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Original

Daily deal shoppers: What drives social couponing? / Ieva, Marco; DE CANIO, Francesca; Ziliani, Cristina.. - In: JOURNAL OF RETAILING AND CONSUMER SERVICES. - ISSN 0969-6989. - 40:(2018), pp. 299-303. [10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.03.005]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11381/2824819 since: 2021-11-17T21:06:08Z

Publisher:

Elsevier Ltd

Published

DOI:10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.03.005

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note finali coverpage

(Article begins on next page)

08 May 2024

Daily Deal Shoppers: What Drives Social Couponing?

Abstract

This paper contributes to the service marketing literature with a focus on deal-of-the-day (DoD) website shopping. The work explores drivers of adoption of DoD shopping among young consumers. We show that value conscious consumers are less oriented towards DoD while deal-prone consumers are more likely to purchase DoD. In contrast to previous research, which found that price savings are the main reason for coupon use, our study finds that Enjoyment plays a major role in young consumers' DoD shopping behaviour. DoD platforms could leverage Enjoyment to create a compelling value proposition for both consumer and merchant attraction and retention.

Keywords: social couponing, enjoyment, e-commerce, promotion

1. Introduction

The growing prevalence of digital media and tools in marketing has affected companies in recent years (Leeflang et al., 2014). Companies employ the new online channels in different ways to promote their products and services, and seek a better understanding of how they should formulate their online promotion strategy to maximize customer response (Ailawadi et al., 2009; Shankar and Hollinger, 2007). Coupons have become digital, and consumer goods manufacturers, service providers and retailers make them available online (Barat et al., 2013; Suri et al., 2004). For instance, on their website Kroger offer online coupons that can be automatically redeemed when the shopper checks-out at any Kroger store. In addition, e-coupon websites have established themselves as platforms that enable consumers to browse through numerous service and product categories and download coupons that appeal to their preferences (Fortin, 2000; Kang et al., 2006). In recent years, a relatively new type of online coupon website called “Deal of the Day” (DoD) has emerged (Ardizzone and Mortara, 2014; Krasnova et al., 2013). DoD websites enable customers to purchase “in a social way”: the more customers purchase together (a specific service or product), the greater the discount they get (Anand and Aron, 2003; Hu et al., 2013; Liang et al., 2014). DoD savings opportunities range from 50 to 90% off. Moreover, DoD differ from traditional coupons because they require consumers to pay in advance for services and products in order to receive bigger discounts (Nakhata and Kuo, 2016).

DoD have been referred to as one of the biggest phenomena in e-commerce (Magno et al., 2014). DoD platforms have significantly changed the retailing of services across several industries, such as tourism, hospitality and beauty (Heo, 2016). Groupon has emerged as the leading DoD player in several countries (Krasnova et al., 2013): the company is nearing 50 million customers worldwide and has worked with over a million merchants (Investopedia, 2016). Recently, DoD platforms have taken advantage of new mobile applications and tools (e.g. push alerts, geo-localization) to boost their use by consumers (De Canio et al., 2015).

Despite the growing appeal that DoD platforms have for consumers, most studies to date have focused on the benefits that DoD platforms offer to merchants: DoD websites put small merchants (such as restaurants, fitness clubs, niche e-tailers) in contact with prospects. DoD provide

opportunities for price discrimination and customer acquisition (e.g., Edelman et al., 2014). However, profitability of DoD for merchants is often compromised due to the depth of price cuts (e.g., Kumar and Rajan, 2012). Recent research shows that consumers exposed to price promotions rely on affect and emotions as well as price when they choose promoted goods and services (Aydinli et al., 2014). A closer exploration of drivers of DoD shopping among consumers would provide new useful insights to ensure the sustainability of the DoD business model (Kim et al., 2013; Krasnova et al., 2013; Kumar and Rajan, 2012). However, there is a lack of studies in this area, and the need for further contributions on the topic has been highlighted by several previous works (e.g. Boon et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2013; Krasnova et al., 2013; Kumar and Rajan, 2012). A better understanding of drivers of DoD adoption would also be beneficial for developing new theory on online price promotion.

This paper aims to identify the drivers that influence consumers in their adoption of DoD shopping which could be leveraged to create a more compelling value proposition both for consumer retention and merchant attraction. The study is based on a rich body of literature in the areas of marketing promotion and e-commerce, exploring the role of six different constructs: Deal Proneness, Value Consciousness, Market Mavenism, Shopping Smart, Perceived Risk and Enjoyment.

