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Collector's Relationship to Access-Based Consumption: A Sneakerhead's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on what persuades sneakerheads to partake in access-based consumption. This research is important because the relationship between collectors, particularly sneakerheads, and access-based consumption has not yet been explored. This topic was studied by conducting semi-structured interviews with sneakerheads, to find themes and correlations that depict motives for consumers to participate in access-based consumption. As well as motives, this topic was studied to discover deterrents that may drive sneakerheads away from renting their sneakers. These findings will contribute something new to the literature based upon access-based consumption, because currently there is no literature that depicts what motivates or discourages collectors/sneakerheads to become access-based consumers. To extract those findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The sample was a convenient sample from a Charlotte, N.C. mall. After conducting the interviews, it was found that saving money was a major motive for sneakerheads to rent their sneakers. Other than economic benefits, it was also found that for one-time use and status seeking purposes sneakerheads are motivated to rent their sneakers. Deterrents such as anxiety, hygiene, possessiveness, and sneaker condition were all discouragements that drove sneakerheads away from renting their sneakers. Within this study, there is also a proposed plan of how a sneaker-renting platform could benefit the consumer and the market simultaneously.

INTRODUCTION

There has been recent change in the state of mind of consumers, where they would rather gain access to a product without ownership than purchasing the product with ownership. This change has persuaded consumers to seek experiential purchases rather than possessive purchases. Most of these experiential purchases are sought through collaborative consumption, which according to Belk (2014) is "people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation" (p.1597). The particular type of collaborative consumption used in the aforementioned sentence is access-based consumption, which is "defined as transactions that can be market mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place" (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012, p.3). Since access-based consumption is a form of collaborative consumption, it can be challenging to distinguish one from the other. For example, Flight Car, a peer-rental car company that coordinates traveling-consumers to rent their

vehicles to one other, partakes in collaborative consumption, while on the hand Zip Car, a car rental company that charges consumers on the basis of car usage but not for maintenance, gasoline money, or insurance, partakes in access-based consumption. Although these car rental companies operate differently from each other, they have both helped the economy by saving consumers money and have helped the environment by reducing the amount of carbon dioxide emissions emitting vehicles on the highways. Research has found many motives for consumers participating in access-based consumption. Lawson (2011) has found that freedom from ownership, variety seeking, value seeking, status seeking, environmentalism, and risk avoidance motivates consumers to participate in non-ownership consumption. Variety seeking becomes a motive when a consumer desires to have multiple products at once or has many options to choose from, while on the other hand, value seeking becomes a motive when a consumer evaluates their options based upon price and quality. Risk avoidance

was not only found by Lawson (2011) to be a motive for access-based consumption, but was also considered in research conducted by other business researchers (Lawson, Gleim, Perren, & Hwang, 2016). Lawson et al. (2016) considered risk avoidance as motivation, when they explained how access-based consumption allows consumers to try a product before committing to owning the product. Depicting choice confusion as the origin of risk avoidance, Lawson et al. (2016) postulated that “consumers are likely to prefer to try a product when they have choice confusion as it reduces their risk, thus leading to positive perceptions of access-based consumption” (p.7). Furthermore, Lawson et al. (2016) included economic benefits, such as saving money from renting rather than buying, as a motive for access-based consumption. Economic benefits are classified as extrinsic motives for consumers to involve themselves in access-based consumption (Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2015). Receiving more value for less cost is the most common economic benefit sought, when consumers decided to indulge in access-based consumption (Tussyadiah, 2015). For example, if a consumer plans to use a tool once, he/she can rent the tool from a hardware store for \$30 a day rather than buying the tool for \$400, therefore saving the consumer \$370. Lawson’s (2011) suggestion that simplified maintenance is a motive for access-based consumption can be correlated to why some people rent their car from the access-based car rental company Zipcar, which provides insurance, maintenance, and gasoline money to their car renters. Flexibility is another driver that pushes consumers towards access-based consumption, because an access-based business model allows consumers to change-out their merchandise whenever they become bored with their current-rented good (Edbring, Lehner, & Mont, 2015). Most consumers, who are driven by flexibility to participate in access-based consumption, favor products that have fast innovative cycles, for the reason that when these products are upgraded, the consumer can upgrade without facing divestiture or spending excess money (Edbring et al., 2015, p.10). Similar to flexibility, trend affinity is a motive for chic-consumers to take part in access-based

