SHOPPING IN VIRTUAL WORLDS:
PERCEPTIONS, MOTIVATIONS, AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

Avatars are spending millions of dollars yearly on shopping for virtual items in free-form Virtual Worlds (VWs), such as Second Life. Some studies explaining Virtual World users' motivations to spend real money on virtual items from a consumer point of view are only available for game-oriented VWs and not for the free-form type. By means of conducting in-depth interviews with Second Life shoppers, the current paper: (1) explores the added value perceived from shopping in free-form VWs, (2) discusses free-form VW shopping motivations in relation to those in game-oriented VWs as well as to traditional and online shopping motivations, (3) reveals users' motivations to 'reside' in VWs, and finally (4) classifies and profiles VW shoppers into distinct VW shopper types considering their shopping behavior and store preferences.

Keywords: shopping motivations, Virtual Worlds, virtual items, shopper typology, Second Life.

1. Introduction

Virtual Worlds (abbreviated as VWs) are 3D Internet-based simulated environments that can be categorized into game-oriented and free-form worlds (Bainbridge, 2007). While the users in game-oriented Virtual Worlds have a goal to achieve (e.g., World of Warcraft), free-form Virtual Worlds are environments that mimic the real world with no specific goal imposed by the Virtual World, such as Second Life, There and Meet Me (Hassouneh and Brengman, 2011). As of Q3 2009, the total number of registered VW users is believed to be around 671 million worldwide and they are spending around $1.8 billion on virtual assets (KZero, 2009; Guo and Barnes, 2007). In Second Life (abbreviated as SL) alone, $150 million worth of virtual items were traded between residents in the third quarter of 2009, up 54% from the same period a year earlier (Linden, 2009). Reperes (2007), a marketing research company, surveyed 419 residents of the VW SL about their purchase habits. They found that shopping constitutes a popular activity with 72% of VW residents surveyed stating to go shopping in the VW at least weekly and over half of them making a purchase on a weekly basis. Some studies from a consumer point of view explaining VW users' motivations to spend real money on virtual items are available only for game-oriented VWs (Lehdonvirta, 2005; Guo and Barnes, 2009) and not for the free-form type, such as SL. The current study aims to fill this gap by exploring avatars' shopping motivations in addition to perceptions and shopping behavior, in free-form Virtual Worlds.

Many entrepreneurs have been attracted to free-form VWs (here after referred to as VWs) and are setting up stores that sell virtual products (e.g., virtual shoes, furniture, food) and services (e.g., event management) to VW residents to make a profit. For some of them, VWs are the only source of income (Au, 2009a), with several business owners earning more than a million US dollars a year in SL (Au, 2009b). Real world businesses, alike, are setting-up stores in the Virtual Worlds, such as Nike and the book retailer Snowbooks in SL. By offering their real and/or virtual products for sale, they aim to build their brands, and/or to grow their revenues (Arakji and Lang, 2008). While some were able to create a successful presence in-world (i.e., in the Virtual World), many failed to attract customers to their stores. Reeboks' virtual store in Second Life, which allows users to create custom versions of Reebok shoes for their avatars and for themselves, successfully distributed more than 27,000 pairs of digital shoes in

its' first 10 weeks (Tedeschi, 2007). Other businesses, however, were not as successful and had to re-launch, such as Circuit City (Nino, 2008), or end their presence, such as American Apparel in SL (DMD et al., 2007). Such failures suggest that the new channel has its own rules and unique customer needs that should be well understood before engaging in any business or marketing related activity in-world.

While possessing their own unique characteristics, Virtual World stores were found to share a lot of elements with traditional and online retail stores (Brengman and Hassouneh, 2009). Understanding customers' shopping motivations has been proven crucial to the success of traditional as well as online retailers. For instance, customers' motivations were found to influence in-store behavior, store preference and patronage for both traditional and online stores (e.g., Joines et al., 2003; Rintamaki et al., 2007; Teller et al., 2008). Since Virtual Worlds are emerging as a new venue for retailing (Bourlakis, Papagiannidis, and Li, 2009), avatars' shopping motivations can be expected to have a similar effect on their in-store behavior as well as on their VW store preference and patronage. Thus, by conducting in-depth interviews with SL residents, this paper explores the different motivations behind shopping for virtual items in the VW. It investigates whether similarities and/or differences exist in comparison to (a) game-oriented VW shopping motivations and, (b) real life (RL) shopping motivations, considering traditional retail stores as well as the 2D online channel. While the online channel added utilitarian value to the customers' shopping experience, such as convenience and the extended assortment offered on the Internet (Brengman et al., 2005), the current study examines the added value experienced from shopping in the VW. Furthermore, Virtual World shoppers are segmented into distinct shopper types, in terms of their shopping behavior and store preference. VW usage motivations in combination with in-world shopping motivations were considered for profiling VW shoppers. The current study is, thus, of significant value not only for academic researchers interested in studying consumer/avatar behavior and retailing within VWs, but also for businesses and entrepreneurs interested in doing business in VWs.

