

# *Hedonism and Culture: Impact on Shopping Behaviour A Research Agenda*

**Subhashini Kaul**

## *Executive Summary*

Increasingly consumer shopping behaviour is being seen from the holistic perspective of the entire shopping experience. The holistic view requires a retailer to focus on the shopper experience with the store. Thus the retailer focus is not on the store itself but what the store means to the shoppers. This implies that a retailer needs to understand the 'way in which' different shoppers perceive the same store.

This paper refers to three key dimensions that influence the 'way in which' consumers look at a retail store:

- Shopping environment
- Socio-cultural context
- Individual roles, motivations, and behaviour.

These dimensions take into account not just the differences between shoppers in terms of their individual motivations, but also try to model the variations caused in shoppers due to cultural influences. One key theme of this paper is the variation caused in the perceived hedonic value of shoppers. Hedonic value refers to the 'sense of pleasure' associated with shopping. In the Indian context especially, several retailers have referred to cultural differences and the resultant differences in shopper hedonic orientations. However, there are a few existing frameworks available that enable assessing the association between hedonism and culture in the Indian shopping behavioural context. This paper provides a theoretical framework and a robust research agenda that will help researchers and retailers alike address this need. ✓

### KEY WORDS

**Hedonism  
Culture  
Shopping Behaviour  
Indian Retail  
Research Agenda**

**I**ncreasingly consumer shopping behaviour is being seen from the holistic perspective of the entire shopping experience. The experiential view of shopping takes a far more holistic approach to the consumption process, right from involvement to post-purchase usage, and incorporates the hedonistic perspective into the existing, primarily cognitive-rational information processing view of consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982a). Hedonic shopping value refers to the sense of enjoyment and pleasure that the consumer receives from the entire buying experience associated with shopping at a store (Griffin, Babin and Modianos, 2000) and this value perception could vary depending on (1) individual shopping orientations, (2) cultural orientations and, (3) the economic and competitive environment in which the consumer shops (Woodruffe, Eccles and Elliott, 2002).

In the Indian context, several retailers have referred to cultural differences and the resultant differences in shopper hedonic orientations. However, there are a few existing frameworks available that enable assessing the association between hedonism and culture in the Indian shopping behaviour context.

This theoretical paper reviews existing studies to develop a nomological framework to understand the impact of the above three factors on the purchase behaviour of shoppers. Several hypotheses are generated in the process. Based on the framework, the author suggests future research needs to address several issues related to hedonic value across different product categories; across distinct cultures within or across countries; across developing and developed economies; and across different stages of retail evolution. Indian retailers and international players planning a foray into India, would gain significantly from research into hedonic value across different cities with cultural variations especially if they can identify the key differences in shopping orientations.

## **THEORY OF SHOPPING**

According to Woodruffe, Eccles and Elliott (2002), for examining shopping from a holistic perspective, one needs to understand its three key dimensions—the ‘shopping environment’, the ‘socio-cultural context’ and the individual shopper in terms of his/her ‘roles, motivations, and behaviour.’ These are briefly described below.

### **Shopping Environment**

This refers to the ‘landscape’ of shopping. For example, in India, shopping was primarily an activity undertaken

at ‘unbranded’ stores located at ‘branded’ commercial streets—in small pop-and-son kind of stores to which have been added a plethora of large supermarkets, departmental stores, specialist apparel stores spread over several floors. In recent times, the Indian retail landscape is being dotted by several malls, replete with escalators and a never-before visual and hedonic content to them.

### **Socio-Cultural Context**

Culture has been defined in different ways depending on the theoretical perspective of the researcher (Smircich, 1983). Rather than defining culture, the author states the commonly accepted view of the components of culture which includes values, symbols/artifacts, actions, and cognitions, emotions and meanings (Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson, 2000). In the context of this paper, culture is similar to Geertz’s symbolic anthropological view by which culture is defined as a system of shared symbols and meanings impacting behaviour, including shopping behaviour. Shopping has some symbolic meaning, some emotional and cognitive association, and these meanings differ across cultures. Variations in behaviour across cultures can often be traced to the variation in symbolic associations. At the same time, these symbolic meanings and associated behaviour within a culture are not necessarily rigid. They can and do undergo a change. In the Indian context, for example, shopping and all associated roles such as bargaining, etc., for most of the frequently purchased items were traditionally associated with women. With shopping becoming an increasingly hedonic activity, involving the family as a unit, the socio-cultural context for shopping has changed in India.

