

# Multichannel Shopping Well-being: A Narrative Based Examination

## Abstract

**Purpose:** The objective of this research is to investigate whether and how shopping well-being emerges from multichannel shopping. The multichannel shopper has more choice of where, when and how to shop, and could potentially experience greater shopping well-being than the single channel equivalent. On the other hand, it is possible that multichannel shopping creates levels of complexity for consumers in terms of their channel decision processes and therefore the potential increase in shopping well-being may not actually occur.

**Design:** An interpretive approach is adopted and narratives are used to provide a focus on the multichannel shopper's lived experiences. Narrative generation was conducted with 12 participant shoppers from across the UK in March and April 2016.

**Findings:** Multichannel retailing does not deliver universally enhanced shopping well-being. Findings suggest that while well-being is enhanced by some aspects of multichannel shopping, diminished well-being is a more frequent outcome. Six themes emerged from the narratives delineating aspects of multichannel shopping which diminish well-being: finding what you want; ease and flexibility; staying in control; getting a fair deal; pleasure and fulfilment; guilt, regret and annoyance.

**Originality/value** This research makes three contributions to our understanding of shopping well-being: by providing more in-depth insight than previous studies; by examining all shopping activity rather than recreational/discretionary shopping; and by examining shopping well-being from a multichannel rather than single channel perspective.

**Keywords:** multichannel shopping; shopping well-being; consumer behaviour

**Paper type** Research Paper

## **Introduction**

Shopping plays a big part in people's lives; seldom can it be avoided completely, it takes time and effort and usually results in financial outlay. Given the ubiquity of shopping, it is appropriate to examine the impact that the shopping activity has on individuals and the extent to which it adds to or detracts from their quality of life or well-being.

Shopping well-being is defined as 'the extent to which shopping contributes to one's perceived quality of life or life satisfaction' (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016 p2). While there is a plethora of research on the (dis)satisfaction derived from shopping, studies of shopping and aspects of well-being are limited in number and focus on discretionary, recreational shopping (Goldsmith, 2016), compulsive shopping (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989) or on highly specific contexts such as visiting a shopping mall (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2013; El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016), online shopping dispute resolution (Ha and Coghill, 2008), gift giving (Sherry *et al.*, 1993), plus-size consumers' search for clothes (Otieno *et al.*, 2005), or the contribution which shopping may make to the personal well-being of vulnerable groups such as the elderly (Lim and Kim, 2011; Chang *et al.*, 2012) or the socially-excluded (Dennis *et al.*, 2016). There is, therefore, a gap in our understanding of how shopping in general affects well-being. A better understanding of this is particularly relevant, given the substantial changes which have continued to take place in the shopping environment since the advent of multichannel shopping two decades ago.

## **Multichannel shopping and shopping well-being**

Multichannel shopping is the pattern of shopping-related activities which consumers perform across different channels such as stores, the internet, mobile devices, catalogues and the telephone. A consumer may use one channel, two or many. They may use different channels belonging to the same organisation such as the branches and ATM's of a bank, or patronise the channels of different organisations such as buying groceries in store from one retailer and online from another. They may use different channels in similar ways or use channels differently, perhaps searching for information on one channel and purchasing in another. The multichannel shopper has more choice of where, when and how to shop, and could potentially experience more convenience, than the single channel equivalent, leading to greater levels of shopping satisfaction and shopping well-being. On the other hand, it is possible that multichannel shopping creates levels of complexity for consumers in terms of their channel decision processes and therefore the potential increase in shopping well-being may not actually occur. Indeed, while retailers' investment in provision of multichannel shopping infrastructure is substantial and growing (Anderson, 2015; Bowden, 2016; Luxury Daily, 2016), predictions of shops being replaced by electronic channels have not materialised (McNair and May, 1978; Rosenburg and Hirschman, 1980; Schneiderman, 1980; Korgoankar, 1984).

While there is no shortage of academic research on multichannel retailing (e.g. Lee and Grewal, 2004; Wallace *et al.*, 2004; Dholakia *et al.*, 2005; Avery *et al.*, 2012; Pauwels and Neslin, 2015) and on multichannel shopping (e.g. Schoenbachler and Gordon, 2002;

Verhoef *et al.*, 2007; Schröder and Zaharia, 2008; Ganesh *et al.*, 2010; Chocarro *et al.*, 2013) multichannel *shoppers* have attracted less attention from researchers. Practitioner research is increasingly focussed on the shopping journey (e.g. Court *et al.*, 2009; Whitehead, 2014) and has a concomitant emphasis on microscopic disaggregation of the act of multichannel shopping into its component actions. This stream of research is undoubtedly important, but the focus on the journey can lead to a loss of focus on the traveller, in this case the shopper, and their experiences and feelings. Balasubramanian *et al.*'s (2005) qualitative study is a notable exception; but while this research provides insight into shoppers' channel choices, it does not help us understand whether consumers see multichannel shopping overall as a positive force which contributes to their well-being.

