploration and conviviality	0,312703
Satisfaction	0,760683

All the values of the average variance extracted are satisfactory, well above 0.5 except for those of the four multiplicative variables representing the interaction effect between the independent variables and the moderating variables, which means that the average variances due to the errors are greater than the variances explained by the items of each of the trained constructs.

4. Discussion of Results

The main objective of this research is to identify the main long-term consequences of in-store browsing behavior. The consequences of this particular shopping behavior are successively the subjective expertise, the opinion leadership, the word-of-mouth, the visit experience, the satisfaction and the revisit intention.

Once the measurement instruments were purified, we used a principal component analysis (PCA) to identify the number of main factors to be retained and to establish the internal reliability test through the calculation of Cronbach's Alpha. At this level, the results of the principal component factor analysis of all the scales presented kept all their items given their good reliability (Crombach's α>0.5).

In order to test the research model as well as to evaluate the research hypotheses, we chose to use the Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares) software recommended by Lacroux (2009) because of its user-friendliness and the possibility of obtaining graphic representations of the estimated model. We noticed that the browsing variable is divided into two dimensions. The first dimension is named the duration of browsing and the second is the leisure related to browsing.

Similarly, the lived experience variable is divided into two dimensions. The first dimension is called exploration and conviviality within the store and the second is enchantment.

We were able to show that the involvement of the consumer in a product category and his favorable attitude towards the store visited are the personal variables that prompted the Tunisian consumers surveyed. These are the most enthusiastic consumers who are strongly interested in a product category and who have considerable pleasure in browsing. They consider this activity as a kind of leisure.

In addition, our research confirmed that the duration of browsing leads to higher levels of knowledge in the product categories in which the consumer has interest, the Tunisian consumer has a good expertise in the field of clothing which is a very endearing and interesting field. On the contrary, our data show that browsers are not able to influence other consumers (friends, family members...) through word-of-mouth activity despite the fact that it is the main means of informal exchange between individuals. Similarly, browsers are not opinion leaders, who can be considered, by other consumers, as important sources of information, despite being considered trustworthy, sociable, and having credible and relevant opinions.

Our study did not confirm Lombart's (2004) work according to which "the more the browser enjoys strolling through the stores, the better the experience of pleasure and distraction, the more positive word-of-mouth he or she can engage in" and therefore we rejected the hypothesis which states that lived experience is considered a moderating variable between browsing behavior and word-of-mouth.

On the other hand, the results of this research show the link between the length of time spent browsing in a point of sale and the satisfaction of the visit made to this same point of sale. Indeed, a satisfied customer has a high probability to visit the point of sale again. Therefore, this satisfaction cannot influence others by engaging in favorable word-of-mouth and subsequently managers can take advantage of this consumer category.

Table 16: Summary of main results

Hypothesis	**Results**
H1: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on opinion leadership.	Rejected
H2: Opinion leadership has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.	Validated
H3: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.	Rejected
H4: Subjective expertise has a positive influence on opinion leadership.	Validated
H5: Sustained involvement has a positive influence on subjective expertise.	Validated
H6: Browsing has a positive influence on subjective expertise.	Validated
H7: Browsing has a positive influence on opinion leadership.	Validated
H8: Browsing has a positive influence on word-of-mouth.	Rejected
H8.1: Really lived experience has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between a consumer's in-store browsing behavior and word-of-mouth intention.	Validated
H9a: Sustainable involvement has a positive influence on duration of browsing.	Validated
H9b: Sustainable involvement has a positive influence on browsing leisure.	Validated
H10: The adoption of a browsing behavior by a consumer within a point of sale has a positive influence on the satisfaction of the visit made in this same point of sale.	Validated
H10.1: A consumer's satisfaction during a visit to a point of sale has a positive influence on his or her intention to return to that same point of sale.	Validated
H11a: Browsing has a positive influence on the intention to return to the same point of sale.	Validated
H12: Browser satisfaction has a positive influence on the intention to engage in positive word-of-mouth.	Rejected

Conclusion

Our research focused on browsing behavior and aimed to provide a better understanding of point-of-sale frequentation behavior.

In the first part of this research, we have shed light on the browsing behavior. In the same way, we took an overview of the main consequences of this experiential behavior such as subjective expertise, opinion leadership and word-of-mouth, lived experience, consumer satisfaction at the point of sale and his intention to revisit and to establish possible links between them. Thus, we conducted a survey of 202 Tunisian consumers as they were leaving the "ZARA" store.

As a result of this survey, we were able to confirm the existence of significant and positive links between sustainable involvement and browsing, as well as between browsing (the leisure related to browsing) and subjective expertise, browsing (the duration of browsing spent in a point of sale) and opinion leadership. We found that subjective expertise can also be an explanatory variable for opinion leadership, which is itself a word-of-mouth determinant. These different links were presented in our

conceptual model, inspired by the Richins and Root-Schäfer (1988) model, adapted by Lombart and Labbé-Pinlon (2005).

