Social effects on unplanned in-store buying

Rojanasak Chomvilailuk a, Ken Butcher b

aSchool of Business, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Bangkok, 10400, Thailand
bDepartment of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia

Abstract

While numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of out-of-store marketing (e.g. shopping trip goals and price promotion) and in-store marketing (e.g. shelf design) on customer buying behavior, few studies have investigated the influence of social effects on unplanned in-store purchasing. In store-social influences refer to purchase behavior arising from a recommendation or advice from a closely connected and important person to the customer. The current study conducted two focus group interviews with respect to research participants’ grocery shopping experiences. The first focus group composed of 6 university staff and 8 university students were recruited for the second group. Most focus group participants are female. This is salient for the Thai cultural context whereby shopping is still considered the domain for females or housewives particularly for the university staff group. Research findings revealed that both groups mostly prepared shopping lists before going to the store. However, the list could be an unwritten note. Unplanned purchases were driven by economic value, such as discounted price and sales promotion. However it was found that an accompanying person could alter the research participant’s planned buying list and even loyal brand purchases. Specifically, a customer’s friend and/or relative may affect the respondent’s purchasing pattern. For example, a friend or spouse or relative may give information about defects or the quality of products during in-store shopping. As a result, a customer’s unplanned buying decision may be affected by social effect in terms of buying or not-buying even though the customer is motivated by purchase impulses from shelf-exposure. Based on the current research’s findings, there is a need to develop the current theoretical models for the unplanned buying by including the social effect. Furthermore, logical explanations why and how social effect has an impact on unplanned in-store buying are required and resulted in relevant construct development. Social media that is an important route of social effects on in-store buying behavior should be investigated. Strategic management implication is that market practitioners are required to consider the marketing program investments on the customer’s social effect for enhancing the in-store unplanned product performance.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).
Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the 2nd International Conference on Strategic Innovative Marketing.

Keywords: Social effects; unplanned; in-store buying

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: rojanasak_cho@utcc.ac.th
1. Introduction

Bell, Corsten and Knox (2011) examine an impact of out-of-store marketing on customer’s buying behavior. The authors found the effect of shopping trip goals and favorable pricing on the unplanned purchase. Moreover, Bell, Corsten and Knox (2011) reviewed literatures back from the present to 1960s’ and found various factors affecting the unplanned buying behavior of customers, such as in-store marketing to stimulate forgotten product items, individual difference in terms of unplanned buying manners, customer characteristics, and sales promotion marketing programs. Nevertheless, there are few of studies investigating the impact of social effect on the unplanned in-store buying behavior. Thus, this current research intends to fill the gap. With respect to literature review relevant to social impact on customer behavior, Nitzan and Libai (2011) found customers who have close connection with another person who is important for them and also when the customers have no loyalty, there is a high tendency of defection responses. In other words, the customers with planned shopping lists may not buy the listed goods because close connected person of the customer deviates the customers’ purchasing intention. According to the gaps from previous studies, the current research proposes that the social effect can have an impact on the customer’s unplanned in-store buying. Since, the customers shopping in the retail shops are the social unit for which it receives an effect from social participations.

As the social effect aspect on unplanned buying behavior is new and shortage in terms of prior studies, and also most of available research are westernized environment, this research chooses to study Eastern environment as Thailand markets with respect to unplanned in-store buying behavior on grocery product category. Specifically, to be familiar and comprehend the background and fundamental customer behavior for unplanned in-store buying, this research adopted the exploratory survey approach of Chambers et al. (2008) by conducting two focus group interviews, university staff and student. Particularly for the focus-group data collection method, previous research points out that focus group method is appropriate for the exploration stage when the research has an objective of behavioral and social studies especially linked to customers’ consumption and expenditures (Chambers et al., 2008). Next section will provide a selective and relevant review of literature.

2. Literature review

This section presents the relevant literature review in which the authors discuss important aspects of unplanned in-store buying behavior, social effect, and the possibility of the relationship between two variables to provide propositions for being the framework of exploratory survey.