A positive association has been found between shopping and overall well-being. In a study of elderly Taiwanese people Chang *et al.* (2012) found that regular shopping activity was associated with longer-term survival. Lim and Kim (2011) examined the effect of TV shopping on the personal well-being of older consumers and found that it provided parasocial interaction and alleviated feelings of loneliness. Dennis *et al.* (2016) found that shopping, particularly via the mobile channel, had a positive effect on the well-being of the socially excluded. While these studies demonstrate the effect that shopping can have on the well-being of vulnerable groups, it would appear that the only research which examines shopping well-being among shoppers in general is the quantitative work of El Hedhli *et al.* (2013; 2016), where well-being is found to fully mediate the relationship between the hedonic value derived from a shopping mall visit and mall attitude, as well as word of mouth. However, El Hedhli *et al.*'s (2016) conceptualisation of shopping well-being is restricted to a 4-item scale and the focus on mall shopping, which is largely discretionary and often recreational, limit the insight of the role of shopping well-being and the generalisability of the findings. There is, therefore, a considerable gap in our understanding of how shoppers see the well-being emerging from a multichannel shopping environment and the extent to which multichannel shopping is seen as an improvement on traditional, single channel shopping in terms of enhancing the sense of well-being derived from shopping in general.

Given this background, the objective here is to investigate whether and how shopping well-being emerges from multichannel shopping. An interpretive approach is adopted and narratives are used to provide a focus on the multichannel shopper's lived experiences. Narratives are seen as having a powerful contribution to make to consumer research given their ability to generate deep, rich insight and to uncover fundamental principles and values (Shankar *et al.*, 2001) by allowing shoppers to frame their experiences in their own way, with minimum intervention from the researcher. Narratives are used widely in consumer research (see Shankar *et al.*, 2001 for a review) but although Ruane and Wallace (2013) use narrative research to provide rich insight about the use of the online shopping channel by Generation Y females, it would appear that this technique has not been used to examine shopping more broadly.

This research makes three contributions to our understanding of shopping well-being: by providing more in-depth insight than previous studies; by examining all shopping activity rather than recreational/discretionary shopping; and by examining shopping well-being from a multichannel rather than single channel perspective.

## **Methodology**

Shopping is complex and a 'type of personal project' (Goldsmith, 2016 p60) where motivations are heterogeneous, highly contextualised and constructed around the 'realities of lived experience' (Buttle, 1992 p349). Shopping well-being is also complex, and is a highly nuanced concept which is not best served by the narrow focus of the extant positivist, quantitative research (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2013; El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016; Goldsmith, 2016). Narratives are ideally suited to uncovering the role that shopping plays in consumers' lived experiences and the well-being constructed from multichannel shopping.

Narratives play a sense-making role in individuals' lives, are a meaningful way of voicing thought and experience (Schembri *et al.*, 2010) and are considered to be an ideal data collection method for interpretive research as a means by which the consumer's lived experience can be placed at the focus of research rather than abstraction (Thompson *et al.*, 1989). A form of depth interviewing is required whereby the researcher facilitates a conversation with the participant, and allows narratives to emerge. Rather than using a structured or semi-structured question guide, the researcher poses only very broad questions and encourages the participant to talk in depth. Each 'interview' can, therefore, take a different form depending on the nature of the participant.

In the early stages of the research, a pilot interview was conducted to test the narrative approach in a shopping context; the participant was selected on a convenience basis. The pilot demonstrated that the participant was able to tell stories about their multichannel shopping experiences and that, with minimal intervention from the interviewer, rich narratives could be generated. The pilot also demonstrated that negative as well as positive information related to the participant's sense of shopping well-being emerged spontaneously from the narrative, thus confirming the suitability of the data collection technique for this study.

Therefore, narrative generation was conducted with 12 participant shoppers from across the UK in March and April 2016. Participants were recruited by a professional market research company on the basis of being regular shoppers. As shown in Table 1, a mix of men and women, older and younger, and urban, suburban, semi-rural and rural participants were selected in order to provide coverage of differing demographic groups and life stages and to represent diverse levels of access to the store shopping channel. Participants were not selected on the basis of socio-economic status, but all were in employment and a wide range of occupations was represented.

