

Unethical Consumers: Deshopping Behaviour Using the Qualitative Analysis of Theory of Planned Behaviour and Accompanied (De)shopping

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Structured Abstract

Purpose

Previous research indicates that deshopping is a prevalent and growing consumer behaviour. This paper examines deshopping from a consumer perspective, and applies the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to demonstrate how this behaviour can be managed and prevented. An accompanied (de)shop is also conducted. This paper also places deshopping within a legal and ethical context, in relation to the established literature in this field.

Methodology approach

This paper tests the TPB variables in a qualitative way by conducting in-depth interviews with deshoppers, who had completed a quantitative questionnaire. The results further support and enhance the quantitative TPB results collected previously with 535 consumers. An accompanied (de)shop is also reviewed, as this qualitative research technique, enables an enhanced understanding and evidence of the deshopping process, which has not been demonstrated previously. The findings demonstrate support for these qualitative research tool, which enable a deeper understanding of the deshopping process and its management.

Findings

The findings demonstrate important use of the TPB as a qualitative research technique. The model is also expanded and redesigned by adding additional variables as a result of this research. The accompanied (de)shop findings demonstrate support for this qualitative research tool, which also enables a deeper understanding of the deshopping process and its management.

Practical implications

The research concludes with the implications of deshopping for the industry and makes recommendations as how to reduce deshopping, as well as recommending the qualitative research techniques utilised to future researchers.

Originality

This paper has identified the key variables that influence deshopping, and demonstrates that procedures can be designed to reduce this behaviour by manipulating the TPB variables. This paper has also added additional variables to the TPB model, which have proved to be influential in deshopping behaviour, thereby developing theoretical knowledge of TPB. The use of the TPB has also provided a theoretical underpinning to utilising a consumer education program to prevent problem behaviours. This research demonstrates that this could alter deshoppers' attitudes and subjective norms.

This is also the first paper to place deshopping in a legal framework which highlights the legal loopholes in a retailer's returns policy and the implications of new directives which will influence retailer's abilities to refuse a return. This paper is also the first to explore deshopping within an ethical framework that has created new knowledge on the unethical consumer in relation to deshopping behaviour.

This study also incorporates an accompanied (de)shop methodology; this form of research has never been undertaken in relation to deshopping activity and has generated completely new knowledge of what is happening when the actual behaviour is taking place.

Keywords: Deshopping, consumer behaviour, returns, retail borrowing; theory of planned behaviour, accompanied shopping, consumer ethics, consumer behaviour, consumption, fraud; retail returns policies, consumer psychology.

Introduction

Research reveals alarming results on the prevalence of the dishonest consumer behaviour known as deshopping. Deshopping is the

'deliberate return of goods for reasons other than actual faults in the product, in its pure form premeditated prior to and during the consumption experience.'

(Schmidt et al., 1999 p.2)

An example of deshopping would be buying a suit for an interview and returning it afterwards – behaviour that could be described as using retailers as a clothing library. Previous research indicates that deshopping is widespread and is substantially affecting retailers' profits. Indeed, reducing the behaviour could add up 10% or more to profitability (King 1999, King 2004). Deshopping has previously been analysed from a consumer perspective and retailer's awareness of the problem has been highlighted (Zabriskie 1972-1973, Wilkes 1978, Jolson 1974, Schmidt et al., 1999, Piron & Young 2001, King & Dennis 2003 and King & Dennis 2004). Previous research has explored deshopping behaviour by addressing it as a process of consumption and as a risk reduction strategy (Schmidt et al, 1999), and identified thoughts and emotions behind the behaviour (Piron and Young, 2000). Recent research has addressed techniques for modifying the behaviour based on a quantitative modelling technique (King 2004). This study is novel in two respects. It is the first to address deshopping using depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the behaviour. It is also the first study to utilise accompanied (de)shopping. More broadly, this study provides a fundamental insight into understanding of the management of deshopping as a modern and growing consumer behaviour.

