

Millennial women's use and perception of Pinterest

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DEDICATION

For my mother, my angel...who taught me the value of hard work, kindness and reaching for your dreams.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how single young adult women feel about Pinterest. The research took a qualitative phenomenological approach through semi-structured, in-person interviews. Participants were selected through purposive sample method, fitting the criteria of: female, non-married, ages 25-35, living in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, with high use of Pinterest. Through an ethnographic interpretive analysis of field notes and transcripts of the interviews the participants expressed feelings of empowerment, connectedness, sense of control and utilitarian/hedonic value that emerged from the data. These categories of emotions were interpreted by the researcher as ways of coping with stress in their lives. Pinterest, therefore, provided the mechanism for these emotions that allowed them to escape from stress. The findings and resulting conclusions of this study have implications for future research in better understanding how web design can aid millennial women in coping with stress.

Key Words: *Pinterest, coping mechanism, escapism, shopping motivation, technology adoption, flow, hedonic value, utilitarian, web design, empowerment, socialness, functionality*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how and why millennial women use Pinterest. Started in 2010, Pinterest is a relatively new technology that has been, some would argue, wildly successful, but has not been the subject of empirical research in the retail marketing field. Millennial women, who are the focus of this study, experience stress in their everyday lives such as losing a job, health issues, balancing work with family, and struggles in personal relationships. They have had to find ways to cope with these different challenges as young adults. An article on empowerment gives clues to some of the changes women of this generation face in comparison to earlier generations:

The growing access of the web in the late 20th century, has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to start online activism. In recent years, blogging has also become a powerful tool for the educational empowerment of women (Empowerment, 2014, p. 2).

This study aims to explore Pinterest as a social media platform and to understand how this technology is used by millennial women and why it is such a popular social media platform. This work fills gaps in existing knowledge, where ample literature is available on concepts such as online shopping behaviors, hedonic and utilitarian motivations and values, technology adoption, socialness, and ease of use, but few have looked at the

intersection of these concepts in relation to social media applications like Pinterest (Brown & Dant, 2012).

This phenomenon is also important for retailers to understand because this demographic is emerging as one of the largest consumer bases in the U.S. (What women want: Insights into \$7 trillion women's purchasing power, 2013; Mediative Releases Key Insights Into the Online Purchasing Power of Women, 2012). As discussed in an online strategy journal, "Inevitably when technology enables and changes consumer behavior quickly, many firms will struggle to understand the new market dynamics at play" (Strategic Direction, 2013, p. 17). Since marketing campaigns incur costs to businesses, it is crucial that there be metrics to prove there is value that is being gained from the activities, in other words, a return on investment. Kumar & Mirchandani (2012) underscored the necessity of establishing return on investment by emphasizing concepts like speed and visibility of the marketing. The Customer Influence Effect measures influence that individuals in social media can have on others. In the case of Hokey Pokey, they noted an 83% increase in return on investment for social media along with a 40% growth in sales, as well as increased brand awareness from their customers (Strategic Direction, 2013). Kumar & Mirchandani (2012) purport that these statics suggest that social media will have lasting and sustainable power for many years to come.

A study from Bizrate Insights (2012) suggests that over 1 in 4 people have purchased an item directly from an image sharing site like Pinterest, through clicking on an image they saw on this site, based on data collected from 3,741 online buyers in March of 2012. In a related study, one in five online shoppers say their most recent purchase was from Etsy.com and was based on an image they saw on Pinterest (Bizrate

Insights, 2012). This study also cites that the clothing and apparel category account for approximately 39% of the total purchases that were influenced by Pinterest images.

Online retailers indicated which sites Pinterest users are most likely to purchase from after clicking on product seen on Pinterest. Etsy tops the list with 19%, followed by 13% for brand stores, 12% for small boutiques, and 7% for big retailers. However, the study fails to define the categories. For purposes of aligning and comparing the Bizrate Insights data with this study, it is assumed that Etsy represents small boutiques and small apparel retailers, while “brand store” and “retailer” align with the term large U.S. apparel retailers (Marketing to Women, 2012). With regards to frequency of use by the participants in the study, four in 10 claimed to use Pinterest at least once a week, however the study does not note the length of time for each use (Marketing to Women, 2012).

In an article for USA Today, Petrecca says that “businesses are definitely taking notice” (2012, p. 1) and large companies such as West Elm and Bergdorf Goodman are using Pinterest to display their products Petrecca also cites research by ComScore, where the mostly female user base is highly engaged, and on average viewed the site for 98 minutes in the month of January 2012.

Strugatz (2012) also ties together the concepts for this thesis study well; her work on building brand awareness through customer engagement leads to return on investment for businesses. She discussed how brands today are looking closely at their social media efforts and are focusing on this key question: What is the return on their investment?

Statement of Problem

Further exploration and understanding of Pinterest is necessary since social media continues to grow in popularity and adoption and research on this particular subject is currently lacking. Millennial women represent consumers with some of the greatest purchasing power, therefore a better understanding of what drives these consumers to use Pinterest can provide valuable insight to retailers and enable them to better market and develop web and technology products for this consumer group (What women want: Insights into \$7 trillion women's purchasing power, 2013; Mediavive Releases Key Insights Into the Online Purchasing Power of Women, 2012). A better understanding of the motivation for women to use this social media will allow companies to better market and develop products for them.

Qualitative methods such as interviewing will be used to gain a deeper insight into the millennial woman's perspective of this type of social media and how they use it in their daily lives. Through in-depth interviewing of participants, researchers can learn how millennial women interact with Pinterest, how events in their lives have shaped their point of view and influenced their usage, and lastly to determine commonalities between them for transferability purposes that the web design and technology world can use to better understand this consumer group.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain a deeper insight into the millennial woman's perspective of Pinterest and interpret themes that emerge which could relate to existing theories of shopping behavior. Millennial women are clearly telling retailers

what they want by collecting images of things that interest them on Pinterest, but it is essential for retailers to understand *why*, so they can better predict what their consumers will want and design product to market to them in the future. It is important to understand what factors are contributing to the success of this newer technology so that retailers and web designers can better reach their customers through the products they create.

Definition of Terms

Pinterest is a social media application that is “a tool for collecting and organizing things you love” (Facebook, 2013). It is a way for individuals to collect inspiration on things including home décor, apparel, DIY projects, cooking, artwork, quotes, and beauty. Pinterest is also medium for businesses to promote their product through images and text. It allows for organizing these images through the use of “boards”, a sort of virtual pinboard. The Pinterest functionality also allows for interaction between users through “following” and posting “comments”, similar to other social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Large U.S. based apparel retailers are rapidly joining the growing trend of utilizing Pinterest as a marketing tool to increase brand awareness. Companies such as Kate Spade, Target, Dolce & Gabbana, and Gap have collected tens of thousands of followers and have each created dozens of boards displaying everything from individual products to ideas for throwing holiday parties (Pinterest, 2013). This particular form of social media is appealing to companies because it enjoys the benefit of being free as well. Pinterest as a company has also recognized the growing percentage of their users who are businesses by continuing to develop the functionality of the application, and gearing it

more and more towards business users. Pinterest now affords companies the ability to track and analyze the users who are pinning from them, what pinners like, brand guidelines, and even a widget builder (Pinterest, 2013).

Social Media (applications): Commonly used websites and mobile software programs that are social in nature such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest are examples of current social media. Social media is the interaction among people in which they create, share, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Social Media, 2014).

Pinterest: First launched in March of 2010, Pinterest has close to 70 million users comprised of over 80% women and 500,000 business accounts (Smith 2013). Pinterest is accessible to the general population through the internet at www.pinterest.com and through applications designed for Apple and Android product such as tablets and iPhones.

Pins: Similar to a bookmark, pins are a way to save a hyperlink for content including images, comments and links to websites found on the internet.