Table 1: Research participants

<b>Nickname</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Life stage</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Location</b>
Brett	Male	35	Lives alone	Self-employed electronics business owner	Suburban
Cassie	Female	56	Lives with partner	Local government officer	Suburban
Ian	Male	28	Lives alone	IT project manager	Suburban
Joe	Male	25	Lives with partner and young children	Store manager	Suburban
Koo	Female	33	Lives with parents	Business analyst	Urban
Laurie	Female	24	Lives with partner and young children	Travel agent	Suburban
Maria	Female	44	Lives with adult children	Art curator	Urban
Nicky	Female	25	Lives with mother	Photographer	Urban
Reza	Male	42	Lives with partner and young children	Sports centre manager	Urban
Sharon	Female	40	Lives with partner and young children	Project manager	Semi-rural
Stewart	Male	55	Lives with partner and teenage children	IT engineer	Small town
Tony	Male	64	Lives with partner	Retired consultant	Rural

Interviews lasted between 1-1.5 hours and were audio recorded. Most took place in participants' homes in order to create a natural environment and so that, if required, the participant could have easy access to the PC, laptop, tablet or other device they normally use for non-store shopping. Three interviews took place in a meeting room at the researcher's university campus. Interviews began with a brief explanation of the nature and overall purpose of the research and an assurance of confidentiality. Participants were asked to talk about their shopping experiences in general, in different shopping channels and in product categories of their choice, allowing their interest in and engagement with different types of shopping to emerge spontaneously. After each interview, the audio file was transcribed and both the recording and the transcription were subjected to close analysis by repeated listening/reading. Data collection and analysis progressed in an iterative manner (Bryman and Bell, 2015). NVivo 10 was used for data coding. A combination of descriptive, in vivo, process, emotion and values coding (Miles *et al.*, 2014) was used in the first-cycle stage to identify narrative threads related to shopping well-being. Once all data had been subjected to open coding, second cycle axial coding (Saldaña, 2013) was conducted to refine initial codes, remove redundancies and look for connections in order consolidate themes in the data. Coding was carried out by the researcher and an independent researcher checked the final coding scheme to ensure integrity.

## **Findings**

All the participants engage in multichannel shopping behaviours. Their shopping narratives feature every channel found in a multichannel shopping system; physical shops including markets, the online channel via a desktop or laptop computer, printed catalogues, telephone, the mobile channel via tablet and browser, tablet and app or via phone and browser or phone and app. There is considerable heterogeneity of multichannel shopping behaviours both across and within narratives. This accords with Thompson's (1997) view that consumer response to products, and by extension to shopping channels, is essentially pluralistic and depends on 'which personal meanings are salient in a given consumption context' (p439) and to Buttle's (1992) conceptualisation of shopping behaviour as varied, contextualised and 'incompatible with a general orientation to shopping' (p355).

Surprisingly, the narratives are richer in demonstrating diminished rather than enhanced shopping well-being through the use of multiple channels, though evidence of both is present. Narrative threads connected to multichannel shopping well-being are now presented, organised around six main themes: finding what you want; ease and flexibility; staying in control; getting a fair deal; pleasure and fulfilment; guilt, regret and annoyance.

### **Finding what you want**

Participants recognise that the variety of shopping channels available to them gives access to a wider range of products, services and suppliers than if they were using shops

alone. However, this feeling of increased choice is equivocal and is accompanied by concerns.

*'Where shall I start? Shall I look in the shops, or shall I look online?'* (Cassie)

*'...sometimes go round in circles looking at things and you know... the suggestion of maybe a review on some site, so you go and look ... and decide it's too expensive so you go back, you look for something that's a bit less expensive, you go off to look at some retailers, you find that there are no distributors for that product in the UK.'*  
(Stewart)

*'And I go in there and I see the website, and ... sometimes it doesn't work cos it's on a blog and not on actually something you can buy.'* (Nicky)

*'The thing that frustrates me is the amount of things they have listed on their site that are out of stock, so that I find quite frustrating ...there'll be a whole list of things and then you realise that so many of them are out of stock. So I'd rather that they just removed them.'* (Sharon)

Participants' narratives reveal that using the online channel for shopping search can end in frustration when its global reach throws up geographically inaccessible products or when the search ends in the right product on a non-transactional website. Sharon's narrative extract shows that she feels the width of product range available online is illusory and even deceitful. The feeling that too much choice is not necessarily a good thing is conveyed by Cassie.

