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Research Article

**Customer Value and Value for Customer – Retail Sector's
Need for Transformation**

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Abstract

During the last years, declining revenues in stationary retail can be observed. Strong price sensitivity of customers is reinforced by various technical progress driven opportunities of digital price comparison and participation of consumers in virtual networks. Whilst influence of digital media increasingly gains more importance for decision-making behavior, particularly social media therewith becomes a key aspect of success in retail sector. A major challenge for retailers in the near future is how to use already existing social networks of shoppers. Due to the economical importance and its market relevance, this article focuses on the Point of Sale (POS) in stationary retail with regard to consumer-packaged goods (CPG). This article provides a theoretical framework, considering relevant factors for brand

choice behavior, particularly the concepts of trust, commitment and price. Moreover, it explores how shopper involvement and customer recommendations can positively influence share of customer and increase share of wallet in retail sector. With regard to influences of social media on buying habits of customers, the authors of this article find that traditionally relevant purchase decision-making mechanisms remain, but change in their meaning.

Keywords: Shopper, Trust, Involvement, Brand, Social Web

Introduction

In recent years, the retailing sector has become exposed to new conditions. Technical progress and changes in competition can be

considered main reasons for increased economic pressure. Especially in retail stores, the need to differentiate and to successfully stand out from competitors' on- and offline has become a focus of attention for retailers. In addition, the process of concentration in the retailing industry has led to increased requirements for selling-space productivity as well as CRM with regard to customer loyalty. Pressure is also applied on the junction between the retailer and the customer by new POS-concepts of competitive producers/retailers, partially with own branch and store concepts.

The strong price sensitivity of customers in core markets in Europe, depending on the competitive situation, is reinforced by various opportunities of digital price comparison, either at the POS via mobile applications or via internet access from the

computer at home. As a result, on one hand, customers are increasingly informed and perceive also online-based shopping alternatives. On the other hand, a pure price competition virtually cannot be won if a wide range of products is to be offered. For some time, consumers have already become used to shop online, utilize their smart phones for shopping assistance in the stores and benefit from the Internet as a major source of product information. Already in one of three purchases in retail stores the information consumers need are retrieved from the Internet. This corresponds to 60 per cent of the turnover in the stationary trade in consumer goods. Fewer and fewer online users trust traditional advertising and increasingly rely on the opinions from people in their network. Respectively, companies lose their influence and sovereignty over the brand experience (Steimel/Gentsch/Dimitrova, 2012).

How can retailers at this absolute transparency about prices and reviews on the Internet penetrate customers and encourage them to purchase? Changing global consumer behavior in terms of communication and reference channels is demonstrated by several studies. The authors of this article suggest that despite this movement, the traditionally relevant purchase decision-making mechanisms remain, but change in their meaning. This paper outlines an approach on how the experience of shopping online and offline can be improved. With this article as a first step of their analysis, the authors refer to secondary data and literature to perform a meta-analysis of the buying behavior of Customers.

First, the characteristics for the purchase of CPG are presented and subsequently the role of digital influences on the decision-

making and brand choice behavior of customers in their role as consumers and shoppers. Customer is anyone who spends money. A consumer is someone who uses a product. Shoppers in this article are specified as customers with an intention to buy or to look at the things that are sold in a previously chosen destination. The term shopper therefore refers to the concept of shopping mission which means the reason of the shopping trip from the shopper's perspective. In short, shoppers and consumers are not necessarily the same person but cannot be considered in isolation from each other. Every consumer is eventually a shopper, but not every shopper is necessarily the consumer of the specific product. Individual brand choice is the output of a decision process in the limbic system and therefore not directly observable. On their shopping journey, customers are exposed to a wide range of media influences. The neurobiologist

Gerald Huether has been studying the effects and the impact of different media on our limbic systems. Regardless of how the developments are to be assessed in terms of media consumption and the effects on the limbic system, the changes in brain structures caused by media consumption are obvious. Huether refers to a change from a real life oriented limbic system to a more virtual environment specialization when consuming contemporary media (2008). Social Media became part of the life of many, not only of digital natives. These findings are reason enough to include virtual aspects in the research considerations of this article and in the study. Special attention in this context is given to the issue of social commerce as a fusion of social media and e-commerce. As a form of electronic commerce it intends the appreciation of the shopping experience through the use of social media and related social interaction in the network. This

appreciation results in an improvement of the purchasing experience for the shopper, by seeking to convey trust, benefit and enjoyment in the three areas, particularly, product search, product selection and product recommendation. For the retailing sector two basic social commerce strategies are seen to be applicable: „Whilst it may be technology that enables social commerce, the rationale is social; helping people connect where they buy and buy where they connect (Marsden, 2010).“ In particular local shopping services need to break the boundaries between stationary shopping and shopping online. Customers can check prices and availability of products in the local stores whether on the move or from home. Web coupons can then be redeemed when shopping local in stores.