### **Individual Roles, Motivations, and Behaviour**

There is a fairly extensive amount of research examining individual shopping orientations. A review of these indicates that orientations impact shopping behaviour including store choice based on several factors such as consumer demographics and psychographics (Cheung, Yee-Man and Hui, 2002; Darden and Ashton, 1974) usage situation (Moye and Kincaide, 2002); price sensitivity (Magi, 2003); social referents (Evans, Christiansen and Gill, 1996), involvement (Williams, Painter and Nicholas, 1978), need recognition (Bruner, 1986) and so on. Product category differences are also known to impact shopping orientations though studies in this area have

been primarily limited to online purchase behaviour (Vijayasathya and Jones, 2000).

## HEDONIC CONSUMPTION

### Evolution of Hedonism

Consumer value from the shopping experience is believed to have two distinct forms: hedonic and utilitarian (Babin and Darden, 1994). There is some evidence that there are two aspects of product performance predictions that interest consumers: hedonic and utilitarian (Batra and Ahtola, 1991).

The term, 'hedonic' was first used in correcting price indices for quality (Cowling and Cubbin, 1972). Hedonic prices were the implicit prices of attributes 'revealed to economic agents from observed prices of differentiated products and the specific amounts of characteristics associated with them' (Rosen, 1974). Studies in this stream found that hedonic rather than utilitarian attributes of a product explained a greater amount of variation in prices (Rosen, 1974). Hence the term, 'hedonic,' was used in an *economic sense* to indicate that the index was computed taking into consideration not just the objective aspects but also the qualitative utility obtained from a product. Most of the effort was then devoted to making the hedonic price model more robust in a variety of contexts: household production model, pediatric services demand, real estate valuation (value of quiet, value of pollution, value of neighbourhood externalities), job satisfaction, digital computer industry and computer services demand, demand for cable television, breakfast cereals, and valuation of public goods. The application was to develop generic product categories rather than brands, a product rather than a consumption view, and to express the 'subjective valuations' of the consumer in 'objective' terms.

In 1982, the term, 'hedonic,' was first used in a consumption sense (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic consumption refers to those 'facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one's experience with products' (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982a). Subsequently, consumer motivation researchers included the hedonic consumption view to the hitherto primarily utilitarian view. Hedonic value or 'hedonism' referred to the aesthetic and experience-based subjective aspects of consumption and meant regarding mundane products as rich symbols.

The experiential view associated with hedonism takes a far more holistic approach to the consumption process, right from involvement to post-purchase usage, and incorporates the hedonistic perspective into the existing, primarily cognitive-rational, problem-solving information processing view of consumption. Emotional arousal—seen as a type of consumer response related to hedonic consumption—is considered a major motivation for at least some products and hedonic value as determining the level of involvement with the purchase of the products. It reflects across all stages of decision-making: in the involvement (emotional as opposed to thought-based), task specification (experience-oriented rather than problem-solving), motivation to search for information (more affective than cognitive) as well as in terms of how products are perceived and evaluated (symbolic meaning rather than feature-based evaluation).

The view of hedonism as proposed by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982a) continued in further research parallel with the hedonic price value models application to market equilibrium studies.

### Hedonism and Product Symbolism

The experiential perspective of consumption is 'phenomenological in spirit and regards consumption primarily as a subjective state of consciousness' (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982b). All products have a certain degree of hedonism. This is because all products have some degree of symbolic meaning that arouse at least some degree of hedonic motivations among individuals (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982a, 1982b; Kleine, Kleine and Kernan, 1993; Schlosser, 1998).

If products are varying in the extent of inherent symbolism, then one can expect that the hedonic value would vary across product categories. This is supported by research examining the extent of hedonism in different products (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Bloch, Sherrell and Ridgway, 1986; Babin and Darden 1994; Lofman, 1991). Hedonic value across products seems to vary depending on the intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of the product (Dodds and Monroe, 1985). Utilitarian value is associated with tasks that are easily completed.

This leads to the first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Hedonic value will differ across different product categories with products of routine purchase such as coffee and detergents having lesser hedonic value as compared to non-

routine purchases such as cellular phones and watches.

This hypothesis implies that any product associated with simple routine task completion like purchase of coffee or detergents is likely to be less in hedonic value as compared to a product with a higher degree of information processing and involvement such as cellular phones where the outlay is much larger and bargain-seeking behaviour may impact product purchase (Thaler, 1985; Monroe and Chapman, 1987).