Deshopping and the legal and ethical positions

Deshopping can be considered as attempting to gain 'pecuniary advantage by deception', which is an offence under The Theft Act, 1968 (c.60) (Law teacher, 2004,

http://www.lawteacher.net/Criminal/Property_%20Offences/TA%201968.pdf). This applies when a customer claims a full refund for what he or she claims is a garment of unsatisfactory quality when the garment has actually been worn (Ibid). Section 15 of The Theft Act refers to obtaining property by deception (and the definition of property includes money – Section 4). Engineering the garment to look like it is defective is fraudulent and illegal under section 16(1) Theft Act 1968 c.60 (Ibid).

Consumer ethics are defined as:

‘The moral principles and standards that guide the behaviour of individuals or groups as they obtain, use, and dispose of goods and services’
(Muncy & Vitell, 1992 p.298)

Vitell et al (2001) pointed out that once the consumer has determined a set of perceived alternatives or courses of action, two ethical evaluations become apparent: the deontological evaluation which is where the focus is on the actions of the behaviour and its inherent rightness or wrongness, or the teleological aspect which addresses the consequences of the behaviour. Vitell et al (2001) found that these ethical evaluations directly affect the consumers’ intentions to partake in a behaviour.

Researchers have explored the negative association between the illegal behaviour and the perceived chance of being caught. Such studies demonstrate that the fear of punishment deters people from partaking in a behaviour, and a person is more likely to partake in criminal behaviour if there is low risk of detection (e.g. Cole 1989.)

Apart from considerable research on religiosity by Vitell and colleagues (which we consider in the section below) there has been a lack of attention paid to consumer ethics (Brinkman 2004; Muncy and Vitell 1992). Two of Vitell’s papers examine forms of retail fraud but these do no more than touch upon deshopping without specifically addressing the ethical issues of this behaviour (Muncy and Vitell 1992; Vitell and Muncy 2005). Muncy and Vitell (1992) reported that a number of important factors influence ethical judgements. These include whether: (i) the buyer or seller is at fault; (ii) the activity is perceived as illegal; (iii) it does direct harm to the seller; (iv) the consumer has a negative attitude to business; and (v) the consumer equates the unethical with the illegal. The results indicated that ‘fault’ is important because consumers

‘believe that if it is the seller’s mistake or the seller’s fault that leads to the seller being harmed, then he or she is getting what they deserve’ (Muncy and Vitell 1992, p.595).

This suggests that educational campaigns informing shoppers about the amount retailers lose financially as a result of these unethical behaviours would reduce the behaviour.

Vitell et al (2001) has indicated that consumers do have morals and principles, and they do understand the difference between right and wrong and they intend to act in accordance with their perception of the two. Ford et al (2005) demonstrate that consumers’ values and beliefs incorporate preferences and choices between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, which can differ depending upon culture. Considerable work by Vitell has demonstrated that only a minority of consumers act with the outcomes of their actions in mind (Vitell 2001; Vitell, 2003; Vitell and Paolillo 2003; Vitell and Muncy 2005 and Vitell et al 2005) This work also

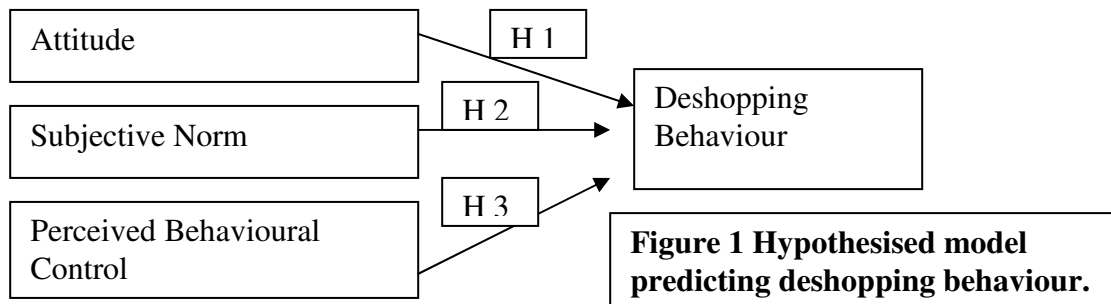
reveals that they would be prepared to purchase counterfeits or partake in deshopping (Vitell 2001). Brinkman (2004) Vitell et al (2001p.164) states that,

'the customer may be king but, if regal history is anything to go by, we cannot always expect kings to be legal, decent and honest. ... We simply have to live with the realities of commercial life – some consumers are going to try and rip us off.'

