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E-tail emotion regulation: examining online hedonic product purchases

E-tail emotion
regulation

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Abstract

Purpose – This research examines how hedonic shopping experiences for online music impact emotion regulation processes and how feelings regarding previous online music purchases influence repeat purchase behaviour. The paper aims to introduce a model that explains and examines the mediating role of consumers' attitudes, emotion regulation and subjective norms in the shopping experience for online music.

Design/methodology/approach – Structural equation analysis based on AMOS 17.0 techniques, using the maximum likelihood estimation method, was used to assess the measurement and structural model. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to determine construct and discriminant validity before testing hypotheses of the structural model.

Findings – Results indicate that shopping for music online involves an emotional and hedonic component. Specifically, consumer attitudes, emotion regulation as well as subjective norms influence repeat purchase intentions.

Research limitations/implications – Emotion regulation in traditional retailing environments has been heavily studied, however, limited research exists to examine emotion regulation in the online retailing environment. With the proliferation of online retailing, this study makes important contributions to understanding online shopping behaviour for hedonic products.

Practical implications – Based on the findings of this research, online music retailers should consider developing applicable customer-valued alternatives to positively influence the overall online shopping experience.

Originality/value – This paper models consumer emotion regulation beyond the traditional retailing environment and examines it in a virtual retailing environment. Results prove to be important as emotion regulation impacts consumer behaviour beyond previously known traditional settings.

Keywords Emotion regulation, Online retailing, Consumer behaviour, Hedonic products, Retailing, Electronic commerce

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The novelty of online retailing within the past decade has gradually evolved into an everyday channel for shopping. Shopping experiences are no longer just about purchasing a product; instead, an integrative experience that captures both utilitarian and experiential elements is expected (Fiore and Kim, 2007). Such integrative shopping experiences are progressively translating over to the online retailing experience. Most

traditional brick-and-mortar outlets with online operations receive close to 50 percent of their total sales via the internet (Hargrave, 2008). In the US, about 154 million people, or 67 percent of the online population shopped online, contributing to online retail sales of \$155 billion in 2009 (Sehgal, 2010a). US online sales are expected to grow at 10 percent annually through 2014 (Sehgal, 2010a); and in Western Europe, online retail sales are expected to grow at 11 percent per year (Sehgal, 2010b). Evidence of consumers transitioning into e-commerce channels as an avenue for routine shopping is indicative of consumers' primary constraints (e.g. time and money), with convenience serving as the highest attraction for online shopping (Girard *et al.*, 2003).

One product which is purchased frequently on the internet is music. In 2010, US consumers purchased 326.2 million CDs and digital album downloads (Wall Street Journal, 2011). The advent of digital media serviced by online music retailers such as iTunes, Pandora, Amazon MP3, Rhapsody Music, and eMusic have revolutionised popular music consumption. Further, the popular idea of mobile devices serving as consumers' living, entertaining, and working platform progressively integrates social and cultural constructions of modern society. By the end of 2012, the mobile PC market is projected to account for 335 million users worldwide, growing over 40 percent since 2006 (eTForecast, 2010). Along with these projections, digital music consumption is expected to increase due to mobile compatibility advances and demands for more experientially appealing and entertaining engagements.

Not only do consumers derive utilitarian value from shopping, but many consumers report experiencing positive feelings and satisfaction from the interactivity of shopping online (Dholakia and Zhao, 2009). Burns and Neisner (2006) suggest that both cognitive evaluation and emotional responses explain the satisfaction experienced in retail settings. Specifically referencing consumer shopping behaviors, research has demonstrated that individuals engage in activities, one of which may be shopping, to induce positive emotions (Garg *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, the consumption and purchase of hedonic products, or goods and services with subjective features that produce pleasurable responses (e.g. music) may be used to induce positive emotions (Andrade, 2005).

Consumer research has examined how consumers may be driven by hedonic motivations to shop in traditional retail outlets (Babin *et al.*, 1994; Godey *et al.*, 2009). Accordingly, consumer emotions towards a purchase experience can be a major determinant of whether a consumer is satisfied and will continue to purchase a product or patronise a venue (Burns and Neisner, 2006). However, to date, limited studies have explored consumer buying behavior as it relates to experiential engagement and hedonic purchases on the internet (Raney *et al.*, 2003). Additionally, much of the marketing literature has examined emotion regulation and emotion-based purchases within the context of traditional forms of consumption and purchase (Fiore and Kim, 2007), but few studies have investigated this phenomenon within the context of online shopping. As consumers are increasingly engaging in electronic retail therapy – similar to consumption behavioral patterns in traditional retail therapy to regulate emotions – research examining the unique nature of consumer behavior in the context of online retailing environments is warranted as consumers progressively embrace online retailing.

