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Shopping with consumers: reflections and innovations

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper reflects on the protocol suggested for using shopping with consumers (SWC) as a means for gathering high-quality, naturalistic text in the field.

Design/methodology/approach – The original SWC method combined accompanying consumers in the field as they shopped with in-depth interviews.

Findings – This paper reflects on how SWC has been used in past research, including new and innovative applications of the method to a variety of research phenomena.

Research limitations/implications – The primary limitation of the approach is the amount of time required to implement SWC thoroughly.

Practical implications – SWC has the advantages of a multi-method research design. In addition, SWC hastens trust and rapport with informants, potentially yielding richer data.

Originality/value – This paper is unique in terms of reflections on how a variety of scholars have used SWC to investigate phenomena of interest beyond that investigated in our original data collection. In addition, we offer suggestions for future research in areas that could clearly benefit from application of the method.

Keywords Shopping, Retailing, Qualitative research, Interviews

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Over ten years ago, we began using a method for gathering qualitative data that we termed shopping with consumers (SWC). Within the scope of several major research projects that involved consumer shopping over the past decade, this method has enabled us both to create rich datasets and illuminate shopping behavior in specific contexts (McGrath and Otnes, 1995; Otnes et al., 1993, 1997). We believe the method inherently generates text that, in conjunction with depth interviews, yields insights that may otherwise remain hidden from researchers.

The world’s 100 largest retailers now generate $2 trillion in revenues, and each of the major industrialized regions of the world can boast its own retail giants (Berman and Evans, 2004). Recent studies continue to underscore the importance of shopping to economic health, and some have specifically acknowledged the need to understand consumers’ shopping activities (Ackerman and Tellis, 2001; Compeau and Nicholson, 1996; Nelson, 1996). Moreover, although some scholars sing the praises of SWC as a technique for gathering high-quality naturalistic text (Davies et al., 1999), many have stopped short of incorporating it into their research designs. This paper argues that
SWC is a valuable and effective method for gathering naturalistic data in the field. While not without its shortcomings, we argue that SWC may be the most potent means of capturing consumers’ shopping behavior, and when used in conjunction with depth interviews, of acquiring valid and reliable perspectives on actual versus recalled shopping activities.

Background
We wrote the original methodological paper in 1995 (Otnes et al., 1995), where we laid out a protocol for use and described how it could be used in conjunction with other methods (primarily depth interviews) to provide high-quality text. Given the focus of this special issue, it seemed both appropriate and timely to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of this method, to review what has been learned through the application of SWC by ourselves and others, and to offer advice on training researchers in the use of this method. The studies using SWC since 1995 have examined shopping both in traditional brick-and-mortar stores and online contexts. In this paper, we describe how SWC has proven useful in these studies, and also explore how SWC can help researchers push the envelope in research on activities involving consumer/retailer interactions. First, we briefly describe the method as outlined in Otnes et al. (1995), then devote the rest of the paper to the innovative ways SWC has been used, along with ways in which SWC could be used in the future.

Steps involved in shopping with consumers
Our original method involved combining SWC with depth and other interviewing techniques, yielding six basic steps that typically required five weeks to complete (Otnes et al., 1995, pp. 106-8). A one-week gap is recommended between each step to minimize researcher and informant fatigue. The first step was recruitment, which involved initial solicitation of volunteers. Potential informants were screened through a preliminary telephone contact to make sure volunteers met the criteria for our studies. Obviously, criteria can differ depending upon the nature of the study, but our focus was on ensuring consumers had a sufficient amount of shopping to complete during the study timeframe. In our studies, small monetary incentives were used to recruit volunteers.

The second step was an initial one-on-one depth interview designed to establish rapport between the researchers and the volunteers prior to accompanying them on shopping trips. Our initial interviews typically followed a specific schedule (McCracken, 1988) across all informants to address key topics under study. During these interviews, the first shopping trip was scheduled and an attempt was made to address any logistical concerns participants may have had regarding these trips. For example, meeting places and times were determined, rides were arranged (if necessary), and issues such as who might accompany the researcher/informant team were discussed. Given the inherently intrusive nature of this method, we believed it was essential to allow informants to shop as “naturally” as possible, which means we always permitted others to join in shopping if they would normally do so. In this step, we also explained the process of taking notes during the trips so participants would not be alarmed during the actual trip. Although taping of the shopping trips was a possibility, we consistently refrained from doing so, opting instead to take skeletal notes during the trip, followed by preparing detailed field notes immediately after the interaction.
The third step was the initial shopping trip, which began either during transport to or upon meeting at a predetermined retail setting. General baseline questions were asked of all participants (e.g. “What are you shopping for today?”), but the nature of this method guarantees the emergence of informant-specific questions. Thus, researchers were not bound to follow the same schedule of questions for each individual (indeed, differences arose in the researcher-informant relationship based on the initial interviews). Topics that had been introduced in the first interview were typically developed during this first shopping trip, along with new insights that were generated in situ.