Boards / Secret Boards: The location where pins and re-pins are organized by the user, similar to a virtual pinboard. The user also has ability to make the board secret so it is viewable only to themselves or other users they designate.

Following / Followers: The ability for a user to view another user's Pins in their Home Feed. Users are able to follow all of another user's boards or select specific boards.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on web design and functionality, flow concepts, technology adoption, utilitarian and hedonic value theory will provide further context relative to this study of Pinterest and emotional shopping behaviors. Deeper knowledge of these subjects was critical in framing interview questions and the conclusions discussed in later chapters of this thesis. The following sections will highlight key theory on these topics and provide connections specific to Pinterest technology.

Web Design & Functionality

Ample information exists to support the theory that visual design aspects of the web heavily influence user preferences and pre-use usability perceptions (Lee & Koubek, 2010). Research shows that aesthetic qualities of a website can significantly impact, in a positive way, user preference for the site. However, it is important to note that while these theories generally hold true, use of visual aspects does not necessarily equate to aesthetic quality. Aesthetic quality is not only subjective to each individual, but can vary across different contexts. Another critical aspect to consider in web design is the strong correlations between functional aspects of a site such as navigation and content organization and visual aspects like color typography and layout. Functional aspects and visual aspects have been found to be interrelated and influence, either positively or negatively, a user's overall perception of a site.

Existing literature shows that effectiveness of picture verses text dominant formats can vary across different customer and relationship groups (Lewis, Whitler &

Hoegg, 2013). Pinterest qualifies as a picture dominant format which is heavily saturated by image with little text. While it is widely accepted that a picture dominant format is more effective, some studies show that at a lower aggregate level there are only minor differences in response and performance to either version. The use of illustration has been found to be a significantly important predictor of user assessment of overall impression, beauty, and appeal of a website (Schenkman & Jönsson, 2000). Increased use of illustration has shown to improve overall impression, beauty, and appeal scores, as long as the site was still found to have symmetry. Picture dominant formats could be seen, as was the case in the study of Wang, Baker, Wagner & Wakefield (2007), to be perceived as more social. Their work looks at the socialness of websites and the positive effects on patronage behavior and flow, as well as the positive effects on emotions like arousal and pleasure.

Web design research has indicated that modular product design allows for maximum variety for offerings as well as being optimal for enabling customization (Wu, Chen, Lee & Chen, 2010). Pinterest's layout would be considered to fall in this category of modular design. Modular design, therefore, assumes grouping of color and images as a part of its foundational elements. Grouping color sample chips or product thumbnails has shown to reduce search times, yield lower error rates and was much preferred. Allowing users to view all options and compare product groupings of varying colors also achieves greater preference scores.

Consistently found throughout research in the field of web design, visual complexity and symmetry are generally accepted to be stronger predictors of how users will judge aesthetics of a website, more so than color (Seckler, Opwis & Tuch, 2015).

Users in most contexts have shown that they rate sites higher for aesthetics when it has low complexity and high symmetry. Some works have shown that users relate the concepts of complexity and colorfulness, where the more graphics and colors used in a website, the more complex and colorful it becomes (Nadkarni & Gupta, 2007; Seckler, Opwis & Tuch, 2015). While it is widely understood by those in the field of design that the use of color and graphics can have positive effects, these studies also serve to highlight that there may be a threshold of saturation where users can begin to experience negative effects and feel overwhelmed.

Often times, a user's first impression of a website is determined by predominantly visual aspects. As mentioned previously, many design characteristics can contribute to overall impressions of a website, such as size and content of images, typography, color, and use of white space (Alberts & van der Geest, 2011). Color, in particular, can lead the user to form immediate perceptions of a site that can either attract or detract a person. Researchers suggest that color can evoke strong emotions from users (Valdez & Mehrabian, 1994). Many studies have been conducted in past years looking at the effect of individual colors on how people feel while viewing them. Certain studies relate red to "beauty", yellow as "exciting" with "approachable qualities", gray as "immobile" and green as "calm" and "suggesting nature" (Richards & David, 2005). Studies also indicate color as a visual web design element can give cues of trustworthiness to users (Alberts & van der Geest, 2011; Clark & Costall, 2008). In the context of this literature review, trust is considered an emotional response to specific design choices of color. Specifically, blue has been found to evoke feelings of trust while black is perceived as least trustworthy (Alberts & van der Geest, 2011). Blue has also been found to consistently influence

emotion, described as a “desire for purity and transcendence”, and even the “most preferred color world-wide” (Reeves, Edmonds & Transou, 1978; Richards & David, 2005).

Anson & Samala (2012) discuss how Pinterest is important to brands because it is a tool that is visual and immediate. Concepts such as instant gratification are highlighted in their work, saying today’s society wants immediate satisfaction. Pinterest gives users the ability to quickly and easily find the source of an image within a single click, and with the recent addition of new functionality, users are able to click once more to buy the product. Ease and convenience are at the core of the success for Pinterest as an application. Users are able to collect, retain, and organize images with attached text comments that can contain links and other useful information with few clicks and little effort. One description suggests that people are creating their own personal magazine or catalog with Pinterest. Web design that harnesses these concepts could allow brands to potentially reach new consumers they wouldn’t normally connect with in another forms of marketing.

Understanding the concept of people creating emotional spaces driven by imagery and the way people collect and organize images can be powerful knowledge for web and technology designers. While discussing Pinterest’s popularity, Twist Image president Mitch Joel shared:

Up until Pinterest came along there wasn’t a way to visualize that tagging or bookmarking or sharing process. I think part of it is just that human beings are very visual people and to create that mood board is a profound and powerful thing (Laird, 2012, p. 8).

This literature also introduces the idea that people are creating personas for themselves and projecting their lifestyle through the use of images on Pinterest. Laird (2012) does note that Pinterest is still in a stage of infancy, and will most certainly evolve over time, so it is difficult to gauge how it will impact consumers and their purchasing behavior. Although data on the adoption and referral rates for Pinterest are captivating, it is still not well understood how the site's popularity is ultimately impacting the bottom line for retailers (Laird, 2012).

The results of this literature review of web design principals and functionality indicate that while many studies can be found surrounding the use of image verses text in web design and the use of singular colors to evoke emotions, little research has studied the intersection of image intensive sites and emotion. Principals of visual design for the web like complexity, symmetry, and modular design were found to play a significant role in users' overall impressions and perceptions of aesthetic quality. Current research also suggests the importance of visual design dimensions in harmony with functionality considerations like navigation and content organization.

Flow

Theory related to the concept of flow provides useful insight in understanding why Pinterest attracts millennial women users. In a study by Mahnke (2014), grounded theory was developed on flow experiences of the users of a large shopping platform. This theory uncovered theoretical relationships between specific and realizable website design options, corresponding latent constructs, and the flow experience. The researchers defined flow experiences as, "related to pleasant, intrinsically motivated activities that are

usually experienced as very positive” (p. 1). Furthermore, the researchers attributed the concepts of ease of use, intention for use of the site, and the site’s usefulness as a part of the flow definition. Through this work several themes emerged that were found to be positively correlated: goals and motivation, absorption, fluency, information organization, information quality and quantity, and information filter accuracy. Goals and motivation referred to the ability for users to stay motivated towards either an existing goal or motivated to be open to formulating new goals during the visit. Absorption referred to the ability for the user to stay in a focused state of mind, not distracted by irrelevant stimuli, also leading to a disassociated experience of time. Fluency relates to absorption in the ability for the user to receive goal-relevant information, which also can include a sense of control. Information organization referred to the underlying concept of hierarchy of information, and is comprised of elements like navigation, searchability, and appropriate levels of content information. Information quality and quantity referred to the reception of information that is crucial and relevant to the user. In cases of user-generated content, the data suggested that it would be helpful to have a control mechanism. Information filter accuracy referred to the necessity for a website to have a sizeable amount of content/information to reach a broad enough target audience, where it becomes a necessary design element to include ways for the user to filter the information they are trying to process and not be overwhelmed. Mahnke’s (2014) categories of flow provide possible criteria by which information gathered through interviews of Pinterest could be judged and similarly categorized.

