

Consumer Search: An Extended Framework

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While consumer search behavior has been studied for many years, its treatment has been limited to purchase contexts. This article defines ongoing search as search occurring outside of the purchase process, and places it within an overall framework for consumer search. In addition, it presents results of an exploratory study of ongoing search indicating that recreational or hedonic motives for ongoing search are more significant than practical, informational motives. This study also shows that product involvement is strongly linked to ongoing search and that ongoing searches appear to be important elements in the marketplace.

Although consumer search has been investigated for years, nearly all of the many studies have focused on prepurchase events—that is, information gathering relevant to a specific consumption problem (see Claxton, Fry, and Portis 1974; Furse, Punj, and Stewart 1984; Newman 1977; Punj and Staelin 1983). This conceptualization embraces the traditional decision-making perspective, where a buying problem is recognized and search activity follows to help solve that problem. It is proposed here that an orientation focusing solely on prepurchase search is deficient and unable to account for search activity that is recreational or that occurs without a recognized consumption need. Such activities as browsing in an antique shop or subscribing to an automotive magazine by persons not in the market for these products are not addressed by traditional search theories. In such situations as these, product information is obtained, yet the plan to purchase within the product class may be indistinct, temporarily removed, or in some cases, nonexistent.

In addition to conceptual shortcomings, limiting the study of search to prepurchase settings can understate the amount of information consumers have at their disposal when making a purchase. Many studies have found that despite the obvious benefits derived from prepurchase search, consumers have surprisingly little enthusiasm for the pursuit, even when buying expensive

or socially risky goods (see Newman 1977). Claxton, Fry, and Portis provide one explanation for the observed lack of prepurchase search reported by consumers (1974, p. 35):

Information gathering is a continuous process, even when the purchase is not foreseen. As a result, when the decision is made to make a purchase, relatively little explicit search is required.

Therefore, studies relying on prepurchase contexts may only assess a subset of consumers' total search activity.

Although consumer search has long been conceptualized as a prepurchase activity, a few researchers have recognized that consumers search at other times and for other reasons. Tauber (1972) delineated a list of shopping motives, most of which were separate from desires to make a good purchase. Bellenger and Korgoankar (1980) found that many consumers enjoy the act of shopping itself, without respect to buying, while Bloch and Richins (1983) found that retail store browsing was positively related to product interest, product knowledge, and word-of-mouth activity concerning the product. While the studies just described have provided a broader perspective on search behavior, they are still limited to retail settings. Search outside a purchase context can involve a wide range of activities; for example, reading a fashion magazine to see the newest styles or discussing fashion trends with friends can serve the same purpose as browsing through a clothing boutique. The research described in this article addresses limitations of the existing literature noted above by examining search activity that is not linked to purchase

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FIGURE
A FRAMEWORK FOR CONSUMER INFORMATION SEARCH

	PREPURCHASE SEARCH	ONGOING SEARCH	
DETERMINANTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in the purchase • Market environment • Situational factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement with the product • Market environment • Situational factors 	
MOTIVES	To make better purchase decisions	Build a bank of information for future use	Experience fun and pleasure
OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased product and market knowledge • Better purchase decisions • Increased satisfaction with the purchase outcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased product and market knowledge leading to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -future buying efficiencies -personal influence • Increased impulse buying • Increased satisfaction from search, and other outcomes. 	

intent and by incorporating search elements outside the retail setting.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework presented here delineates the determinants, motives, and outcomes of prepurchase and ongoing search, which are summarized in the Figure. Before discussing these framework components, however, it is important to distinguish between prepurchase search and ongoing search. *Prepurchase search* has been defined as (Kelly 1968, p. 273):

Information seeking and processing activities which one engages in to facilitate decision making regarding some goal object in the marketplace.

Search occurring outside of purchase contexts, as noted earlier, is a considerably more obscure concept and is the primary focus of the present investigation. *Ongoing search* is conceptualized here as search activities that are independent of specific purchase needs or decisions. That is, ongoing search does not occur in order to solve a recognized and immediate purchase problem.