The fourth step was a second depth interview with each participant. Due to the nature of this method, these interviews were tailor-made for each individual and did not follow the same schedule. These interviews were designed to clarify specific questions the researchers may have had about behaviors observed during the first shopping trip. Although some clarifications were sought during the actual trip, questions also often arose later, upon reflection as the researcher prepared detailed field notes. Typically, the researcher incorporated these questions into the agenda for the second interview. In addition, we used second interviews to develop insights that may not have been evident during the first interviews, but became salient once actual shopping behavior was observed. At the close of the second interview, the second shopping trip was planned and scheduled.

The fifth step was the second shopping trip, which used identical procedures as the first trip, although the shopping venue changed based on preferences of the participants. By this stage in the researcher-informant relationship, a certain level of familiarity was typically reached, and the informants began to interact with the researchers as closer companions, often requesting opinions and advice. It is at this juncture that the researcher must consciously try to remain neutral in terms of offering opinions without offending the informant in the process. Although in our experience, it seemed perfectly acceptable to assist in physical ways (e.g. helping carry bags), the researcher had to cultivate a variety of non-committal responses when asked such questions as, “Do you think my sister would like this blouse?” In short, we found that it was difficult, but not impossible, for researchers to minimize their influence on the actual shopping decisions being made. We understand the argument made by Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) regarding the need to become personally involved with the phenomenon under study (along with the notion that it may be impossible to remain completely neutral (Oakley, 1981). Indeed, these issues are complicated ones to address in conducting this type of research. In our case, we felt it was desirable to become very involved with our participants up to a point, but refrain from influencing actual purchases to the extent possible given a specific situation.

Finally, the sixth step was a follow-up interview after the usage occasion, which differed depending on the phenomena being studied (e.g. in the case of our Christmas gift-giving study, a phone interview was scheduled after the holiday). It may be advisable to make the follow-up interaction an in-depth, face-to-face interview to allow for deeper probing than is achievable during a telephone conversation (not to mention the added bonus of being able to assess facial expressions and body language). Regardless of the specific methodology, a follow-up interview is an excellent way to clarify any remaining questions on the part of the researcher that may have arisen during the second shopping trip, as well as an outlet for participants to provide
additional information and insights (who typically were eager to share personal news and reflective insights relevant to the research topic with the researchers).

We recommend the full six-step procedure in order to generate the type of text that will provide deep insights. However, as we will describe below, other studies have been conducted (both by ourselves and other researchers) that combine various methodologies in innovative ways to provide multi-method research designs that go beyond this basic six-step protocol.

Pros and cons of the method
Certainly, every method has its strengths and its weaknesses, and SWC is no exception. We will briefly outline the shortcomings of the method, followed by a comparison of its advantages and disadvantages to other research techniques (see Otnes et al., 1995, pp. 102-5, for a thorough discussion of these points).

While we believe the disadvantages of SWC are minimal, they nevertheless need to be seriously considered by any researcher considering the method. First, and primarily, we discourage its use as a “stand-alone” method; in fact, the richest and most theoretically rewarding text was produced when we combined SWC with other techniques. Second, the method is limited to studies of shopping and other experiential retail and service encounters.

There is also a possible need for similarity between the researcher and the informant on some dimensions (most noticeably, in our experience, gender). In our research, female and male researchers had different types of interactions with our participants, who were predominantly female. Although we are not suggesting the genders of the researcher and informant must always be the same, sensitivity to the types of experiences that may be realized is essential. In addition to gender, it is possible that extreme differences in socio-economic status or age between the researchers and the consumers may also require special attention and sensitivity on the part of the researcher.