### Hedonism and Cultural Influence

Several motives of shopping are socially and culturally anchored (Tauber, 1972; Siu *et al.*, 2001) including ethnic identifications (Eun-Ju, Fairhurst and Dillard, 2002) and acculturation effects (Ownbey and Horridge, 1997). Dworkin and Saczynski (1984) explored into the individual differences in hedonic 'capacity' which he defined as 'an individual's ability to experience pleasurable affect'. Consumption itself has been linked to 'symbolic meanings, values and lifestyles – all of which are likely to be specific to local cultures' (Shaw and Clarke, 1998). Several studies have examined and recognized the strong impact of values in shaping consumer motivations and product choices (Carman, 1978; McCracken, 1986; Yau, 1988).

This leads to the second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Cultural differences amongst consumers in terms of materialism, family values, role of reference groups and centrality to self, and their perceived hedonic value of a product such as orange juice would be strongly correlated.

This hypothesis implies that apart from products that are evidently ethnic and socio-culturally preferred, mundane products that have a mix of utilitarian and hedonic value, such as those associated with health, are likely to be impacted by cultural influences because they have different symbolic associations (Ximing and Collins, 2002).

### Hedonism and Economic development

It has been argued that the consumer would place greater emphasis on utilitarian value of products in a developing country rather than hedonic value which would be more important for consumers in developed countries (Malhotra, Ulgado and Baalbaki, 1994).

This leads to the third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* A personal product such as shampoo would primarily provide hedonic value to consumers in developed economies and primarily provide utilitarian value to consumers in a developing economy.

This hypothesis implies that similar products are likely to be bought based on different motivations, when comparing shoppers across developed and developing countries.

### Hedonic Value and Shopping Environment

Another dimension that can be used to study consumer shopping behaviour is the shopping environment (Woodruffe, Eccles and Elliott, 2002). Since information search and related shopping orientations are closely linked (Westbrook and Black, 1985), the fourth and final hypothesis is formulated as follows:

*Hypothesis 4:* Hedonic value from shopping at a store would be high (low) when retailing is in a mature (nascent) stage of evolution.

### SUGGESTED RESEARCH AGENDA

The above four proposed hypotheses will aid to a greater understanding of buying behaviour of shoppers.

#### Research Questions

In particular, the research would address the following questions:

- What are the factors (or characteristics of shoppers) that influence their hedonic buying behaviour across different product categories?
- Does culture/sub-culture influence the shoppers' hedonic value from shopping and his/her buying behaviour?
- Is there an association between the level of development of a country's economy and the shoppers' hedonic buying behaviour?
- Is there an association between the level of competition in the market and the shoppers' hedonic buying and shopping behaviour?

#### Hypothesis Testing

It is suggested that the hypotheses testing be undertaken

- across different product categories within a specified culture;
- across different retail landscapes;

- across different states within India that have distinctly different cultures;
- across different countries that are similar on some cultural parameters such as family values, or materialism;
- across different countries that are culturally dissimilar;
- across developed and developing economies with/without cultural similarities.

## SUGGESTED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sampling and Data Collection Method

It is recommended that an exploratory study be conducted among shoppers at the retail stores in the regions/states/countries of interest. The sample size for a more detailed study would be derived after this exploratory study, though indications are that the respondents may come from the higher income segments of the society, especially in the Indian context. It is recommended that the data be collected using the method of 'Observation' of shoppers within the selected stores and for given structured questions (see Appendix for suggested Measures), by administering a shop intercept outside the

store after the selected respondents have finished their shopping.

Appropriate analytical tools will need to be employed to explain the phenomenon and the interrelationship among the variables.

### Measures

I suggest using the measures and scales given in the Appendix:

1. To measure the extent of hedonism in different products and shopping as an activity for given store type: the parsimonious HED/UT scale developed by Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann (2003)
2. To measure cultural influence on perceptions of shopping as an activity: scales developed by Lindridge and Dibb (2002) and the original sources of literature they referred to.

Detailed suggestions on how to administer the questionnaire are also included in the Appendix which may be useful for planning the data collection methodology.

**Note:** Though the measures are based on a review of existing literature, their validity in the Indian context needs to be examined.

## APPENDIX

### SUGGESTED MEASURES FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH

This appendix contains measures and scales culled out from various sources of literature with some measures suggested by the author. Sources of measures are specified. The Appendix also provides suggested instructions for investigators **and** suggested coding patterns are given in **bold**. Depending on the study objective, measures as given below may be added/deleted.

#### Questionnaire Part I

Have you recently (in the last one month) bought any of the following products? Please also indicate the store where you bought the product:

Products	Please tick mark if you have bought product in last one month	Store Name (SN)	Type of Store (TS) (to be filled in by the Investigator)
1. Coffee	<b>Codes 1-6 depending on which product chosen for rest of the questionnaire</b>		
2. Detergent			
3. Packaged orange juice			
4. Shampoo			
5. Cellular phone			
6. Wrist watch			

(For Part II, the Investigator should ask the respondent to select only one product, preferably non-routine, if it has been bought in last one month)

#### Questionnaire Part II

Q1. Keeping in mind the product \_\_\_\_\_ (ask respondent to insert product type here by himself/herself using Part-I answers) you recently bought, indicate your perceptions about that product by marking appropriately on the scale below.