However, there is a danger in reacting to genuine consumers with mistrust, as this may lead to consumers becoming equally mistrusting of retailers. For customers to be better behaved, retailers must remain ethical and try to develop close relationships with their customers. They should reward the honest customers and 'punish' those who act unethically. It is worth remembering that many customers act responsibly and the temptation to partake in unethical behaviour seems to be prevented by the consequences. Although undesirable consequences for the deshoppers are rare and the chances of being detected unlikely, many customers still take the ethical decision, and would not consider returning garments fraudulently. Many customers are honest and forthright and would not even contemplate partaking in this behaviour. Retailers must respond appropriately with consideration to their valued and honest customers.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is a model used in this study to explain influential variables on deshopping behaviour and demonstrate how deshopping can be modified (Ajzen 1991).. This study consists of a full-scale survey of 528 questionnaires. The respondents were a convenience sample selected from female shoppers in malls near to fashion clothing outlets.



According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, **intention** to perform a behaviour is influenced by three dimensions: **attitude**, **subjective norm** and **perceived behavioural control**. A person's **attitude** towards a behaviour represents evaluation of the behaviour and its outcomes. The **subjective norm** concerns the extent to which other people important to a respondent approve or disapprove of the behaviour. **Perceived behavioural control** refers to the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour (Ajzen, 1985;1991). TPB has successfully been used in previous studies to control undesirable behaviours, indicating good correlations between behaviour and planned behavioural control.

In this study we have considered the model illustrated in Figure 1. In this simplified model, three hypotheses have been developed: H1 Attitude towards deshopping will significantly predict deshopping behaviour; H2 Shoppers' perceptions of the extent to which others important to the respondents approve of deshopping (subjective norm) will significantly predict deshopping behaviour; H3 Shoppers' perceptions of the ease of carrying out deshopping (perceived behavioural control) will significantly predict deshopping behaviour.

Methodology

A quantitative questionnaire was completed with 535 women in two shopping centres in North London. A random sampling technique was utilised. The sample consisted of a broad age range and income bracket due to women being randomly selected. This study has focused on only female consumers with wide ranging demographic characteristics as previous research has been conducted on both genders, yet most recently Piron & Young (2000) identified that females borrowed four times as much as men. This research has drawn on these important findings in an attempt to quantify the behaviour accurately amongst female consumers.

The quantitative results were analysed using multiple regression and these are demonstrated elsewhere. The quantitative results demonstrated that deshopping represents a substantial problem for the UK female clothing retailers. Out of 528 participants 266 deshoppers and were identified in the questionnaire. The hypothesis tested achieved various degrees of moderate support. The initial indications are that procedures can be designed to reduce this behaviour.

Having explored the quantitative results further qualitative research was conducted to further explore the significance and exploration of the TPB variables and to aid the understanding of deshopping and TPB model. The deshoppers chosen for interview were identified through the questionnaire. All the respondents who qualified as deshoppers and who had provided their contact details were contacted initially by post. This was followed up by a telephone call asking to arrange an interview.

This technique is named sequential quan-qual analysis whereby the qualitative follow up is based on the quantitative scores (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998). Wass and Wells (1994) also support the idea that interviews may be an additional means to validate the findings from the questionnaire. During this qualitative analysis there was a detailed exploration to establish the meanings behind the respondents high quantitative scores. The categories investigated in the interview were the same as the variables that were investigated during the quantitative analysis. This process enabled a deeper understanding of the emotions and feelings behind the figures. Furthermore, the observational data (Accompanied Deshopping) can also be used to confirm the existence of the variables highlighted during the interview (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998).

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted there was no predetermined list of questions to work through, although the researcher had a clear idea about the aspects to explore and the TPB variables that needed to be discussed. The interviewee was given the opportunity to talk freely about events, behaviour and beliefs in relation to the topic area (Saunders et al., 1997).

For confidentiality purposes interviewee names have been altered. Results are demonstrated in relation to deshopping examples provided, followed by the TPB variables and additional variables that were considered influential.

It is evident that the analysis incorporates more of Liza's comments than the other respondents. This is because Liza's comments are the most eloquent whilst still being typical of the consensus.