Trend in Competition

Brand management has become a critical issue for the retail industry in recent years. The core benefits of products are increasingly similar and a differentiation of their actually verifiable performance is therefore difficult. Product quality in combination with the price originally was a relevant criterion in purchasing decisions (Domizlaff, 1982). In the age of modern technology consumers seem to take quality for granted and to more focus on information and conveyed emotion. In times of increasing virtualization and associated information overload, a need for orientation and continuity arises for buyers (Beysuengue, 2006). Thus, brands can serve as reference points and show the way out of the dilemma of differentiation (Kroeber-Riel, 1986).

Furthermore, increasingly more customers expect service around the clock. With the possibilities offered by social media, boundaries between companies and customers are blurring. What is happening is comparable to an outsourcing process of marketing activities and customer services towards the Social Web. Technorati Media's Digital Influence Report gives an overview of the digital budget spendings of companies, breaking down their social budget. That survey indicates, that 60% of brand marketers predict an average increase of 40% in social spend for 2013 (Technorati Media, 2013). In this context, Porter and Kramer state that many businesses still see value in too narrow limits by optimizing the short-term financial performance without a long-term focus and, moreover, criticize the lack of orientation of business activities to the needs of customers (2011).

Trends Online

According to a Nielsen study (2012) the buying behavior of consumers from 56 countries, the willingness for online purchases of products from the food and beverage category grew by 44 % within two years. While key attributes required by shoppers such as convenience, value and choice are attributable to online-shopping, according to the study, the degree of influence of the Internet, and especially of e-commerce, depends mainly on the category of consumer-packaged goods (CPG). Shoppers choose in this concern an omni-channel approach, in which online shopping constitutes an addition to the traditional brick-and-mortar retailing.

The same study (ibid.) also provides values for the usage patterns of grocery shoppers in relation to online connected devices. In Europe, about 55 % of grocery shoppers conducted the search for a product online and only about 49 % of grocery shoppers have purchased a product online. Almost 40 % of Europeans search for deals online and read product information.

Conspicuously low is the use of the website of the manufacturers and retailers. Less than 20 % of the grocery shoppers browse this traditional communication channel. Europeans are bringing up the rear of the grocery shopper when it comes to the use of social media for feedback to a grocery category. Less than ten percent of European grocery shoppers participate by writing reviews and/or blog posts. For producers and distributors this

development requires a rethinking of traditional company-client-interfaces in the sense of a more direct and bi-directional contact to their customers.

Nevertheless, a moderate growth of the influence of social media on purchase decisions can be noted. Based on the type of site preferential visited for purchases a slight decline in online-only sites can be seen, while brick-and-mortar-store sites are used more often. These indications refer to the two comparative quarters Q1 2010 and Q3 2011. It remains to be seen how this trend may continue in future periods. However, this study gives an impression of changing shopping habits and ongoing dissemination and ubiquity of the internet.

New Ways of Customer Involvement

In order to prevail in the reference group, products and brands must be sufficiently better than a currently used product (Parfitt/Collins, 1968). If a product fulfills this criterion and is bought by customers depends on various factors, mainly on brand trust, price, commitment with a specific brand and customer loyalty. The following is a brief depiction of the basic mechanisms of brand choice regarding CPG. It is provided as a framework to understand the changes in the buying behavior of customers and to underline the corresponding need for adaption in the retail sector.

Customer Involvement and Showrooming

For retailers the competition for customers is elementary for survival. In this context, the points of contact of a brand with its buyers are crucial. For the stationary retail industry, on one hand, it means a challenge to identify the needs of the connected customers and, on the other hand, to manage the trend of Showrooming. To recover sales the retail sector would be well advised to take advantage of digital opportunities to differentiate from competitors and to create decision-relevant shopping experiences in-store (Marsden, 2013). Generally, Showrooming can be described as the search for products in stationary retail stores and the subsequent purchase of these products online (Richter, 2013).

The importance of this trend heavily depends on the specific product category and range from 63 % for consumer electronics to 16 % on Jewelry and Watches (ibid.). The more technically sophisticated a product is in need of explanation, the higher it ranks with regard to Showrooming. As by far the most important reason for customers to search offline and subsequently shop online, the price is called with 72 % (ibid.).