Novak, Hoffman, & Yung (2000) discuss the cognitive state of consumers through the act of navigating the web and categorizes behaviors by levels of: skill,

control, challenge, arousal, focused attention, and interactivity. The researchers look deeply into the extent that consumers will go to participate in chat rooms and search for information on products. The authors note that while the concept of flow has been widely studied, it has been hard to conduct quantitative studies because of the considerable lack of definition, therefore making flow difficult to measure (Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000). The article was written at a time when internet technology was still very new to the masses, which is important to remember in the context of review. The conceptual model for the study was based on theories in prior work by Hoffman & Novak (2000). They looked at consumer navigation behavior on the web by evaluating factors characterized as: seamlessness (in response sequence), intrinsically enjoyable, loss of self-consciousness, and self-reinforcing. Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, served as a foundational influence for the purpose of their study, arguing that online consumer behavior is even more critical to understand than offline (Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000). Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) research on Maslow's hierarchy of needs also provided useful theory for Novak, Hoffman, & Yung's (2000) work on facilitating the flow state. The hypotheses test the correlation between variables like control, challenge, arousal, telepresence, and time distortion to the ability to experience flow, and at what magnitudes. The study was conducted using quantitative measures using multiple scales of measurement from several previous studies that measured concepts the researchers were using for their study: playfulness, importance, arousal/control/positive affect, exploratory behavior, telepresence, interaction, and narrative description of flow. Extensive pilot testing was conducted through qualitative study of 147 participants and ultimately 1654 participants with complete data were identified through probabilistic

sampling and self-selection method. The results demonstrated a balance between the concepts of playfulness, importance, arousal/control/positive affect, exploratory behavior, telepresence, interaction, and narrative description when trying to encourage flow. For example, according to the researchers, a site should be challenging enough to arouse the customer but not so challenging that they become frustrated and log-off. The study showed how greater challenge correlated to greater focused attention, which then showed positive relation to flow. Interestingly, concepts like security, reliability, and low prices were not important distinguishing factors for users to feel they've had a compelling online experience (Novak, Hoffman & Yung, 2000).

Mathwick & Rigdon's (2004) study to "identify the antecedents and experiential outcomes of flow and various non-flow states of mind" (p.2) focused on earlier concepts of flow. The authors also looked further into the idea that there could be differences in the ability to achieve flow depending on the purpose of use at any given time for a consumer, whether they are on the web for a goal-oriented task versus recreational use. Mathwick & Rigdon (2004) sought to evaluate original flow theory in relation to four states of mind: boredom, apathy, anxiety, and flow. The researchers specifically highlighted concepts as they are perceived by the consumer, and also the role that escapism and immersion can play in flow theory. Participants in the study were asked to perform online searches for various high and low involvement. The results from 110 questionnaires demonstrated that boredom, apathy, and anxiety all correlated to lower levels of decisional control and lower levels of internet usage. The researchers also asserted that the perception of play is highly sensitive to consumers, and that the balance

between Internet search skills and the challenge of navigation can therefore impact a consumer's involvement with a product (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004).

Technology Adoption

Technology adoption is another factor useful in understanding social media. Ko, Kim, & Lee (2009) discuss how factors such as usefulness, enjoyment, ease of use and instant connectivity relate to perceived value and technology adoption of m-commerce. Their study showed that consumer's perception of value plays an important role in determining behavioral intentions, especially purchase intention. The researchers drew upon the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) conceptual model developed by Davis (1989) as foundation for their framework, which focused on predicting behavioral intentions to buy and use a certain piece of technology. As antecedents for behavioral intentions, the researchers looked at perceived value, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, instant connectivity, and perceived enjoyment to evaluate consumers' technology adoption intention. An online survey of Korean mobile internet users resulted in 511 valid questionnaires for data analysis. The study's hypotheses that there was a positive correlation between the antecedents were accepted, which represented that factors in perceived value, strongly relates to the intention to adopt a particular piece of technology, in this case, mobile technology.

Van Dolen, Dabholkar, & De Ruyter (2007) focus on the technical functionality of chat groups as an advisor-type communication style by websites and how attributes such as ease of use, speed, reliability, enjoyment, and control relate to the adoption of this technology. The researchers used theory focused on satisfaction as an outcome measure

by Dennis & Garfield (2003) and DeSanctis & Poole (1994) on structuration theory to develop their conceptual model. The model connects the technology attributes of the perception of: control, enjoyment, reliability, speed, and ease of use to the chat group characteristics of group: involvement, similarity, and receptivity to determine the satisfaction level of the chat session by the user. The computer-based experiment was conducted with 212 business students from a large Western university, with chat groups of four to six students lead by an advisor on the subject of financial advising. The researchers employed a likelihood ratio test to compare the multiple levels to serve as a predictor. The researchers found that commercial retailers can use a combination of structural features from both technology and chat group attributes to design an experience that will lead to satisfied customers (Van Dolen, Dabholkar, & De Ruyter, 2007).

Another study conducted by Lee (2011) researches concepts of technology adoption attributes and intentions. The purpose of this study was to evaluate factors of price, product deliverables, and intangible attributes that affect post-adoption intentions of Mobile Data Services through brand loyalty. Lee (2011) found that consumers use a complex series of cognitive, conscious, subconscious, and emotional elements when making purchases. Findings suggested that consumers who are loyal to a brand are also more likely to repurchase, less price sensitive, and willing to pay more. The brand value model by Neal (1999) served as a theoretical framework for Lee (2011) to further explore the concept of value and predicting customer loyalty. Lee also employs theory on gender differences in adoption from Noble, Griffith, & Adjei (2006) and Cyr, Hassanein, Head, & Ivanov (2007) that show women shop on emotion and men with higher education levels are quicker to adopt new technologies. The researcher found that the theoretical

framework was supported through this study and analysis, with the exception of the effects of price. Lee (2011) found that the results indicate that both product deliverables (through services) and intangible attributes directly influence brand e-loyalty and therefore post-adoption intentions, while price did not appear to effect these intentions. Concepts like convenience (ease of use), fashion, perceived usefulness, and social interaction were important variables for product deliverables (Lee, 2011).

Hedonic & Utilitarian Value

Past research in the field of consumer behavior has shown that shopping behavior is rarely driven by pure reason and logic, and there is an emotional component that needs to be considered. Therefore, hedonic and utilitarian theories and the role they play in the larger scheme of consumer behavior are important to understand on a deeper level as a part of this research. Related research on this topic primarily focuses on the widely cited 1972 study of shopping motivations by Tauber (1972). This study, along with research by Arnold & Reynolds (2003) and Hama (2001) provided a theoretical framework upon which this study could build.

Both pieces of research by Tauber (1972) and Arnold & Reynolds (2003) centered on key concepts in the field of consumer behavior. Tauber developed a series of shopping motivations based on the belief that consumers are motivated by a variety of psychological needs, rather than being purely driven by the need or want to acquire a product. He categorized these motivations as: personal (role-playing, diversion, self-gratification, learning about new trends, physical activity, and sensory stimulation) and

social (social experiences, communication with others, peer group attractions, status and authority, and pleasure of bargaining).

Arnold & Reynold's (2003) study of hedonic shopping motivations employs a mixed methods approach to investigating the reasons why people go shopping. They introduce their work by stating:

Over the years, retailers have been buffeted by a number of macro-environmental forces that have changed the landscape of the industry. These include the spread of mass-discounters, the proliferation of suburban power centers and lifestyle retailing formats, and the recent arrival of the Internet as an alternative retail platform offering consumers unparalleled convenience (p. 1).