2.1. Unplanned in-store buying behavior

Unplanned buying behavior is implicitly defined as the shopping practices that are the results from exposure to in-store stimuli by which customer may have new created needs and/or be reminded for temporarily forgotten needs (Bell, Corsten & Knox, 2011; Hui, et. al., 2013). Meanwhile, Inman, Winer and Ferraro (2009) defined that unplanned buying behavior is a purchase without specific plan before the shopping event. It can be inferred that there is a situation that customer (s) buys the product without purchasing intention before going to the store. Furthermore, this phenomenon can happen, even customer (s) has a shopping list. Some prior studies added that unplanned buying is relevant to emotional response (Talukdar & Lindsey, 2013; Verplanken & Sato, 2011). Thus, this research adapted the previous specified definitions to scope the meaning of unplanned buying behavior as the purchases for product categories or items without plan before going to store. With respect to this adapted definition, the current research can expand the knowledge of unplanned buying behavior to cover out-of-store and in-store stimuli, and emotional and non-emotional responses on the purchase behavior. Additionally, the defined unplanned buying behavior of this study is consistent with the findings of Block and Morwith (1999).

Previous research found that unplanned in-store buying behavior could be a result of out-of-store and in-store marketing programs (Block & Morwith, 1999). For example, customer (s) can receive advertising information of discount prices and sales promotion as the out-of-store marketing offers. The customers who received the advertising message may have an intention to shop and buy the goods involved with the marketing campaigns. However, these out-of-store marketing programs may have effectiveness when there is an exposure of customers with announcement
in the store. In other words, even the customers received the advertising information but they might not expose to the reminding message in the store, the customers perhaps buying the items, which were not relevant to the campaign. In conclusion, there is an evidence to support that out-of-store and in-store marketing programs can influence unplanned in-store buying behavior. However, there are few studies focusing on the effects of accompanying persons with customer and/or close connected persons on the customer’s unplanned buying decision. The next section will discuss this aspect.

2.2. Social effects

Human being, as we knew, is a social animal. Eligibly, customers as human being need social relationship and have an interaction and social connection with others. Nitzan and Libai (2011) pointed out that social defined in other words as the connection and information transmission is a general fact and practice of human being and/or customer. Furthermore, social influence can happen when there is a transmission of information among people who are connected to one another. Thus, one may have a buying behavior deviate from his/her own practices when there is the information transmission from his/her connected people. For example, one may receive an experience of product usage from his/her friend/relative/family member. Suppose that his/her connected people have bad experience with the products, there may an impact on the customer who is making decision about shopping the products. Moreover, Bell, Corsten and Knox (2011) also pointed out that unplanned buying behavior could be affected by out-of-store factors, specifically as word of mouth from family and friends. Similarly, Chang, Molly, and Yan (2011) found the impact of social characteristics on customer’s positive emotional response. However, Inman, Winer and Ferraro’s (2009) research findings against the proposition of social effect on customer decision-making. Thus, the current knowledge and research theory still have been sparse. Specifically, there still have been questions what the results of the social effect are, when the customer’s connected person influence happens in the in-store situation. Again, up to date, there is few study investigating in this specific issue. In particular, with respect to the priori studies (e.g. Bell, Corsten & Knox, 2011; Chang, Molly & Yan, 2011; Nitzan & Libai, 2011), it can be inferred that there may be the impact of social effects on the customer’s unplanned in-store buying behavior. As a result, this current research proposes a proposition as the framework for exploratory study as follow:

**Research proposition: social effects from customer(s)’s friend/relative/family members have impact on unplanned in-store buying behavior.**

Next section discusses methodology in the dimensions of concepts of the method, sample and data collection, and data analysis approach.

3. Methodology

For this exploratory study, focus group interviews were conducted. To gain insight into respondent’s perspectives, it is important to establish freely flowing communication and information exchange. Application of a laddering interview technique facilitates the flow of information in unstructured interviews because researchers establish a rapport with interviewees (Renolds & Gutman, 1988). In addition, the laddering technique encourages the inclusion of probing questions that link perceptions across a range of attributes, consequences and values to gain a deep understanding of the interviewee’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations (Patton 1990).