The paper is structured as the follows: first, shopping motivations and shopper types in traditional and online retail stores are discussed and literature related to motivations concerning the purchase of virtual items in Virtual Worlds is reviewed. Consecutively, our study objective and methodology is explained, followed by our findings. Avatars' perceptions of shopping in the Virtual World are presented and explained. Next, their shopping motivations are revealed and discussed in relation to related literature. VW users' motivations to "reside" in the Virtual World are clarified, and for each user type distinct shopper types are identified and profiled, taking into account their specific VW shopping behavior and store preferences. Finally, research implications are discussed and future research directions are suggested.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Shopping Motivations in Traditional and Online Stores

While many researchers have investigated shopping motivations in traditional retail stores, a certain overlap seems to exist. One of the most cited studies was carried out by Tauber (1972). He classified motivations into *'personal'* (i.e. playing a culturally prescribed role, diversion from daily routine, receiving sensory stimulation, self-gratification, learning about new trends and fashion, and getting physical activity) and *'social'* ones (social interaction outside the home, communicating with others sharing similar interests, affiliating with peer groups, increasing social status and experiencing authority, and successfully bargaining and negotiating). Westwood and Black (1985) added to Tauber's typology a *'product oriented'* dimension (i.e. acquiring the desired product). The authors identified seven shopping motivations: anticipated utility, role enactment, negotiation, choice optimization, affiliation, power and authority, and stimulation. Others have reached similar classifications. Sheth (1983), for example, distinguished *'functional'* (tangible aspects, i.e. product assortment, price, etc.), *'non-functional'* (non-tangible aspects, i.e. store clientele, reputation etc.), *'social'* motivations (social interaction etc.), and *'personal'* motivations (i.e. enjoyable experiences). Dholakia (1999) classified shopping motivations into: *'utilitarian'* (product oriented), *'hedonic'* (non-functional), and *'social'* motivations.

Earlier studies have long focused on studying the *'utilitarian'* aspects of the shopping experience in both traditional and online stores. Online shoppers, for instance, were found to be motivated by utilitarian values, such as convenience of locating and comparing merchants (i.e. time and effort savings), evaluating price/quality ratios, information availability, ease of use, selection (the need to vary choices of stores, brands, or products), and physical store orientation (e.g., immediate possession and social contact) (Grewal et al., 2003; Mathwick et al., 2001, Joines et al., 2003; Teo, 2001, Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001; Bagdoniene and Zemblyte, 2009; To et al., 2007; Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004). To increase online sales, retailers should, according to Bridges and Florsheim (2008), design their websites to serve utilitarian goals rather than to offer hedonic value. Their study demonstrated that online retailers can increase their visitors' purchase likelihood by making internet users believe they are skilled at using the Web and perceive that they can move quickly through a website.

Recent studies, however, have shifted their attention to the *'hedonic'* aspects of shopping (i.e., the enjoyment or pleasure derived from the shopping experience). For instance, Arnold and Reynolds (2003) developed and validated an instrument that measures hedonic shopping motivations. By means of conducting in-depth interviews, six categories of hedonic shopping motivations were revealed: adventure shopping (shopping for stimulation, adventure, and the feeling of being in another world), social shopping (the enjoyment of shopping with friends and family, socializing while shopping, and bonding with others while shopping), gratification shopping (shopping for stress relief, shopping to alleviate a negative mood, and shopping as a special treat to oneself), idea shopping (shopping to keep up with trends and new fashions, and to see new products and innovations), role shopping (the enjoyment that shoppers derive from shopping for others, i.e. finding the perfect gift for others), value shopping (shopping for sales, looking for discounts, and hunting for bargains). In an attempt to study the sources of traditional store shopping enjoyment, Cox et al. (2005) collected data from over 1300 shoppers. They found that consumers tend to be drawn to shopping's more private pleasures, particularly the enjoyment of bargain hunting, followed by browsing, being pampered, and sensory stimulation, followed by kinesthetic pleasure and finally only few consumers appear to shop in order to mingle with other shoppers. Sit (2003) studied youth's motivations for entertainment consumption in shopping centers. Three key motivations were identified, namely thrill seeking (seeking of arousal, exhilaration and fun), escapism (driven by recuperative needs, involving the relief of boredom and recovery from tensions), and socializing (interacting with people who share similar interests). Many studies also confirmed the importance of such hedonic aspects in the online shopping experience, along with the utilitarian aspects, in shaping online shoppers' attitudes and behavior (Childers et al., 2001; To et al., 2007). Hedonic online shoppers (who are motivated to shop because of hedonic designs of websites) were found shopping online for adventure, authority, status, information gathering, involvement with a product category, positive sociality and surprise, as well as for bargain hunting purposes (To et al., 2007; Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001). Parsons (2002) tested the application of Tauber's (1972) non-functional motivations in an online shopping context. All personal motives were applicable with "diversion", "self gratification", and "learning about new trends" proving to be strong motives for online shopping. As for social motives, four out of the five social motives were found descriptive with respect to online shopping: "social experience outside the home", "communications with others having a similar interest", "peer group attraction", and "status and authority".