Due to the improved cost structure of online trading, the stationary retailers experience increasing pressure. Thus, for example, the US retailer *Target* in early 2012 asked its suppliers to provide POS products with additional features to make price comparisons more difficult or even impossible. Concurrently, *Target* stressed the importance of its brick-and-mortar stores as showrooms for the products of its suppliers combined with a call

to lower the prices of their products to keep up with online offerings (Zimmermann, 2012).

CPG as food and everyday products result in a relatively low involvement (Kroeber-Riel/Weinberg, 1999), however, the customer in total spends a substantial part of his income for these products. The decision for and against a brand thus has no negligible weight and includes a total of ultimately not insignificant involvement (This applies all the more since the product-range of retailers includes a growing proportion of private-label products). According to Reichwald and Piller, involvement is to be understood as a specific activation directed on the information acquisition and information processing awareness to object-oriented information processes. In this extent, it can be differentiated between high- and low-

involvement products. High-involvement products are often expensive products or products that the consumer procures and keeps around for a long time. The high involvement is attributable to the imminent risk of a bad purchase and the associated financial loss. But the price, however, is not solely decisive. The high involvement could also arise from the consumer identification with the product and/or the intention to distinguish themselves from their social environment. The interest of an individual in a product category increases its willingness to personally influence the purchasing decisions of other market participants (2009). With progressive social networking activities a more direct influence of individuals on the decisions of many gains weight. As an additional effect, the information flow is considerably accelerated. A barely manageable wealth of information is available on demand, with a

considerable impact on the involvement of customers. On the one hand, the risk of a mistaken investment can be reduced significantly through a variety of information easily accessible. On the other hand, even simple products can be charged with emotions and values and thus may raise the individual involvement. Logically, the variety of information can also become an obstacle for customers. As an information overflow blurred the line between important facts and emotional charging of brands, for the customer it may result in a state of confusion.

The brain generally strives for cognitive relief and control decisions are partly unconscious (Schreier/Held, 2006). This means that with regard to selection decisions at the point of sale a shopper does not buy a product if at least one brand promise is suspected unfulfilled. However, the possibility cannot be

excluded, that dialogue-based media can trigger such uncertainty and may reinforce or reaffirm the consumer in it. So it is at least not unrealistic, to see the involvement of the customer closely linked to its expectations towards a brand, or even trust.

Accordingly, it can be assumed that producers and retailers need to build a strong, trusted brand to allow the shoppers to opt for a particular retailer and its product range. However, this only applies to cases in which the customer accepts a brand as a relationship partner. Animism theories suggest the assumption that there is a need to give objects human characteristics to simplify interactions with the non-material world (Fournier, 2001). Fournier in this context postulated to see a brand as an active participant in building a relationship. Moreover, in general linguistic use brands can be enlivened, humanized or even personalized (Beysuengue, 2006). Brand management should

therefore build confidence in brands and minimize the perceived risk of buying. Brand commitment and brand loyalty can only be built through trust.

Social Services as Triggers for Trust and Brand Choice

Links, search capabilities, personalization and interaction through location-based services are increasingly integrated by companies and increasingly used by recipients. This development was primarily driven by the proliferation of Social Media. Services such as blogs, emails, search engines, social bookmark sites, Facebook, Google +, Twitter, You Tube, allow companies to acquire highly personalized content. In spite of criticism and privacy issues, Social Media emerged to become the communication standard in recent years.

There is also a growing proliferation of mobile devices such as smart phones, tablets or notebooks/ ultra-books, which are increasingly supporting mobile use of these online services and thus promote networking between companies, brands and customers. Ubiquitous computing is a matter of course. Consumers and companies communicate at eye level. Brand communication is taken to a new level.

Due to the direct dialogue oriented communication, the reputation of a brand is a decisive success factor. A respected brand name conveys a certain product quality and is a strong product value indicator, which does not necessarily have to be attributed with a detailed knowledge of the characteristics of a product (Aaker, 1997). In this way the choice between alternative brands within a product class is facilitated because it allows

consumers to more easily distinguish between them (Beysuengue, 2006).

Trust plays a role in many scientific disciplines, such as in philosophy, sociology, social psychology, economics and education (Licharz, 2002). Accordingly, it is not unrealistic that at least as many definitions exist and a consistent use of the term has not been agreed so far. With regard to E-Commerce this problem is exacerbated by the fact that there are different trust subjects; here to name the Internet as a transaction medium and the retailer as a transaction partner (Ahlert/Heidebuhr/Michaelis, 2008).