Miles and Huberman (1984) indicated that construct validity of qualitative interview data can be achieved with less instrumental question preparation. However, a strong priori instrument can help researchers establish the depth and breadth of interview questions that constructed around the research question. The priori instrument is also appropriate to provide external validity and reliability because of its generalization power from comparable cases and cross-case analysis. To balance data quality concerns associated with free flowing interviews with the obvious constraints of priori instruments, interview questions were only used as a guide to confirm, at the end of the interview, all aspects of importance had been probed.
3.1. Samples and data collection

This study conducted two focus group interviews. First, the authors contacted and invited university staffs both male and female to participate the focus group by explaining the aims and scope of this research. There were six lecturers joining the interviews, which the prospects were asked as screening questions for the respondents’ self-shopping experiences. Noted that the authors also approached the male university staffs, however, there was no one willing to participate in the survey. The male university staffs responded that shopping would be the issue of female or housekeeper. Second, the university students were approached and asked to participate in the focus group interview, similar approach as the university staffs. The student respondents passed the test of screening question for shopping experiences. Total number of student group is eight, which the gender combination is three males and five female.

3.2. Data analysis

To preliminarily obtain important issues and understand fundamental unplanned in-store buying behavior and social effects, the authors pursued a content analysis, which is the systematic observation and description of the obvious content of communication (Zikmund et al., 2013). In other words, this analysis concentrates on systematic analysis along with observation to identify the particular theme of the message. Specifically, this research scoped the content themes on having shopping list/shopping goals, connection with social, unplanned in-store buying behavior, and reasons of unplanned buying.

4. Results

Research findings from the focus group interviews show that the frequency of shopping in the university staff group is less than the student group on average (Table 1. and Table 2. in the Appendix A.). Both groups mostly prepare the shopping list before going to the store, especially for the university staffs. However, there is a tendency that the student group may have no written list compared to the staff group, even the student respondents stressed that they have the list of goods for the shopping trip. For example, respondent L pointed out that ‘Yes, have products in mind of shopping trip but no list’ (Table 2.). The reason of this difference between university staff and student may be that the students are young and can easily keep the list in their mind without worrying forgotten items of goods.

Interestingly, all respondents have unplanned shopping behavior in the retail grocery shop. However, it seems to be clear that the respondents intend to obtain the listed products before they shop the unplanned ones. Furthermore, the important drivers of unplanned buying for both groups are economic value, such as discount price and sales promotion. For example, respondent A answered the question of reasons of unplanned buying as ‘like… sales promotion’ (Table 1.), and respondent I pointed out that reasons of unplanned buying was ‘Sales promotion and price discount’ (Table 2). In addition, customer’s store selection mostly relies on the economic values in terms of cost saving and convenience (Table 3. in Appendix A.). Product involvement is also likely to affect the selection of store types. Emotional value, for example, brand consideration is crucial for specific respondents who regularly loyal to brand (Table 3.—continued in Appendix A.). These respondent groups are likely to shop consistent with their shopping list. However, the accompany persons of the brand loyalty group may deviate his/her unplanned buying in the store.

Specifically, this current research finds the impact of social connection on unplanned buying behavior. Customer’s friends and parents may affect the purchase patterns. For example, friend or parents give information that the product has defect or high quality. This information will affect the customer’s decision, not buying or buying, on the unplanned buying product items even the customer may be interested in the products as the shelf exposure. Moreover, the accompanying of family, relatives, and friends in the shopping trip may have an impact on the customer’s unplanned buying (Table 3.—continued in Appendix A.). For example, respondent B: ‘…once my friend told me that products are not good. When I see them on shelf, I don’t buy them even they look good’, and respondent I: ‘…I don’t want to go shopping with my parents. When I found products I like and they are not in my intention, my parents might say they are expensive or not good. So, I cannot buy them’.
With respect to contributions of this research, specifically the issue of social effect in terms of accompanying family/relative/friend on unplanned buying behavior is emerging and an original initiated by this study. However, the authors aim to make familiarity and understand fundamental buying behavior of unplanned in-store purchase before conducting empirical hypothesis testing. As a result, this research is in the exploratory stage and conducts the focus group interviews. The findings are not verified by rigid information. Further literature reviews and empirical study are required. However, with respect to this current research, there is additional information postulating that there is a need to develop the current theory explaining and predicting the behavior of unplanned in-store buying by including the social effect in the model. Furthermore, the social effect through social media should be the important issue of further study since the respondents cited the modern routes of their connection. Also, practitioners are required to consider significantly an investment on customer’s social activities for enhancing the in-store product performance with respect to customers’ unplanned buying.