2.2. Shopper Types

Earlier studies have attempted to classify shoppers into distinct types, many of which overlap between both contexts (traditional and online).

Stone (1954) identified four store shopper types: *'economic shoppers'* (concerned with buying products at the lowest price), *'personalizing shoppers'* (value building relationships with store personnel), *'ethical shoppers'* (shop loyal), and *'apathetic shoppers'* (non-active). Stephenson and Willett (1969) grouped consumers into *'recreational shoppers'* (enjoy the act of shopping regardless of whether a purchase is made or not), *'convenience shoppers'* (concerned with time and effort savings) and *'price oriented shoppers'*. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) revealed five shopper segments: *'minimalists'* (only concerned with value shopping), *'gatherers'* (concerned with idea and role shopping, and exhibit the lowest level of value shopping.), *'providers'* (enjoy role and value shopping, and score the lowest in non-generosity), *'enthusiasts'* (fully enjoy all hedonic aspects of shopping), and *'traditionalists'* (moderately enjoy most hedonic shopping dimensions). Five types of shoppers were also identified by Cox et al. (2005): *'joyless shoppers'* (do not enjoy any aspect of shopping), *'bargain hunters'* (enjoy looking for and finding deals), *'enthusiasts'* (enjoy every aspect of shopping), *'attention cravers'* (enjoy being pampered by sales people), *'explorers'* (enjoy exploring the retail space).

Similar typologies of online shoppers exist in the literature. For instance, Brown et al. (2003) classified online shoppers into 7 types depending on their shopping orientation: *'personalizing shoppers'* (prefer shopping at places where they are known by staff or receive personalized service), *'recreational shoppers'* (shop for the pleasure of shopping itself), *'economic shoppers'* (aim to get the best possible value for their money), *'involved shoppers'* (are highly involved in most aspects of the shopping process), *'convenience-oriented, recreational shoppers'* (equally value the convenience, shopping enjoyment, and price dimensions), *'community-oriented shoppers'* (prefer patronizing local merchants), and *'apathetic, convenience-oriented shoppers'* (apathetic towards shopping). Interestingly, they found most internet shoppers to be recreational shopping-oriented or price-oriented. Rohm and Swaminathan (2004) developed a different typology consisting of four online shopper types based on their motivations: *'convenience shoppers'* (motivated by the time and effort savings), *'variety seekers'* (motivated by the variety across retail alternatives, and product types and brands), *'balanced buyers'* (moderately value convenience and variety), and *'store-oriented shoppers'* (who desire immediate possession of goods and social interaction).

In a recent study conducted by Ganesh et al. (2010), five shopper types were identified as common between traditional and online store shoppers (*'apathetic shoppers'*, *'basic shoppers'*, *'bargain seekers'*, *'destination*

shoppers', and *'shopping enthusiast'*). On the other hand, two types were considered unique to the online medium: *'interactive shoppers'* (concerned with personalized services and online bidding), and *'e-window shoppers'* (concerned with stimulation and web surfing). Thus, the online medium allowed retailers to offer customers added value that led to new motivations and shopper types. The different shopping experience provided by both platforms (offline and online) appeals to and thus attracts different types of shoppers.

From the above discussion, we expect to reveal similar shopping motivations and shopper types in the Virtual World to those identified in the RW retailing literature involving traditional and 2D online retail contexts. Still, we assume that the channel's special characteristics (e.g., the existence of the unique in-store entertainment possibilities (Brengman and Hassouneh, 2009)) will also elicit new shopping motivations and shopper types. In the following section, we review literature related to motivations behind shopping for virtual products in both types of VWs: game-oriented and free-form.

2.3. Motivations for Acquiring Virtual Products

The billions of dollars spent yearly on purchasing virtual goods in VWs are fostering researchers to study virtual products' attributes and users' motivations. Martin (2008) argues that virtual goods in SL are being purchased not for their *'use-value'*, but rather, for their *'exchange'* and *'symbolic values'* of expressing wealth, power, status, individuality, and belonging. Lehdonvirta (2009) conducted an exploratory study on the attributes that drive consumers to purchase virtual goods (in general and not necessarily in free-form Virtual Worlds). The author concludes that virtual items can have one or more of the following attributes: *'functional'* (performance and functionality), *'hedonic'* (e.g. visual appearance and sounds, provenance), and *'social'* attributes (e.g. rarity). Focusing on the Virtual World "Habbo Hotel" as a case study, Lehdonvirta, Wilska and Johansson (2009) examined "virtual consumption" from a sociological perspective. The authors discuss how virtual goods are being used as *'social markers'* and to build and communicate self-identity to other members of the community.