While it is conceptually useful to differentiate ongoing search from prepurchase search, the two concepts are difficult to separate in practice. The problem lies with precisely specifying when a purchase problem has been recognized and the decision process started. The willingness and ability of the consumer to make a purchase at the time the search occurs may be the best distinguishing characteristic of these two search domains. When a person is searching with an interest in a product but without a demand (i.e., financial resources or intention to buy are lacking), s/he is engaging in ongoing rather than prepurchase search. The border between

the two processes is further obscured by the possibility of impulse purchasing.

The term "ongoing" indicates that the behavior occurs on a relatively regular basis, independent of sporadic purchase needs. Ongoing search for automobiles, for example, may include subscriptions to automotive magazines. In contrast, prepurchase search may involve reading the same magazines, but only once every three or four years, when a new car purchase is at hand. While prepurchase search and ongoing search can be differentiated by their purposes, the activities involved would appear identical to an outside observer (Furse, Punj, and Stewart 1984).

Search Determinants

In a prepurchase context, the extent of search is determined, in part, by the buyer's short-term involvement with the consumption problem resulting from risk perceptions (Clarke and Belk 1979; Moore and Lehmann 1980; Newman 1977). Other factors influencing levels of prepurchase search include the market environment, situational factors, and product familiarity (Moore and Lehmann 1980). Levels of ongoing search are also a function of involvement (Bloch 1981; Bloch and Richins 1983; Tigert, Ring, and King 1976). In this case, however, the involvement is enduring in character, reflecting a continuing interest or enthusiasm rather than the temporary product interest resulting from purchase requirements. As with prepurchase search, levels of ongoing search are also influenced by market factors such as the availability of product information and time or other situational constraints.

Search Motives

The consumer's primary motive for prepurchase search is to enhance the quality of the purchase outcome (Punj and Staelin 1983). Ongoing search, on the other hand, may involve two basic motives. The first is to acquire a bank of product information potentially useful in the future (either for personal use or for dissemination to others; see Hirschman and Wallendorf 1982). The second motive is pleasure or recreation. In this case, consumers engage in ongoing search for its intrinsic satisfactions. In practice, it may prove difficult to separate these two motives for ongoing search. There is empirical and conceptual support, however, for making such a dichotomy. Hirschman (1980), for example, introduced the notion that some consumers seek cognitive or informational stimulation, while others seek sensory stimulation in the consumption experience. Venkatraman and MacInnis (1985) extended the cognitive/hedonic dichotomy to search activities, albeit only in a prepurchase context. It is proposed here that the informational/hedonic dichotomy can be extended to ongoing search.

Search to Build Information Banks. The first ongoing search motive, information banking, involves increasing product expertise, but for reasons other than to optimize the outcome of a planned purchase. Expertise can also make a consumer feel well informed, enhance product care, add to feelings of self-actualization, and improve the quality of future product selections (Fleischmann 1981). Ongoing search to build product knowledge and prepurchase search are similar in their functional orientations. The central difference is the consumer's ability and/or readiness to buy at the time of the search activity. For ongoing search, a purchase problem is not recognized and the buying decision may be temporally quite removed. Because it is difficult to specify precisely when the purchase process begins, it may be profitable to consider the information-banking aspect of ongoing search as an extension of prepurchase search contexts.

Search as Recreation. The second proposed motivation for ongoing search activity is to have fun or to experience positive affect. Punj and Staelin (1983) have noted that some consumers get pleasure from seeking information about products, and many authors have studied inherent pleasure as the motivation for a variety of behaviors (see Csikszentmihalyi 1983; Miller 1973). In these situations, activities are not guided by goals or outcomes, but by the process itself. This process orientation to behavior has been given a variety of names, including Funktionslust (Buhler 1930), ludic behavior (Berlyne 1960), and intrinsic motivation (Deci 1975). It is proposed here that for some individuals, ongoing search behavior is such an activity—that is, it represents a leisure pursuit performed as an end in itself.

Outcomes of Search

Search activities lead to a variety of outcomes. For prepurchase search, outcomes noted in the literature include better choice decisions, increased product and market expertise, and heightened satisfaction with a purchasing job well done (Punj and Staelin 1983). Whether motivated by desires for product knowledge or hedonic response, ongoing search also culminates in several outcomes described below.

Future Purchasing Efficiencies. The ongoing searcher acquires product and marketplace information on a regular basis, even if the primary motivator of the activity is pleasure seeking. Therefore, product expertise developed through ongoing search makes a consumer more efficient—able to rely more heavily on less costly internal search when a relevant consumption problem arises in the future (Bettman 1979). When considered in an ongoing search framework, even consumers reporting little prepurchase search may be well prepared to make a satisfying purchase decision.

