

## Using Mobile Devices in the Retail Store

Posted At : March 15, 2018 12:47 PM | Posted By : Dr. Suri Weisfeld-Spolter  
Related Categories: Consumer Behavior



Use of mobile devices has become commonplace for contemporary retail shoppers. At their fingertips, consumers can easily obtain lots of information to aid their shopping efforts and decisions. This phenomenon has been a challenge for some marketers; for others, a benefit. For instance, brick-and-mortar retailers have announced store closings (e.g., Macy's in 2016 and early 2017), dissolution (e.g., Limited's elimination of its store format in 2016), or corporate layoffs (e.g., WalMart in 2017), as their financial metrics are upended through e-commerce. At the same time, e-tailers have parlayed their technological competencies to embrace technologically-savvy buyers. Witness Alibaba's acute aspirations to become a worldwide e-marketer and Amazon's tremendous expansion of the breadth and depth of its offerings as well as recent establishment of its own global delivery service.

Retail salespeople have traditionally been providers of information for customers. Indeed, until the advent and enormous growth of the internet and e-commerce, sales personnel tended to be the primary purveyors of information in selling. As noted above, however, the retailing dynamic has changed markedly. Many retail customers now turn increasingly to marshaling information from alternative sources—particularly from mobile devices. In fact, consumers seem to be replacing traditional retail salesperson functions—such as collecting information, comparing prices, and securing the order—with mobile devices. This situation may well foreshadow a decline in the importance of salespersons in buyer-seller interactions.

Interestingly, a consumer's mobile device is somewhat similar to retail salesperson input in that it mimics the personal nature of selling. Accordingly, many of today's consumers tend to consult their smartphone rather than interact with retail sales personnel. Indeed, 73% of shoppers would rather use their phones than deal with the salesperson.

With increasing consumer preference for mobile devices for both hedonic and utilitarian reasons and avoidance of the retail salesperson, we did a study to explore the consumer's information search behavior vis-à-vis the salesperson's selling behavior so as to enhance understanding of how retail salespeople can influence mobile dependent shoppers.

We found that the more searching consumers do on their phones, the more they experience increases in perceived control, which fosters their purchase intention. These findings suggest that retailers should create an environment that facilitates feelings of perceived control because that construct is closely connected to the pathway between search and purchase intention. For example, providing consumers with easy access to free wi-fi in stores is one technique to help create a shopping environment that nurtures mobile phone searching. Retailers might also adopt a selling philosophy that helps consumers in their role as search agents to perceive that they are controlling the interaction with the salesperson (e.g., "Come to our store and be the boss," "We don't push you; you are in charge"). Because the mobile phone seems to increase feelings of control, retailers should also assist consumers to stay connected to their phone so that they can continue to search in the store. Furthermore, salespeople should be trained to be search assistants for the customers rather than assume the traditional role of "pushing the sale." In this context, retail salespeople could assist consumers in their search activities by providing comparison websites, review sites, and alternative search terms. In a similar way, companies can create apps for the mobile phone to engage consumers while in the store, and salespeople can direct them to download these applications.

*\* This post is based on a journal article recently published in Psychology & Marketing titled, "Under the sway of a mobile device during an in-store shopping experience". To read more about this study, findings and implications, contact Dr. Weisfeld-Spolter [sw887@nova.edu](mailto:sw887@nova.edu)*