*'(online search produces) a bit too much though sometimes ...a surfeit of riches really.'* (Cassie)

Furthermore, the time which online search takes generates some resentment among participants.

*'I don't want to go through the headache of comparing models through different retailers.'* (Koo)

*'...you know I do wonder sometimes ... the amount of time that you're actually spending trying to work it all out you might as well have just, you might have still ended up buying the same product if you'd just gone into the shop. I think an interesting thing to do would be to see how much time I actually spend researching everything and ... whether it is as convenient as it appears to be.'* (Sharon)

*'...it (online search) takes up quite a few hours, you don't want to rush into something you know. But at the same time it is quite a draining sort of process.'*  
(Brett)

*'I don't know if I will be capable to do that in five minutes online, I would be half an hour... I would need to read a lot of reviews and a lot of articles and whatever.'*  
(Ian)

Feelings of diminished shopping well-being as a result of the time taken by online search are accompanied in some narratives by feelings of inadequacy or a lack of self-efficacy in online search. This was strongest in Cassie's narrative.

*'...you've also got things like Pinterest, you can see what other people are looking at.... But ...it gets really confusing ...takes you to a website and it doesn't show what you were looking for.'* (Cassie)

*'... (named retailer) is a great website 'cos it does give you lots of people's feedback and it also gives good deals and things. But then it'll take you to a different website, ..., and then it comes up with another eight websites for each different airline... And oh my lord and then your head starts to ache. So we shelved it.'* (Cassie)

However, online search can increase shopping well-being through saving time, and through being able to search at a time and place of your choosing.

*'So it has definitely saved me time, cos I remember years ago when I was little my mum dad would, you know say we wanted a bed they'd drag us around everywhere. Whereas nowadays you just go online and you've got the information there before you go out the door ...so you already know where you're going to spend your money.'* (Joe)

*'...you can look at leisure in your home, you can sit there with a cup of tea when you've done all your chores and you don't need to rush.'* (Cassie)

Online search is seen by participants as ideal when you know what you are looking for.

*'I want the dress that fits me at the waist and comes down at the bottom. So that's why I go online, it's like nowhere has exactly what I'm looking for, so that's why I go online.'* (Nicky)

*'... I had an idea exactly of what I wanted ..., so I had a look online, typed in fish-tail wedding dresses, that sort of stuff... loads popped up.'* (Laurie)

Participants' narratives show that they frequently fall back on Google and a few trusted websites such as Amazon, rather than exploring the online channel more fully. This can give rise to a feeling that they have not searched hard enough and being haunted by feeling that haven't found 'the right thing'. Shops are seen by some participants as being better when you do not know what you are looking for by showing you things to buy, and providing help and advice.

*'it's just that I like to go into... shops and you don't know what you're going to find, and you obviously see things and you're... oh wow like that's really good.'* (Laurie)

*'The best thing about the shopping in the actual physical store is being able to see the product, and maybe even to see another product that you might need.'* (Ian)

*'You know when you're in the store you can just look and see things.'* (Brett)

*'...let's say for example my fishing gear, if I was going to buy it online but was unsure and I went to a shop at least the guy in the shop would give me a bit of advice and I can feel the product, see the product, play with it. Whereas you can't do that on a computer can you.'* (Joe)

Store shopping, however, presents its own challenges to finding what you want.

*'Well some of the big department stores are quite hard to negotiate around,, they're massive. And we had to ask about three people to find out where the ladies' dresses were ... but they had some on one floor and some on another floor. So there was no clear arrows ... and nobody around to ask... And you just think oh for goodness... especially if you haven't got a lot of patience with shopping you think well shall I carry on... shall I persevere.'* (Cassie)

*'I couldn't find it because the store was in such a mess.. whoever was managing the store hadn't thought about the way that they were presenting the items.'* (Koo)

It appears that participants see no ideal way of searching for things while shopping and that the advantages of both online and offline search are mitigated against by disadvantages.

### **Ease and flexibility**

Narratives reveal many things that make shopping more or less easy and thus impact shopping well-being. Considerable heterogeneity of attitude is revealed; while, for some, online shopping can result in reduced shopping well-being compared to store shopping, for other participants the opposite is the case.