The last two points of this quote are of particular relevance since Pinterest promotes the concept of lifestyle retailing and is an Internet application that could be found to be convenient. Arnold & Reynolds (2003) also note how comprehensive research on the topic of hedonic reasons people go shopping had been lagging at the time of the study in the retail field. They do cite, however, a study by Babin, Darden, & Griffin (1994) where, "informants have expressed a sense of escapism while shopping" (p. 78) which is key to the research question put forward by this paper. As part of their study, Arnold & Reynolds (2003) conducted qualitative semi-structured depth interviews of 98 men and women, ages 18 to 55 on their hedonic shopping behaviors. As a result of the interviews, the researchers were able to identify several themes based on the responses. Gratification Shopping, which refers to shopping with the purpose of stress relief and Idea Shopping, which refers to shopping to keep up with trends and new fashions, were two themes expressed by the participants of this study. For example, one participant's response that

was coded as Gratification Shopping in the study was, “I like to go shopping when I’m stressed; to me it’s a way to get my mind off of what happens to be stressing me out that day” (p. 92). Another response, categorized under Idea Shopping was, “Sometimes I go to look just to get an idea. If I feel like or see a style in a magazine I might go to a store and try it out just to see how it looks. It’s something new and different and I just want to try it” (p. 93).

In Hama’s (2001) quantitative study titled “Shopping as a coping behavior for stress” she discusses the particular shopping behavior of impulse buying and its relation to the shopping motivation of coping with stress. Hama (2001) notes, “Modern society is said to be stressful. People who are under stress tend to practice appropriate coping behaviors in order to avoid severe stress responses (e.g. conflict, anxiety, depression)” (p. 1). Hama (2001) continues to define the term emotional coping behavior as a means to maintain one’s self of well-being. She defines this emotional coping behavior with the term of diversion buying, which is also used interchangeably with the concept of impulse buying. Hama’s (2001) study asserts that there is a distinction between impulse buying, which just helps in reducing stress, while diversion buying behavior is more clearly and obviously aimed with the intention of releasing stress. This study was conducted by survey method to 78 males and 104 females, mostly undergraduate students, where participants were given 26 items to choose from for causes of stress, and then 26 items for ways of releasing stress. The researcher does not discuss the rationale of how/why participants were chosen and how/why the different options for stress and relief were decided. The researcher used the REC Scale as the method of measurement for the rationality and emotion of the shopping behaviors. The results of Hama’s (2001) study

were that almost half (49.2%) of the respondents said they went shopping when they felt stressed, and of those respondents 61.2% were female, compared to only 32.5% of males who said they practiced diversion buying. For the respondents who answered they practice diversion buying, the largest percentage said they went to department stores (43.4%), which was interesting that they preferred a place with a variety of products, as this is also a feature that Pinterest offers. Hama (2001) also looked at the timing of the diversion buying, and found that most respondents chose to use diversion buying right after stress (40.2%), which Hama (2001) stated indicates that diversion buying provides an relatively easy method of stress release. The researcher notes was that one of the elements of diversion buying, as it relates to relieving stress, was the concept of acquisition or acquiring of things. This concept could be compared to Pinterest in the user's ability to collect images and keep them on Pinterest boards. Overall, Hama (2001) concluded that "shopping was an efficient means of stress release, especially for women" (p. 219).

Another by article Malcolm (2014) stated, "Across the country, single women feel worse than both men and any age group about their ability to make ends meet" (p. 1). A survey was given to 1200 adults conducted by Consumer Research exclusively for Malcolm's (2014) article, where the results showed that about 60% of single women said they do not earn enough to cover their expenses. Malcolm (2014) provides an example of one woman's personal story, where after she lost her job as a sales manager she was made to feel she had to make a career change which meant she needed to return to school and was forced to start over at the bottom in a new field. According to the young woman, age 32 and single, without working her second job, "I wouldn't be able to finish my

masters, and I wouldn't be able to probably pay my bills. I can't seem to make enough money in the one job to pay for all my expenses wherever I'm living" (p. 2). This study sheds light on a larger issue that is facing women of this generation. Many are losing jobs, having to start careers over, while faced with the expense of going back to school while trying to earn a livable wage. These issues, as demonstrated in this article's study and its personal accounts, are indisputably a source of stress for millennial women.

Wang, Baker, Wagner, & Wakefield (2007) discuss the potential for correlation between the concepts of perception of socialness and flow, arousal, and pleasure. More specifically, the concept of flow was evaluated by assessing participants' level of control, interest, attention, and curiosity of a website. The antecedents of flow, arousal and pleasure were then explored in their relationship to hedonic and utilitarian values. The researchers also investigated the relationship between hedonic and utilitarian values to patronage intention. The conceptual framework for the study surrounded the thought that people view computers as having human-like qualities and social cues which affects their behavior and reactions. The study surveyed 250 homeowners from a large national database panel of 1.5 million consumers on a travel website, with a construct where one site had high socialness and the second with low socialness. Participants were shown either a low-socialness or high-socialness website for custom-made window blinds. The result of the study was that researchers were able to identify a correlation between website socialness perceptions and positive effects on hedonic and utilitarian values. Furthermore, the researchers demonstrated a positive relationship between these perceptions and values with patronage intentions (Wang et al., 2007). These findings

have implications for many different industries, and should especially be considered by website design teams to help attract, engage, and retain their customers.

Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan (2008) also provide insight on the subject through their work on post-consumption feelings of satisfaction and delight in relation to hedonic and utilitarian product design features. This research introduces the idea of expectation and intertwines it with hedonic and utilitarian value. A key hypothesis is that expectations of how a product should function would likely have a strong correlation to the level of satisfaction with the product. The researchers also explore how consumers who are delighted with a product share this feeling and potentially influence other consumers. The conceptual framework for the study outlines potential relationships to be explored between positive/negative consumption experience, superior hedonic/utilitarian design benefits, promotion/preventative emotions, satisfaction, and customer loyalty through word of mouth and repurchase intentions (Chitturi et al., 2008).

The researchers conducted three studies across different product categories: cell phones, laptop computers, and cars (Chitturi et al., 2008). A 2 x 4 between-subjects design was used for 240 undergraduate students where participants were given a booklet with starting instructions, then were asked to review information, each structured with a combination of hedonic and utilitarian benefits for the chosen product. Participants were then asked to review different consumption scenarios and answer questions regarding how they would feel in that particular situation. A multivariate analysis (MANOVA) across the different product categories and experience types suggested that there was evidence that the type and intensity of emotions experienced after consumption of hedonic benefits differ from that of utilitarian benefits. Specifically, the levels of word of

mouth and repurchase intent, derived from satisfaction and delight, were significantly different between the two benefit types (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Previous research on the relevance of value dimensions, specifically tied to established hedonic and utilitarian values and future patronage intentions can also be useful for providing context. According to Overby & Lee (2006), “value judgments have been shown to influence preference, satisfaction, loyalty and other important outcomes” (p. 1) and as such, are important for consumer behavior experts and retailers alike to have a deeper understanding.

Overby & Lee (2006) explore the concept of value dimensions between hedonic and utilitarian values and their correlation to preference and future patronage intentions. They hypothesized that utilitarian value would be more strongly related to preference of Internet retailer. The researchers acknowledged, however, that frequency of shopping could play a moderating role. Overby & Lee (2006) draw on theory from Bolton & Drew (1991) in determining how they defined value, not solely as a trade-off of price and quality, but also encompassing hedonic and utilitarian. The researchers reference work from Hoffman & Novak (1996) to define utilitarian value from task-specific online shopping and work from Babin, Darden, & Griffin (1994) to define hedonic value from shopping for escapism or entertainment.

