

Consumer Purchase Intention towards Floral Products: A Study Based on the Five Consumption Values

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Abstract—This paper focused on the factors affecting consumers' choice of flower shops for purchasing floral products by interviewing 11 heavy users of floral products based on the five consumption values. The research collected data on how and at what level these values may affect consumer consumption choices individually. The finding showed that the human touch from the retailer's service (emotional value) is the most important for consumers for floral products consumption instead of product quality (functional value), which is generally considered the most influential value in consumers' choice of tangible products. Various factors under each of the other three consumption values are also explored for consumer purchase of floral products.

Keywords—consumer purchase intention, consumption values, SMEs, floral business

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the floral industry has prompted the understanding of consumer behaviour in flower consumption in China (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, retailers must understand what customers value in their floral buying experience and purchase decisions to apply the right strategy. Most research on floral consumption in Asia is quantitative (Huang & Yeh, 2009; Lai & Huang, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2023). A lack of qualitative research studies the consumers' floral purchase behaviour in-depth, and there is no research about floral products purchased in Macau. Therefore, this research is a first step in understanding what factors affect consumers' purchasing intentions and behaviours regarding floral product purchases in Macau.

This research aims to determine what affects consumers' choice of floral shops when purchasing flowers in Macau through qualitative, in-depth interviews. From the perception of the heavy users of floral products, we apply the consumption values proposed by Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) to analyse their behaviour towards floral consumption. This research adopted a purposive sampling targeting female office workers between the ages of 20 and 50, who are heavy users of floral products that purchase more than once a month.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers can be categorised into personal and gift users (Goodwin *et al.*, 1990). Regarding floral purchases, personal users focus more on external sources of product information, whereas gift users are more concerned about word of mouth (Huang, 2007). In Macau, it is common to buy flowers for both self-use and as gifts at special festivals, and consumers tend to value high-quality and expensive products (Luo, 2021). The demand in Macau is big because gift-giving culture is very common during festivals such as New Year,

Mother's Day and graduation ceremonies (Lou, 2022).

Their purchase motives influence Consumers' choices (Goodwin *et al.*, 1990). According to prior research, both self-users and gift users tend to choose retail stores with good reputations because they can ensure the quality of the product (Huang, 2007). However, many other factors influence the consumption behaviour of consumers, including internal influences, social influences, and situational influences (Wu, 2020). We will focus on five consumption values that will affect the consumers' purchase decision: functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value as consumers make their purchase decisions on floral products based on different values for different uses and purposes (Huang & Yeh, 2009).

Functional value is often considered the primary driver of consumer choice since consumers may alter their choice based on the product's characteristics or attributes (Ferber, 1973). The reason consumers purchase floral products for decoration is that they like the smells and appearance of them. Many commercial buildings will get a lot of potted plants in the office because they believe the product could improve the working environment by refreshing and cleaning the air, increasing productivity, and reducing stress (Thomsen *et al.*, 2011).

Although floral products have short longevity, lack trendiness, and are relatively expensive, many consumers are still willing to pay for their social value as gifts for their loved ones on special festivals like Mother's Day and Valentine's Day (Huang & Lin, 2015). Group membership can also influence individual behaviour, so social value strongly affects consumer choice because expectations of thoughts are based on shared beliefs within a specific culture or social group (Lau, 1989).

Besides, social influences mean consumers may be affected by the opinions of people around them, like friends and family. To avoid a bad quality product, people tend to listen to suggestions and recommendations from friends and family (Youl, 2002).

Emotional value can be positive or negative, representing positive feelings such as confidence, comfort, excitement, and pleasure or negative ones like fear and anger (Desmet, 2021). Goods and services are often associated with an emotional response (Sheth *et al.*, 1991).

Every business would agree that customer satisfaction is vital for success, and customer satisfaction measurement is now one of the leading performance indicators with net profit and return on assets (Barlow & Maul, 2000). Therefore, moving the customer with good service and relationships is important because their purchasing decisions are all infused

with emotion.

Moreover, emotions can influence consumers' decision to purchase impulsively if they are impressed by the context of the atmosphere created by the business (Liao *et al.*, 2016) or the background music played by the store (Guéguen & Jacob, 2010). As a result, they will do more buying than planned.

Epistemic value is related to the desire for knowledge and can be motivated by intellectual curiosity or seeking novelty (Desmet, 2021). Consumers tend to switch their choices and search for new experiences due to the motives of exploratory, novelty and variety seeking (Hirschman, 1980). Some customers may switch plans for credit cards and long-distance telephone services because they try to compare which service plan is more suitable and cost-effective for them (Gerrard & Cunningham, 2004).