Aiming to explain users' perceptions of real-money trade (RMT) of virtual assets in massively multiplayer online games, Lehdonvirta (2005) based her findings on Yee's (2005; 2006) player motivation model. Yee (2006) classified game-oriented Virtual World users based on the following motivations: *'achievement'* (advancement, mechanics, competition), *'social'* (socializing, relationship, teamwork), and *'immersion'* (discovery, role playing, customization, escapism). Lehdonvirta (2005) concludes that players' perceptions of real-money trade of virtual assets are derived from: *'status enhancement'* (RMT enables rewards to be bought, violating the achievement hierarchy), *'competitive advantage'* (RMT is cheating because it can be used to obtain competitive advantages), *'keeping up with co-players'* (RMT allows those with less time to catch up and play together with their friends), *'experiencing new content'* (RMT breaks the magic circle, but gives more choice over which content to experience), *'customization'* (RMT makes it easier to obtain a set of assets that correspond to player's taste) and *'self-expression'* (RMT allows players to express themselves through their buying behavior).

In an attempt to develop a preliminary model of individual determinants for the decision to purchase virtual items in Virtual Worlds, Guo and Barnes (2009) conducted an exploratory study on virtual item purchase behavior in game-oriented Virtual Worlds. The model suggests that players' motivation to purchase virtual items is derived from four factors: '*perceived enjoyment*' (the extent to which fun can be derived from participating in Virtual Worlds), '*character competency*' (achieving matching skills for challenges from game tasks or against other players), '*the requirements of the quest system*' (quest systems require virtual characters to have/wear certain virtual items for participation), and '*the quality of the Virtual World*' (the level of game content quality). Personal factors identified to explain virtual item purchase behavior in game-oriented Virtual Worlds relate to: effort expectancy, habit, social influence, virtual item resources, personal real resources, performance expectancy, and perceived profit-making opportunities. Interestingly, "social influence" was found to be of major determinant in players' buying decision making.

3. Research Objective and Methodology

The fact that free-form Virtual Worlds are basically platforms for socializing and networking that do not impose any goals on their users, limits the generalizability of previous findings concerning buying behavior of virtual items in game oriented Virtual Worlds. The current study aims to fill this gap by exploring motivations for shopping for virtual items in free-form Virtual Worlds. First we find out how VW residents perceive shopping in the VW as compared to shopping in traditional RW stores or online. Subsequently we disclose what motivates them to shop for virtual items in the Virtual World. Finally, we develop a VW shopper typology based on their VW shopping motivations and behavior.

To gain a profound understanding of the reasons why avatars shop for virtual items in free-form Virtual Worlds, in-depth interviews with twenty active Second Life users were carried out in the Virtual World "Second Life". This qualitative research approach offers several advantages: it can help to find meaning behind the numbers (answering

the 'why' question) (Sykes, 1990), while providing a clear and holistic view of the context (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

3.1. Sample

The Virtual World of Second Life is composed of 27,483 regions that are widely spread over a virtual land that exceeds 1871 square km (Linden MJ, 2009; The Metaverse Journal, 2009). The fact that Second Life is spread out over such a huge amount of virtual land makes it very hard and time consuming to locate users by randomly walking/flying around. Therefore, respondents were recruited in two ways. First, the SL search engine was used to locate SL clubs and/or shops, because clubbing and shopping are popular activities in SL. The interviewer would then teleport to that place and a respondent would be chosen randomly (i.e., the avatar closest to the researcher would be interviewed). In case no avatar was found at a specific place, another shop/club would be chosen using the SL search engine. At the end of each interview, the respondent would be asked to refer the interviewer to an online friend who would be willing/interested to be interviewed and then the interviewer would text message and teleport to the next respondent. This way we achieved to reach a diverse sample of SL users, with varying levels of SL experience (from 6 months to 5 years). The ultimate sample was composed of 10 males and 10 females, ranging in age from 18 to 55 years old, and originating from different countries (USA , Brazil, Ireland, India, UK, and Luxemburg), which is fairly consistent with SL population demographics. According to Linden Lab, the company that runs SL, 60% of the VW users (in terms of the hours spent in-world) come from outside the USA (Linden T, 2009). As of April, 2008, 84% of the population is 25 years and older, with those aged 45 and above continuing to be the heaviest users (spending on average 70 hours per month). Females make up 45.5% of the SL population and spend nearly twice as long online as males (Bananaverse, 2008).