Through quantitative study, Overby & Lee (2006) first pretested with a small group of shopping experts to assess the effectiveness of their scales, which lead to the formulation of an Internet website survey sent out through numerous Internet newsgroups. Participants were asked to respond to questions with a Likert scale which asked about a recent shopping experience. The researchers were able to collect 817

usable responses for their analysis, for which they used confirmatory factor analysis to test the fit of the model. Worth noting, however, was that the sample group was predominantly white and male, which could possibly effect the weight that the utilitarian value carries in determining preference. It is widely accepted in the industry that men are driven less by hedonic motivations in their consumer behavior than women, and that women tend to be more emotional shoppers (especially in certain product categories) than men. Overby & Lee (2006) found their hypotheses to be supported where utilitarian value would be more strongly related to preference of Internet retailer.

Babin & Babin (2001) discuss the concept of typicality with factors like store location, salesperson appearance, and store name and the relationship to patronage intent. The premise of their argument is that shoppers develop a sort of “prototype” for a certain type of store based on a culmination of their previous experiences of what they perceive to be similar store types. Shoppers may then enter into a store experience with preconceived expectations which are either met or not met and can influence the likelihood that they will visit the store again. The theoretical framework outlines how cue configuration leads to assimilation/contrast, which leads to perceived typicality. After-effects then influence perceived value and patronage intentions, a conclusion drawn after review of relative theory. In their study Babin & Babin (2001) hypothesized that shopping tasks are facilitated, or made easier, if there is increased familiarity and therefore a desired purchase would be more likely. However, they also speculated that atypical store-type experiences might also hold benefits for shoppers that could lead to increased purchase intent.

To operationalize these theories, Babin & Babin (2001) conducted a quantitative study by using scales from previously conducted studies of hedonic and utilitarian values to evaluate excitement, romance, and shame with the variables of store location, store name, and salesperson appearance. They conducted a pretest to determine these most associated characteristics and then conducted a survey of female clothing shoppers, and asked the participants to provide reactions to three varied store concept. As a result, the researchers were able to demonstrate changes in the variables of store name, salesperson appearance, and store location affect the expectations for consumers for that particular category of store type. They found that clothing stores that were atypical, or not what was expected, and evoked higher levels of romance and excitement, which represented the hedonic values. Babin & Babin (2001) argued, through their findings, that stores that were a typical concept evoked more positive affects which would increase patronage intentions and customer loyalty.

The literature discussed in the previous section on web design and functionality, flow concepts, technology adoption, and hedonic and utilitarian value theory provided further insight during the development and analysis of the participant's interviews. Substantial research in the field of consumer behavior (hedonic and utilitarian value) exists for brick and mortar stores as well as theory related to technology design (functionality, flow, adoption), however, gaps in how these concepts connect in social media platforms like Pinterest need further exploration.

Research Question

How are millennial women using Pinterest, and why?

The primary objective of this thesis study is to explore how and why millennial women are using the social media application Pinterest as part of their daily lives. The study seeks to understand the perspective of millennial women by interpreting their viewpoint through common themes that emerge.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Interview Site & Participants

This study used a purposive sampling method to select 10 participants (N=10) for a semi-structured in-person interview. Participants were interviewed in a public place of their choosing, so that they were able to feel comfortable during the interview. The potential existed where participants could possibly want to discuss more sensitive topics to understand what struggles they've had in recent years, i.e. health/wellness, job satisfaction, personal relationships, etc. so it was important for participants to be in a place that they were able to feel at ease while discussing these issues. Ten participants were chosen for an in-person interview through snowball sampling from referrals of personal and professional acquaintances. To attempt to minimize researcher bias, participants were selected that were as distant an acquaintance as possible through snowball sampling, having had very limited to no previous contact. All participants were single (non-married) women in the age range of 25-35 who live in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area, which was an essential factor to be able to conduct in-person interviews.

Single (non-married) women were selected because a common use for Pinterest by women is for planning major life events like a wedding or having a baby, so further investigation was desired of how women are using Pinterest who are *not* likely planning for such an event. Participants were also chosen with the criteria of a high number of pins (1000+) and followers (100+).

Data Collection Methods

The phenomenological approach taken for this research. As described by Creswell (2007), this type of research has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews. Therefore, in-person interviews were conducted and recorded with the participants described above in a public place of their choosing. Prior to conducting interviews, IRB approval was obtained and consent forms were reviewed with each participant and signed. The interviews were recorded then transcribed verbatim. As a method of triangulation, member checks were also conducted after the final question to ensure the participant had been clearly understood and their words captured accurately. Field notes were also taken during the interview, as well as descriptions of the interview site, observations of the participant, and initial reactions by the researcher immediately following the interview.

Data Analysis Methods

This study employed the use of triangulation to take several approaches to analyzing the data collected during interviews. A preliminary analysis was done to ensure accuracy of the transcription, where each transcript was read completely through

while listening to the interview recording. The first step of analysis involved reading each transcript by question, for example reading each transcript for Question 1, to look for themes that emerged across the specific question. Second, each individual transcript was read from beginning to end to pull out specific items that were in addition to responses to the interview questions. During analysis a detailed journal of reflections and thoughts that occurred during this process was kept to capture themes for discussion. Third, a review of the themes that emerged from transcript readings was conducted. It is also important to note that each step of analysis occurred on a different subsequent days, and not all in one sitting to help reduce bias. The similarities and differences between the data found in the transcripts will be discussed further in the conclusions section of this paper. Last, selection of statements from the transcripts were identified to be included in the final conclusions to support findings.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were primarily length of time to complete the project and resources available, such as funding. The time frame for completing this thesis only allowed for interviews and data analysis for 10 participants.

Qualitative research, by nature, inherits certain limitations such as researcher bias because the researcher is the instrument of interpretation. Therefore, it is important to understand how the researcher's perspectives and own experiences shape their interpretation of the information learned through the interviews. The researcher for this study, as a millennial woman with considerable experience in using Pinterest, was a qualifying member of the participant group. The researcher's philosophical paradigm

takes a social constructivist view of research, which inevitably influenced the findings and conclusions of this study. The researcher attempted to minimize the influence of personal bias through methods such as transcribing the interviews verbatim and through the continued involvement and review with three committee members for this thesis work.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Findings

Through an ethnographic interpretive analysis of field notes and transcripts the participants shared their perspectives within the themes of organize/personalize, search vs. browse, do-it-yourself content, socialness, sense of control, utilitarian and hedonic value, empowerment, and connectedness. The following analysis attempts to provide a rich, thick description of the perspectives of the millennial women that participated through observation and interviews (Creswell, 2014).

Organize & Personalize

All 10 participants discussed at length how they organize and label their boards. Eight of 10 also detailed positive experience with Pinterest because of the personalization capabilities such as naming boards, selecting images for the cover of the board, and the ability to mark boards private. Theory supports the idea that the ability to organize and

personalize increases the positive perception a user has of the site and increases the likelihood of adopting the technology (Ko, Kim, & Lee, 2009). As Participant 5 stated:

Pinterest is more personal or private for me, it is really for me to post my ideas about things I like and am interested in. I use Pinterest for my personal reasons to capture ideas. I feel like Pinterest is for me, about me.

Furthermore, the ability for users to collect and save items that interest them gave the participants a sense of personalization. Participant 9 described this feeling as, “You can make it what you want, I have full control over my own boards and how I organize my pins. It feels personalized for me, it can be very different things for different people”.