Interview Results

Deshopping Examples

✧ Liz describes a garment that she purchased recently from Gap that she has worn but did not feel good, so is going to take it back. (Interviewee 1)

✧ 'I have done it once because I had worn it and did not like it that much. It was a top from Pilot. I wore it 2-3 times then picked seam, as a reason to go and give it back. I was excited to get my money back and get rid of the top' (Interviewee 2)

✧ *'I wanted a dress, but mum wouldn't lend me the money, I liked the dress so I wore it and then came back next morning and took it back with my friends.'* (Interviewee 3)

✧ Linda says she has deshopped about six times and she would return clothes *'whenever she needs to do it'* (Interviewee 4.)

✧ Linda explains that she

'tucks the labels* in tops when I wear them and if I can see a bit of plastic then I wear a cardigan with it.' (Interviewee 4.) * by 'labels' Linda means the store tags attached to the garments, often with the price and size on.

✧ Hetty describes one occasion in Warehouse, with a £45 top that she wore for a night out and then did not need it anymore. It was not premeditated at time of purchase. (Interviewee 5)

✧ Lilly describes returning a £70-80 pair of trousers to Morgan, having unpicked the studs down the side seam. Lilly's trousers had shrunk, but she knew that if they were faulty then she could return them. (Interviewee 6)

✧ I have had the clothes for ages and got bored of them so I unpick a seam and then take them back. (Interview 8)

✧ I had worn trousers for Xmas day and for New Year and enjoyed wearing them and then took them back. (Interview 9)

Attitude

✧ 'Give it a go. The worst that can happen is they will not take it back. They cannot arrest you!' Liz believes the main consequence of deshopping to be embarrassment. (Interviewee 1)

✧ *'I knew what I was doing was wrong but really wanted to wear the dress and really wanted to go to the party.'* (Interviewee 3)

✧ Deshopping is an option if she really needed the money back or really did not like her purchase. (Interviewee 5)

✧ Lilly is confident when returning genuine garments but 'feels bad when she's returning stuff that she should not be'. (Interviewee 6)

✧ Gail explains that this is acceptable when not done with intention at time of purchase. (Interviewee 7)

✧ This is a real buzz and seeing as the retailers are ripping you off I do not feel bad at all. After all they make it so easy, what do they expect? (Interviewee 8)

✧ I really would not like to buy something that had been worn, but I believe that if there are no consequences, and every else is doing is, then I do not have a problem with it. (Interviewee 9.)

Subjective Norm

✧ Her mum would not approve or return garments if she was aware that Liz had worn it, her mum would probably say 'good luck to you if you can get away with it' (Interviewee 1)

✧ Karen is keen to get her parents approval for returns and if something is wrong with a garment she will ask her mum before she takes it back. (Interviewee 2)

- ✦Heather got the idea, from her best friend. She went shopping with her when she did it. (Interviewee 3)
- ✦Heather explains how she purchased trousers with her mum, and her mum took them back after she had worn them. *'Mum is up to date with all the tricks, I learn how to argue from her.'* (Interviewee 3)
- ✦She explains how her elder sisters of (28 and 24), damage clothes and 'snap heels off of shoes and stuff.' (Interviewee 5)
- ✦Hetty's mother does not approve but says, if you want to you can, but think about what you are going to say before you walk in there. (Interviewee 5)
- ✦Lilly feels that she is influenced by friends *'if they can do it, why can't I?'* (Interviewee 6)
- ✦Gail's friends told her she 'was a cheapskate' when she repeated the story. (Interviewee 7)
- ✦ My friends know that I do it I think my mum knows as well. (Interviewee 8)
- ✦ I have heard of my daughter's friends (she is 28) doing this, and they never have any problems, 'so I thought if they can all do it then why can't I?' (Interviewee 9)

Perceived Behavioural Control

- ✦Liz feels that over the last 5-10 years returning has got a lot easier (Interviewee 1)
- ✦ Karen did not find deshopping difficult, but unpleasant as she felt guilty. (Interviewee 2)
- ✦ 'You can take nearly take anything back, and its not as scary as you think it should be really.' (Interviewee 5)
- ✦Gail believes that the consequence is not getting a return or exchange, as the police would not be involved as it is not shoplifting or stealing *'its just misrepresentation of facts.'* (Interviewee 7)
- ✦ 'I have had managers called over before, but I could argue all day till I get my money back.' (Interviewee 8)