3.2. Interview procedure

A detailed discussion guide was prepared in advance to assure interview comprehensiveness and relevance. The interviewer provided a brief description of the goal of the in-depth interview, and respondents were first asked to introduce themselves and to give a reason why they are in SL. Respondents were then asked to think about SL shopping in general (associations, likes and dislikes). Subsequently, they were asked about their typical moments for in-world shopping, followed by questions about their SL shopping behavior (i.e., type and number of items bought, shopping frequency). Consecutively, respondents were asked to explain the way they usually locate shops, and the criteria used when choosing stores. Respondents were then asked to compare shopping in SL with traditional and 2D online shopping (likes and dislikes). Finally, each respondent was asked to describe his/her ideal SL store. Throughout the in-depth interviews, the interviewer probed when deemed necessary to get more insight into the avatars' underlying SL shopping motivations. Each in-world interview lasted for about an hour. The text messaging tool of the SL platform was used for conducting the interviews, and snapshots of the interviewees' avatars were taken.

3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken in two stages. First, transcripts of the interviews were read thoroughly several times and summarized. Using paper coding and a thematic approach, profiles were generated for each respondent, containing their reasons for being in SL, their shopping motivations, their shopping behavior, demographic information, and store preferences. Since a user's motivation for being in SL appeared to directly affect their shopping motivations and behavior, respondents were grouped accordingly. Shopping motivations revealed for each respondent were then related to corresponding motivations retrieved in the literature pertaining to shopping behavior in traditional and online stores, as well as to purchasing behavior of virtual items in game-oriented Virtual Worlds. In case no match was found in the prevailing literature, a new theme would be proposed. Shopper types were then identified based on respondents' profiles. In a second stage the interviews were coded and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 8, in order to reinforce the methodological rigor and reliability of our analyses (Sinkovics et al., 2008). Nodes were created for the themes revealed in the first stage. Interviews were scanned individually and references for each theme were identified. A new node would be created for any arising theme. Respondents were then coded as cases and were assigned attribute values (i.e. with respect to gender, their main reason for being in SL, etc…). This allowed for comparisons between the respondents according to these characteristics. Graphs were also utilized to visualize and assess the emerging results. The second stage helped in refining the results and in enhancing the objectivity of the findings. A similar two-stage analysis procedure, using paper coding and qualitative software, was utilized by Khan and Shaikh (2011).

4. Research Results

4.1. Virtual World Shopping Perceptions:

Interestingly, all respondents interviewed perceived shopping in the Virtual World Second Life in a positive way. They find it enjoyable. One of the respondents avowed: "I love shopping in SL". This positive attitude towards SL shopping was found to be attributed to the following reasons:

Convenience: Shopping in SL is viewed as convenient in many ways. In comparison to shopping at traditional retail stores, shopping in SL does not require physically traveling to the store. Instead one can request immediate teleportation with a simple mouse-click. In addition, shopping for virtual products in the VW implies immediate delivery of the products purchased. Some SL shops offer product bundles; they sell a complete set of complementary products (e.g., clothes with matching accessories), which in turn saves customers' time and effort, making the shopping experience easier. Also, the fact that trying on clothes before buying is not, usually, necessary is another motivator for shopping in SL. Related statements include: "What I like about SL shopping is that everything fits, no trying-on trying to find the right sizes"; "it's fairly easy to search for and purchase products". 'Convenience' has also previously been identified by scholars as a motivator for shopping using the online medium (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Brengman et al., 2005).

Social Factor: According to the following statements, respondents also seem to appreciate the lack of unwanted social contact in VW stores: "SL shopping is more fun, no crowds or rude people, pushy sales women…", "customers do not have to fight the crowds like in real stores". Other respondents however point out to miss the presence of real salespeople in SL stores and still others appear actually to be looking for social contact while shopping.

Product Variety and Unlimited Possibilities: SL shops offer a wide variety of product types, styles, and colors, which are updated frequently (some report weekly updating), motivating people to shop for different types of products more frequently. One respondent reported "Oh, I love it (SL shopping) because of the large variety; anything from vampire stuff to Christian... it's here". Furthermore, in the Virtual World, stores offer products that are not for sale in real life stores (e.g., body parts, dancing skills,…). Previous studies have also provided evidence that internet shoppers also seek variety (e.g., by Donthu and Garcia, 1999). Some of the VW users interviewed mentioned that they shop in SL for products that are rare in the real world (RW) or because they can find products in the VW that are "cooler" than their RW counterparts. One respondent noted: "I wish they had boots as cool in real life".

Affordability: In comparison to their RW counterparts, virtual products in SL are much more affordable. This simple fact appears to motivate many users to shop in the VW and to affect their attitudes and shopping behavior. One SL user provided the following quote: "I buy things here that I wouldn't in real life (RL), I have a car and a condo… luxury items are more accessible here, things we cannot afford in RL we can have here". The factor 'affordability' has previously also been identified as a motivator for online shopping by, for example, Vellido et al. (2002).