consumption, because access-based consumption allows them to keep up with the new trend without going bankrupt (Möhlmann, 2015). As our population is becoming more cognizant of the limited resources that fuel our market, some consumers are persuaded to indulge in access-based consumption because of an environmentalist mind state (Baumeister, 2014). Moreover, environmentalism has persuaded many consumers to become political consumerists and only shop in a way that will enable them to cause desired political and environmental outcomes; therefore, political consumerism has been a recent motive for consumers to involve themselves in access-based consumption (Catulli et al., 2013, p.9). Except for major drivers for access-based consumption, such as environmentalism, economic benefits, flexibility, variety seeking, or political consumerism, there are some consumers who switch over to access-based consumption just based upon enjoyment (Teubner, 2014). This enjoyment stems from the fact that these consumers are participating in a business model that is fairly new, which allows them to become a trend setter amongst fellow consumers.

Other than access-based consumption and the motives for access-based consumption, literature about collections and how they relate to identity was collected, because the goal of this research is to figure out a method to persuade collectors to partake in access-based consumption. Whether people purposely or mistakenly do it, people look at their possessions as part of themselves (Belk, 1988, p.139). In addition, Belk (1988) implies that a person usually starts to regard their possessions as part of themselves, when they become able to exercise power over those possessions. For instance, when a consumer first buys a fast car, such as a Lamborghini, he/she may consider himself/herself as someone who has a nice car; however, once the consumer is experienced at maneuvering their Lamborghini at high speeds, he/she may start to consider himself/herself as an expert Lamborghini driver. Belk’s (1988) statement, “the more we believe we possess or are possessed by an object, the more a part of self it becomes” (p.141), further elucidates the

aforementioned example. Belk (1988) suggested that even though one may not have much control of the world, they can gain a sense of power via having control over their collections. After an unintentional loss of a possession, one may feel as if they have lost a part of themselves; not only because they lost a belonging, but because that possession was perceived by them as part of their extended self (Belk, 1988, p.142). Other than unintentional loss of a possession, when one recognizes a possession of theirs to no longer be compatible with their identity, they are likely to discard the possession (Belk, 1988, p.143). For example, when a child is becoming an adolescent, they are likely to abandon their toys that they now deem to be “childish.” Ahuvia (2005) further expanded Belk’s (1988) research, when he concluded in his research that “loved items were connected to the self both by expressing the self and by transforming the self into some new desired form” (p.180). Although Ahuvia (2005) expanded the research conducted by Belk (1988), he rejects Belk’s (1988) notion that our possessions reflect our extended self and proposes that our possessions are a reflection of our inner self. Throughout his research Ahuvia (2005) depicts how possessions are used to resolve identity conflicts. For example, Ahuvia (2005) interviewed a woman named Cindy, who was having an identity conflict between her rural background and her current metropolitan life. Cindy resolved this identity conflict by collecting antiques, which not only fulfilled her yearning for her past rural life, but also helped her assimilate to her present metropolitan life because antiques are seen as status markers in metropolitan areas.

So far the research found on access-based consumption, motives for access-based consumption, possessions, and the relation possessions have with identity have been discussed, because the intent of this research is to figure out a method to persuade collectors, sneakerheads in particular, to become access-based consumers.

METHODOLOGY

Data was extracted via a qualitative study, where semi-structured interviews were

conducted. The semi-structured interviews took place on a Saturday at a local mall in the Greater Charlotte area, for the fact that this location and time was the most appropriate to find sneakerhead-interviewees. The purpose of these semi-structured interviews were to assess how sneakerheads feel about access-based consumption, what motivates or discourages them to participate in access-based consumption, and what they like or dislike about the current sneaker market. During the interviews, interviewees were asked about their sneaker collection like how do they store their sneakers, how do they get rid of unwanted sneakers, and what brands are they most loyal to. Interviewees were also questioned on how they became sneakerheads, so I could better understand the origins of “sneakerhead culture.” After the interviews were conducted, they were analyzed for finding the measures that drive sneakerheads to rent their sneakers and the measures that deter sneakerheads away from renting their sneakers.