Past experience

- ✦Liz has never been caught deshopping and if she perceived that there was a chance of being caught she would 'not have the balls to do it' (Interviewee 1)
- ✦Prior to return Karen felt apprehensive, *'The feeling has put me off'* (Interviewee 2)
- ✦ *'I was confident it would work as I had done it before.'* (Interviewee 3)
- ✦If she was refused a refund she would be annoyed as she could not wear the top again as it had a hole in (Interviewee 4)
- ✦Linda explains that if her friends have taken something back to a store and she can see it was easy, then she would try that shop. (Interviewee 4)
- ✦ From my experience a lot of the time they don't ask questions (Interviewee 5)
- ✦Lilly describes her experience as quick, and she could easily do it again by unpicking stitching. (Interviewee 6)
- ✦ *'I do this all the time, and never have any problem. It is so easy.'* (Interviewee 8)

Control Belief

- ✦Liz always checks that there are no marks on garments for evidence and it 'looks genuine'. (Interviewee 1)
- ✦Liz plans her response in advance of returning the garment that she has worn to Gap, 'it was purchased for a cousin or niece and they do not want it.' (Interviewee 1)
- ✦Liz alternates returns between stores so that staff do not recognise her (Interviewee 1)
- ✦When deliberately damaging the garment *'the seam looks more realistic than taking scissors to it'* (Interviewee 2)
- ✦Heather feels more comfortable with certain retailers (Interviewee 3)

- ✦ Before returning garments Heather ensures that there is no queue to save embarrassment, she also considers what the sales assistant looks like. (Interviewee 3)
- ✦ Linda shops where she knows the return policy. She ensures that she only keeps her tops for a little time when she wants to take them back so that there is no problem. (Interviewee 4)
- ✦ Hetty will also disassociate herself from blame by saying 'her sister doesn't like it or it doesn't fit her' so she is not playing a role in the process. (Interviewee 5)
- ✦ I did not keep my receipt as I did not need to, especially at 'Marks.' (Interviewee 9)

Intention

- ✦ For a special occasion coming up I need a pashmina, just to literally wear to walk in and walk out, with a strapless dress. For a hundred pounds I could get one to return it 'I would cut off the tag and receipt and keep it in the bag, for return.' (Interviewee 1)
- ✦ Liz states that this is never intentional at the time of purchase. She is a bad shopper that changes her mind. (Interviewee 1)
- ✦ ' I needed something to wear, it was getting late went in and bought it but didn't like it very much, wore it, and then took it back' (Interviewee 2)

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- ✦ 'If money situation is not that good, and I only want it for one night, it is wrong but it is the only way. It's not something I am planning to do.' (Interviewee 3)
 - ✦ Certain retailers make Lilly feel more comfortable as 'M&S is easier to return than Morgan'. (Interviewee 6)
 - ✦ Gail always keeps receipts about a month, just in case. (Interviewee 7)
 - ✦ Tara does not think it is necessary to know your legal rights 'you just have to hold your ground.' (Interview 8)

Analysis of Interview Results

The above demonstrated how the TPB has been applied to deshopping. The qualitative results enhance our understanding of the behaviour and highlight the importance of the influencing TPB variables. The qualitative research supports the quantitative findings and the application of the TPB to deshopping. The implications of the qualitative results in relation to the TPB variables are explained below.

✦ Attitude. Attitude is closely associated with deshopping as is SN and PBC. Retailers can address PBC readily by imposing strict returns procedures, and SN by introducing an education programme.

✦ Subjective Norm. The findings support questionnaire results that deshoppers are concerned with opinions of people who are important to them. The interviews highlight that the respondents are influenced by people (friends, parents) in a negative way as well as in a constructive and beneficial way. This would suggest that if consumers' were educated about the affects of this behaviour and the legal ramifications if they were caught then deshopping should become less acceptable and the deshopper should be more likely to discontinue the behaviour.

✦ Perceived Behavioural Control. This demonstrates the large element of control that the deshopper perceives they have over the deshopping process and its successful outcome. The interviews highlight the perceived 'ease' at which they carry out deshopping. If this perception of control could be altered e.g. by tightened return policies -the behaviour could be reduced.