Thus, the purpose of this research is three-fold. First, it applies affect regulation theory in a virtual shopping setting as opposed to traditional retailing formats. It proposes that consumer emotion regulation is also applicable in online shopping contexts. Consequently, hedonic shopping experiences for music, as a form of emotion

regulation, can translate beyond the traditional retailing formats to virtual formats. Secondly, it proffers a conceptual model (see Figure 1) explaining the online music shopping experience, and specifically examines the mediating roles of consumer attitudes, coping mechanisms and subjective norms in online music shopping behavior. The model is tested using structural equation modeling. Lastly, relevant marketing mechanisms are identified which electronic retailers (e-tailers) and managers can employ to integrate customer-valued elements into the online shopping experience. The implications of this research will help provide current online music retailers with a better understanding of how consumer feelings regarding previous online music purchases influence repeat purchase behavior, allowing for a more comprehensive perspective of how to maintain loyal customers.

Our paper is organized as follows. First, we summarize existing research and review affect regulation theory as it pertains to our study. Next, we formulate hypotheses about the motivations of consumers with regard to hedonic online shopping experiences for music as well as examine repeat purchase behavior for online music. We then discuss the research methodology employed and present our findings. We conclude with implications for online marketers and retailers.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Consumer researchers have studied consumer behavior in online channels in various contexts, including brand loyalty (Chu *et al.*, 2010), price sensitivity, search costs perceived risks and signalling cues (Lynch and Ariely, 2000).

Insightful findings that inform marketing strategy is that online consumers tend to be more brand loyal and price sensitivity may be contingent on product category (Chu *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, signalling cues such as brand reputation, advertising and warranties can serve to reduce perceived risks of shopping online.

However, from a consumer satisfaction perspective, the advantages of shopping on the internet are unequivocal in that the internet provides a powerful and relatively inexpensive means for information searching (Alba *et al.*, 1997), allows for interactivity

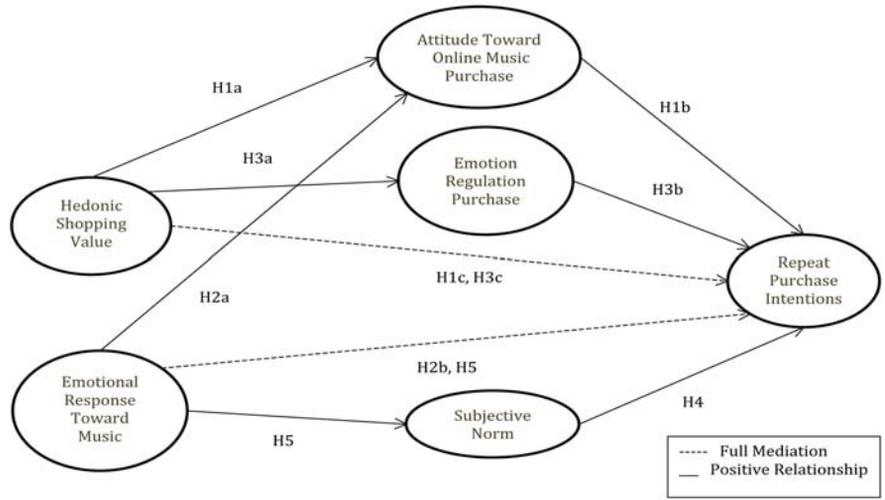


Figure 1. E-tail therapy model for purchasing music online

on a real-time basis (Peterson *et al.*, 1997), offers perceptual experiences that are far superior to printed catalogues (Pentina *et al.*, 2010), and can conquer geographical space on a real-time basis (Chu *et al.*, 2010). As a result of the few restrictions online shopping involves with respect to product assortment, its accessibility and convenience, as well as its ability to offer consumers pleasurable perceptual experiences, individuals may especially be drawn to use the medium for experiential engagement. Such hedonic motives are discussed next.