5. Conclusions

Unplanned in-store buying behavior is exist in the markets. Although, customers have their own shopping list both in written and unwritten format, the customers may buy the unintentional items of goods. Important factors that may influence the unplanned in-store buying behavior are an out-of-store marketing programs and in-store social effects. The out-of-store marketing programs compose of various marketing offer, e.g. sales promotion, price discount, and packaging. Meanwhile, the in-store social effects are consisting of a recommendation (and/or interference) of parents, relatives, and friends. Specifically, the recommendation and/or interference of social effects on unplanned in-store buying can be made through various routes, e.g. cell phone or face-to-face by accompanied with close connected person.

As a result, researchers in unplanned in-store buying behavior should investigate and develop incremental models to enhance the current theory of explainable power for the buying behavior. Meanwhile, market practitioners should be concerned the effect of social factor on unplanned in-store buying. Finally, future research should be conducted on the direction of conceptual framework development and empirical hypothesis testing.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the School of Business, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, and the Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University for their supports in terms of research facilities. Last but not least, the authors thank the research respondents of both university staffs and students.

Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent# and gender</th>
<th>Income (US$/month)</th>
<th>Frequency of shopping</th>
<th>Shopping list/Shopping goal</th>
<th>Connection with social</th>
<th>Unplanned buying behaviour</th>
<th>Reasons of unplanned buying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, female</td>
<td>&gt; 1,650</td>
<td>One time per 4 weeks</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>By sms and email contact with society</td>
<td>Yes, regularly get the products in the list and buy the unplanned products too</td>
<td>Like the product, sales promotion, recommendation from friend, accompanied by relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent # and gender</td>
<td>Income (US$/month)</td>
<td>Frequency of shopping</td>
<td>Shopping list/Shopping goal</td>
<td>Connection with social</td>
<td>Unplanned buying behavior</td>
<td>Reasons of unplanned buying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, female</td>
<td>&gt; 1,650</td>
<td>More than one time per week</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>Cell phone, direct contact with closed society, family members and friends</td>
<td>Yes, regularly get the products in the list and buy the unplanned products too</td>
<td>Normally use the product, sales promotion, impulse feeling at the store, recommendation from relative and friend, accompanied by relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C, female</td>
<td>980-1,300</td>
<td>Twice a week</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>Cell phone, Whatsapp</td>
<td>Yes, regularly get the products in the list and buy the unplanned products too</td>
<td>Forgotten needs but stimulated by shelf exposure, recommendation from friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D, female</td>
<td>&gt; 1,650</td>
<td>One time per 4 weeks</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>Land phone and cell phone for contacts with family members and friends</td>
<td>Yes, regularly get the products in the list and buy the unplanned products too</td>
<td>Sales promotion, and want to try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E, female</td>
<td>&gt; 1,650</td>
<td>Longer than 4 week for one time</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>Face to face meeting, sms for sometimes</td>
<td>Yes, but regularly get the products in the list or intend to buy</td>
<td>Sales promotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, female</td>
<td>&gt; 1,650</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>Yes, have list</td>
<td>BB and cell phone</td>
<td>Yes, regularly get the products in the list and buy the unplanned products too</td>
<td>Shortage of house store, sales promotion, and trying attraction products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. The profiles of the respondents, Group2 (University students)
Table 3. Customer’s general shopping behaviour and factors possibly affecting the customer’s unplanned buying behaviour (grocery product category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Quote (s) from respondent’s information (for examples)</th>
<th>Support or non-support by previous studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place, and location</td>
<td>Close to house, cost saving, convenience</td>
<td>Respondents B, C, D, F, H, I, J: “…like to go to supermarket that is closed to house. So convenience”</td>
<td>Support the findings of Bell, Corsten and Knox’s (2011) control variables affecting on unplanned buying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents E, N: “…don’t want to go out many rounds, waste car gasoline. Go to this place because convenience”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent with product categories</td>
<td>Respondents C, D, F: “…go to supermarket for buying household products, such as toothpaste, soap, etc.” “…go to department store when we want to buy personal products, such as cosmetics, cream…”</td>
<td>Partially support the concept of product involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned buying behavior</td>
<td>Almost every shopping trips have unplanned buying</td>
<td>All respondents: buy unplanned product in each shopping trip but regularly get the products in the list, first.</td>
<td>Support the previous research of Block and Morwitz (1999). In particular, Block and Morwitz found that customers make a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic value factors: cost saving, sales promotion, discount price, additional items,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Respondents B, L: “…get the unplanned products because the store impulses me by discount price, sales promotion campaign. For</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
example, the store bundle two products in one pack and sale at discount package price.