✦ Past Experience. Deshoppers have not encountered serious problems or punishment as a result of fraudulent returns. Deshoppers consider that the worst past experience would be to be refused a return and thus have to keep the garment. This imagined experience is influential

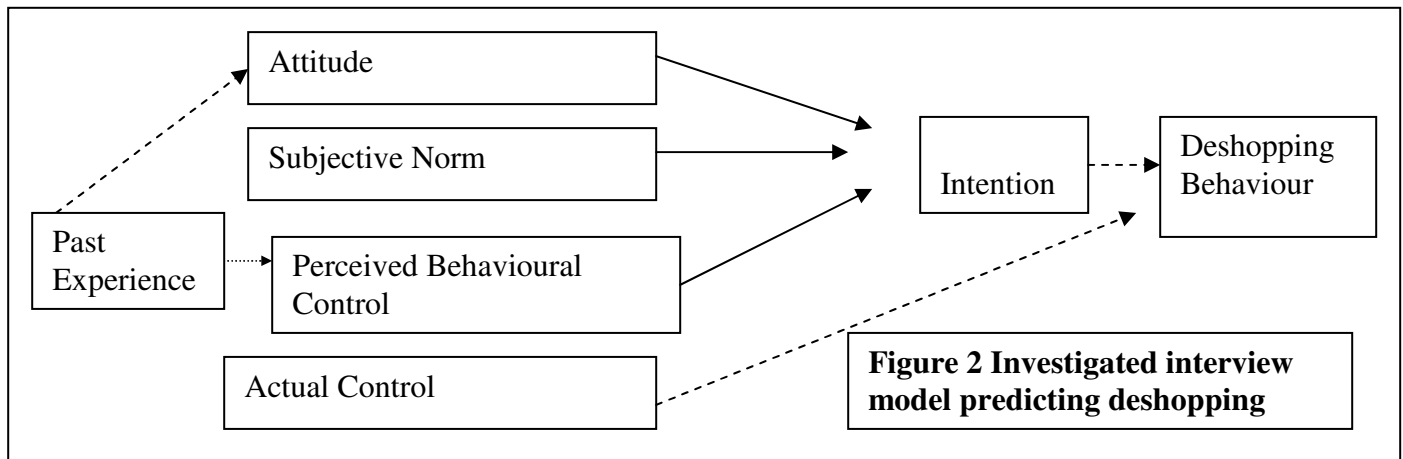
in their perception of deshopping being easy, and contributes to the attitude that they may as well try it because they have nothing to lose. The deshoppers' successful previous experiences enable consumer's to have a deeper understanding of the returns process thus enhancing their knowledge and confidence for the next time.

✧ Intention. The questionnaire highlights that 'intention' to deshop a garment is not always evident at the point of purchase. The deliberate return of a garment may not be pre-meditated from the outset, but it is intentional at point of return.

✧ Actual Control. The results demonstrate that there is almost no actual control over the behaviour as none of the deshoppers interviewed had ever been caught. The deshopper considered that the worst that could happen as a result of the behaviour was not getting a refund.

From explaining the questionnaire results it can be concluded that deshoppers would be less likely to deshop if they perceived it to be difficult. The in depth interviews indicate that just by very rarely refusing a refund, retailers are not doing enough to make deshopping difficult. This is because at present, when the deshoppers encounter a refusal of return, it is not recollected as a bad experience. This is therefore not deterring them from partaking in the behaviour again. The interviews particularly demonstrate that if this experience had led to severe embarrassment or involved the police or criminal proceedings it would change the deshoppers actual control and their attitudes.

In the figure below the solid lines investigated during the quantitative analysis were supported and explained further by these interviews. Although, this qualitative research also supports previous research, that addresses additional elements, to be measured alongside the TPB (represented by the broken lines, in the figure below.)



The qualitative results demonstrate support for these new elements. For example, 'past experience' is a vital variable in preventing undesirable behaviours. The interview results show that past experience is a major determinant in deshopping behaviour. This could be because shoppers are learning and becoming more experienced as a result of their previous experiences. This supports consumer behaviour literature, that demonstrates that people learn from their past behaviour. As a result this research demonstrates that previous experience should be added to the main TPB variables in further research, or should at least be considered as an important component which influences behaviour. The results also demonstrate that, as deshoppers have never experienced 'actual control' it cannot be

confirmed as an influential factor in deshopping behaviour. Although 'actual control' is not verified by this study, the researcher believes that if the deshoppers had a severely bad experience, which involved criminal proceedings or a ban from a retail outlet they would be deterred from partaking in the behaviour again. So it should be considered as an important variable that influences behaviour.