However, not everyone likes to seek novelty. The greater the risk in future choices, the greater the customer's propensity to reduce choices and engage in relational market behaviour (Baker, 2001). Therefore, retailers can retain existing customers, although part of the consumer choice may be affected by epistemic value. Build customer loyalty by consistently providing high-quality services and products (Lohani & Bhatia, 2012).

Conditional value due to the nearby availability of the product or discounts offered is the most significant factor affecting consumer behavioural intentions (Qasim *et al.*, 2019). For instance, consumers in Macau like to buy flowers during cultural festivals such as Chinese New Year, they will purchase floral products which symbolise good luck (Yeung & Yee, 2010).

Other factors affecting consumer purchase intention include internal factors such as the personal value of consumers. These factors may affect the consumer's personality, how they develop their attitude towards a product, and how much they desire it (Prasad & Jha, 2014). Although personality variables lack control, it was reported that a general impulsive buying tendency is strongly rooted in personality (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001).

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted a qualitative method to answer the question: What factors affected consumers' choice of flower shops when purchasing flowers in Macau? The qualitative method was to understand the consumer more deeply through their narrative of experiences from in-depth face-to-face interviews (Jarratta & Fayed, 2001; Queirós *et al.*, 2017), which could not be achieved with the quantitative method based on pre-established factors and statements (Mays & Pope, 1995). What we knew about the consumer was general. Without interaction, we could not understand consumer's thoughts. Therefore, we intend to guide interviewees with semi-structured interview questions that allow them to think and speak more through recollecting their experiences (Gill *et al.*, 2008).

We adopted a purposive sampling targeting heavy users of floral products with 16 questions covering the five consumption values to understand their reasons for recurring purchases and the key consumption values that affected their purchase decision. Eleven interviews were conducted when the data met saturation. The target for this research is female office workers between the ages of 20 and 50 with repeat

purchasing habits from flower shops.

The transcripts were analysed, coded, and categorised under the five consumption values concerning the consumers' choice of flower shops in Macau using the Thematic Content Analysis Method. The results were consolidated to determine how these values affect consumer consumption.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected through face-to-face, in-depth interviews with female-heavy users of floral products in Macau was guided by the consumption values including functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values. This section lays out the data analysis under the different consumption values to determine the key factors affecting the purchase behaviour of floral products customers.

A. Functional Value: Self-enjoyment for Mood Enhancement

Consumers may buy a floral product depending on many functional variables such as price, durability, and quality. The research found out all the interviewees like to purchase floral products for their own use, and only 6 have the habit of buying flowers for others. So, further exploration was conducted from the interviews to draw out the functional values that the floral products create for these interviewees.

All the interviewees stated that purchasing floral products makes them happy and energetic. One interviewee said, "*It is pleasing to observe their (the plants) way of changing.*" Others also expressed their interest in observing the growth process of their plants.

Another interviewee said, "*It makes me feel brand new and in a good mood.*" One of them likes to purchase flowers based on religious functions. "*Since I have to replace fresh flowers for Buddha, I need to purchase flowers weekly.*" Two of them like to purchase flowers because they believe they can create good feng shui, one interviewee expressed that, "*Flowers can help to attract good luck and relationships. I believe it can improve my fortune.*"

Although majority of the interviewees prefer potted plants, and believe they are more cost-effective and long-lasting compared to flowers, they would still purchase flowers as they believe they can match in different combinations and look pretty as decoration, take up less space, and that flowers can be changed rapidly. They expressed that their daily mood can be enhanced by changing flowers.

Therefore, in terms of the functional value of purchasing floral products, the value provided by the products to these consumers is the enjoyment of nurturing the products which enhance their mood.

B. Conditional Value: Preferred Variety and Location over Promotion

All the interviewees for this research agree that they would definitely purchase special flowers during festivals, although majority of them said that they buy flowers at any time. However, as one of them stated: "*For celebrating Chinese New Year, I would purchase some floral products to represent good luck.*" And our interviewees tend to be willing to spend more on flowers during festivals.