As previously mentioned, there is a potential for consumers to alter their behavior due to the presence of the researcher. Although there is no way to eliminate this problem completely, it can be managed. In our opinion, it is essential for researchers to remain as neutral as possible in the field when participants ask for their opinions and advice, despite the need to establish rapport. Our own experience suggests that, over time, individuals become more relaxed and natural in their interactions with the researchers, such that their behavior seems to be less monitored than one might fear.

Finally, shopping with consumers is obviously a costly endeavor, both in terms of time and money. Generating the text is labor-intensive, and transcribing the text involves either a great deal of time (if doing it oneself) or a fair amount of money (if outsourcing it). In addition, financial incentives may be required to attract informants (more than is typical of other methods, in some cases, due to the amount of time involved). In addition to these self-evident costs, it should be pointed out that there are other costs to the researcher. Shopping with consumers requires great patience and self-restraint. People have very different shopping styles, and the role of the researcher is to offer as little interference as possible. Researchers considering this method should reflect on whether they have the ability, patience, and/or temperament to allow the shopping trip to unfold as the consumer desires.
Based upon our extensive experience using this method, we believe the advantages of SWC clearly outweigh the disadvantages. First, when combined with other methods, the multi-method aspect of the research design invigorates each research technique that is used. For example, observation alone does not allow researchers to verify and clarify questions that arise, whereas interviewing alone does not allow observation of actual behavior. Obviously, SWC, as we have outlined, allows the researcher to do both – observe actual behavior and ask individuals to assist in the researcher’s interpretation of that behavior. While consumers’ explanations of their behaviors are rarely taken at face value, it is nevertheless very valuable to acquire those explanations, and compare them with actual shopping behavior. For example, a participant may try to rationalize a particular action but the researcher is free to accept or reject this explanation. This situation obviously points to the need on the researcher’s part to balance his or her own interpretations with those of the informants, a statement which applies to many qualitative methods.

Second, we believe the method hastens the trust and rapport that develops between the researcher and the informant. In short, SWC involves a shared activity that is typically enjoyed by the participant and that creates a less academic “space” for interaction. Even when conducted in their own home, interviews can often be intimidating experiences, since the researcher may be viewed as an intellectual stranger. Although such perceptions of social distance can also emerge during shopping, there is something inherently democratic about the activity that puts the participant on more of an equal footing with the researcher. In fact, the consumer may perceive that he or she is actually the expert, and feel more comfortable expounding upon issues pertaining to the acquisition and purchase of goods or services in situ.

Finally, since consumers establish their own agendas for the shopping trips, and typically explain their behavior while it is occurring, researchers are able to gain insights that may not have occurred to individuals during an interview. That is, different insights may emerge during the process of shopping then would be reported at another time. Similarly, because the researcher can question the participant while shopping, different insights may emerge than those obtained through passive observation, which does not offer the researcher any chance to question those being observed. We believe that the variety of text generated while shopping with consumers is the biggest advantage of the method.

Past use of the method
As discussed in Otanes et al. (1995), the earliest researchers who used shopping with consumers did so in order to capture verbal protocols in retail settings and develop quantitative models of consumer in-store decision making (Bettman, 1970; King, 1969). In contrast, early uses of the method by scholars working primarily in anthropology and sociology were intended to help produce a more holistic, naturalistic understanding of shopping behavior (Miller, 1993; Prus and Frisby, 1990). Since the discussion of SWC by Otanes et al. (1995), the method has been used almost exclusively by scholars working within the interpretive paradigm, and their research has demonstrated that SWC is a potent method for generating meaningful findings with regard to a variety of topics. In this section, we review the ways SWC has been used, and the insights that the method has contributed.
Not surprisingly, our own research has employed the SWC protocol in a variety of studies that explore aspects of shopping. For example, McGrath and Otnes (1995) used the method to study the ways strangers interact in the retail setting, in conjunction with depth interviews and observation. This text enabled them to develop a framework of the overt (e.g. the “help-seeker”) and covert (e.g. “the follower”) interpersonal influences that emerged when strangers interacted with each other in a variety of retail locales.