*'...that's why probably we online shop sometimes cos we've got kids and it's stressful when you're running, when you've got to chase a two year old round (named retailer).'* (Joe)

*'...nowadays time's precious you know ...it's a headache going to (named shopping centre) and trying to find a parking space or it's busy always...I prefer to buy online ... well shopping during the day time when everyone's at work is not too bad, but on a weekend I just can't stand the volume, the sheer volume of people and stuff like that. So I do prefer to shop at home ...'* (Brett)

*'...you don't feel perhaps so pressurised, ... if you're shopping online ...you haven't got a sales assistant or people queuing behind you as you might in a physical environment.'* (Cassie)

Online shopping avoids having to take children to stores, avoids crowds, queues and the effort of travel and parking. However, online shopping is not effort-free. Online grocery shopping is seen as requiring too much advance planning and organisation by all except one of our participants. Online clothing/footwear shopping also features strongly as a source of diminished well-being as a result of the frequent need to return items which do not turn out to be as they appeared on a website or app.

*'...even if you can, you know buy all your clothes online, have it delivered and send it back for free, even the whole process of repacking it and everything is a hassle to*

*me... I don't like that because even if it's a free return there's still some involvement in getting it back you know.'* (Brett)

*'...before you know it the return date has gone and you're stuck with this item that you don't really want. And you know have I been refunded, I must remember to check, all that sort of thing.'* (Cassie)

*'...the amount of times she has to send stuff back I'm thinking to myself why don't you just go ... to the shop, try it on, and if you don't like it or if it doesn't fit then you haven't got to go through all that hassle. You know I haven't got time for it.'* (Joe)

Participants' narratives show that they recognise that the online and mobile channels give them more flexibility over where and when they carry out some of their shopping activities, and as a result enhance their shopping well-being by making shopping easier.

*'I shop with (named retailer), which I quite like because I've got the app on my phone, so that's really handy cos I can sit there in front of the TV, or if I'm out somewhere and I can remember something I can quickly add it in to my basket....'* (Sharon)

*'I've got my phone in my hand so it's so easy when you're on the phone to one of your friends and they're like oh this top or da da da. And then next you know I'm on my phone looking at it and you've got (it).'* (Nicky)

The ease and flexibility of online shopping facilitate serendipitous purchases for some participants and the use of mobile devices features strongly in this regard. They can be reading a review of a book, looking at a poster for an exhibition or talking to someone about a film and can buy immediately with a few clicks. There is a feeling that this broadens their horizons, introducing them to things they would not otherwise get to know about let alone buy.

*'We were talking about a film and ...by the end of the conversation I'd ordered it on (named retailer).'* (Tony)

*'I may have watched a programme on television and there's been a review of someone's newest novel and so....a quick search on (named retailer)...there it is. It's £8.99. Click. Bought.'* (Stewart)

Home delivery might be thought of as increasing the ease of shopping, but this is not necessarily the case. Delivery is an aspect of multichannel shopping which has a primarily negative effect on shopping well-being.

*'I begrudge paying the delivery charge and I'd rather just go there and buy it.'* (Joe)

*'I had a look online at (named retailer), but they charge quite a lot for post and packaging ...it takes five days doesn't it sometimes as well, and we wanted it straight away.'* (Laurie)

*'... just from a purely practical point of view it might be difficult getting deliveries... I'm never sure, especially in the summer, if I'm going to be in in the evenings. ..and I don't entirely trust some of my neighbours to take things in.'* (Cassie)

*'I'm out a lot. I'm not confident that I will be at the agreed place when they will deliver the groceries. I'm kind of scared that it may get spoiled or something like that...'* (Ian)

*'...there's the other element of online shopping where if you're out when a parcel arrives ...you ...go and pick it up from somewhere or wait till it comes back or you have to chase it up.'* (Sharon)

Our participants demonstrate that there is no single form of multichannel shopping journey which provides maximum ease and flexibility, even for an individual shopper. What is easiest and most flexible depends on what is being purchased and on situational factors, and not on the shopper.

### **Staying in control**

Feeling in control is necessary for enhanced shopping well-being; in contrast, participants' narratives often featured episodes where control was lost and this resulted in diminished well-being.

For some, online shopping is the most effective way to establish control:

*'And they populate the basket as well, so my job once they've populated the basket is to go in and take out everything I don't want.'* (Sharon)

*'...say I didn't have enough money so I just thought to myself OK I'm going to buy two bras now, I know exactly what size and exactly what design I want to get so then I'll just go online and get...the two.'* (Nicky)

For others, shopping in stores offers the best control:

*'But when you are looking for things online though you do tend to get side-tracked by oh what's that, oh that's quite nice, no come on, concentrate ...focus. So it's probably a bit safer to do it in a shop maybe....'* (Cassie)

*'We went through a phase of doing it (shopping for food online), we stopped doing it cos we were spending so much money and chucking it in the bin.'* (Joe)

The 'always on' nature of online shopping appears to be seductive to some people and can be a cause of loss of control:

*'I'm a victim of night time shopping, you know when you can't sleep and ...you've read, you've turned the light off, you try to go to bed and I've got my phone out. And then something might spark in my head that I need to buy and I start looking online.'* (Nicky)

Although, once again, considerable heterogeneity of attitude within and between narratives is revealed, the ease with which online purchases can be made while sitting on the sofa watching television, during a sleepless night or via stored lists of favourites appear to make it more likely to result in loss of control than store shopping.