Personal Influence. Product information obtained through ongoing search is likely to be disseminated to friends and family, as product expertise is related to opinion leadership (Leonard-Barton 1985; Price and Feick 1984). A recent study by an automotive market research firm found that two-thirds of new car buyers relied most heavily on information provided by their social contacts in deciding on a make of car (J. D. Power and Associates 1984). In addition, a survey by *Car and Driver* (1978) found that each of its readers makes an average of 19 new car recommendations a year. These findings indicate that ongoing searchers may have considerable influence in the marketplace.

Impulse Buying. An ongoing searcher browsing in a retail establishment without an intent to buy may, nevertheless, leave the store with a purchase. It is reasonable to assume that the more frequently one is in a store, for whatever the reason, the greater the likelihood that one will buy (Bellenger, Robertson, and Hirschman 1978). Given the growing significance of catalog marketing and toll-free order lines, such impulse buying also may be found among ongoing searchers in the print medium.

The outcomes of ongoing search described above constitute a representative, but not exhaustive list. A number of other outcomes are possible, including improvements in problem solving skills, increased leisure satisfaction, and regulation of variety drives.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

The quality of available evidence for the above framework is uneven. While hypothesized relationships for prepurchase search have been extensively investigated, those for ongoing search are based on more tentative evidence. To bolster knowledge of ongoing search and to provide empirical support for portions of the framework above, an empirical study was undertaken. In conducting this study, there were three specific objectives:

1. To determine whether informational and recreational motives for ongoing search have significant and equal impact on level of ongoing search, or whether one motive is a stronger determinant.
2. To examine the relationship between ongoing search and product involvement.
3. To assess the impact ongoing searchers have in the marketplace.

Product Classes Studied

In choosing products for this study, the primary criterion was the potential for ongoing search among consumers. In particular, products were sought for which available information is high and for which a relatively wide range of ongoing search levels across subjects can

EXHIBIT
OPERATIONALIZATION OF VARIABLES

Ongoing search measures ^a	Perceived informativeness and enjoyment of ongoing search activities ^b
Clothing	Clothing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you visit clothing stores or departments, just to look around or get information, rather than to make a specific purchase? • In a typical month, how many clothing catalogs do you look through? • How many clothing or fashion-related magazines do you subscribe to/read regularly, but do not subscribe to? • How often do you talk to friends and acquaintances to get information or advice concerning clothing and clothing styles? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to clothing stores • Discussions with retail salespersons • Looking at clothing catalogs • Reading ads in fashion magazines • Reading articles in fashion magazines • Discussions with friends
Personal computers	Personal computers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you visit computer stores or departments, just to look around or get information, rather than to make a specific purchase? • How often do you browse through computer book sections at bookstores? • How many personal computer magazines do you subscribe to/read regularly, but do not subscribe to? • How often do you talk to friends and acquaintances to get information or advice concerning personal computers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to computer stores • Discussions with retail salespersons • Browsing through computer book sections • Reading ads in computer magazines • Reading articles in computer magazines • Discussions with friends • Discussions with other computer users

^a Because ranges of individual items varied, the items were standardized prior to summation or reliability testing.

^b Informativeness was measured on 5-point scales that ranged from "Not at all informative" to "Extremely informative." Enjoyment was measured on companion scales that ranged from "Not at all enjoyable" to "Extremely enjoyable."

be observed. Based on these considerations and the desire to add generalizability to study findings, two product classes were chosen: clothing and personal computers. While these product classes differ in many ways, they both offer ample opportunity to engage in ongoing search. There are numerous retail stores and special interest magazines focusing on these classes, and product differentiation and rates of product change are high enough to stimulate search behavior.

Method and Sample

Questionnaires were mailed to a probability sample of 1,500 respondents in a Sunbelt SMSA. Since it is unlikely that any general SMSA frame would contain enough subjects who engage in high levels of ongoing search for a given product to provide adequate construct range and response variance, the probability sample was supplemented with two additional samples of subjects presumed to be more involved with the product classes under study. Thus, surveys were also sent to 383 individuals on customer mailing lists provided by women's and men's clothing specialty stores and to 460 persons on local computer-store mailing lists. Since relationships between constructs rather than generalization to specific populations were of interest, this procedure was deemed appropriate (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1982). A second questionnaire wave was sent approximately 10 days after the first to stimulate response.