In this context, trust can be understood as a mental state, which is attributable in terms of 'perceived probabilities', 'confidence'

or 'expectancy' on already prolated positive experiences with the relying party (Beysuengue, 2008). Morgan and Hunt understand the term trust as the willingness of interested parties to rely on the provider in terms of its future behavior („exchange partner's reliability and integrity“) without further examination (1994, p. 23). Trust is thus to understand as the willingness and ability to meet the positive expectations addressed to it. Reinmuth declares that every human individual has a standard assessment of trust that he/she could use as long as decision-relevant information is not provided in a sufficient degree (2006). Consequently, confidence can only be of importance for the decision of a consumer when the decision must be made under uncertainty (Kenning, 2002). Apparently, general trust in online-shopping seems to exist, when – just – price is reason

enough to shop online. Trust in the product itself can eventually be provided by Showrooming.

Accordingly, Weinzinger sees the main function of trust in the reduction of complexity (2004). With increasing complexity of products, the demand for the brand concept rises logically. The consumer is faced with a variety of factors that significantly increase the perceived risk of personal and organizational purchase (Beysuengue, 2006). The variety of factors significantly increases the perceived risk of purchase (Beysuengue, 2006). According to Bauer, risk consists of "the significance of the negative consequences of a possible wrong decision, and the ongoing uncertainty about the occurrence of these negative consequences" (1960, p. 24). This includes financial disadvantages and also social sanctions, such as the loss of social

status and recognition in the private sector (Schmidt, 2001). In terms of the shopper's journey, brand management can and should differentiate between the brand of retailers (private label) and the trade brand (any other brand). On its shopping mission the customer finally decides for a specific company and in store for a specific product. It is therefore logical to bring the traded product range in line with the brand of the company. This would also be consistent insofar as thereby the state of brand confusion with respect to the specific company can be largely eliminated. The term brand confusion describes the negative consequences for the consumer-related decision behavior resulting from the complexity of environment (Weers, 2008). In consequence, and as a result of limited cognitive abilities, the customer chooses reduction strategies that lead to a simplification of the selection process – with reference to the selected shopping center and

finally to its product range. The reasons for this can be seen in the reduced cognitive engagement with the product. In relation to the concept of trust, this simplification is principally caused by indifference and generalization (Luhmann, 2000). With indifference, specific causalities regarding a possible negative development are excluded by trust. Threats are blanked out, which in fact cannot be eliminated, so they cannot irritate actions. This in fact means a displacement of information.

The social media activities outlined earlier have the potential to increase or decrease this lack of appropriate decision-making process for customers. Taking advantage of consumer insights helps companies to trigger the choice of brands. Through the mechanisms of generalization and indifference, information is not only processed unconsciously, they are even neutralized.

Accordingly, the selection decision is made unconsciously. As a result, the principal risk of arbitrariness – even interchangeability – threatens the brand of a specific category. Moreover, brand values often turn out only in the medium or long term, resulting in a large degree of uncertainty. The scopes for actions obtained by trust support trying-out actions, which must necessarily take place outside of conventional safety routines. Trust is therefore fundamental for addressing uncertainty in dealing with unfamiliar situations (Bornschieer, 2001). Some internet applications give customers a trustworthy environment, which may lead to trustful information and improved buying decisions.

Leveraging Profitability for CPGs in Loyalty

Building trust to stabilize long-term sales in the retail sector cannot be the sole objective of marketing activities.

Similar to the concept of trust, commitment is seen as an essential component for long-term relationships. In addition to trust, commitment is among the emotional barriers to change. This can provide long-lasting relationships, even if they are not directly connected with a material advantage. Commitment thus represents a state of excitement and maintains a relationship even in the event of possible economic disadvantages (Beysuengue, 2008).

With their commitment-trust theory, Morgan and Hunt represent a point of view that commitment and trust are two key factors in relationship marketing (1994). Both factors encourage the partners to further invest in the business relationship in order to maintain it; however, temporary drawbacks may appear. Moreover, commitment makes partners classify particularly risky activity as less risky. Morgan and Hunt also assume that a partner only increases its commitment, if the partner is trustworthy, because the risk of vulnerability would be otherwise too high.