Search vs. Browse

The ability to search and collect information emerged from the 10 participant interviews and was commonly associated with positive feelings across all. Each participant expressed, through specific examples, that they enjoyed the ability to search more easily and collect images to be able to re-visit later. Organization and navigation of a site can be critical to success because of the ability to deliver utilitarian value (Novak, Hoffman, & Yung, 2000). Best exemplified by a statement from Participant 2, “Before, you would just go ‘I hope I would remember this’ but now we have a place where you can go ‘oh yeah, let me go back to this one board of mine’ ...I spent a weekend reorganizing them one time”. Overall, these were particular pieces of functionality the participants specifically discussed that they uniquely preferred on Pinterest in comparison to other forms of social media like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Similar to organizing and personalizing, all 10 participants discussed at length the ways in which they browse and search Pinterest. All participants expressed that they use the application for specific task-oriented searching, for content such as cooking recipes, hair-style ideas for weddings, and home décor. For example, Participant 9 stated, “There are definitely certain things I would browse for on Pinterest before going to Google because it’s just easier, I feel like I see more quicker where with Google it is just list format”. However, eight of 10 participants also use Pinterest for browsing activities such as idea and inspiration shopping, with no particular task they are trying to accomplish at the time. Participant 6 illustrated this point with the following comment, “I feel like I browse fashion if I’m bored, I’ll actively seek out ideas if I’m super bored with my wardrobe”.

Do-It-Yourself Content

One clear theme that emerged from the interviews was centered on the content type called do-it-yourself or DIY. Every participant interviewed gave several examples of positive experiences where they had been searching content such as gardening, crafts, and cooking recipes, which would be considered DIY activities. Discussion of this topic, in particular, seemed to excite the participants as was observed through non-verbal cues like engaged body language, smiling, and quickened speech. This interpretation was drawn from review of the field notes, which repeatedly captured these similar observations of body language of the participants. Included are excerpts from the transcripts to demonstrate how this theme was found in the interview data. All 10 of the participants expressed a feeling that they are motivated to do more in their lives, some

even saying they wish they did more through using Pinterest. The participants said how it motivated them to be more active and try new things. Participant 1 stated:

I think it is has definitely had an impact in my life, you know in a positive way.

I'm learning new things, I think it's inspiring me to be more creative, in a sense.

And I find it very motivating.

All 10 participants demonstrated that Pinterest has been a main resource for them to search for do-it-yourself content.

Socialness

Another theme that emerged from review of the transcript data was socialness. Six of 10 participants spoke of concepts such as following others, connecting with friends by sending ideas through pins, and perceptions of comments within the pins. Wang et al. (2007) discovered how perception of socialness of a site has a positive effect on a person's perceptions and values as well as re-patronage intent, which was clearly demonstrated by the participants in this study as well. Participant 3 said:

Pinterest makes me like people I don't even know and Facebook makes me dislike people I do know. You go on to Facebook and people are whining and annoying and its people you know in real life. So, Facebook makes me dislike people I do know and Pinterest makes me like people that I've never met.

A sub-theme that emerged under the main theme of socialness was that of privacy. As with most topics relating to technology and the Internet, privacy is usually a top priority or concern. In relationship to perception, six of 10 participants spoke about how their privacy on Pinterest was important to them, specifically how they were or would be

perceived by others. The subject of private boards for wedding idea was discussed in the context of privacy, where the participants seemed somewhat bashful about collecting this type of content when they weren't engaged, hence the reason they stated that they kept it private. Another type of content participants preferred to keep private belongs to sensitive subjects like religion and politics. One of the many examples of this type of feeling was demonstrated by Participant 2:

And so I've learned through Pinterest that some of my friends are I guess not what I thought, or their beliefs are different. Or else, people judge you on your pins that you pin... So, there's definitely a raw side to it that you have to be conscientious of kind of who your audience is, but then also you still want the freedom to be able to express yourself.

While the above direct quotation certainly provides evidence that supports the sub-theme of privacy, it also provides evidence of the larger theme at work, that of socialness with freedom of expression.

Sense of Control

Presumably, feeling a sense of control can mitigate the stress that can follow when one feels out-of-control. Van Dolen, Dabholkar, & De Ruyter (2007) determined through their work that a perceived sense of control can lead to increased adoption rates for technology, along with increased levels of satisfaction. Pinterest, as stated by the participants, not only gives the user a way to collect and save images and related information that interests them, but also allows for the ability to organize and personalize these spaces the way they want. These capabilities evoke emotions that make the user

feel in control, as Participant 10 said, “It helps me feel like I’m more in control and organized, you don’t have to panic about saving things from multiple places like in Safari and Chrome”. It is often a lack of control that can be a cause of stress, and because Pinterest provides the ability to be in control, users are able to cope with the chaos elsewhere in their lives.

Utilitarian & Hedonic Value

As demonstrated in previous literature, a sense of utilitarian and/or hedonic value can have extremely positive effects on a person’s mood and perceptions (Overby & Lee, 2006). Functionality and web design elements found in Pinterest, therefore, can lead users to feel they are gaining utilitarian and hedonic value. The participants all found success in their searching activities, which provides utilitarian value. Participants also discussed how their browsing activities were to be considered as positive, which provides hedonic value. The positive feeling of these values could possibly give reason to why millennial women are so attracted to Pinterest. The following sub-themes were identified from the interview data and were found through literature review to be related to utilitarian and hedonic value: ease of use and flow, information relevancy, visual aspects, idea shopping, and aspiration.

Ease of Use & Flow

The fact that Pinterest is easy and convenient to use for millennial women, something that was clearly expressed by the participants, is a significant factor driving their usage. Having the ability to quickly and easily search and capture ideas, organize

images of inspiration, and be able to retain, or essentially collect, these thoughts are unique functionality traits of Pinterest that are contributing to its success with millennial women. Mahnke's (2014) work found that theoretical relationships exist between flow and positive, action-motivated experiences with sites. The following quotation from Participant 1 exemplifies the notion of convenience that all participants were found to express, "Pinterest makes it more convenient, saves me time so then I'm not searching and searching and searching for things, it's just right there for me to go through". Participant 1 also discussed how she enjoyed being able to organize her thoughts, a sentiment that was echoed by the other participants:

I use it to capture my thoughts and organize what's going on in my head and in my life. It's just nice to have a visual. I do like the fact that when you pin something, it's always there and you can always go back to it.

Not only is ease of use a contributing factor to utilitarian value, but allowing the user to enter a flow state has been shown in prior research to give sense of utilitarian value. As Participant 9 stated, "I browse Pinterest when I'm watching TV or in bed before I go to sleep, it's just kind of mindless so I don't have to be extremely focused".

Information Relevancy

The relevancy of information is another way users can gain a sense of utilitarian value. Mahnke (2014) points out how the quality and quantity of information perceived to be relevant by the user can directly impact their ability to achieve a flow state. This concept was positively mentioned by all of the participants when describing their searching and browsing of Pinterest. For example, Participant 9 said, "The quality of the

content is more interesting and engaging, the photo helps catch my eye”. Interestingly, participants discussed not only the relevancy of the content to their own lives and how Pinterest suggests content that might be of interest through the news feed, but how they easily find information that is relative to others in their lives like parent, friends, and younger children. Participant 6 stated, “There’s so much valuable information for any aspect of life and anything you are looking for.” She also noted how she continues to use Pinterest as she enters different phases of life: for wedding showers, gifts for children of friends, or even a retirement party for her father. The ability to quickly and easily have access to a variety of information that is perceived to be relevant to the user provides them with an increased sense of utilitarian value.

Visual Aspects

Several participants specifically mentioned the visual aspects of Pinterest and that it appeals to them, making their browsing and searching more effective. As Participant 10 described, “Pinterest is very visual, so for us visual learners it’s going to draw me in more than just copy. You can see really quickly what you think will be relevant to you by the image”. Pinterest’s format is highly saturated by image with little text, much more so than Twitter and Facebook. In another example, Participant 5 stated, “I’m a very photo visual person...Pinterest is really for me to post my ideas about things I like and am interested in.” Existing theory has shown that picture-dominant sites improved perceived satisfaction with websites which was echoed in the findings of this study (Lewis, Whitler, & Hoegg, 2013).