## **Getting a fair deal**

The feeling of getting a fair deal from a retailer is an essential component of shopping well-being.

*'I like the idea of going on a website and getting a good deal, something that I didn't miss, and just feeling like I've done something very efficiently, very quickly and I'm satisfied.'* (Koo)

*'...so you're more informed before you go out shopping ... you're armed with the knowledge of the prices, the deals... Which is important because you want to get a deal don't you?'* (Joe)

This sense of getting the best deal can, however, be compromised in a multichannel system.

*'Collected a new one, went straight to the counter and said to the lady oh I'm returning this one cos it's a hundred pounds more. She said oh aren't you lucky, clever you. So actually I've saved a hundred pounds but that was just pure luck, and you do kind of think perhaps they could have mentioned on the website you know this will be reduced in two days' time, but of course they're not going to do that are they.'* (Cassie)

In addition, the feeling of missing out on a deal is a clear cause of diminished shopping well-being.

*'Number two thing I hate is probably finding out there is a deal that I didn't know about...I bought a hand cream, a ladies hand cream and there was a deal on the back of the receipt, and the receipt was showing me something that I could have actually used in-store just then.'* (Koo)

Participants expect prices in general to be cheaper online but, somewhat paradoxically, they also expect retailers to offer the same products at the same prices in all channels. They are prepared to spend time comparing prices, usually online, and they want to feel that retailers are being open about the best deals.

## **Pleasure and fulfilment**

Narratives reveal that participants, even those who do most of their shopping online, view online shopping as less pleasurable and fulfilling than shopping in stores.

*'I'm stuck in Wimbledon from eight right through till about five thirty ...I'm just trapped, that's the whole day gone. So I have to use my phone or I have to use my PC at work to get things done and pay for things. I've sat at my desk and I've spent money buying things and I feel like I haven't experienced anything out of it. I kind of like walking in and out of shops on the street, seeing people, watching people going past, the different smells, the foods, the environment you're in.'* (Reza)

*'...it's (online shopping) often more just solving a problem ... which is a wee bit different from the shopping experience. I enjoy going to do a food shop with my*

*children for example ...as part of a sort of a routine, you know this is a nice weekly activity, all's well in the world, ...so it's quite nice on Friday morning, we have a routine of we get up...to get to the market, we visit a few of our favourite stalls.'* (Maria)

*'Some people complain that London is just too busy, but I actually like that because like I said I'm so stationary sometimes I don't get to see people in a normal way. So shopping is a reason to do that and I go into (named shopping mall), and just doing the thing that makes us civilised, which is shopping for good and services with you know other members of society. You don't get that a lot in the office.'* (Koo)

*'I want the personal experience ... you know you're spending that sort of money, sell me, make me feel good when I walk out there...'* (Nicky)

Stores offer a sensory experience which non-store shopping cannot match – the sights, sounds and smells enhance well-being, and for some shoppers the opportunity to interact with others is a pleasurable experience. Unfortunately, sometimes this desire to visit a store backfires:

*'(Named retailer), they do ladies shoes, and I was on their website looking at the shoes. And you can just put it in the basket and click and collect, but you know I wanted to hit the pavement so I actually went the store. And I said oh I saw these online, and this was to a member of staff in the store, and she said oh we only sell those online. But it didn't say that on the website so I could have saved myself a trip, but I was going into other stores anyway but I ended up going into (other named retailer). So to me that worked against them.'* (Koo)

*'... I think if there's too many people around it is hard to concentrate, you know so you make bad decisions potentially if there's a lot going on and you're rushed into stuff.'* (Brett)

Online shopping is portrayed in some narratives as functional and sterile, in others as simply a means of searching before visiting stores. Narratives involve poorly designed websites which may look beautiful but are not functional, or which seem little more than a huge list of items. Stores, on the other hand, create diminished well-being in two main ways: other people affect shopping well-being through crowds and queues, and poor in-store layouts and signage confuse shoppers. However, stores are mentioned wistfully in some narratives as the ideal shopping environment provided they are (a) quiet, and (b) have a personal advisor on hand to guide and support the shopping experience.