In situations of trust, causes of risks can be seen in the vulnerability caused by the result of trust and the uncertainty about this result (Beysuengue, 2006). With reference to brands, Lau and Lee define trust "as a consumer's willingness to rely on the brand even in the face of risk because of its expectations that

the brand will cause positive outcomes" (1999). They distinguish three factors that influence trust in a brand and correspond with the customer-brand relationship: The brand itself, the company standing behind the brand and the customer, who is interacting with the brand.

Brand interaction in different media can be based on three basic categories. *Earned media* increasingly complements the classical concepts of *Owned and Paid Media* as core factors of customer communication. A principal definition of these types of media was made already in 2009. In his Blog, Corcoran describes Owned Media as „Channel a Brand controls“ and Paid Media as „Brand pays to leverage a channel“. In contrast, the Earned Media is used „when customers become the channel“ (Corcoran, 2009). The latter is regarded among experts as the form of advertising,

which enjoys the greatest confidence among consumers and has the highest advertising effect. Companies should therefore endeavor to ensure that the resonance in non-business assets (Earned Media) is positive and is being carried on. According to Technorati Media, 55% of the companies surveyed have Earned Media goals in the year 2013 (Technorati Media, 2013).

Through social media companies are increasingly transparent, so it becomes apparent when brand promises are not fulfilled (Leitl, 2011). In this context, the predictability of a brand has a significant impact on consumer confidence. A predictable brand allows customers to anticipate what kind of performance it will provide in the specific situation of its use. If the brand additionally enjoys a good reputation, this may trigger a sufficient level of trust in the consumer to purchase a product

(Beysuengue, 2006). Confidence increases because the customer knows or can estimate that nothing unexpected can happen when using a brand. But also prediction of not-trusted behavior can lead to increased confidence, as long as the paths are predictable, where there may occur a breach of trust.

Additionally, problem solution orientation of a company also plays an important role for customer confidence. The term problem solution orientation describes the assessment of corporate motivation by the customer to anticipate problems occurring before or after the purchase phase and to find a satisfactory solution (Beysuengue, 2006). The direct contact with customers through social media holds a wealth of information for a solution-oriented customer service and makes a company

maximally transparent to outsiders who can choose from a variety of communication channels.

As a result of customer trust, customer loyalty can develop, and with increasing influence of commitment eventually increase the re-purchase intention. This intention is implemented finally with an active loyalty in the readiness to act (Oliver, 1999).

From Price Sensitivity towards Values

The more comparable and interchangeable a product is, the greater the importance of price for purchase decisions. Accordingly, the subjective value of a product is crucial in the decision of whether a price is judged to be appropriate or not. Conversely, the price also affects the subjective value of a

product.

Prices may therefore be regarded as information about the product and its quality. This is especially the case if the product is either of minor importance for the shopper or he is unfamiliar with it. Werth concludes in this regard, that a subjective value for money is required (2004). In Germany especially, the price plays the important role for foods and products for daily use (Kliger/Tweraser, 2000). The consumer requires a certain quality and would like to get basically no social status. Insofar, food and products of daily use move in a vicious circle. On the one hand, customers do not want to pay much for these articles and on the other side, no subjective value is created by low prices. Shoppers must therefore be activated for brand selection decisions within the sense of involvement. To that extent, a

company's products must either have unique characteristics, which are only available in certain brick-and-mortar-stores or the shopping experience in local stores must be sufficiently increased.

To reach the customers, the brand promise must orient the requirements of consumers. To consider shoppers and consumers as an important part in the value chain of brand development is a necessary prerequisite. The Social Web provides perfect conditions for that.

The trend towards Showrooming is increased by price if internet-shops are capable of providing appropriate information with the digital presentation of specific products. New shop-concepts allow the digital alternative to be favorable for a group of

customers due to extra information, recommendations from other users, easy connection to further products related to the original one, etc. That matches with the statement that 72 % of all Showrooming is done to gain information that is not available online, but in order to shop for the lowest price later on (Richter, 2013). Depending on the quality of the customer interface there is the chance for producers and retailers to transform the general decision away from pure price considerations towards values.

Conclusions: Leveraging Profitability for CPGs

For the retailing sector there are basically two ways for increasing turnover with respect to its customers: the share of customers and the share of wallet. The first dimension is to be understood as the number of shoppers and the frequency with

which they purchase the products of a specific category, eg, in the stores. The second dimension considers the buyer and the amount of financial resources available for shopping in the aforementioned category with a specific retailer. Particularly the second dimension corresponds with the concept of loyalty. The approach introduced here is based on the GfK's key performance indicators for category assessment (GfK Consumer Tracking, 2008). Retailers must aim it accordingly, to increase the number of shoppers as well as the frequency of purchases in the respective categories and secondly, to increase the proportion of customer spendings in each category.