Note: Investigator to ensure that routine products are selected by respondent on the basis of 'recency' and 'frequency' using the 'quota' sampling method, preference to be given to non-routine products (such as cell phones and watches) ONLY if purchase was made in the last one month

(Investigator should explain scale details to the respondent) as follows:

For product \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in product type details here once again):

(Source: HED/UT scale by Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann, 2003)

Contd.

PP11	Ineffective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Effective
PP12	Unhelpful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Helpful
PP13	Not functional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Functional
PP14	Unnecessary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Necessary
PP15	Impractical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Practical
PP16	Fun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fun
PP17	Exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dull
PP18	Delightful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not delightful
PP19	Thrilling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not thrilling
PP20	Enjoyable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Un-Enjoyable

Q2. Keeping in mind the same product you mentioned above, please indicate the extent to which buying it reflects your status by marking appropriately for the following questions: **(Investigator should explain the 5-point Likert scale and state that the research intention is to measure the role of the 'specific product' as status enhancer)**

- PE11 The product reflects my family's social position in my community  
 PE21 It adds status to my family name in the community  
 PE31 It increases other people's respect for me  
 PE41 It tells people how successful I have been in life  
 PE51 By buying this product I feel I have more respect from other people  
 PE61 I believe the product has improved my status in the community

Q3. This question relates to the extent to which buying and using this product matches with your self-image. Please indicate your answers by marking accordingly:

**(Investigator should explain the 5-point Likert scale and state that the research intention is to measure relevance to self-image, both private and collective selves)**

(Source: Webster and Beatty,1997)

- SCP1 This product expresses who I am  
 SCP2 This product matches the way I really see myself  
 SCP3 Using this product symbolizes my true personal values  
 SCP4 This product fits with my tastes  
 SCP5 Using this product indicates others' preferences/expectations of me  
 SCP6 Using this product ties in with my desire for social acceptance  
 SCP7 Using this product fits my social roles  
 SCP8 Using this product speaks of my connectedness to others  
 SCP9 Using this product fits my profession

### Questionnaire Part III:

#### 'Shopping Experience and the Individual

Q1. Think of the store \_\_\_\_\_ where you bought \_\_\_\_\_ **(investigator should ask for name of store where product in Part II was bought)**. How would you describe your past shopping experiences at this store?

PS11	Ineffective	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Effective
PS21	Unhelpful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Helpful
PS31	Not functional	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Functional
PS41	Unnecessary	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Necessary
PS51	Impractical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Practical
PS61	Fun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not fun
PS71	Exciting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dull
PS81	Delightful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not delightful
PS91	Thrilling	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not thrilling
PS01	Enjoyable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unenjoyable

Q2. Keeping in mind the same store you mentioned above, please indicate the extent to which shopping at this store adds to your status by marking appropriately for the following questions: **(Investigator should explain the 5-point Likert scale and state that the research intention is to measure Role of 'shopping at the store' as status enhancer)**

- SE11 Shopping at this store reflects my family's social position in my community  
 SE12 Shopping at this store adds status to my family name in the community  
 SE13 Shopping at this store increases other people's respect for me  
 SE14 Shopping at this store tells people how successful I have been in life  
 SE15 By shopping at this store I feel I have more respect from other people  
 SE16 I believe shopping at this store has improved my status in the community





## Q3. Materialism

**Success**

- MS1 I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes  
 MS2 Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions  
 MS3 I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success  
 MS4 The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life  
 MS5 I like to own things that impress people  
 MS6 I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own

**Centrality**

- MC1 I usually buy only the things I need  
 MC2 I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned  
 MC3 The things I own aren't all that important to me  
 MC4 I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical  
 MC5 Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure  
 MC6 I like a lot of luxury in my life  
 MC7 I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know  
 MC8 I think material objects are a sign of success

**Happiness**

- MH1 I have all the things I really need to enjoy life  
 MH2 My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have  
 MH3 I wouldn't be happier if I owned nicer things  
 MH4 I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things  
 MH5 It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like to.

**Part IV****Demographic Details of the Respondent****REFERENCES**

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\* GLOBE questionnaire family values items have been added to the Instrument wherever appropriate, Courtesy: Prof. J S Chhokar who made the instrument available to the author, see references GLOBE.