### **Guilt, regret and annoyance**

Multichannel shopping creates a range of negative feelings which clearly diminish shopping well-being. Firstly, a sense of guilt is created when participants choose large over small retailers, engage in showrooming behaviour, or shop for specialist products such as books online rather than in a store.

*'...actually did that thing which I really don't approve of. Although I had done the research first, I went into a certain well known retailer .... and saw the item that I'd*

*seen online ...and it was really to ascertain when you actually unzipped this thing and had a look at it, was it big enough? And having done that I then did go and buy it online ....I can probably salve my conscience by saying that I didn't actually pick the sales staff's brains about the product.'* (Stewart)

Participants also experience a sense of regret at the loss of local, independent and specialist shops.

*'...that's why they're all shutting down, the fishing shops, ... because of the online. So I'm having to travel further now ...but you know it's worth the journey sometimes.'* (Joe)

*'...I would have liked to buy locally... I guess in terms of inconvenience... yes there's a few little independent stores that I used to cherish that are gone now...'* (Maria)

Stewart's personal conflict about supporting local independent retailers comes across clearly in his narrative:

*'...small independent shops selling everything from bottles of wine, to cameras to audio equipment. ..the small, specialist independent retailer. And for that to be taken over by the (named retailer) I think there's just something horribly wrong with that. Although the price thing is, is a conflict. When it comes down to it you can support your local retailer all you want but if he's going to charge you more then you won't go to him every time.'* (Stewart)

Furthermore, multichannel shopping is heavily dependent on technology, and this is a source of annoyance and diminished well-being for some participants. Koo is particularly vocal about the shortcomings of technology:

*'...if you go to self-checkout in (named retailer) and you get an error, and there's nothing I can do because I don't...what's caused the error. But if there's a salesperson there who knows what to do that's fantastic, but sometimes there's no one there and you're just standing there and looking at this error and you can't go any further.'* (Koo)

*...it's just that by the time I've started clicking I'm tired because they haven't built their website in a way that's intelligent enough.'* (Koo)

Finally, receiving emails from retailers causes annoyance. They are seen as much more intrusive than traditional communications from organisations which would have been delivered by post, and have caused participants to have to change their email account.

*'I think they're quite... just an annoyance you know, cos you get so many emails from so many different companies you know ... I do find that quite annoying that they're pushing stuff like that. You know something in the post you just throw it away but where it's an email, if you've got other emails you know they're pushed right down to the bottom and then you've got all these other junk emails that you're probably never looking at.'* (Brett)

*'I hate it to be honest with you. ... I'm deleting them daily'* (Laurie)

*'...it drives me mad, no I don't like it. If I want something I'll look.'* (Joe)

Feelings of guilt, regret and annoyance feature strongly in every narrative. Some of these are clearly not caused by multichannel shopping, for example not having enough money to spend, but many result from factors such as increased incorporation of technology-mediated communications into the shopping process, lack of integration of retailers' channels, the lure of showrooming, and the decline of local, independent and specialist shops.

## **Discussion**

Shopping well-being is an under-researched concept, which has so far only attracted the attention of quantitative researchers (El Hedhli *et al.*, 2016; 2013). While quantitative research has established the relationship of shopping well-being with other constructs (hedonic value, mall attitude and word of mouth), shopping well-being is a multi-faceted construct which deserves closer and deeper examination. In particular, retailers investing in multichannel systems may expect that by providing shoppers with more choice and flexibility in how, when and where they shop, shopping well-being would be enhanced as a result. However, this study suggests that while well-being is enhanced by some aspects of multichannel shopping, diminished well-being is a more frequent outcome.

Difficulties in finding what you want feature strongly in our participants' narratives and demonstrate that both online and offline shopping can fail to create well-being in the search phase of the shopping journey. Contrary to much of the extant literature, which suggests that consumers will prefer to search online as their time and effort costs are lower than when searching in stores (see for example Verhoef *et al.*, 2007), this study finds that shoppers associate significant costs with online search; its scope and flexibility are appreciated but can also be bewildering and lead to feelings of low self-efficacy, fatigue and frustration, all of which are considered to diminish well-being (Warr, 1990). This study also supports the findings of Peterson and Merino (2003) that online search is rich in complexity and far from a panacea.