We have also used SWC to study issues pertaining to an overlooked concept of consumption-related emotions (Richins, 1997), that of “consumer ambivalence” (Lowrey et al., 1998; Otnes et al., 1997). Using the SWC protocol of alternating depth interviews and shopping trips, and accompanying that protocol with same-sex focus groups, enabled us to interpret how consumers’ mixed emotions that occurred sequentially or simultaneously influenced their wedding planning experiences. In addition, we discovered how these emotions were related to three different levels of ambivalence, namely:

(1) psychological (stemming from internal emotions);
(2) social (stemming from role conflict with others); and
(3) cultural (stemming from discrepant cultural values).

Otnes (1998) also used SWC when examining the roles that the bridal salon could play for brides. Employing a team of undergraduate students trained in SWC, she found salons can serve as a school, storehouse, dressing chamber, and ritualistic singularizer for the bride.

Miller (1998) conducted an extensive ethnography of shopping behavior among 76 households in North London. Although not referring to the SWC protocol per se, Miller combined interviews with shopping trips at an array of retail sites. These activities enabled him to discover that even mundane shopping activities have meaning for consumers that extend beyond their functional aspects of “provisioning.” In particular, Miller’s “theory of shopping” argues that for women in particular, shopping is “one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice” (p. 18). Moreover, women who perform what he terms the sacrificial work of shopping consistently reward themselves in the field for doing so, by purchasing fattening, edible “treats” for themselves and their children. Miller’s (1998, p. 42) description of this behavior demonstrates how vital it was for him to accompany shoppers in the stores:

Many of these treats are eaten before they even reach the check-out, so that they are paid for using the empty wrappers… Curiously, there is also one extremely common practice amongst adults of eating one or more grapes soon after entering the supermarket, as a kind of treat taken from the supermarket itself. A high proportion of shoppers do this, and few shoppers were observed to eat any other commodity without paying.

In short, Miller’s use of SWC, coupled with interviews, enabled him to offer new theoretical insights into the meaning of shopping, and to argue convincingly that for women, shopping represents a sacrifice of time and effort that enables them to express love to their families.

Sherry (1998) conducted a four-year ethnography of Nike Town Chicago, combining SWC with intercept interviews, observations, and autodriving (conducting interviews around visual stimuli such as photographs; see Heisley and Levy, 1991). The text gleaned specifically by SWC enabled Sherry to study consumers’ in-store reactions to
Nike Town’s premium pricing policy, and the tendency of shoppers to regard Nike Town as more of a sightseeing destination than a retail store (or in one consumer’s words, as a “shrine” Sherry, 1998, p. 118). He used this text to create an extensive interpretation of the three-story Nike Town Chicago store as a “site magnet for secular pilgrims” (p. 141) who reaffirm the tenets of destination and experientially oriented marketing. Moreover, his findings affirm the assumptions of architects, interior designers, and brand managers that designing “cathedrals to consumption” does enhance consumers’ experience with, and affinity for, brands.

Likewise, McGrath (1998) employed SWC, projective techniques, interviews, and traditional observational techniques in her study of male and female differences in shopper preferences at an outlet mall. Although primarily reporting findings with respect to the projective techniques in this study, later works that explored male shopping behavior (Otnes and McGrath, 2001) validated her findings that both men and women often expect shopping to satisfy an emotional component, and that “all shoppers seek a level of attention and a level of service that may lie beyond the conventional” (McGrath, 1998, p. 451).

Recently, Xia (2003) used SWC along with more limited-access observational techniques to explore issues pertaining to internet browsing. She argued that combining depth interviews with shopping trips enabled her to capture incidences of casual browsing behavior that consumers might have forgotten or deemed unimportant to discuss in an interview, to compare consumers’ narratives of their own browsing activities with those recorded by the researcher, and to help the researcher formulate relevant and insightful questions for follow-up interviews. Specifically, Xia instructed participants to engage in the type of browsing in which they would normally engage on internet web sites of their choice, in their homes or wherever they typically conducted internet shopping. The text gleaned from these methods was then used to make refinements to what Xia terms the “browsing/searching continuum,” which categorized consumers’ shopping activities based on their level of engagement with retail stimuli and the goal-directedness of their behavior. It also enabled her to refine the conceptual distinctions between functional and recreational browsing.

Lowrey et al. (2004) employed SWC in their longitudinal study of Christmas shopping. During five Christmas seasons in a 12-year period (1990-2001), they interviewed and shopped with the same five women (Lowrey and Otnes, 2003). The insights that pertain to using SWC in a longitudinal research design are as follows: SWC enabled them to compare shopping activities at the same retail stores, to enhance validity in terms of understanding marked changes in shopping strategy, and to understand how consumers’ in-store activities might have changed over the years.