RESULTS

After conducting five interviews with sneakerheads, I started to gain insight on the motives that would drive a sneakerhead to rent a pair of sneakers and the discouragements that deter sneakerheads from renting a pair of sneakers. Just as Lawson et al. (2016) inferred, the economic benefit of renting their sneakers was a reoccurring motive interviewees said would influence them to rent a pair of sneakers. As seen in Graph 1 (see Appendix), the economic benefit of renting sneakers made up forty percent of the motives. One interviewee even gave an example where a consumer, who may be saving money for a certain pair of sneakers and does not have sufficient funds to purchase the sneakers, may be interested in renting those pair of sneakers as a substitute. Another interviewee implied that since most young sneakerheads do not purchase their sneakers, rather their parents, parents of young sneakerheads may be interested in renting sneakers to save money. Ranking next to the economic benefits of renting sneakers, the one-time use benefit of renting sneakers also comprised forty percent of motives in Graph 1

(see Appendix). This motive is derived from sneakerheads who are trendy and purchase the latest sneaker release every other weekend. These types of sneakerheads differ from other sneakerheads, where they are experiential with sneakers rather than possessive. Therefore, they are not seeking to collect sneakers but to keep up with the trend of sneakers that are released nearly every weekend. Keeping up with the trend can be costly and consume a lot of closet space, thus renting a new sneaker weekly can clear storage and prevent spending large amounts of money. Most of the time trendy sneakerheads try to sell their sneakers to possessive or laggard-trendy sneakerheads via second-market to regain funds lost from purchasing those sneakers and reinvest those funds into a new pair of sneakers. As you can see, trendy sneakerheads' consumer behavior can be appropriately accommodated if they can rent sneakers and return them at their leisure. Other than the economic and one-time use benefit of renting sneakers, status seeking was also a motive for renting sneakers. As can be noticed in Graph 1 (see Appendix), status seeking shared twenty percent of the motives. Status seeking is a motive for sneakerheads who like to differentiate themselves from the average sneakerhead with sneakers that expensively cost more than the average sneaker. For instance, a sneakerhead who is trying to seek status, may purchase a pair of \$800-\$900 Giuseppe sneakers compared to a pair of \$150-\$200 Nike sneakers. By renting their sneakers, instead of purchasing them, status seeking sneakerheads can still receive their sought status without actually being a member of "high society." As stated before, Lawson (2011) supports the fact that status seeking can be a motive for consumers to participate in access-based consumption.

Just as I needed to know the motives that would drive sneakerheads to rent their sneakers in order to better understand the relationship between sneakerheads and access-based consumption, I also needed to know the deterrents that discourage sneakerheads to rent their sneakers. Making up forty percent of the discouragements in Graph 2 (see Appendix), anxiety was a key deterrent driving sneakerheads away from renting their sneaker. Majority of the

interviewees said anxiety would arise from the thought of having to return the sneaker. The thought of returning the pair of sneakers evoked anxiety in interviewees because they would most likely be more mindful of where and how they are walking to avoid any scuffs that may cause surcharges once the rental period is over. This type of anxiety would distract sneakerheads throughout the day and become very mind boggling. Hygiene and sneaker condition were similar deterrents that each comprised twenty percent of discouragements (see Appendix). Hygiene was a deterrent because some interviewees were worried that the renter before them would have bad hygiene and propose the probability to infect them with a bacterial infection such as MRSA. Other than the interior of the sneaker, the condition of the sneaker's exterior worried the interviewees. Some interviewees were worried that the renter before them would have poor shoe maintenance and were going to cause them to rent a shoe that is not in appropriate condition. Although most of the deterrents have negative connotations, possessiveness was a discouragement of interviewees who were proponents of the idea of renting sneakers, but would rather purchase their sneakers to keep. Just as hygiene and sneaker condition, possessiveness comprised twenty percent of the deterrents in Graph 2 (see Appendix).