Of the approximately 2,300 surveys mailed, 712 were returned, providing a 29 percent overall response rate.

The response rates differed, however, across the three subsamples employed in the study. For the personal computer, clothing, and general random samples, the response rates were 54 percent, 40 percent, and 19 percent, respectively. The relatively low response of the probability sample can be attributed to lower interest levels and to the relatively high number of rural and low-income addresses contained in that sample. Editing produced a total usable sample of 679.

Measures

Ongoing Search. Product-specific multi-item indices were used to assess levels of ongoing search in several domains: retail settings, the mass media, and interpersonal sources (see the Exhibit). Each item was worded to emphasize activity that occurs on a regular basis and that can thus be presumed to be independent of purchasing. Individual items were standardized, then summed. Item analyses of the two ongoing search indices showed satisfactory internal consistency with alpha coefficients of 0.70 for clothing and 0.80 for personal computers.

Scores among the three subsamples were compared to partially validate the search indices. For clothing, the mean search index score for the clothing boutique customers was 1.63, while the general sample and the personal computer sample produced scores of -0.26 and -1.34, respectively. Results were also as expected for the personal computer index. The computer-store sample mean was 2.20, compared to -1.19 for the general

sample and -1.46 for the clothing-store sample. The differences in group means were significant ($p < 0.001$) for both product classes ($F = 50.9$, $df = 2,582$; $F = 138.6$, $df = 2,651$).¹ These results not only provide evidence of measure validity, but also suggest that ongoing search is a product-specific phenomenon for a particular consumer segment. There was also a wide range of scores on the two indices, generally. Over the entire sample, clothing-search scores ranged from -3.58 to 8.97 , and the computer-search scores ranged from -2.73 to 10.22 . These findings support the use of clothing and personal computers as products with wide variance in ongoing search.

Search Benefits. To investigate the two proposed ongoing search motivations and address the first research objective, two sets of measures were developed. Respondents were asked to rate on five-point scales the informativeness of various ongoing search activities and the level of enjoyment derived from these activities (see the Exhibit).

Consumer Difference Variables. Enduring product involvement was measured by a pair of multi-item instruments that draw from the previous work of several researchers (Bloch 1982; Tigert, Ring, and King 1976). The product-specific involvement measures employed standardized items and summated scoring.² Impact on the marketplace was assessed by three items: (1) level of expenditures in the product category, (2) the importance to the respondent of new product developments as an indicator of innovativeness, and (3) opinion leadership concerning the product.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Motives for Ongoing Search

It was posited earlier that consumers engage in ongoing search in order to build a useful bank of product information and/or to experience pleasure in a product-oriented activity. This study related respondents' informativeness and enjoyment ratings to levels of ongoing search using both bivariate and multivariate analyses. Table 1 presents the results of these analyses.³

¹ In validating the ongoing search indices, sex differences were also examined. For both product classes, significant differences were observed. In the case of clothing, females engaged in more ongoing search than did males ($x = 1.56$ for females, $x = -1.24$ for males; $t = 190.50$; $df = 1,677$; $p < 0.001$), while the opposite was true for computers ($x = 0.92$ for males, $x = -1.09$ for females; $t = 75.21$; $df = 1,652$; $p < 0.001$).

² The specific items used for each involvement index were product interest, time spent thinking about the product, and average importance of the product to the performance of several social and career roles. The first item employed a four-point scale, while the other two items used five-point scales. The two three-item indices showed satisfactory reliability, with alphas of 0.83 and 0.77 for the clothing and computer measures, respectively.

³ To ensure that reports of ongoing search were not contaminated by prepurchase activities, analyses were also performed that excluded

informativeness ratings were used first as predictors of ongoing search, with enjoyment ratings added in a second stage of analysis. The practical or informational benefits of ongoing search were considered first because they represent an extension of traditional conceptualizations of search in prepurchase settings. The less well-known hedonic benefits of search were added to the model to determine how much additional explanatory potential they provide.