Idea shopping

The activity of idea shopping has been shown in prior research to increase hedonic value (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Tauber, 1972). Pinterest provides the ability to shop for ideas through the browsing feature and a news feed of suggested ideas and content pinned by other users they are following. Participant 8 described the extent to which she uses Pinterest to idea shop:

I try not to open it when I have things to do because I think it's addicting. When I open a pin, the bottom part has suggested pins from other people who pinned things like this, and I'll just keep on clicking down the rabbit hole.

Similar statements were made by participants in the Arnold & Reynolds (2003) study of hedonic value and shopping behavior. As noted in findings, all participants discussed how Pinterest has been a positive experience for collecting ideas and inspiration, in particular do-it-yourself content. Clearly, millennial women are finding hedonic value in the positive emotions that are being evoked through this activity.

Aspiration

A sub-theme of aspiration was also evident throughout analysis of the data. Aspiration is defined as something one wants to be or have in the future, without necessarily having a roadmap of action to get there. As Arnold & Reynolds (2003) point out, consumers find ways to escape into a fantasy-like place to fulfill a variety of psychological needs. Pinterest, as the participants expressed, allows them to capture images and content about things they want for themselves in the future, like homes, ideas for children's rooms, or travel destinations. As Participant 7 said, "It's fun because it's a

place where you can combine the realistic, actual things that you are going to do and the dreamer stuff that really you're never going to do". Through the positive emotions associated with aspiration a person can also feel a sense of hedonic value. Pinterest provides a space for millennial women to not only explore who they are today, but who they may want to be one day. For example, Participant 2 expressed, "If you are going to see me for who I am, this is really who I am. I think you can look at Pinterest like, this is either A) the life I'm living or B) the life I want to live."

Empowerment

As the process of data analysis began, another clear theme that emerged from the interviews was centered on empowerment. The participants each expressed how Pinterest had been a source of inspiration for them of activities they wanted to do, which led to a feeling of empowerment. For example, Participant 3 expressed:

When I use Pinterest I feel like the world is my oyster. Because I use it so much for home décor and cleaning, that kind of stuff. And recipes....when I use Pinterest I feel like I could cook that for sure or I could get my apartment to look like that, I could accomplish anything.

All of the participants gave numerous examples of types of projects that they would like to try or places they would like to go based on images and information they found on Pinterest. The interviews provided ample data of how Pinterest drove action in both the present and intention for action in the future. Participant 2's statement provides evidence for this theme, "I feel happy when I can express myself and I think even though I may not

have the time to do this right now, I hope, it brings hopefulness to my life, just because I hope I can do it one day”.

The theme of empowerment bears an important relationship to the topic of coping because a feeling of empowerment can be a valuable way to combat stress. High levels of engagement by the participants while discussing Pinterest, as was observed and captured in the field notes, suggests that Pinterest is encouraging them, by being a resource for new ideas, to take an active role in their lives. Feeling like one is taking a more active role in their life can lead women to feel more productive, where Pinterest is a tool that provides them with the ability to connect with this inspiration and feel empowered. Overall health and wellness has suffered for many in recent years with the downturn of the economy and high unemployment rates, which can cause as severe stress. Empowerment is one such mechanism of coping that can counteract stress. Several times throughout the interviews the participants expressed how Pinterest has helped provide a creative outlet for them from a bad day or the stress of their jobs, which further supports this theme.

Connectedness

Connectedness is another way in which Pinterest has had a positive effect on the lives of millennial women. Lee (2011) suggests that social aspects are an important dimension of a site to drive loyalty. Pinterest has certain socialness aspects that the participants highlighted that allow them to connect with friends, family, and other people or brands that inspire them. Pinterest also plays an important role in demonstrating how Pinterest provides an escape for women, because they are able to

create a persona of their aspirational self. Pinterest was represented as a means of creating a persona of either the life they felt they were living or a life they aspired to live. Participants expressed how they were conscientious of the perception they were creating in the Pinterest world, and they also were creating perceptions of others they interacted with on Pinterest. The participants were also acutely aware of the privacy, or in some cases lack thereof, with regards to the persona they create on Pinterest. This concept also relates to empowerment because women felt a sense of empowerment with the ability to be able to create a persona to which they aspire. Through these feelings of being able to create a lifestyle they want and having the ability to control the perceptions of this persona, women are essentially creating a fantasy life for themselves which allow them to escape from the stresses of their lives.

CHAPTER 5

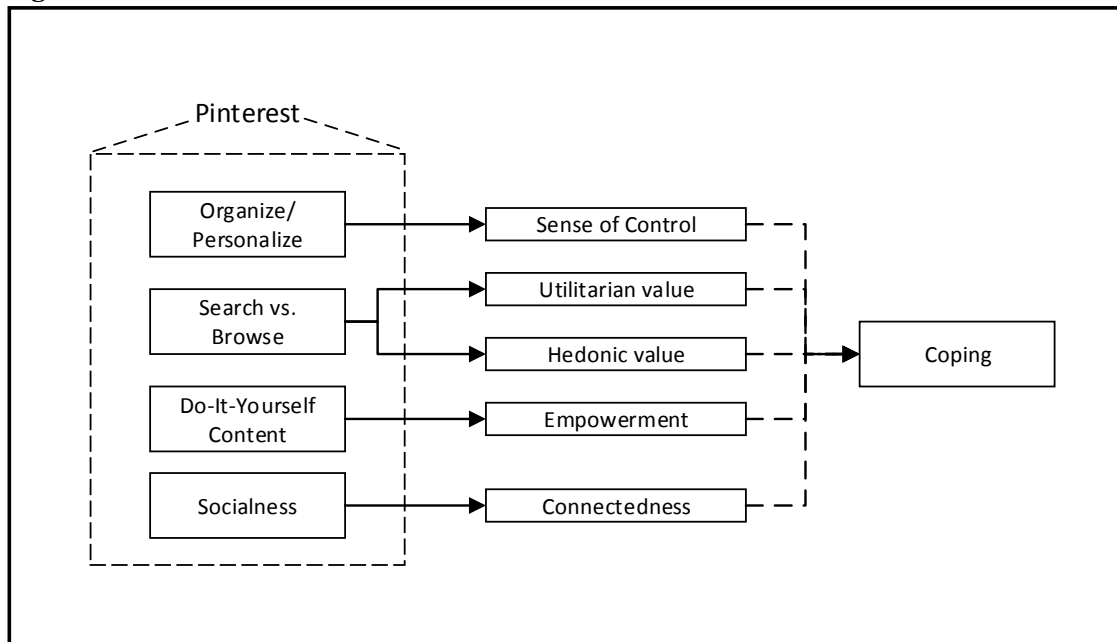
CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework has been developed from review of theory through literature and as a result of the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants: organize/personalize, search vs. browse, do-it-yourself content, socialness, sense of control, utilitarian and hedonic value, empowerment and connectedness. From these themes, conclusions were drawn by the researcher in how they relate to the themed feelings of sense of control, utilitarian and hedonic value, empowerment and connectedness. Ultimately, the findings of this research along with review of previous

work in the field suggest that these feelings provide millennial women with a sense of coping from everyday stress.