Finally 'intention' is also confirmed as an applicable variable, which is introduced into the TPB model. As the interviews highlight that the influence of the three main variables (Attitude, PBC and Sn) does affect ones intention, to partake in the behaviour. However, the interviews also demonstrate that 'intention' is not always present at the time of a deshoppers' purchase yet, it is always apparent at the time of return.

The researcher suggests that the developed model of TPB encounters all the variables that affect ones behaviour. This analysis should encourage other researchers to incorporate these new dimensions (past experience, actual control and intention) when trying to explain and understand behaviour.

The above results demonstrated how the TPB clearly identifies the main variables that influence the behaviour thereby demonstrating how the behaviour can be modified and managed as a result. So the TPB has supported the hypothesis and the recommendations to retailers about managing this behaviour can be made.

Accompanied (De)Shopping

Accompanied (de)shopping was a research method that was perceived as the most effective way of observing the deshopper in a retail environment. Many researchers interested in purchase behaviour use methods that capture the true nature of the consumer within a retail environment. Shopping with consumers has effectively been utilised within retailing research in the past (Otnes et al 1995). This section addresses the results and analysis of an accompanied deshopping visit, the purpose of this method was to provide documentation of deshopping behaviour and to aid the understanding of the emotions and influential variables (TPB) during the process. The accompanied shopping was undertaken after Interviewee 1 (Liz).

This section is a statement of what happened before, during and after the observation. During the interview Liz described a top she purchased recently, she had worn it and explained that she did not 'feel good' wearing the top, so she was going take it back. During the interview Liz explained that her mother had taken her children around the shopping centre and was to return in one hour subsequent to the interview when Liz planned to deshop the top. Liz invited the researcher to accompany her after the interview to observe the return of the worn garment.

Accompanied (De)Shopping Results

Before the Deshop took place Liz prepared herself by taking the receipt out of the bag and taking out the credit card that she wanted the money refunded on. Liz swapped the carrier bag the garment was in with another, to ensure that the garment was in the correct retailers' carrier bag.

When approaching the retailer it was evident that there were no other customers in the store. There was one sales assistant folding jumpers at the very far end of the shop, whilst one assistant was standing at the till, occupied with paperwork.

As we enter the store Liz turned to the researcher and said:

'I am really nervous, with you here, I am never normally'

The researcher did not reply, so as not to influence the shopper further.

Then Liz walked immediately and directly to the till, clutching her receipt and credit card in one hand, and the carrier bag in the other. Liz did not look at any merchandise whatsoever; she appeared entirely focused on the return.

As the shopper and researcher approached the till, the sales assistant looked up, Liz spoke directly to the sales assistant saying,

'I'd like to return this,'

Liz placed the carrier bag on the cashiers' desk and immediately handed the sales assistant her card and receipt.

The sales assistant opened the carrier bag and took out the worn top, placed it on the counter and began to check the shopper's receipt and bankcard.

Liz then turned to her side, facing away from the sales assistant, and began talking directly to the researcher, asking inquisitively *'So, what University did you do your first degree at?.'* The researcher stated *'Leeds.'* Liz then started talking about how her husband had attended Leeds University and how they used to visit there regularly to see old friends, and how he was now an accountant. Meanwhile the sales assistant was examining the garment and looked at the labels and she gently interrupted Liz and asked,

'Is there anything wrong with it?'

Liz immediately and calmly replied

'No, I bought it for my niece and she doesn't like it.'

Liz continued to talk directly to the researcher facing sideways to the till, whilst the till assistant proceeded with the returns process and began reimbursing the money on the bankcard. Liz then placed her handbag on the counter and began to rummage through it and took out her wallet.

The sales assistant then handed the card and receipt to the shopper and stated that it was her refund receipt. Whilst peering down at her wallet, Liz took her bankcard and receipt and placed them both immediately inside her wallet. She then placed her wallet back in her handbag and turned immediately away from the till and said *'thanks, bye'* to the assistant and began to walk directly towards the door and exited the shop.