Affect regulation theory and online consumption

Affect regulation theories[1] have relied heavily on hedonistic behaviors to help explain consumers' approach-avoidance behavior. Instinctively, individuals attempt to avoid what is bad and approach what is good. Similarly, affect regulation models assume people consistently seek to maintain positive feelings and repair negative feeling states (Andrade, 2005). Accordingly, research indicates that negative emotions are the affective states that are most commonly regulated and therefore are more heavily managed through consumption behaviors (Garg *et al.*, 2007). Present phenomena demonstrate the prevalence of hedonistic and indulgent behaviors as underscored by the increase in emotional eating and obesity (Kemp *et al.*, 2011), hedonic motivations for shopping (Kim and Forsythe, 2007), and the rise in credit card debt among Americans (Bernthal *et al.*, 2005).

More specifically, individuals may regulate affective states by engaging in distinctive, therapeutic shopping experiences (Bui *et al.*, 2011; Krishen *et al.*, 2010). Satisfaction is derived from shopping experiences that incorporate both objective and subjective interactivity for consumers (Dholakia and Zhao, 2009). However, not only can retail shopping therapy exist in the most traditional forms of retailing, but also in advanced forms of e-tailing. Increasingly, consumers are using retail therapy in virtual environments to create positive emotional shopping experiences in the privacy of their homes (Precision Marketing, 2008). These virtual platforms can integrate both information and entertainment through their aesthetic orientation (Mohammed *et al.*, 2003). For example, online retailers are beginning to utilize product virtualization technologies to enhance the online environment for customers that shop for apparel online (Kim and Forsythe, 2007). Product virtualization technologies allow online shoppers to view the product interactively, thus providing both product information and an entertaining shopping experience.

As discussed previously, in addition to the sensory appeal of virtual environments, advantages reported by consumers and critical motives for shopping online over brick-and-mortar outlets include convenience, time and energy savings, cost savings, and a more diverse range of product offerings (Yang *et al.*, 2007). Such overall positive purchase experiences motivate consumers to continue purchasing and shopping through virtual mediums (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Thus, e-tailing can be an effective and efficient forum for facilitating the regulation of emotions.

Hedonic shopping value, emotional response toward online music purchases, and attitude toward purchasing music online

Findings in e-tailing research demonstrate that attitude toward a retail website may be influenced by website factors such as trust, ease, and entertainment (Lin *et al.*, 2008). However, a primary consideration for the acceptance of online shopping begins with a consumer's attitude toward purchasing music online. An individual's attitude towards

a behavior involves the extent to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable appraisal of the behavior in question. Attitude toward a behavior can form the basis for intentions as well as actual behavior. Research has demonstrated that positive attitudes toward online shopping have consistently influenced online purchases intentions (Kim and Park, 2005). Further, empirical research has shown that online shoppers have more positive attitudes toward shopping and find it to be more entertaining than shopping at brick-and-mortar outlets (Swinyard and Smith, 2003). Thus, we predict the following:

- H1a.* There is a positive relationship between hedonic shopping value and attitude toward purchasing music online.
- H1b.* There is a positive relationship between attitude toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions.
- H1c.* Attitude toward purchasing music online will mediate the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions.

The emotional responses experienced after a purchase plays an impactful role on repeat purchase behaviour. Previous purchase experiences can become embedded into both cognitive and affective memory (Isen and Labroo, 2003). When customers are satisfied and have positive emotional responses toward an online music purchase, they are likely to engage in repeat purchase behaviour. Research has consistently demonstrated the positive affect-attitude relationship on purchasing decisions (Kim and Park, 2005). Thus, we predict the following relationships:

- H2a.* There is a positive relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and attitude toward purchasing music online.
- H2b.* Attitude toward purchasing music online will mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions.

Hedonic shopping value and emotion regulation

The accessibility and personalization of marketing in e-tailing makes online shopping appealing (Doherty and Ellis-Chadwick, 2010). Previous research has shown that consumers regulate and manage emotions in a number of ways (Levav and McGraw, 2009). Online retailers can provide engaging sensory environments for experiential-seeking consumers (Kim and Park, 2005). The greater a customer values the experiential benefits of shopping online, the more likely he/she is to engage in virtual consumerism, as consumer escapism through online music consumption serves as a favorable and viable emotion regulation option. When a consumer experiences positive emotional responses from an online shopping experience for hedonic products such as music, the likelihood of purchasing music from the retailer is expected to increase. In accordance, we propose the following:

- H3a.* There is a positive relationship between hedonic shopping value and how often a consumer buys music to manage emotions.
- H3b.* There is a positive relationship between how often a consumer buys music to manage emotions and repeat purchase intentions.