Figure 1



Conclusions

The research question of this thesis study, “How are millennial women using Pinterest, and why?” was explored more deeply and meaningful conclusions were extracted from the information provided by the participants. The qualitative data that was collected through in-depth interviews suggested there were feelings of sense of control, utilitarian and hedonic value, empowerment, and connectedness that all resulted in the feeling of coping, or the ability to escape from stress. Throughout the interviews, participants all expressed sources of stress in their lives that fit in the general categories of job/career, health and wellness, and family/friend relationships. Pinterest, in contrast, is a convenient and easy way for them to feel motivated, inspired, to create a persona of a

life they aspire to, and to feel a sense of control in being able to organize their thoughts. These are all emotions that were positive and allowed them to “take a break” from the stress they feel, to escape from it. The following conclusions aim to provide a combination of textural and structural descriptions of the participants’ lived experience with Pinterest to tell the story of the essence of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Coping

Participants used words like “relaxing”, “decompressing” and “take a break”, which all could be used synonymously with coping or escape. For example, two of the participants specifically spoke about how using Pinterest was a type of mental break and a creative outlet from their less creative, more analytical jobs. As Participant 1 stated, “My real job is pretty analytical so it gives me a chance to kind of get outside of that and tap into that side of me. I find it relaxing. I use it when I do need a mental break at work”. Another participant, Participant 2, also stated something very similar, “It’s very analytical (my job), you have to make hard decisions, it’s not creative whatsoever...I need some creativity in my life, and this is an outlet for me, whether it’s cooking, crafting or designing for the future”. This same participant even went so far as to say, “(Pinterest is) an addiction like crack”, which was echoed by several other participants. Research by Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen (1986) demonstrates how people look for ways that allow them to distance themselves from troubling situations, an escape, or avoidance that gives them an alternative focus. Specifically, job-related stress

is mentioned as a common cause for the need of this escapism form of coping, both in the Folkman et al. (1986) research and with participants of this study.

Feelings of sense of control, utilitarian and/or hedonic value, empowerment, and connectedness are all emotions that can lead to an ability cope with stress in everyday life. According to research in the field, “People respond to perceptions of threat, harm, and loss in diverse ways, many of which receive the label of coping” (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Coping, therefore, is the attempt to reduce or diminish the threat, harm or stress. The millennial women who participated in this study demonstrated in many ways, through their comments, how using Pinterest has continuously evoked these emotions throughout their experience.

Sense of Control & Coping

One widely studied function of coping, emotion-focused coping, is used to help regulate emotions from stress (Folkman et al., 1986). This form of coping is commonly employed when people feel they do not have options to affect the situation causing stress. The lack of ability to affect a stressful situation can lead one to feel out of control, thereby seeking mechanisms that give a sense of control. The act of distancing can also be a typical coping response to negative situations that a person perceives is unalterable. Engagement coping is known as an attempt to control stress by intentionally engaging in positive activities as a way to adapt to other uncontrollable stressors (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Together, the ability to organize and the flow state that can be achieved through Pinterest offer millennial women way to feel a sense of control while simultaneously escaping from stress.

Utilitarian/Hedonic Value & Coping

Perceived utilitarian and hedonic value was a clear theme that emerged from the participants in this study. Two concepts, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, have been shown to have a relationship to perceived utilitarian and hedonic value (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). Problem-focused coping centers on the actions one takes to remove or evade stress. Pinterest provides the ability for coping in this form because it enables users to take action through effective searching for relevant information to solve the problem. Successful searching can lead to a perceived sense of utilitarian value and coping. Emotion-focused coping can also be realized through avoidance, wishful thinking and relaxation. Pinterest offers a means for escaping and aspirational feeling which gives a sense of hedonic value.

Mental disengagement is another form of coping that has been widely researched (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Folkman et al., 1986). The purpose of mental disengagement coping is provide a distraction from the source of stress. This can manifest itself in a number of ways, for example escaping through immersion in TV or through sleep. Flow is another means by which a person can mentally disengage from their surroundings. Participants in this study expressed how Pinterest allowed them to enter into a mindless state, which could be considered a flow state.

Empowerment & Coping

Research by Duhachek & Iacobucci (2005) demonstrated how consumers seek active coping strategies as a way to manage stress. Feeling empowered towards action, as participants expressed in this study, could allow millennial women to engage in this form of active coping. Pinterest provides millennial women a way to easily search or browse for content such as fashion, home décor, recipes, cleaning, and beauty tips that can serve as motivation to act on these ideas. In particular, participants expressed how they felt empowered and inspired to take action because of the DIY content on Pinterest. Therefore, the connection can be made that Pinterest provides millennial women with a mechanism for those seeking active coping.

Connectedness & Coping

Several studies have provided insight to the relationship between the concept of connectedness and happiness or wellbeing (Ahn & Shin, 2013; Ong, Chang & Lee, 2015; Wang, Jackson, Gaskin & Wang, 2014). The need for this form of coping stems from a desire to escape social isolation or loneliness. This thesis study particularly focused on single millennial women, some who expressed feelings of loneliness. Ong et al. (2014) also discusses how social activity on the web can increase happiness, positive emotions, and combat depression. Pinterest provided them with a way to connect with others, which helped them cope with feelings of social isolation. Carver & Connor-Smith (2010) researched emotion-focused coping and the role that social support can play to alleviate stress. People seek social support for a variety of reasons, such as information, advice,

sympathy or understanding. Pinterest offers the ability for users to connect with friends, family and others with similar interests who can provide this type of support.

Discussion

The themes interpreted through this study can offer several considerations for web designers and retailers in future. First, providing users with a means to retain and organize content from many sources in one centralized location allows users to feel a sense of control. Second, providing ways in which users can personalize their space will improve their perception and satisfaction of the experience because it will allow them to find relevant information more easily. Third, optimizing search capabilities so users can find relevant information quickly is key to adoption and success of a web platform. Fourth, this study demonstrated how an image-dominant design was preferred by the participants and was a key driver in their choice to browse through Pinterest instead of other social media like Google. Last, including functionality of a social dimension such as the ability to share content through email allows the user to feel a connectedness to others which can improve their experience. These themes emerged from the information gathered through interviews for this study, and in combination with review of existing empirical studies can be interpreted as a means to support coping behaviors for millennial women. These user-centric principals can guide retailers as they design and develop their sites.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several avenues could be considered for research to expand on the work of this study in the future. First, research could continue by broadening the participant base and conducting more interviews to test if these initial findings and themes hold true. Through further collection of data and snowball sampling to gain more participants, future researchers would be able to see if there is repetition and commonality of the feelings that millennial women are experiencing while using Pinterest, providing more credibility to the results.

A follow-up study of a quantitative nature would be valuable as a means to triangulate the research of this qualitative study. Additional studies would provide other ways of approaching the topic to discover if the participant's usage of Pinterest increases during points of stress in their lives. A possible quantitative study could group participants by the criteria used in this study of gender/age/marital status/usage, and have the participants fill out a weekly survey for a length of time that would ask them basic questions evaluating moments of stress or challenges and times they considered to be good or happy. In tandem, content analysis would be conducted of this person's Pinterest usage by collecting how many pins they made in a given day/week, the content of the pins (clothing, DIY, cooking, etc.) which could then be correlated to the surveys.

This type of study could potentially uncover patterns between the level of stress and the level of usage of Pinterest. The research question for this thesis attempted to understand the lived experience of the millennial woman's use of Pinterest, where a quantitative study could test hypotheses if relationships exist between stress and usage.

These patterns could then potentially be compared to the themes of feelings that were established by this qualitative study to provide a more comprehensive view of the topic.

Another area that would be interesting to explore further would be to look into how men are utilizing Pinterest. Since the user base is over 80% women, valuable insight could be gained by looking deeper into the ways men connect with the application and with the potential to suggest ways to change the site to reach increased usage by men (Smith, 2013). This type of research could prove useful to retailers and web designers as another way to market to their male customers.

Lastly, a quantitative study measuring purchasing driven by Pinterest would provide valuable insight for the retail marketing community in determining if they are receiving a return on investment for their efforts in marketing on Pinterest. Such a study could look more specifically at quantifying the purchasing behavior of Pinterest users to attempt to provide evidence that exposure to images of retailers' product is driving consumers to the store to buy.

Future studies could continue to explore different dimensions of this topic and seek more fully understand the use of Pinterest as an escape from stress for women or as motivation to shop.

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APPENDIX

Interview questions

- Tell me about how you use Pinterest.
- How do you organize your boards?
- What are some examples of good and bad experiences with Pinterest?
- Tell me about a few of your favorite pins or topics you pin most about.
- How do you describe Pinterest to others?
- What would you change about Pinterest if you could?