When asked whether a discount is a factor they would consider when buying flowers, eight interviewees said they

care more about the quality and variety than the discount the retailers offer. *"If the flowers are promoted at a low price but with bad quality, I will not buy them."* One of the interviewees stated, *"The appearance of the flower is important to me."* Only three of them care about the price. Therefore, the promotion is effective for them. Besides, ten of them stated that if the promotion were not for the flowers they wanted, they would not make any purchases. Quoting one of the interviewees, *"I will go to another shop to search for what I want [...] Unless I feel interested in the new flower product being promoted, the promotion will not be able to change my mind at that moment."*

It is not hard to see that consumer purchase on purpose and depend on their preference instead of being attracted by promotions. However, as a conditional value, location is an important consideration. Only three of the interviewees think that location is not important. Others consider location important as it concerns delivering the floral product home in good shape. *"Since I have a car, I do not care where the shop is."* One interviewee said, *"The quality is the only thing that matters to me."* But the majority think location is very important as it may be troublesome to travel far carrying the plants and damaging the products. One interviewee stressed that given that the location is convenient, *"even if the price is a bit higher, I am willing to pay for it."* Therefore, product variety and location are the key conditional values affecting floral purchases.

C. Social Value: As a Preferred Gift over Enhancing Relationships

Customers may purchase the floral product for friends and families in Macau because it shows respect and care for the people. Four of our interviewees think that buying floral products can help to enhance good relationships with others because they can have more topics to share. However, seven interviewees think that the sharing can only be interesting for those who like flowers. Therefore, they do not think buying floral products for others can always enhance relationships.

A few interviewees like to give flowers as a gift because they think it is meaningful and suitable for the receiver. One interviewee said, *"I think different flowers contain different meanings. They can express my care towards the recipient."* The majority of them think that most gifts receivers like flowers as it makes them happy, especially giving them during special occasions. As one interviewee said: *"We always take photos on special occasions such as graduation ceremonies, and flowers always be the best props to bring along with."* Two of them think it is a good way to express care and love for others during festivals. Only three of the interviewees seldom give flowers as gifts.

The results show that although floral products may not enhance relationships by creating new topics or foster discussions in our interviewees' opinion, most of them still purchase flowers as a preferred gift because they think that flowers make the receivers happy and are relevant for special occasions.

D. Emotional Value: Essential Human Touch from Floral Shops

The feeling of trustworthiness and originality provided by the floral stores come to our interviewees' minds in the first place when they are making a purchase decision. These are

the main factors that retain the consumer's loyalty because they create the feelings that the consumer wants, and expectations are taken into consideration by the shop.

Eight interviewees think membership in a flower retailer is appreciated, while two think it depends on how much they need to pay for the membership. However, the service provided can enhance their loyalty more than providing memberships. One interviewee commented, *"Being nice and giving a little gift can be more effective to retain customers than membership."* However, one has a different opinion, *"Floral products with more diversity will attract me to be a member instead of a small discount or gift. Such as providing packages with a cake and flower so I can give it to a friend as a gift set directly."*

One interviewee suggested, *"The flower retailer can open a WeChat group to share daily flower information with the group members. Telling us about the arrival of new stock and some activities like special workshops or discount promotions."* The interviewee even said, *"It would be great if the shop could help me design the monthly flower combination. So, it will be convenient for me to take orders immediately without struggling with what to buy every time."*

Five of the interviewees think it is great for a flower retailer to provide them with updates on the floral product. *"It can allow us to be aware of new stock easily immediately,"* the interviewee said.

Seven of them agree that after-sale service through social media effectively attracts sales because it provides a channel to communicate with the shop, and the owner can teach them how to take care of the plants to last longer. *"It will be convenient to ask for help by reaching the owner online, and it provides us the chance to solve the problem without visiting the store directly."*

Therefore, consumers value building a close relationship with the floral shops rather than general benefits like discounts. It is a sense of human touch that consumers value.

E. Epistemic Value: Product Variety is Important to the Consumer

All the interviewees agreed that the variety of floral products is necessary to arouse their purchase intention. One interviewee shared, *"If a flower shop only provides a few choices, people will search for other species from other flower shops."* They believe that the shop will be more outstanding with more special species and offer more choices to consumers as like novelty and agreed that new products can catch their attention and stimulate desire to purchase.

All interviewees agreed that displaying various floral products in the shop would draw consumers' attention. However, the level of consumption also depends on the consumer's budget and preference. Three interviewees admit that beautiful displays increase their urge to purchase and like to stay longer in the shop. Nine of the interviewees expressed that they like to shop around for variety. One of them emphasised, *"I like to discover different kinds of floral products in different shops. Like buying clothes, you do not only purchase in one shop."* Another interviewee added, *"I would like to look for new species that looks pretty and lasts longer. It would be great if the price is reasonable at the same time."*

Therefore, we conclude that in terms of epistemic value,

product variety can enhance the purchase intention of heavy users of floral products.