Freedom of Choice: In the Virtual World, people find themselves free to purchase the products they always desired, but couldn't have in their real world. Real life restrictions (such as social role, living in a conservative culture, body/appearance restrictions, etc…) are absent in such a Virtual World. One respondent mentioned: "I can buy things here that I can't in real life".

Store Environment: Some of the respondents reported being motivated by the ambience of the stores themselves. They enjoy the store atmosphere and like to spend time inside. One respondent noted: "I love the stores here, I like the way they are layed-out". This factor corresponds with 'exciting shopping environments' that was found by earlier studies to motivate shopping in traditional stores (e.g., Dholokia, 1999).

Thus, finding what they want, affordable and in a timely manner with no restrictions what so ever is what drives VW users to have a positive attitude towards shopping in Virtual Worlds. However, this positivism varied between respondents. Some respondents reported to find it difficult to find what they are looking for and to miss the presence of real salespeople in SL stores. Some of the male respondents believed there is less variety in their clothes.

4.2. Virtual World Shopping Motivations:

"*People buy products not only for what they can do but also for what they mean*" (Levy,1959, p.118).

Virtual World residents are found to be motivated to shop for hedonic, functional, and/or symbolic/social reasons. While these motivations correspond to those for shopping in traditional and in online retail stores (Sheth, 1983; Parsons, 2002; To et al., 2007), shopping motivations in Virtual Worlds are further found to be either (1) *Real world related*, or (2) *Virtual World/Second Life- related*. In this section, we elaborate on the different shopping motivations found in the Virtual World:

(1) Real World Related Motivations:

Real world related motivations are defined as the motivations resulting from users' real life unsatisfied needs and wants that they seek to fulfill through shopping in the Virtual World. Three categories of shopping motivations were identified as real world related: *'Shopping for Freedom'*, *Shopping for Gratification'* and *'Shopping for Compensation'*. Each is briefly defined and discussed in relation to prior related research.

Shopping for Freedom: This motivation refers to shopping in the VW for liberty and free self expression, devoid of Real Life restrictions. Many of the interviewed participants were found to be motivated by the fact that in the Virtual World they can shop for the products they desire, not confined by any Real World constraints. RW social and cultural restrictions are absent as well as body-related issues and limitations. A single father noted: "I can wear anything here; in RL I have to be more frugal and a bit more selective and conservative in style". In previous research, the *'need for self expression'* (i.e. the need to presents one's identity to other people) was found to influence participation intentions in virtual communities (Han, Zheng, and Xu, 2007), as well as users' perceptions of real money trade in massively multiplayer games (Lehdonvirta, 2005). One respondent stated: "I have got to have this body in SL, so it's easier to wear the clothes I wish I could wear in RL". These people enjoy shopping without any RL restrictions and shopping for their desired products offers them peace of mind. This category is grounded in McGuire's (1974) tension reduction theory of human motivation, which argues that tension reduction can entice people to behave in a certain way to return the self to a state of homeostasis. Shopping for 'freedom' has also been identified as a motivator for online shopping (Wolfinbarger and Gilly, 2001). This 'freedom', however, is derived by the anonymity and lack of social interaction offered by the online medium. In the traditional retailing literature, shopping has also been identified as an escapist activity (Babin et al., 1994).

Shopping for Gratification: This motivation refers to shopping in the VW for pleasure and the fulfillment of one's desires. As a respondent noted: "It gives me pleasure when I see something I like and purchase it". The variety of products available in SL (including luxury items), as well as their affordability, appear to influence VW users' shopping behavior. Even though these products are virtual, they still seem to convey the same value to the users and they seem to offer them satisfaction. In the traditional retailing literature, shopping has also been identified as an enjoyable and gratifying experience (Arnolds and Reynolds, 2003; Cox et al., 2005).

Shopping for Compensation: according to this motivation VW shopping is seen as a way to achieve one's dreams and potential. People who are not able to make their dreams come true in the RW shop in SL for products that offer them the sense of achievement they need. Or to quote one respondent: "People have a jet set life here, what we cannot have in RL". Shopping in the VW can fulfill Maslow's ultimate needs for "self-esteem" and "self-actualization", which refer to desires for confidence, competence, mastery, adequacy, achievement and growth (Goble, 1970). The compensation strategy introduced by Adler (1917) suggests that one will try, consciously or unconsciously, to cover up feelings of inferiority or unfulfilled desires. Thus, for those who cannot achieve their full potential in RL, the Virtual World offers another chance to fulfill this desire. Hence, they can realize their dreams in the VW rather than in the Real World. Purchasing products in the Virtual World which are desired but unobtainable in RL can thus provide some compensation for such unfulfilled shopper needs.