IMPLICATIONS & DISCUSSION

So far, I have been discussing the research I have found on access-based consumption, motives for access-based consumption, possessions, and the relation possessions have with identity; however, the main purpose of my literature review is to explain how I intend to use my research to figure out a method to persuade collectors, sneakerheads in particular, to become access-based consumers. After learning from Lawson (2011) that environmentalism is a major motive for access-based consumption, I plan to create an access-based business platform that advertises the environmental benefits of renting your sneakers rather than buying them. Such environmental benefits would be less cardboard disposal, which decreases deforestation, because

renting sneakers would not require buying a box. Other than lessening deforestation, by consumers renting their sneakers, they could help lessen the 30 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions a typical pair of sneakers generates during the manufacturing process (Chu, 2013). The aforementioned type of advertisements would enable consumers to help the earth become more sustainable, without completely going “green.” Other than environmentalism, value seeking is another access-based consumption motive I learned from Lawson (2011) that I would fulfill with my theorized access-based business platform. Value seeking would be fulfilled by offering consumers access to \$250 sneakers for a low weekly fee around the price mark of \$50. Moreover, my theorized business platform would alleviate the burden on divestiture for consumers, because they would be allowed to return the rented sneakers whenever they are no longer interested in wearing that particular pair of sneakers. Except learning motives for access-based consumption from Lawson (2011), I have also learned from Ahuvia’s (2005) research that most people desire an object because of competition with another person who also desires the same object (p.180). This lesson learned from Ahuvia (2005) has brought me to the realization why sneakerheads campout for hours each Saturday: sneakerheads are competing for desires. My theorized access-based platform allows sneakerheads who rent their sneakers, to access their sneakers quicker than sneakerheads who buy their sneakers, because they will not have to campout hoping they will be able to receive a pair of sneakers. All in all, my research contributes to the current research on access-based consumption, for the fact that it is dealing with materialism and Lawson et al. (2016) supposed that “more research is needed to understand the relationship between access-based consumption and materialism” (p.20).

CONCLUSION

From this research, it can be observed that although motives such as status-seeking, economic benefits, and one-time use may persuade sneakerheads to rent their sneakers, discouragements such as anxiety,

possessiveness, hygiene, and sneaker condition may deter sneakerheads from renting their sneakers. These findings concur the research that predates this research, such as Lawson (2011) stating economic benefits can motivate consumers to participate in access-based consumption. Hamari et al. (2015) also supports the fact that economic benefits persuade consumers to participate in access-based consumption. Möhlmann (2015) supports my finding of one-time use being a motive to rent sneakers, when he implied that trend affinity is a motive for chic-consumers to partake in access-based consumption. From this research, we can also learn or gain an idea of how to market a sneaker-renting platform to sneakerheads. Although possessiveness is a permanent discouragement for sneakerheads to rent their sneakers, other deterrents such as hygiene and sneaker condition can easily be eliminated via rules set by the business owner of the sneaker-renting platform. For example, the owner could set a three-time max for an individual pair of sneakers to be rented, to avoid condition degradation and hygienic issues.

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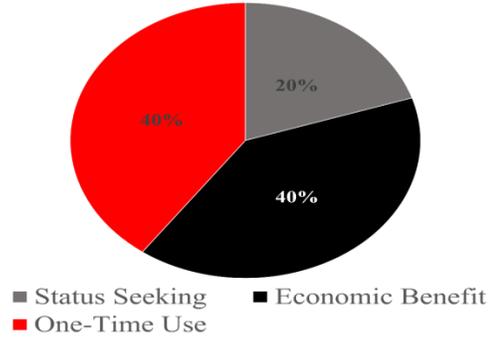
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APPENDIX

Motives *Graph 1*



Graph 2