H3c. How often a consumer buys music to manage emotions will mediate the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions.

Subjective norms and emotional response toward purchasing online

Normative pressure plays a critical role in the cultural construction of what is accepted in society. Subjective norms refer to individual inferences about what others think of the behavior and the motivation to comply with inferred thoughts (Celik, 2011). Previous research shows that subjective norms indirectly influence behavioral intentions (Lu *et al.*, 2005). Further, consumers are able to construct and renew self identities through consumption practices (Ahava and Palojoki, 2004). Commitments to different groups (affiliations) and lifestyles may be communicated about the self through consumption. As such, the consumption of goods and services online can help build social bonds among consumers and can be validated through social interactions and advocacy (Schwartz and Fouts, 2003). As such, how “important others” feel about a purchase behavior can serve to help construct self-identity and may be reaffirmed through repeat purchase behavior. Further, given the current normative acceptance of music downloads, we predict the following hypothesis:

H4. There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and repeat purchase intentions.

Research findings show that sociability provides considerable consumer benefits in facilitating online communities (Hye-Shin *et al.*, 2008). Positive emotional responses from consumption behaviour play a role in encouraging normative constructions, thus reinforcing social consumption acceptances. The benefits of social and relational ties beyond the mere emotional response to the purchase of online music should positively impact future purchase intentions. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5. Subjective norms will mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions.

Methodology

Sample and procedures

Upper level marketing undergraduate students trained in data collection procedures served as data collectors for the snowball sample, as has been utilised in previous marketing research data collection techniques (Close *et al.*, 2009). Data collectors randomly asked students at college universities as well as individuals from the local community to participate in an online survey. Only individuals who self-reported as having purchased music online were selected for participation in the survey. Most participants were from the southern part of the US. Email addresses were collected from those willing to participate in the study and a survey link was sent to each respondent accordingly. Respondents were instructed to read the survey questions carefully and take as much time needed to complete the survey.

After pre-screening procedures were conducted, a total of 214 consumers qualified to participate in the study. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 32 (mean_{age} = 21.4). A total of 52 percent were female and 48 percent were male. A preponderance of college students were solicited for participation in the study since

young adults (18-24) are the most frequent purchasers of digital music (Gerlich, 2005). Of this population, 58.6 percent were financially dependent, while 30.4 percent indicated financial independency, 7.9 percent preferred not to respond. Participants' residency locations were in the following areas: Metropolitan (70.7 percent), Suburban (26.3 percent), and other (3 percent).

Measures

Hedonic shopping value. Participants were instructed to carefully indicate their level of agreement with the following statements based on their last online shopping experience for music: "The shopping experience was truly a joy"; "I continued to shop, not because I had to, but because I wanted to"; "The shopping experience truly felt like an escape"; "Compared to other things I could have done, the time spent shopping online was truly enjoyable"; "I enjoyed being immersed in exciting new songs/products"; "I enjoyed this shopping experience for its own sake, not just for the items I may have purchased"; "I had a good time because I was able to act on the 'spur-of-the-moment"; "During the trip, I felt the excitement in the hunt"; "While shopping, I was able to forget my problems"; and "While shopping, I felt a sense of adventure." A seven-point Likert scale was used. The hedonic value items were adapted from Babin *et al.* (1994). Reliabilities, as represented by composite rho, for the hedonic shopping value scale were appropriate at 0.94.

Emotional response toward purchasing music online. Participants were asked, "After making a music purchase online, it left me with a..." A seven-point, semantic differential consisting of "bad feeling/good feeling," "unhappy feeling/happy feeling," and "displeased feeling/pleased feeling" was used to measure feelings after purchasing music online (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Internal consistency for the measure was appropriate at 0.98.

Attitude toward purchasing music online. A seven-point, multi-item bipolar scale consisting of "negative/positive," "bad/good," and "unfavorable/favorable" was adapted to measure attitude toward purchasing music online (Viswanathan and Childers, 1999). Specifically, respondents were asked: "What is your overall attitude toward purchasing music online?" Reliabilities for the measure were adequate at 0.98.