F. The Most Important Factor

Three interviewees value the quality the most. They think the appearance of the product must be satisfied to please themselves. Six interviewees value service the most. They think that a good attitude is necessary. *“The product can be similar, but the shop owner must be nice and maintain a good attitude. That is the way of doing business,”* one of the interviewees said. Furthermore, one of them emphasised that *“The flower retailer should import the flower consumers want and teach us how to take care of it.”*

One interviewee thinks that cost-effectiveness is most important in her opinion. *“I replace the flowers almost every day, so I care about the price more than anything,”* One interviewee valued the variety of the product the most because it offers novelty to discover different floral products in one shop.

As a result, most interviewees think that service is the most important factor affecting them to repeat purchases from the same flower retailer. It is one of the factors categorised as emotional value because providing personal service helps to enhance the relationship between the flower retailer and the consumer. It can please and satisfy the consumer by making them feel they are being valued. Some personal services beyond consumer expectations can impress them and eventually gain their favour.

V. CONCLUSION

In contrast to prior research that indicated functional value, such as product quality as the primary driver of consumers' purchase decision (Ferber, 1973; Huang, 2007), or conditional value, such as nearby availability of the product or discounts offered as the most significant factor affecting consumer behavioural intentions (Qasim *et al.*, 2019), our research shows that emotional value in the form of service with human touch is the foremost consideration when heavy floral products users choose a shop. Barlow & Maul (2000) pointed out the importance of moving the customer with good service and relationships because their purchasing decisions are all infused with emotions. Our research supports their view since all the interviewees expressed the importance of close relationships with flower retailers who can provide more personal service to satisfy their wants and expectations, such as updating the product information, providing after-sales services, and teaching them how to take care of the plants. It can help the flower retailers in Macau to build a good relationship with the existing customers by impressing them with good services and attitudes.

We also found that the functional value our interviewees seek from floral purchases is mostly for their self-enjoyment, as flowers and other floral products, such as potted plants, can enhance their mood. This could also explain the reason for their frequent purchase of floral products. The Epistemic value in the form of a variety of flower species is also key to motivating floral purchases. However, conditional values such as discounts do not affect these heavy floral users as much as the novelty of different flowers and easy accessibility of the shop location. In terms of social value, although individual behaviour can be influenced by group

membership (Lau, 1989), it does not affect consumer choice very much in Macau. However, the suggestions from fellow floral product lovers can influence their purchase decision, which aligns with Youl's (2002) research. In addition, previous research shows that flowers are perceived as emotional gifts and are used mainly to convey givers' affection to the receivers (Huang *et al.*, 2015). Most interviewees like to give flowers as a gift, although they also give floral products to show care and affection; the main intention of giving flowers is for specific celebrations, or they know the recipients also like flowers.

As a result of this research, we provide a more in-depth view of what heavy floral products users value. For small floral retailers to gain and retain regular customers, they need to develop a human touch in their services and close contact with their customers, especially by sharing knowledge of nurturing plants. Also, good quality and a vast variety of floral products are necessary to attract customers who mainly buy them for personal use, which is for self-enjoyment and mood elevation. Even gift users tend to give floral products to those who like the products and thus have similar values.

The research has its limitations. Although service (emotional value), variety (epistemic value), and quality for enhancing mood (functional value) are found to be the main factors affecting consumer's choice of flower retailers in Macau, these only apply to our target group, female-heavy users of floral products. Their opinion towards flower shops can be similar because they have similar lifestyles, such as frequently purchasing floral products for self-enjoyment and shopping for various flower species. This research does not cover the consumption values for mid-, light-users, and male consumers. Moreover, this research focuses on Macau only, and the result may not apply to the behaviour of heavy users of floral products with different cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, there is room for the future directly based on this research. Qualitative research can be conducted with different demographic groups and behavioural groups, such as the mid and light users. Moreover, the result of the in-depth interviews can be developed into surveys to reach a larger population for quantitative analysis in order to generalise the findings. Furthermore, comparative studies can be developed with heavy floral users of different cultural or demographic backgrounds to understand the differences which can benefit floral retailers selling to a multi-cultural city like Macau.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Lei conducted the research and analysed the data; Phillips edited the findings and wrote the paper; both authors had approved the final version.

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