In the first multiple regression analysis, the perceived informativeness ratings of various ongoing search behaviors were used as predictors of companion items from the search indices. For example, the perceived informativeness of reading ads and articles in magazines was used to predict frequency of magazine readership. Separate analyses were run for each product class and for each of the ongoing search domains: retail browsing, media search, and interpersonal discussions. For both product classes, results showed weak predictability for the informativeness items alone. In the clothing class the informativeness items accounted for very little of the variance in the ongoing search measures, regardless of the information source. For computers the informativeness items were also poor predictors of ongoing search activities, explaining about one percent of the variance in the dependent variables.

Following these analyses, the enjoyment items were added to the informativeness items in the individual analyses to determine whether the recreational aspects of search added to the explained variance in ongoing search behaviors. Differences in obtained R^2 values between the informativeness items alone and the informativeness + enjoyment items were examined and tested for significance. For both product classes, the enjoyment items added significantly ($p < 0.001$) to the explained variance for all categories of ongoing search behavior. When enjoyment ratings are used in conjunction with informativeness ratings, approximately 25–30 percent of the variance in search behavior is explained. These results, combined with the simple correlations, indicate that the perceived enjoyment of ongoing search activities is a relatively effective predictor of the frequency of such activities. Thus, the traditional orientation that considers search to be determined solely by the practical information it provides is deficient.

Ongoing Search and Product Involvement

As noted above, product involvement appears to be a basic determinant of ongoing search. To examine the relationship between product involvement and ongoing

those respondents expecting to make a large purchase in one month for clothing and in three months for computers. Such screening did not produce significant changes in any of the results. The remaining sections of the article report results pertaining to the unscreened sample.

TABLE 1

IMPACT OF PERCEIVED INFORMATIVENESS AND ENJOYMENT OF ONGOING SEARCH BEHAVIORS ON LEVEL OF SEARCH*

Ongoing search behavior	Clothing			Computers		
	Informativeness rating r	Enjoyment rating r	Multiple regression results	Informativeness rating r	Enjoyment rating r	Multiple regression results
Frequency of store browsing						
Visits to retail stores	.24	.55		.08	.50	
Discussions with salespersons	.08	.23		.05	.24	
R ² (informativeness items)			.00			.01
R ² (informativeness and enjoyment items)			.31			.26
F for change in R ²			75.35 ^b			57.13 ^b
Amount of catalog/book browsing						
Reading clothing catalogs/Browsing in PC book sections	.38	.48		.23	.48	
R ² (informativeness items)			.01			.00
R ² (informativeness and enjoyment items)			.24			.23
F for change in R ²			105.08 ^c			98.94 ^c
Amount of magazine readership						
Reading magazine advertising	.35	.49		.20	.23	
Reading magazine articles	.38	.48		.19	.29	
R ² (informativeness items)			.01			.00
R ² (informativeness and enjoyment items)			.26			.09
F for change in R ²			59.20 ^b			16.16 ^b
Frequency of product discussions						
Discussing product with friends	.40	.51		.44	.53	
Discussing PCs with other users	—	—		.30	.37	
R ² (informativeness items)			.03			.02
R ² (informativeness and enjoyment items)			.29			.31
F for change in R ²			135.60 ^c			75.53 ^b

* All F ratios for change in R² are significant at $p < 0.001$.^b $df = 4,674$.^c $df = 2,676$.

search, the summed search and involvement indices were correlated. These correlations ($r = 0.70$ for clothing; $r = 0.67$ for computers, $p < 0.001$ for both) support previous research (Bloch 1981; Bloch and Richins 1983) showing a strong connection between a consumer's enduring involvement in a product class and the propensity to engage in ongoing search.

Marketplace Impact of Ongoing Searchers

To address the third research objective, respondents were divided into groups of heavy and light searchers based on a median split of ongoing search-index scores, and group differences on the three marketplace-impact variables were tested for significance (see Table 2). In addition, ongoing search-index scores were correlated with each marketplace item. Due to the strong relationship between ongoing search and involvement re-

ported earlier, partial correlations controlling for involvement levels were also obtained. These additional analyses would indicate the extent to which ongoing search and the marketplace variables were related independent of product involvement levels.