We focus on young consumers - mostly college students and graduates – because they represent a valuable target for DoD platforms, apart from reasons of convenience. According to Lester et al. (2005), college students spend hours surfing the Internet each day, and are among the consumers most eager to make online purchases (Seock and Bailey, 2008). Moreover, consumers who engage in DoD websites are mostly young people - i.e. college students and white-collar workers - who are open to changes and like experimenting new goods and services (Erdoğan and Çiçek, 2011). Thus, it is important for DoD websites to identify the drivers of college students' online shopping behaviour if they wish to target this substantial market segment effectively.

The present work aims to make the following contributions. First, we improve the understanding of drivers of DoD shopping, which is a relevant contemporary phenomenon in the area of service marketing (Kumar and Rajan, 2012). Our paper shows that there are positive and negative drivers of DoD shopping behaviour among young consumers. Empirical evidence reveals that, in addition to Deal Proneness, Enjoyment plays a major positive role in DoD shopping behaviour. Value Consciousness and Perceived Risk are negatively related to DoD shopping: consumers who are more sensitive to the risk and to the value-price ratio of a purchase will buy less DoD. Second, marketers' attention is directed to the fact that resources will yield better returns if invested in promotional tactics and website features that stimulate fun and enjoyment, rather than invested in price cuts only. This type of DoD platform positioning could attract more merchants, as they will not be scared away by the imperative to sell at rock-bottom prices. Third, our paper provides future research directions. Our findings point to the need to reconsider the way consumers respond to price promotion, as suggested by Aydinli et al. (2014). In fact, one of the key elements behind the mass adoption of DoD platforms lies in the fact that customer response is also driven by affect. This leads to the need for further theoretical contributions on the role of affect and emotions in consumer decision making in the context of price promotion and, more generally, of services marketing.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Marketing literature has long investigated coupons as tools that support customer acquisition and trial of new products and services (Blattberg and Neslin, 1989; Dholakia, 2012; Narasimhan, 1984). Price savings have been identified as the main driver for coupon use (Ashworth et al., 2005; Babakus

et al., 1988). Over time, technological innovations have driven coupon evolution from paper format (e.g. Lichtenstein et al., 1993) to electronic-coupon (e.g. Fortin, 2000), mobile-coupon (e.g. Khajehzadeh et al., 2014) eventually to social-coupon or DoD (e.g. Nakhata and Kuo, 2016).

As far as DoD purchasing and redemption are concerned, we find studies on: shoppers' demographic characteristics (e.g., Dholakia and Kimes, 2011), shopping experience (e.g., Erdogmus and Çiçek, 2011), drivers of DoD shopping (e.g., Erdogmus and Çiçek, 2011; Krasnova et al., 2013; Tuten and Ashley, 2011) and DoD redemption failure (e.g., Nakhata and Kuo, 2016; Parsons et al., 2014).

Consumers involved in DoD shopping show keen interest in deals (Krasnova et al., 2013). The concept of deal proneness was introduced by Webster (1965). Deal prone consumers employ promotional information to make purchase decisions and have a higher propensity to respond to an offer (Martinez and Montaner, 2006). They are known to switch brands in order to take advantage of price promotion. Several researchers suggest that deal proneness is a general characteristic that may vary according to product category (Bawa and Shoemaker, 1987), the channel of deal delivery (Ward and Davis, 1978) and the type of promotion (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990; Lichtenstein et al., 1997; Netemeyer et al., 1995). Deal prone consumers have been found to be more attracted by the availability of a promotion than by the actual depth of the price cut (Dholakia and Kimes, 2011). As DoD platforms provide a huge variety of deals in terms of type of products and services and discount levels (Parsons et al., 2014), we expect a positive relationship between deal proneness and high levels of DoD shopping. Hence we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. Deal Proneness has a positive relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the greater the Deal Proneness, the higher the DoD Shopping activity.