Respondents B, E: Also, there is a free additional item. Interesting! Sometimes we buy these products and forget to buy the listed products...

Respondents C: “...discount price is important. Ever saw advertising before and wanted it. So when come to the store and find this product, I buy it.”

shopping list consistent with the economic drives.

Support the findings of store choice goals effect on unplanned buying (Bell, Corsten & Knox 2011)

Support the reinforcement role of the out-of-store marketing on unplanned buying (Bell, Corsten & Knox 2011).
Table 4. Customer’s general shopping behaviour and factors possibly affecting the customer’s unplanned buying behaviour (grocery product category)—continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
<th>Quote (s) from respondent’s information (for examples)</th>
<th>Support or non-support by previous studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned buying behavior</td>
<td>Emotional value factors: attractive products, strange products, like the shelf design</td>
<td>Respondents A, E: “…there is no this product before. It is brand news. Very attractive. I never have it before, so I buy it.” Respondents A: “I am the one who normally loyal with brand. So, I would buy the unplanned products when there is no difference and their prices are not high…Regularly, I repurchase the same brand. So, even for the unplanned product buying, I consider my familiar brand or my brand.” Respondents N, I: “…beautiful or strange shelf design attracts me to focus on the products and buy them even they are not in my list.”</td>
<td>Partially consistent with the motivation concept. Partially consistent with the empirical research results of Burns (2011) in terms of association between consumer decision making styles and purchasing behaviours particularly for brand consciousness and loyalty. Partially support the study of Chandon, Hutchinson, Bradlow, and Young (2009) in terms of shelf position effect. However the previous research investigates the effect of brand consideration combining with the shelf design effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social effects: recommendation of parents, relatives, and friends, particularly through various connection routes (University staffs normally use face to face, and land line for connection meanwhile university students likely to use modern connection modes, such as communication applications through cell phone)</td>
<td>Respondents B: “…once my friend told me that products are not good. When I see them on shelf, I don’t buy them even they look good.” Respondents A: “…I don’t intend to buy but when my friend tell that product is good, I buy it. I do because I believe my friend.” Respondent C: “…I almost buy a cosmetic product, but when I recall that my friend’s recommendation, not to buy because of low quality…I don’t buy it.”</td>
<td>These findings partially support the findings of Nitzan and Libai’s (2011) study. Nitzan and Libai (2011) point out those social relationships have effect customer retention. As the current research findings show that friends or parents may affect the purchase behavior. Regarding the social media, there is no conclusive results supporting the previous research studying the effect social effect through digital media (Colliander &amp; Dahlén 2011).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social effects: accompanied by parents, relatives, and friends</td>
<td>Respondents A, B: “…man generally doesn’t like to make a shopping list…man wants to try new thing or innovative products. Therefore, we get the unplanned products.”</td>
<td>Respondents I: “…I don’t want to go shopping with my parents. When I found products I like and they are not in my intention, my parents might say they are expensive or not good. So, I cannot buy them.” Respondents L, N: “…when I want to shop, I don’t want to go with my friends. Because I need time…I don’t like that they make me hurry and I cannot shop around. So, for the shopping trips like this, I would not get the unplanned products.”</td>
<td>This research obtains new conclusions regarding the unplanned buying behavior terms of accompanying persons and these persons’ effect on the customer buying decision on unplanned products. However, the findings partially support the findings of Nitzan and Libai’s (2011) study. Nitzan and Libai (2011) point out those social relationships have effect on customer retention. As the current research findings show that friends or parents accompanying with the customer may affect the purchase behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