Upon exiting the store Liz exclaimed excitedly *'See, I told you it was easy!'*

When the researcher asked her how she was feeling Liz said *'great, but I have to get on now, need to get mum and the kids.'* Liz's mother and a double buggy was approaching from the distance and the researcher asked *'how much was that top?'*

Liz replied *'£15'* with a big smile, and said *'I had better go.'* The researcher thanked the participant for her cooperation and Liz walked towards her mother and children who were metres away and Liz began to help her mother with the shopping bags.

Accompanied (De)Shopping Analysis

The main TPB variables that were highlighted throughout the accompanied deshop were:

Liz demonstrated the control belief variable by:

1. Liz's preparation for deshopping by holding her card and receipt
2. Occupying herself during returns process by talking
3. Liz also introducing a 'niece' to allow her to be disassociated from the garment, in case the legitimacy of return is questioned. This seems to be a major factor in her deshopping success.
4. Avoiding eye contact with the sales assistant

The low cost of the garment implies that it was not financially necessary for Liz to deshop, but this would indicate that deshopping gave her a 'buzz,' this is supported by previous research (Schmidt 1999). This is also supported by her reaction and excitement when the deshopping was complete. This affects her attitude.

Accompanied (De)Shopping Evaluation

Having explored the findings and the analysis of them it is apparent that the accompanied deshop demonstrated that deshopping was not prevented or managed affectively. However, the accompanied (de)shop did enhance understanding of deshopping behaviour and enabled the researcher to observe the TPB variables working in action. Recommendations can be made to the retailer in light of such observation research.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the hypothesised variables of the TPB are supported and developed further and the accompanied deshop provides evidence of the behaviour and a detailed documented account of the deshopping process itself. This provides a fundamental insight into our understanding of deshopping and contributes to the limited literature.

The use of the TPB and accompanied (de)shopping as qualitative research methods.

The qualitative research utilising the TPB model proved fruitful in the understanding deshopping behaviour and supporting the quantitative theory. The research also aided the further development of the TPB by adding additional variables. For future research this qualitative approach should be conducted in conjunction with the quantitative questionnaire to validate and enhance the findings. The accompanied deshop proved very useful as a research technique. Both these methods provided evidence of deshopping and enabled a deeper insight and understanding of the behaviour and its motives. In particular they highlight the importance of the influential behavioural variables, which can be altered to manipulate consumer behaviour.

Managerial Implications

This study demonstrates the prevalence of deshopping behaviour, which has serious implications for the retailing industry. The research makes practical recommendations for retailers to manage returns effectively, and provides suggestions that will increase the possibility of deshopping detection. The study also demonstrates how deshopping could be prevented by altering the TPB variables.

Recommendations for Future Research

The literature survey for the legal and ethical section examines US and UK literature. It would be interesting to look at deshopping across countries and cultures, as differing legal and ethical boundaries will have an impact on the behaviour. The researcher suggests that this behaviour may be transferable across cultures. Further research could include comparative research of deshopping between countries. This research could explore countries with lower incidences of deshopping and analyse why. Perhaps this could be related to their legal system,

culture, retailing environment or retail approach to return procedures. This research could establish whether deshopping is a global condition. Further analysis could be conducted to demonstrate how these different retail environments, cultures, policies and the legal framework have influenced consumer behaviour.

Deshopping from an ethical perspective

This study also enabled a deeper exploration of the ethical position of the deshopper and retailer, consistent with previously established ethical theories. The research indicates that although deshoppers are aware that deshopping is unethical, they are still willing to deshop as they are unaware that it is illegal and believe that there are no undesirable consequences to prevent them from partaking in the behaviour. This affects shoppers perception of the behaviour being easy (PBC) which affects their attitude, and this is again supported by their 'past experience.' The interviews also highlight that some deshoppers believe their activity is justified as the retailer is at fault for not preventing the behaviour. Deshoppers are aware that their behaviour is wrong and sometimes feel guilty and this deontological consideration affects their intention whilst still not prevent the behaviour. However the TPB demonstrates that if deshoppers were aware of the losses to the retailers from deshopping they might be prevented from partaking in the behaviour as this could alter their 'attitude' that influences their behaviour.

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