Value conscious consumers have generally been treated as different from deal prone consumers (Lichtenstein et al., 1990). Recent literature has shown that these “are not mutually exclusive concepts, and there can be a segment [of consumers] that is both value conscious and coupon prone” (Pillai and Kumar, 2012, p. 30). While deal prone consumers are interested in deals independently of the depth of the discount or the quality of the product/service, value conscious consumers buy coupons to have a price discount where there is a certain level of quality. Lichtenstein et al. (1993) identify value consciousness as a “concern for price paid relative to quality received” (p. 235) and find it to be negatively related to the quantity of promoted products purchased. To identify the role of value consciousness in DoD shopping we propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Value Consciousness has a negative relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the greater the Value Consciousness, the lower the DoD Shopping activity.

Feick and Price (1987) define market mavens as consumers that have great motivation and sense of obligation to find information about a variety of products and share this information with other consumers. These consumers are willing to introduce new brands and new products to their friends (Feick and Price, 1987). For mavens, coupons are a type of product information they like to collect and share. Price et al. (1988) find that mavens are super-couponers because they tend to spend time and effort collecting and buying coupons. In a qualitative study on DoD shopping, mavens were found to buy a great number of promotions, regardless of their utilitarian or hedonistic value. They were

more also likely to share information about deals and they tended to “go from deal to deal” (Boon, 2013). We can thus hypothesize as follows:

H3. Market Mavenism has a positive relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the greater the Market Mavenism, the higher the DoD Shopping activity.

The two main skills displayed by smart shoppers are sales awareness and ability to evaluate price effectively (Mano and Elliot, 1997). Smart shoppers feel a state of excitement due to price promotion (Schindler, 1989). Smart shoppers’ buying experience creates feelings of pride and enthusiasm that facilitate a positive shopping experience (Feick et al., 1988; Holbrook et al., 1984). Smart shoppers perceive couponing as a challenge and a hobby (Price et al., 1988). They are motivated by money and time saving and by the opportunity to get referrals from other shoppers (Green Atkins and Kim, 2012). Based on these characteristics, we postulate that:

H4. Shopping Smart has a positive relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the more Shopping is Smart, the higher the DoD Shopping activity.

Perceived Risk reflects the consumer’s overall perception of the risk inherent in purchasing products in a specific category (Del Vecchio and Smith, 2005; Dowling and Staelin, 1994). Consumers’ perceived risk has been found to be greater in online than in offline purchasing (e.g. Hansen, 2006; Van den Poel and Leunis, 1999). Previous research associates perceived risk with the purchase of new products or services and brands (e.g. Grewal et al., 1994), as well as with uncertainty about the potential outcomes of the product or service (e.g. Cox and Rich, 1964). In online shopping, an individual’s perception of the level of risk significantly influences purchase intention (Liao et al., 2011; Wu and Ke, 2015). Studies conducted specifically in the DoD context show that DoD shoppers basically fear receiving a lower level of service when using a coupon (Boon, 2013; Nakhata and Kuo, 2016). This fear is intensified by the fact that in order to get a large discount, they have paid in advance. We thus postulate that:

H5. DoD Perceived Risk has a negative relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the greater the DoD Perceived Risk, the lower the DoD Shopping activity.

Consumer shopping behaviour is affected by emotional states (Wolfenbarger and Gilly, 2001). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) found that emotional value was the most important predictor of intention to purchase products or services in a retail setting. In the case of leisure products and services, consumers “bought for enjoyment rather than out of necessity” (Boon, 2013, p. 844). As found by Dholakia (1999), consumers identify as one of the most important reasons for shopping “shopping as pleasure”, i.e. looking for hedonic and experiential attributes in the shopping environment (p.163). Specifically, consumers who perceive shopping as an enjoyable experience tend to display a more positive mood, and are thus more inclined to increase their intended and actual purchases (Beatty and Ferrell 1998; Childers et al., 2002). Shopping enjoyment has been identified as the best predictor of the attitude toward coupon use (Mittal, 1994). We therefore postulate a similar relationship in the case of DoD:

H6. DoD Enjoyment has a positive relationship with DoD Shopping. Hence, the greater the DoD Enjoyment, the higher the DoD Shopping activity.