Browsing behavior (the amount of time spent in a point of sale) can also contribute to longer-term sales growth, as it can lead to purchases being made within the point of sale visited, if, however, consumers are satisfied with their initial visit. This research has also shown that browsing behavior has a significant positive influence, via the satisfaction of consumers with their visit, on the intention to return to the point of sale initially visited. Indeed, a satisfied customer has a high probability of returning to the point of sale. Thus, Lombart shows the positive effect of satisfaction on the frequency of word-of-mouth, which increases when the number of people who had a very satisfactory experience increases. Similarly, Valle and Wallendorf (1977) point out that satisfied consumers are more likely to talk about it with their friends and to influence them. Unfortunately, this statement is inconsistent with our data. On the other hand, the results of this research tend to support the idea that the more a consumer is willing to explore the store's shelves and the more exceptional the store visit is, the more positive impact his or her browsing behavior has on engaging in positive word-of-mouth. Thus, experience (excluding delight) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between browsing leisure and consumer word-of-mouth intention.

From a managerial point of view, our results confirm the importance that retailers should give to browsers in the perspective of their strategies and shed light on the non-transactional consequences of in-store browsing behavior. Indeed, consumers who adopt the activity of browsing in store will be more motivated to make purchases in that store. Thus, browsers can contribute to the increase of sales of the merchants by buying from them. Similarly, a good visit experience allows browsers to develop a positive word-of-mouth activity of the visited store. This form of interpersonal communication attracts new customers to retailers and increases their revenue in the long term. Thus, retailers seek to satisfy browsing customers, increase their intention to return, and subsequently gain these customers as loyal customers.

Therefore, our work can be improved by further research. It is possible to include other variables such as familiarity with the product category and loyalty. Indeed, with respect to the level of consumer knowledge or expertise, current research (Bloch and Richins 1983; Bloch and al., 1989) has only looked at the subjective level of knowledge, whereas researchers in the field of information retrieval generally take into consideration the objective knowledge of consumers (Brucks 1985).

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Appendixes

Appendix1: Survey

Hello, we thank you for kindly answering this questionnaire which is carried out as part of a research work. Please answer the questions according to what you think is most relevant and appropriate. However, it is important that you answer all the questions.

Q.1 The sentences below are related to browsing behavior. For each one, could you please indicate whether you agree or disagree?

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
I often go to this store, only for pleasure, without intending to buy anything.					
I consider that entering this store, without any purpose of purchase, just to spend a moment there, is a waste of time.					
Strolling around this store is really a pleasure for me.					
I often go to this store first of all to have fun and then, eventually, to inform myself.					
I consider that strolling around this store, without buying anything, a real hobby.					
It is part of my hobby to spend time in this store to walk around without buying anything.					
I sometimes stroll through this store like others go to a movie or a soccer game, just to relax.					

Q.2 Below you will find a number of ways to describe this store. Please indicate your degree of agreement?

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
I like to discuss these products.					
You could say I'm interested in these products.					
I feel particularly attracted to these products.					
Just looking for information about these products is a pleasure.					
These are products that really matter to me.					
These are products that are of particular importance to me.					

Q.3 Could you also indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following sentences?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know a lot about these products.					
I have the impression that I know a lot about these products.					
As far as my friends are concerned, I'm a very knowledgeable person in this area.					
When it comes to these products, I really don't know much.					
Compared to most people, I know a lot about these products.					

Q.4 I am going to mention different proposals. Please indicate your degree of agreement?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
People rarely come to me for advice on what to buy.					
I often convince others to buy the leisure products I like.					
When choosing a leisure product, people come to me for advice.					
My opinion on this product matters to others.					
I often influence people's opinions about these products.					
People I know choose their leisure products based on what I tell them.					

Q.5 After your visit, how likely are you going to recommend products from this space to someone you know?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I tell others positive things about this store.					
I recommend this store to someone who is looking for advice.					
I encourage my friends to go to this store.					

Q.6 During my visit to the store today:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I want to touch everything in this store.					
I want to look at everything in this store.					
I want to explore every ray.					
It's a real paradise in this store.					
I find it gratifying to be in this store.					
It's a friendly place.					
The atmosphere is warm in this store.					
We feel comfortable in this store.					
It's a change of scenery to come to this store.					
This is not an ordinary visit.					
This is an unusual visit.					
I'm surprised at this place.					
You're surprised when you walk into that store.					

Q.7 How satisfied are you with your visit to this point of sale?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think frequenting this space was a good decision.					
I am satisfied with my visit to this space.					
I think I had a good idea when I decided to go to this space.					
I am not happy that I went to this space.					

Q.8 After my visit today to the store

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feellikecoming back to this store.					

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Data sheet

Q.1- Sex:	**Q.2- What age range are you in?**
Female	Under 20 years old
Male	Between20 and 30 years old
	Between30 and 40 years old
	Between 40 and 50 years old
	More than 50 years old
Q.3- Civil status:	**Q.4- In which socio-professional category are you?**
Single	Employed
Married	Student
Divorced	Female at home
Widow	Executive
Public servant	
Worker	
Retired	
unemployed	

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Appendix 2: Bootstrapped Model