Purchasing music to regulate emotions. Participants replied to the question: "In general, how often do you purchase music to cope with your emotions?" A seven-point semantic differential consisting of "infrequent/frequent," "seldom/often," and "never/always" was used to measure the frequency of music consumption as a form of coping mechanism (Dahl *et al.*, 2001). Reliabilities were ideal at 0.99.

Subjective norm. Participants were instructed to carefully indicate how the following statements described them: "My friends buy music online"; "People who are important to me buy music online"; "My friends approve of me buying music online"; and "Most people who are important to me approve of me purchasing music online." A seven-point scale Likert scale was used. The subjective norms measure was an adapted measure from Azjen (1991). Reliabilities for this measure were appropriate at .89.

Repeat Purchase Intentions for Music Online. Participants replied to the question: "What are your purchase intentions for music online in the next month?" A 7-point bipolar multi-item scale consisting of "unlikely/likely"; "improbable/probable"; "no chance/certain chance"; and "probably not/probably" was used to measure repeat purchase intentions. Internal consistency for this measure was appropriate at 0.99.

Results

The data was subjected to structural equation analysis in AMOS 17.0 using the maximum likelihood estimation method. As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-step procedure was used to first assess the model for construct and discriminant validity and then to test hypotheses in the structural model.

Measurement model

The measurement model exhibited adequate fit χ^2 (802.94); *p*-value (0.00); CFI (0.94); RMSEA (0.08); and PCLOSE (0.00). To test for convergent validity, factor loadings, along with the average variance extracted were calculated for each latent variable. Standardized factor loadings exceeded the 0.6 threshold as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2006). Additionally, as seen in Table I, the average variance extracted for each construct exceeded the recommended rule of thumb of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2006), which is an indication that the variance captured by the construct is greater than the variance due to measurement error.

In order to assess discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker test (1981) was performed. Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the average variance extracted for a construct is greater than the squared correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model. As shown in Table I, the average variances extracted between each construct is greater than the squared multiple correlations for each construct pairing. The results from the structural model follow.

Structural model

The structural model and hypotheses were evaluated after attaining a validated measurement model. The structural model (see Figure 1) exhibited good model fit: χ^2 (837.43); *p*-value (0.00); CFI (0.93); NFI (0.90); IFI (0.93); RMSEA (0.08); and PCLOSE (0.00). *H1a* through *H5* proposed both direct and mediational effects between latent variables and the primary dependent variables of interest. See Table II for the structural model fit.

Table I.
Average variance extracted, squared correlations and composite reliability

	Repeat purchase intentions	Attitude toward purchasing	Emotion regulation purchase	Subjective norms	Hedonic shopping value	Emotional response toward purchase	Composite reliability
Repeat purchase intentions	0.97						0.99
Attitude toward purchasing	0.51	0.95					0.98
Emotion regulation	0.37	0.14	0.97				0.99
Subjective norms	0.29	0.31	0.24	0.67			0.89
Hedonic shopping value	0.18	0.17	0.28	0.14	0.63		0.94
Emotional response toward purchase	0.37	0.48	0.13	0.24	0.17	0.95	0.98

Structural model fit	Hypotheses	Unstandardised coefficient	Standardised coefficient	Standard error	Critical ratio	<i>p</i> -value
<i>H1a</i>	Hedonic shopping value	→ Attitude toward purchasing music online	0.289	0.158	0.111	2.606 <i>p</i> < 0.05
<i>H1b</i>	Attitude toward purchasing music online	→ Purchase intentions	0.696	0.466	0.106	6.597 <i>p</i> < 0.001
<i>H1c</i>	Hedonic shopping value	→ Purchase intentions	0.119	0.043	0.177	0.673 <i>p</i> < 0.05
<i>H2a</i>	Emotional response toward music purchase	→ Attitude toward purchasing music online	0.703	0.627	0.067	10.549 <i>p</i> < 0.01
<i>H2b</i>	Emotional response toward music purchase	→ Purchase intentions	0.247	0.147	0.127	1.947 <i>p</i> < 0.05
<i>H3a</i>	Hedonic shopping value	→ Emotion regulation purchase	1.303	0.529	0.192	6.797 <i>p</i> < 0.001
<i>H3b</i>	Emotion regulation purchase	→ Purchase intentions	0.185	0.166	0.064	2.89 <i>p</i> < 0.05
<i>H3c</i>	Hedonic shopping value	→ Purchase intentions	0.119	0.043	0.177	0.673 <i>p</i> < 0.05
<i>H4</i>	Subjective norm	→ Purchase intentions	0.295	0.17	0.101	2.925 <i>p</i> < 0.05

Table II.