(2) Virtual World Related Motivations:

Virtual World related motivations are defined as those shopping motivations derived from users' participation, or intention to participate, in Virtual World activities (i.e. shopping for products to fulfill a Virtual World need). Eight categories of VW related shopping motivations were identified: *'Shopping for Community Acceptance', 'Shopping to Meet Requirements', 'Shopping for Self Expression', 'Shopping for Exploration', 'Avatar Role-Playing', 'Bargain Hunting', 'Fun Seeking'* and *'Social Shopping'*. Each is briefly defined and discussed in relation to prior related literature.

Shopping for Community Acceptance: this motivation explains VW shopping for virtual products as a means for VW residents to gain acceptance in the Virtual World community. Many respondents were found motivated to shop in order to have a sense of *acceptance* by the VW community. When registering in SL, all users are given an identical avatar (either male or female wearing an identical outfit) and thus to belong to and be accepted by the VW community, users go shopping for avatar body parts and clothes. "The default stuff they (SL) give you leaves a lot to be desired". In addition, the VW offers residents a wide range of activities to participate in (i.e. swimming beaches, clubs, schools, shopping centers, etc.) that require different outfits in order not to stand out. "Sometimes I shop for things just to participate in events in SL". This motivation is rooted in the basic human need for affiliation (McGuire, 1974), which suggests that people seek acceptance in interpersonal relationships.

Shopping to Meet Requirements: is defined as shopping in the VW for virtual products in order to oblige to Virtual World rules. While the VW of SL does not require users to make any purchases, the owners of some places in SL oblige their patrons to wear certain outfits to be allowed in (i.e. dress codes). For example, avatars are compelled to wear formal outfits for partying in some clubs, or a swimming suit for certain beaches. And thus, such requirements by certain places were found to stimulate SL residents to go shopping. This free-form VW shopping

motivation is similar to "*the requirements of the quest system*' motivator for the purchase of virtual items in game-oriented VWs identified by Guo and Barnes (2009).

Shopping for Self Expression: Many VW users shop for virtual products to express their *individuality* within the VW community. They look for products that match their personality and evoke the image they desire. Some respondents mentioned shopping to make their avatar *as good looking as possible* or to be *unique* and different from others. Other respondents are motivated to buy products that *draw attention* to them from the VW community, while others shop to express their *status*. Martin (2008) also pointed to the fact that virtual goods in SL are being purchased for their symbolic value to express individuality, wealth, power and status.

Shopping for Exploration: this motivation refers to shopping in the VW for exploration and stimulation. Some of the respondents reported enjoying exploring the different stores in SL and getting an idea of what is on offer. "It is fun to look around and see just what I can find", one respondent noted. This motivation resembles "adventure shopping" suggested by Arnold and Reynolds (2003), where people perceive shopping to be an adventurous and exciting experience. It also refers to the enjoyment RL shoppers perceive from browsing in stores and going window shopping as identified by Cox et al. (2005).

Avatar-Role-Playing: according to this motivation, VW shopping is viewed as a means to play the chosen character in-world. VW residents play different roles in-world: some have jobs, others are students, or they are just playing a certain character in-world and thus have to shop to build the character and play the desired role. One respondent mentioned "I work as a dancer in game, so my image has to look good". Previously, Tauber (1972) already identified "role playing" as a shopping motivator to fulfill ones' social responsibilities. In the Virtual World as well, people were found to view shopping as a duty to fulfill their in-world role.

*Bargain Hunting***:** this motivation refers to VW shopping for sales, lower priced items, hunting for bargains, and free items. Many of the respondents mentioned enjoying hunting for bargains, finding lower priced items, and looking for sales**.** One respondent claimed she would also visit unfamiliar SL stores in search for bargains: "Oh yes, I will go look, I love a bargain". Bargain hunting has also been found to be a motivator for traditional RL shopping. Arnold and Reynolds (2003), for instance, identified "value shopping" as a shopping driver and Cox et al. (2005) labeled those who enjoy looking for and finding deals "bargain hunters".

Fun Seeking: this motivation views VW shopping as a playful and fun activity. It relates to playing in-store games, and the enjoyment of dressing up your avatar. Many respondents reported enjoying dressing up their avatars, and viewing it as a fun activity in itself. One respondent mentioned: "I never played with dolls when I was growing up, so I guess I am reliving my childhood, playing with dolls and dressing up". Furthermore, SL stores appear to offer their customers a wide range of fun activities that have been reported to motivate some of our respondents to go shopping, such as winning prizes in store and getting free items. This is similar to the entertainment consumption motivation "thrill seeking" which is defined as shopping for arousal, exhilaration, and fun (Sit, 2003).