Ongoing searchers appear to be significant forces in the marketplace. Among the clothing sample, heavy ongoing searchers spend over twice as much in the same time period as do light searchers, and among computer owners, heavy ongoing searchers have over three times as much invested in their computer systems as do light searchers. The partial correlations indicate that even after respondents' level of product involvement is accounted for, ongoing search is significantly related to product expenditures.

Levels of ongoing search are also related to the perceived importance of keeping up with new product developments, indicating a potential for innovativeness.

TABLE 2
COMPARISONS ON MARKETPLACE IMPACT ITEMS*

Marketplace Impact Items	Clothing				Computers			
	Low ongoing searchers	High ongoing searchers	Simple r^b	Partial r^c	Low ongoing searchers	High ongoing searchers	Simple r	Partial r
Dollars spent: on clothes in last six months/on PC system among PC owners	\$282	\$631	.35	.19	\$1,255	\$4,613	.46	.29
Importance of keeping up with new product developments (5-point scale)	2.42	3.65	.56	.05*	2.02	3.87	.57	.17
Amount of product information given to others (5-point scale)	1.35	2.80	.70	.46	1.36	2.89	.68	.51

* All tests of mean differences, correlation coefficients, and partial correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$ except where noted with *.

^b Correlations between impact items and ongoing search index.

^c Partial correlations between impact items and ongoing search index while controlling for reported involvement index scores. Analyses of covariance using involvement scores as a covariate were also performed for both product categories. With the exception of keeping up with new product developments for clothing, the means for the low and high ongoing searchers remained significantly different at $p < 0.01$.

However, the partial correlations indicate that this relationship is largely due to product involvement, particularly in the case of clothing. Heavy ongoing searchers also reported significantly higher levels of word-of-mouth activity than did light searchers. This result is not surprising, since the product expertise gained through ongoing search makes the searcher sought after by other consumers. The relationship between opinion leadership and ongoing search remained strong for both product classes even when involvement levels were taken into account.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research has elaborated the concept of consumer search and provided a framework for more comprehensive examinations of this topic in the future. In addition, it has developed measures of ongoing search potentially useful in future research. It has also demonstrated some of the deficiencies of traditional orientations toward search as part of a general broadening of consumer research to include all aspects of consumption. This framework suggests that a number of consumers gather product information on a regular basis from a variety of sources with two general objectives: to augment stores of product knowledge and to experience pleasure. Although it is likely that ongoing search meets both objectives simultaneously, data presented here indicate that hedonic benefits are considerably more relevant.

Conclusions concerning the relative impact of informational and hedonic motives must be tempered by limitations in the present research, however. It is pos-

sible that informativeness as measured here represents a less personal concept than enjoyment and so is easier to rate in a hypothetical manner. But rating enjoyment should depend more on first-hand experience, and thereby produce richer responses. Certainly, more sophisticated measures of these motivations would further understanding of ongoing search.

This study has also demonstrated a strong relationship between ongoing search and enduring involvement. The reader should note, however, that the direction of this relationship remains unclear. Though it is tacitly assumed here that involvement represents an internal motivating state of the consumer that manifests itself in a variety of outcomes, one of which is ongoing search, ongoing search activity may have a reciprocal influence on involvement. When ongoing search is pleasurable and product expertise is increased, one might expect increased attachment to the product class through a type of conditioning.

Ongoing searchers are also distinguished by a prominent position in the marketplace. Heavy searchers were found to be heavy spenders within the product class. These spending levels are likely the result of high new product awareness and frequent contact with retailers. In addition, the ongoing searcher is eager to learn of new product developments and is willing to talk about them. Although product involvement plays a role in the observed relationships, ongoing search was shown to have a distinct effect on the marketplace.

In considering future investigations of ongoing search, several promising avenues of inquiry exist. One concerns the demarcation line between prepurchase search and ongoing search. To identify this boundary, research must focus on the exact beginning of the pur-

chase process. In other words, can the point at which a consumption problem is recognized be identified? Greater knowledge of the starting phase of the purchase-decision process will greatly enhance understanding of consumption activities thought to be outside the buying domain. A related question concerns how patterns of information gathering may differ between ongoing searchers and prepurchase searchers. It would be interesting to determine whether ongoing search in a given product class tends to entail consulting sources different from those consulted during prepurchase search. In addition, certain sources of information may be preferred more by ongoing searchers than by prepurchase searchers, regardless of product category.

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