Based on the changing technical conditions a new type of consumer has evolved, often referred to as SoLoMo (social local mobile). These consumers use capabilities of the Social Web in

conjunction with location-sensitive apps to find products, to shop them and share information about their use with others. The use of various channels and social filters allows consumers finally to make smarter decisions. But it is also a great chance for the retail industry. In this context, Marsden identifies three groundbreaking social media trends. These are „Assistive Retailer Technology (ART) to help retailers sell smarter, new Assistive Consumer Technology (ACT) to help customers shop smarter, and next-generation ‚retailment‘ technology to enhance the in-store experience through entertainment” (Marsden, 2013, p. 5).

In this way, companies can fully use the potential of crowd sourcing. The concept of crowd sourcing was coined for the first time by Jeff Howe (2006). It describes swarm intelligence and pursues the idea that certain tasks are divided into small units,

which are outsourced, to broad masses of interested customers. The customer is integrated into the activities of the company as a so-called prosumer and extended in this way its value creation network as a strategic factor of brainstorming. The data can be analyzed with statistical methods and provide valuable information on customer preferences and reactions to brands. Individual profiles provide customized service. According to a study of McKinsey&Company (2010), the per capita revenues of companies that are exceptionally active in the social networks are higher. This article is highlighting an example of how activities can upgrade customers experience with the product of a specific producer or retailer and how it affects the total turnover. Companies have to follow at least a dual approach of supportive procedures to receive more positive recommendations and involvement will positively affect the

overall performance of the enterprise. Both effects can be achieved easier if a multi-channel approach is used.

Accordingly, customers who have purchased a product with a multi-channel retailer are more loyal than customers of pure online retailers or stationary traders who have only a rudimentary online-offer without shop functionality.

Consequently, the three golden wisdom of trade continue to apply: „location, store, loyalty“ (ibid.). Showrooming in an appropriate way may be a key for a long-term success when combining benefits of online and stationary retail with social media skills.

The results are versatile: Customers are involved in development processes themselves and take on roles of communicators. This

allows better, more efficient customer care and leads to commitment through many touch points with the brand. This in turn is rewarded with high brand confidence and may result in increased sales. However, it is necessary to strengthen the brand and to generate a distinctive USP for it. Brand promises should be consistently maintained and communicated whenever possible. And should this not be possible, transparent communication is necessary to ensure. In the end, the consumer will reward a trusted brand with commitment and loyalty. In this way, the share of customers can be positively influenced, and the share of wallet can be increased. Trusted brands become the basis for decisions in a product category and serve consumers as benchmarks in a vast product and brand diversity. Responsible behavior of the brand owners, individualized customer communication and interaction of the brand with the consumer

are the key factors in the competition of the best brands with the customer.

Implications of the Theoretical Framework on Further Research

Especially the grocery retail segment is characterized by a fragmented market structure. And even if the customer spends a significant part of its total income on food and everyday products such as CPG, the decision at the point of sale is often a low involvement decision. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that customers at the POS often opt for a specific product or revise their purchase plans regarding a certain product in favor of another product. Numerous studies show that almost 70% of all buying decisions, at least in terms of daily commodities, are

taken only at the point of sale (POS) (Hertle/Weber, 2009). In addition, several results suggest that many shoppers enter grocery stores with the awareness to buy products that they had not intended to buy and for such purchases even plan a budget (Stilley et al., 2010).

As mentioned before, the limbic system generally strives for cognitive relief and control decisions are partly unconscious (Schreier/Held, 2006). This means that with regard to selection decisions at point of sale, a shopper probably will not buy a product if at least one brand promise is suspected to be unfulfilled. Due to the low involvement, for customers it is frequently not possible to specify which criterion has resulted in the specific decision for or against a product.

In the unconscious decision lies the challenge for the multi-method study design. One way to approach this problem is the linking of physical and virtual test market environment. Virtual customer profiles can be linked to real buying processes through appropriate interfaces both online and offline. A descriptive overview of the current possibilities of linking of the Internet to the stationary trade is presented by Marsden in a recently published Whitpaper of the SYZYG Germany (Marsden, 2013). Through this connection, the influence of positive recommendations and involvement strategies can be measured and controlled. The results obtained in this way can be implemented directly into practice and represent an important component in the competition of retailer for the customers, values and against declining revenues.

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