3. Methodology and Results

Data to test the hypotheses were collected by means of an online survey. The sample was selected from an e-mailing list of undergraduate and graduate students in Business and Economics. They were asked whether they shopped on Groupon. Groupon was chosen as it is the leading platform in Italy, with 10 million subscribers and yearly sales in excess of 250 million EUR (ICT4Executive, 2012; Rusconi, 2014). A total of 359 questionnaires were collected; we focused on respondents who had shopped at least once on Groupon, thus restricting the analysis to 146 subjects. Demographic characteristics including gender and age were also registered. Subjects were mainly females (71.2%) with an average age of 24. DoD shopping was measured by asking subjects “how many deals they had purchased on Groupon in the last year”. It was found they purchased 3 DoD on average. We also recorded whether subjects had ever not redeemed a DoD they had paid for. Deal Proneness, Market Mavenism, Shopping Smart, Value Consciousness, Perceived Risk and Enjoyment were measured by means of Likert scales. All construct measures (Table 1) proved to be reliable or close to reliability according to the commonly employed Cronbach’s alpha’s cut-off values (Nunally and Bernstein, 1994).

Table 1: Construct Descriptives and Reliability

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach’s α	Source
Deal Proneness	4.8	1.2	0.87	Netemeyer, Burton and Lichtenstein (1995)
Value Consciousness	5.5	1.2	0.83	Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, and Burton (1990)
Market Mavenism	4.7	1.3	0.88	Feick and Price (1987)
Shopping Smart	3.8	0.8	0.68	Ganesh, Reynolds and Lockett (2007)
DoD Perceived risk	2.9	1.3	0.85	Cox and Cox (2001)
DoD Enjoyment	4.8	1.4	0.93	Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw (1992)

Because of high over-dispersion in the data, a Negative Binomial regression model was employed to test hypotheses. Gender, age and number of unredeemed DoD were included in the model as control variables together with the independent variables of interest. Number of DoD purchased in the last year was the dependent variable. Analyses were performed using the MASS package of R statistical software (Venables and Ripley, 2002). After mean-centering the continuous independent variables, partial multicollinearity in the model was assessed using variance inflation factor and tolerance values. No issues were detected. The Negative Binomial regression model fitted the data well, as the ratio deviance/degrees of freedom was close to 1 (1.08) and the dispersion parameter significantly different from zero. Moreover, the likelihood ratio test showed that the Negative Binomial model performed significantly better than a Poisson model ($\chi^2_{(11)} = 108.3$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the model

predicted DoD shopping significantly better than an intercept-only-model ($\chi^2_{(9)} = 45.25$, $p < 0.001$). Table 2 shows results from the Negative Binomial regression.

Table 2: Negative Binomial Regression Model

Variable	Estimate	Std. Errors	Std. Beta
(Intercept)	0.732	0.158	
Deal Proneness	0.194 ***	0.075	0.060
Value Consciousness	-0.243 ***	0.079	-0.072
Market Mavenism	0.031	0.074	0.009
Shopping Smart	0.004	0.130	0.001
DoD Perceived Risk	-0.121 *	0.062	-0.038
DoD Enjoyment	0.181 ***	0.064	0.062
Age	0.031 *	0.017	0.033
Gender	0.336 *	0.176	0.038
DoD unredeemed	0.552 **	0.184	0.053

***= $p < 0.01$; **= $p < 0.05$; *= $p < 0.10$.

Regression coefficients are computed on mean-centered variables.

Deal Proneness was related to DoD Shopping ($z = 2.60$, $p < 0.01$) and there is support for H1. Support is found for H2, as DoD Shopping significantly decreased as Value Consciousness increased ($z = -3.08$, $p < 0.01$). DoD Shopping did not significantly increase as Market Mavenism increased ($z = 0.42$, $p = 0.68$), providing no support for H3. Shopping Smart was not significantly related to DoD Shopping ($z = 0.03$, $p = 0.97$) which thus refutes H4. Perceived Risk was slightly negatively related to DoD Shopping ($z = -1.96$, $p = 0.06$), offering partial support for H5. Finally, as DoD Enjoyment increased, DoD Shopping significantly increased ($z = 2.83$, $p < 0.01$), offering proof of H6. Regarding control variables, results show that women tend to purchase more DoD than men ($z = 1.92$, $p = 0.06$). Age is positively related to DoD shopping ($z = 1.80$, $p = 0.07$) and number of unredeemed DoD is positively related with DoD shopping ($z = 3.00$, $p < 0.01$).