For example, in 1990, Laura reveled in going to stores as early as possible (e.g. 6:00 a.m.) the day after Thanksgiving, in order not only to engage in the hustle and bustle that accompanied the kick-off to the Christmas shopping season but also to assist and direct other customers in securing bargains. That year, she actually brought bags with large amounts of promotional circulars into the stores, and showed consumers who were looking at the products being advertised where they could get better deals. However, by 1994, she had lost interest in being “the bag lady,” and merely offered helpful advice to fellow shoppers when it was convenient for her to do so. As her income increased over the years, Laura became less and less inclined to bargain-shop,
and while she relayed that information to the researchers in an interview, the more perfunctory and less bargain-driven nature of her actual shopping behavior validated her descriptions, and demonstrated that her behavior, and not just her description of her behavior, had undergone significant change. Moreover, the researchers used field notes generated from SWC as talking points in depth interviews from one year to the next (e.g. “I noticed you compared prices a lot on a gift you were giving to your daughter (back in 1992); talk about whether you still do that.”)

In summary, SWC has demonstrated its value as a research technique that enables us to:

1. learn about what different types of shopping mean to consumers;
2. understand the significance of retail atmospherics for consumers;
3. supplement other research techniques in order to enrich and complete both methods; and
4. enable researchers to effectively study shopping in a longitudinal manner.

**Training in the method**

As is true of most other qualitative methods, the best training in SWC follows the learning-by-doing model. In the past, when we have successfully trained both undergraduate (Otnes, 1998) and graduate students (Lowrey *et al.*, 2004) to use this method, we have always provided careful instructions prior to their entry into the field, and also built time into the research design for a thorough and attentive debriefing and review of field notes after the students’ initial interactions with informants in retail settings. In addition to providing students with basic grounding in observational methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 1992) and interviewing techniques (McCracken, 1988) (since SWC is often used in conjunction with depth interviews), we believe the following points are critical with regard to training both students and novice researchers in the use of SWC.

1. We instruct students to carry a small notepad that they can fit in their hand. However, it is important to caution them not to be so intent on note-taking that their attention is directed away from what consumers are actually doing, but to use the notebooks sparingly in order to capture particularly rich *verbatim*, or to write notes or questions they can probe in subsequent interviews or shopping trips. We discourage students from taking tape recorders or video-recorders because of their intrusiveness, and because worries over equipment functionality may distract them from observing activities.

2. With regard to the amount of time researchers should remain in the field on a single shopping trip, we follow the “shorter is better” recommendations made by others (Bogdan and Taylor, 1984), in order to reduce intrusiveness and participant and researcher fatigue. Specifically, we recommend shopping trips ranging from 45 minutes to 1½ hours, with immediate scheduling of interviews within the next week in order to probe shopping trip activities, topics, and/or questions that emerged in the retail setting.

3. Following standard recommendations for participant observation, we tell students the most important way to maintain the reliability and validity of the text is to create their field notes immediately after the shopping trips.
By “immediately after” we mean they should move from parking their cars to parking themselves in front of their computers in order to ensure the highest quality text possible. An excerpt from field notes created after a shopping trip demonstrates the level of detail possible:

Belle was having trouble getting into this particular dress. The saleswoman was not around, so zipping the dress up from the back was a hard task for Belle. With her head out, she then looked outside the dressing room door for the saleswoman and said, “I’m abandoned…” (The saleswoman came and) after having trouble getting the train’s hook to attach to the dress…called in another saleswoman to help. (With another dress) Belle was having a hard time zipping the slip, so she yelled from the dressing room door, “Can you come here?”

(4) We have found that one of the most effective training exercises is to send teams of student researchers to engage in “interobserver cross-checking” (Adler and Adler, 1992, p. 381), to discuss pre- and post-conceived notions of these encounters, and to compare note-taking in terms of quality and perspective. Moreover, this exercise clearly demonstrates how researchers’ assumptions and biases can influence the recording and interpretation of text. To avoid overwhelming participants, we recommend sending no more than two students on any given shopping trip.