The feelings of guilt generated by showrooming behaviour are accompanied by a degree of resentment at multichannel retailing facilitating, even allowing, such behaviour, especially when the shop being visited to search for or examine products is independent or specialist. This ambivalence is at odds with much of the extant literature, which posits showrooming as providing a high level of utility to the rational shopper (for example Mehra *et al.*, 2013). The emotional effect of showrooming has been examined, but only in terms of its impact on the self-efficacy and subsequent performance of retail salespeople (Rapp *et al.*, 2015). This study sheds new light on showrooming by finding that it can create a sense of guilt in shoppers; evidence of the negative effect of guilt on well-being is reported by Strelan (2007) and this potentially offsets any positive effect of showrooming derived from cost savings. The effect of guilt on complaining behaviour

and word of mouth has been examined (Soscia, 2007) but it does not appear to have been studied as a possible outcome of multichannel shopping behaviours.

Multichannel shopping diminishes well-being when channels are not well integrated; products which are available in one channel but not another cause wasted shopping journeys and lack of price harmonisation creates a sense of unfairness at missing out on the best deal. Multichannel retailers who are seen to be reducing the level of stock held in stores in an effort to push shoppers online are resented. While the economic benefits to the firm of channel integration (Neslin and Venkatesan, 2009; Neslin *et al.*, 2006) and the positive effect of channel integration, through image congruence, on attitude and purchase intention are recognised (Jones and Kim, 2009; Kwon and Lennon, 2009), this study reveals that a lack of integration brings emotional costs to shoppers and reduces well-being. This may result from shoppers' perceptions that fairness or justice is reduced when the multichannel retailer does not integrate channels effectively. Perceived justice/fairness has been widely examined in the context of service failure and recovery (see for example Patterson *et al.*, 2006) but it would appear that its effect on shopper well-being has not previously been researched.

Receiving deliveries and returning items are found to be enduring sources of annoyance for shoppers and, as a result, diminished well-being; logistics problems have been found by researchers to be a perceived disadvantage of non-store shopping for some time (e.g. Schoenbachler and Gordon, 2002) but the investment made by retailers in their logistics systems does not seem to have ameliorated these problems. The use of a click and collect service, although popular with some shoppers (Jones and Livingstone, 2015) is not necessarily a means of rebuilding well-being, as this requires a trip to a store. The level of annoyance and frustration created by emails from multichannel retailers is very high; the capacity for digital marketing to be seen as intrusive and annoying has been recognised for some time (Rettie *et al.*, 2005) but multichannel retailers do not appear to be heeding this. In addition, negative emotions such as annoyance impact negatively on brand attitudes and behaviours (Romani *et al.*, 2012) and so have the potential to damage the multichannel retailer's brand.

Although we do not seek to generalise from our exploratory, interpretive study, our findings cast doubt on the relevance of dichotomous conceptualisations of shopping as either hedonic or utilitarian (Babin *et al.*, 1994) and of shoppers as either convenience-seeking or experience-seeking (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980) as a means of predicting how shopping well-being may best be achieved. We find that each shopper exhibits a multiplicity of traits, depending on what is being purchased and on situational factors and thus there is no single, straightforward path to shopping well-being.

### **Conclusions, limitations and further research**

Multichannel retailing does not deliver universally enhanced shopping well-being. The very nature of a multichannel retailing system and the interplay between channels

creates tensions of many kinds in shoppers resulting in diminished well-being. Shoppers' attitudes and preferences as to the shopping channel which is going to deliver the most well-being are not fixed and will vary depending on the specific circumstances of the shopping activity.

This study is defined by its exploratory and interpretive nature, which is a strength given the limitations of extant research on shopping well-being. However, the research design brings with it some limitations. The use of the narrative technique allows significant insights on what participants see as relevant and important to be gathered; while this is a central tenet of interpretive research, it may mean that coverage of episodes affecting shopping well-being is reduced. Ethnographic research may provide a means of examining shopping well-being more comprehensively, and this could be a useful platform for future research. Shopping well-being is likely to be shaped over time rather than being entirely created or destroyed in a single shopping journey; narratives do not necessarily provide the best means of gathering longitudinal information, and this study's participants were not specifically directed as to the time scale to cover in their narratives. Future research could use participant diaries as a means of recording how shopping well-being is enhanced and diminished over time. Retailers themselves could employ these techniques to gain insight on their customers' shopping well-being. In addition, there is scope to build on this research via quantitative study, for example to examine the relationship between multichannel shopping well-being and shoppers' characteristics and attitudes.

This study shows that multichannel shopping does not automatically result in enhanced shopping well-being and, therefore, multichannel retailers should avoid assuming that the provision of multiple shopping channels is in itself sufficient to create this well-being. The findings presented here provide valuable insight to multichannel retailers in aiding their understanding of what to focus on in order to enhance their customers' shopping experience and, in turn, their shopping well-being.

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