Attitude toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intention. *H1a* and *H1b* specify direct effects, while *H1c* predicts a mediational effect. The results of these direct effects are presented in Table II. *H1a* predicted that hedonic shopping value would be positively related to attitude toward purchasing music online. *H1a* was supported ($\beta = 0.289$; S.E. = 0.111; $p < 0.05$). This indicates that hedonic shopping value is positively linked to more favorable attitudes toward purchasing music online. Moreover, *H1b* proposed that attitude toward purchasing music online is positively related to repeat purchase intentions. This hypothesis is also validated ($\beta = 0.696$; S.E. = 0.106; $p < 0.001$), revealing that more favorable attitudes toward purchasing music online is related to greater repeat purchase intentions. Also *H1c* predicted that attitude toward purchasing music online would mediate the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions. Results confirm *H1c* (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Attitude toward purchasing music online fully mediates the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions ($\beta_1 = 0.289$; $\beta_2 = 0.696$; $\beta_3 = 0.119$, S.E. = 0.177, $p > 0.05$). The Sobel test statistic further confirms full mediation ($z = 2.35$, $p < 0.05$), supporting *H1c*.

H2a and *H2b* specify both direct and mediational effects. *H2a* proposed that there is a positive relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and attitude toward purchasing music online. This hypothesis was confirmed ($\beta = 0.703$; S.E. = 0.067; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the experience of positive emotions after purchasing music online is associated with greater repeat purchase intentions. Also, *H2b* predicted that attitude toward purchasing music online would mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions. Analysis validates *H2b*. Attitude toward purchasing music online fully mediates the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions ($\beta_1 = 0.703$; $\beta_2 = 0.696$; $\beta_3 = 0.247$, S.E. = 0.127, $p > 0.05$). Further supporting *H2b*, Sobel test statistic confirm full mediation ($z = 5.57$, $p < 0.001$).

Emotion regulation and repeat purchase intentions. *H3a*, *H3b* and *H3c* denotes direct effects and mediational effects. *H3a* proposed that hedonic shopping value is positively related to how often a consumer buys music to regulate emotions. *H3a* was confirmed ($\beta = 1.303$; S.E. = 0.192; $p < 0.001$) demonstrating that hedonic shopping value is related to an increase in how often a consumer buys music to manage emotions. Further, *H3b* predicted that how often a consumer buys music to regulate emotions is related to repeat purchase intentions. The results support the *H3b* prediction ($\beta = 0.185$; S.E. = 0.064; $p < 0.05$) which indicates that the frequency of buying music to regulate emotions is associated with increased repeat purchase intentions. Also *H3c* predicted that the frequency at which a consumer buys music to manage emotions would mediate the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions. Results confirm full mediation due to the non-significant path between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions ($\beta_1 = 1.303$; $\beta_2 = 0.185$; $\beta_3 = 0.119$, S.E. = 0.177, $p > 0.05$) as shown in Table II. Sobel test statistic also confirm full mediation ($z = 2.54$, $p < 0.05$) to support *H3c*.

Subjective Norm and Repeat Purchase Intentions. *H4* specify a direct effect, proposing that subjective norms would be positively related to repeat purchase intentions and results confirm this prediction ($\beta = 0.295$; S.E. = 0.101; $p < 0.05$). This

finding demonstrates that subjective norms are related post-purchase intentions, supporting *H4* (see Table II).

H5 specifies a mediational effect. As predicted in *H5*, subjective norms would mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions. Analysis validates *H5*, such that subjective norms fully mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions ($\beta_1 = 0.475$; $\beta_2 = 0.295$; $\beta_3 = 0.247$, S.E. = 0.127, $p > 0.05$). Sobel test statistic further confirm full mediation ($z = 2.72$, $p < 0.001$), supporting *H5*.

Discussion

This research aimed to provide further understanding concerning the underlying motivations of individuals in shopping online for digital music. We found that consumer attitudes, emotion regulation as well as subjective norms influence repeat purchase intentions for online music. Specifically, findings indicate that attitude toward purchasing music online fully mediates the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions as well as emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions. Thus, an individual's favorable or unfavorable evaluation of purchasing music online is so impactful that it functions as an intervening factor between affective responses and repeat purchase intentions.