(5) We remind students of the important issues that emerge because of gender differences between researchers and consumers (as mentioned earlier). As we pointed out in the original article on SWC, all of our female participants brought others on the shopping trips that they knew would be conducted by a male researcher. While we do not know if this was because of perceived safety issues, or just to ensure a certain level of comfort, for shopping trips where researchers are interested in seeing consumers shop alone, these issues should be proactively addressed by the research team.

(6) While this final point is certainly not exclusive to SWC, there is a need to teach students a certain level of closure etiquette. In our experience, the level of rapport that is typically generated often leads to a strong desire on the part of informants to offer a parting gift at the end of the set of interactions (and at times, on the part of the researchers as well). As long as these gifts are not elaborate, students should not hesitate to accept such tokens of the bonding that has taken place. Ironically, while they are providing valuable information to researchers, it is often the case that participants actually feel they have received gifts of companionship, time, or other gestures. As a result, they often want to be able to reciprocate through small tokens, and refusal of these gifts might annoy or offend informants.

Future suggestions for using the method
Given our current reflections on SWC, specifically on how we and other researchers have used it since we first explicated the method, we now have more evidence that SWC is a compelling method, and can more ably discern its contributions. As a result, we have a few suggestions for ways researchers could push the envelope and employ SWC in studies pertaining to shopping. First, it would be interesting to use SWC in the study of auction behavior. This is a specialized case involving time-constrained
transactions in which product information is incomplete but sales are often final. It may also be a context ripe for the study of cognitive dissonance, as buyers must either incorporate purchases into their lives or find another outlet or rationalization for a less-than-perfect choice. Accompanying potential bidders to live auctions or incorporating Xia’s (2003) modifications to sit with online bidders as they negotiate electronic auction sites (e.g. e-Bay) could prove quite illuminating. In addition, other types of electronic shopping with consumers (e-SWC) could provide insights into what might be a very specialized type of shopping behavior.

Second, “guided” shopping, in which individuals hire shopping tour guides, would be an appropriate phenomenon to investigate using SWC. We know of two types of guided shopping:

1. department store assistants, or “personal shoppers,” who typically aid a single consumer in the purchasing of seasonal wardrobes, collections of household items, holiday gifts for a variety of recipients, etc.; and
2. shopping experts who typically take groups of consumers on tours within a specific city (e.g. Chic Shopping Paris).

Studying this type of guided shopping would illuminate our understanding of the encapsulated purchase process. Within a limited time frame, consumers must buy-or-walk, while simultaneously assessing their degree of trust in the shopping guide.

Third, and peripherally related to the above, any type of group shopping activity could be illuminated through the use of SWC. In several regions of the United States (and, we expect, elsewhere as well), bus trips take large groups of consumers from smaller towns to urban shopping centres for a concentrated day of shopping. Moreover, longer tours to cities often incorporate shopping excursions into their itineraries. Shopping with consumers on these trips could expand our understanding of special types of shopping, such as that for souvenirs, collectibles, and of course, gifts. On a less organized scale, simply shopping with friendship (or kinship) groups could yield interesting results, including possible new insights into the ritualistic behaviors that seem to guide teenagers’ use of shopping malls as gathering places, and a greater understanding of shopping as avocation. Furthermore, new constructs in consumer behavior, such as power relations within social networks and other types of social influence on consumption (Lowrey et al., 2004) are areas that could obviously be illuminated through the use of SWC in conjunction with other methods.

Finally, pushing the envelope further for SWC (at least as we have used it in the past), Reason’s (1998) notion of co-operative inquiry could be used to modify and further enhance the method. This involves ensuring that:

...all those involved in the research are both co-researchers, whose thinking and decision making contribute to generating ideas, designing and managing the project, and drawing conclusions from the experience, and also co-subjects, participating in the activity being researched (p. 264, emphasis in the original).

This could mean that the initiating researchers would allow consumers to be actively engaged in determining how the research would progress. Although we have typically sought the opinions of our own participants with respect to our findings, we have not taken the extra steps outlined by Reason that would categorize our method as truly
co-operative. Alternatively, a group of researchers could actively study their own shopping behavior.

Final reflections
Although potentially yielding great benefits to researchers interested in retail-oriented behavior, SWC has been relatively overlooked as a viable and valuable research technique. We hope this paper and our earlier work have demonstrated the value of incorporating this method into qualitative research design. For if “learning by doing” is a truism, certainly learning by shopping with consumers is the methodological parallel to this adage.

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