4. Conclusions and Implications

In contrast to previous research finding that price savings are the main drivers for coupon use, our study found that hedonic values play a major role in consumers' DoD shopping behavior. Younger consumers will purchase more DoD when they encounter an enjoyable shopping experience. Nevertheless, consumers who pay more attention to the value-price ratio rather than to price itself will reduce their purchase of DoD. In line with previous literature, those who are more oriented towards deals and bargains will tend to buy more DoD. Surprisingly, Market Mavenism seems not to be related to DoD shopping. The tendency to share information on deals and bargains within consumers' social environment seems not to play a positive role in their shopping activity. The same applies for the relationship between Smart Shopping and DoD shopping. DoD shopping is not predicted by self-perception as a skilled and knowledgeable shopper. Finally, DoD Perceived Risk discourages consumers from buying more DoDs. Table 3 summarizes the main findings.

Table 3: Summary of main findings

Hypothesis	Support
H1: (+) Deal proneness (+) DoD Shopping	Yes
H2: (+) Value Consciousness (-) DoD Shopping	Yes
H3: (+) Market Mavenism (+) DoD Shopping	No
H4: (+) Shopping Smart (+) DoD Shopping	No
H5: (+) DoD Perceived Risk (-) DoD Shopping	Yes
H6: (+) DoD Enjoyment (-) DoD Shopping	Yes

This study addresses an emerging phenomenon in the area of service marketing literature and makes several contributions. First, the study introduces the role of affect in DoD shopping behaviour. Results suggest that DoD shopping is driven not only by utilitarian motives: emotions play a significant role and can be considered as one of the main drivers, as shown by standardized betas (see Table 1).

Second, we show the contrasting roles of Deal Proneness and Value Consciousness in DoD shopping: value conscious consumers are less oriented towards DoD while deal prone consumers are more likely to purchase DoD. Third, our study confirms that Perceived risk discourages consumers from purchasing DoD regardless of age: DoD Perceived Risk is found to be significant among young consumers, despite their supposed familiarity with the online medium and online shopping.

Results have major managerial implications for DoD platforms and merchants alike. DoD websites are encouraged to play on the variety of offers available in their positioning and communication strategies, to present offers in a fun way and enhance website navigation experience so that it triggers higher enjoyment for users. An enjoyable shopping environment will lead to store loyalty (Johnson et al., 2015). Emotional, hedonic and playful interfaces should attract new customers and retain old ones, a desirable outcome in an increasingly crowded marketplace like that of DoD and, more generally, online price promotion.

Marketing resources will yield better returns if invested in promotional tactics and website features that stimulate fun and enjoyment, rather than only in price cuts. This type of positioning could attract more merchants to DoD platforms, as they will not be scared away by the need to offer products and services at rock-bottom prices. A more sustainable pricing point for products and services on offer could encourage merchants to use the platform repeatedly, and provide it with a steady flow of revenue over time. A solid base of merchants could also result in improving customer service, which the study revealed as a factor in discouraging customers from DoD shopping. Along the same lines, DoD platforms should strive to reassure customers about risks associated with DoD shopping all the way along the website shopping experience.

5. Limitations and Future Studies

This study has several limitations, which could be addressed by future research.

The study employed a cross-sectional survey with a descriptive model, and did not aim to estimate causal effects. Because the sample size was limited, the study did not test interactions or more complex relationships (e.g. quadratic) among independent variables and the outcome. The analysis is

limited to the student population of a single university. Age is a significant predictor of Groupon usage even in the homogenous group of young consumers. Hence, the established relationships may vary by age segment. Future studies should therefore take a causal inference perspective for studying drivers of DoD shopping, and should test the moderator role of age.

We measured DoD shopping by means of a self-reported measure: the number of DoD purchased in the last year. In order to limit possible heterogeneity deriving from the use of multiple DoD players, we focused on one DoD player only. Further studies need to examine DoD shopping through different measures (e.g. amount spent or other behavioural data) and across several DoD platforms.

Empirical evidence suggests there is a need for further exploration of the relationship between purchase behavior and the affective content of deals. Further contributions should adopt a theoretical perspective that accounts for affect as a separate input in the purchase decision, as suggested by Aidynli et al. (2014).

In our study we included non-redemption of pre-paid DoD coupons. However, the measure we used did not take into account refunds or compensation. Further studies should explore the long-term effects of not redeeming a DoD on (1) DoD shopping and (2) Loyalty to the DoD platform.

Acknowledgment

The authors thank Chiara Bonaretti Alessandri for her support during the earlier stages of this study.

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