Results also show that buying music online to manage emotions is related to hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions. In fact, emotion regulation processes mediate the relationship between hedonic shopping value and repeat purchase intentions. Finally, this research demonstrated that subjective norms, including family, friends and "important others" fully mediate the relationship between emotional response toward purchasing music online and repeat purchase intentions.

In summary, individuals effectively evaluate the entire sequence of steps in the purchase process for online music. Attitudinal, emotional responses and normative factors toward a purchase experience impact the decision to revisit an online retailer in the future.

Managerial implications

Given the impact attitude towards purchasing music online and emotion regulation processes had on repeat purchase behavior in this research, online retailers should invest resources in developing and maintaining their websites to cultivate and sustain favorable attitudes and experiences from consumers when purchasing music online. Specifically, positive attitudes and affective responses might be created through customer engagement. Retailers might achieve this by appealing to the senses and emotions of consumers, facilitating interaction and communication among consumers, and making purchasing online as convenient as possible.

Just as brick-and-mortar outlets make efforts to appeal to the senses and emotions of consumers (e.g. retail therapy), online retailers should also consider implementing customer experience management programs that appeal to experiential-seeking consumers. As previous research suggests, emotions can serve to build strong connections between brands as well as retailers (Jawahar and Maheswari, 2009). Eliciting positive emotional responses from consumers in an online context can be

achieved through adoption of sophisticated technologies that enhance product examination and improve customer perceptions and experiences with websites. Creating an online retailing environment that is aesthetically appealing by using visual effects and music can appeal to hedonic motivations and emotion regulation processes.

This research demonstrated the impact external influences, or “important others” (i.e. friends and family), have in encouraging customers to return to a website. Therefore, continuously improving and adopting technology that facilitates communication not only between the firm and consumer, but also between consumers, will enhance the customer experience in online shopping. Online retailers can make it easy for consumers to engage in communication and even advocacy from their website. Social media provides a viable platform for such activity. Social communities such as Facebook, Four Square and GooglePlus serve as communication and information repositories for sharing consumption experiences and retailers are linking their sites to these platforms.

Finally, as online retailers determine where they can make the most impact on influencing consumer attitudes once consumers visit their website, value-added components such as customer service (e.g. live chats) should be given special attention. This will help to ensure that the purchase experience remains convenient for the consumer. Subsequently, such efforts will help the firm in cultivating positive, robust attitudes in consumers toward their shopping experience.

Limitations and future research

Although this study makes important contributions to understanding more about online shopping behavior for hedonic products, it is not without limitations. The design and data from this study was used to determine associative/relational linkages, however, no causal relationships could be established. Future research might include studies which take place in an experimental, laboratory setting where causal relationships can be substantiated and actual behavior assessed. Further, the majority of study participants used in this research was between the ages of 18-24. Participants were also from the US and heavily concentrated in a specific geographical region. Although ages 18-24 is an appropriate age demographic for digital music downloads, future studies might examine whether differences exist between other age groups in overall evaluations. Additionally, data might also be collected from individuals in other countries to examine whether cross-cultural differences exist in consumption behavior.

Additionally, this research only examined shopping behavior for one type of hedonic product (i.e. music). Future studies might use a model similar to the one proposed in this research to examine other product categories in the online shopping experience. This research also did not examine specific emotions that individuals may experience or attempt to regulate through internet shopping. Additional research might explore which discrete emotions (e.g. sadness, loneliness, anger) consumers make efforts to mitigate through online shopping for hedonic products.

Conclusion

This research illuminates the significance of consumer attitudes, emotion regulation and subjective norms in the online shopping experience for hedonic products such as music. The emotional and hedonic appeals experienced in the traditional retail outlet can be effectively simulated and transplanted in a virtual setting. Thus, emotion

regulation practiced in the traditional retail setting (i.e. *retail therapy*) now has a virtual alternative: *e-tail therapy*.

Research opportunities that explore consumer behavior in the context of *e-tail therapy* abound and are warranted as the number of in-home and mobile shoppers continues to grow.

Note

1. The term “affect” is used in this context as the superordinate category for feeling states. Emotions, which can be grouped into discrete categories (e.g., amusement, joy, contentment), are inherent in affect (Bower and Forgas, 2000). Hence, emotion regulation processes can be explained in “theories of affect regulation.”

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