*Social Shopping***:** this motivation views shopping as a way to meet new people, or to interact with friends or family while in-store. One respondent explained how the presence of other shoppers affects his store choice: "I am more likely to enter a shop if there are other shoppers there. I count the green dots" (in a SL map each green dot corresponds to an avatar present in a certain location). This motivation for social interaction while shopping aims to fulfill the basic human need to belong and be loved, which is according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs craved for when basic physiological and safety needs are met. "Social shopping" has also been identified as a traditional shopping motivation by Arnold and Reynolds (2003) and by Cox et al. (2005) referring to the enjoyment of shopping with friends and family, socializing and bonding with others while shopping. Contrary to expectations only a few respondents were found motivated to go shopping for social interaction in the Virtual World.

4.3. Virtual World Shopper Typology:

Carefully analyzing the interviews reveals that VW users' shopping motivations, behavior, and store preferences are closely related to their motivations to "reside" in the VW itself. Shopping in SL is thus seen as the means to accomplishing the actual motivation for being in SL. Therefore, to profile SL users into distinguishable shopper types, their motivations for being in the Virtual World were considered as well as their SL shopping motivations.

Our findings suggest that VW residents can be categorized into three main categories based on their motivations to reside in the VW: (1) '*Explorers/Socializers'*, (2) *'Role Players'*, and (3) *'Freedom/Compensation Seekers'*. In this section, these motivations for using the Virtual World are discussed first and the shopper types pertaining to each VW user type are then explained profoundly in terms of their shopping motivations, behavior, and store preferences.

(1) **Socializers/Explorers**:

These people are in SL either to socialize and meet people from around the world or to explore the VW (which may be for a real life purpose such as attending an in-world course). One respondent mentioned: "I

am trying to learn how to build educational sims… history in particular, allowing students to experience events and buildings in history". They want to be part of the world "SL" and to be accepted by its community while expressing their RL selves, and thus have to do some shopping. Eight respondents (out of twenty) were identified as self-expressionists. Interestingly, when asked about their attitude towards purchasing a real product in the VW (i.e., to be delivered to their real home address), this VW user type was the most accepting and welcoming to this idea. One respondent explained his attitude: "It would give the game some more realism". This user category is driven by a "social" motivation found behind participating in game-oriented Virtual Worlds (Bartle, 1997; Yee, 2006). "Socializers" are defined as those who enjoy chatting and interacting with each other.

As the main motivation for shopping among this group of VW users is 'self-expression', we will label these shoppers as *'Self Expressionists'*. 'Self Expressionists' were found to be either *Functional Shoppers* (i.e., interested in convenience) or *Hedonic Shoppers* (i.e., appreciating the recreational aspect of shopping). The shopping behavior of 'Self Expressionists' is similar to their RL shopping behavior. Functional shoppers in RL are functional in SL too, and hedonic shoppers in RL are the same in SL. Each one of these shopper types have found some value in SL shopping over RL shopping (traditional and 2D online shopping) but missed the availability of some features that are available in the other two channels:

'Functional Self Expressionist Shoppers': This kind of shoppers looks for the right products and "style" to express their real character. They buy items that fit with their personalities and express their interests (i.e. a medieval suit purchased by a history-lover). They, however, don't like to spend a lot of money, time or effort when shopping to find the right products. They mainly use the SL search engine to locate shops. One respondent noted: "what comes first on search is where I go". They prefer stores with a complete range of products that satisfy their different needs "all in one spot". One respondent referred to it as "the universal store". In addition, they seem to be more price sensitive than other shopper types; looking for lower prices and wishing for a 2D store interface that allows for price comparisons. This shopper type mainly shops for avatar-appearance related products to be able to live the experience of SL and to be accepted by the in-world residents (i.e. to join parties, events, school, etc.). These people are not heavy shoppers; they only shop for one or two products in a regular shopping trip when they feel the need. "As long as I am satisfied with my look I rarely go shopping" one shopper reported. This type of "functional" shoppers has been identified previously in the retailing literature (e.g., Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Graham, 1981). Consistent with earlier findings (e.g., Donthu and Garcia, 1999; Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999), most of the shoppers that fall into this category are found to be active online shoppers. For instance, one respondent reported shopping online for: "almost everything that is not food and even that". Some of them found the immediate delivery of products in SL a plus over 2D online shopping. While others missed having a search engine for comparing prices between different SL stores.

'Hedonic Self Expressionist Shoppers': This kind of shoppers enjoys the shopping experience by nature and thus shopping constitutes an important part of their in-world activities. They express themselves through the items they are buying. "Bright mood means I'm looking for something bright, bad mood I'm usually looking for black" one respondent explained. They enjoy exploring the different shops and products available. "We like to just explore and see what we find, SL is infinite". Interestingly, however, being shopping lovers doesn't necessarily mean that they are buying more items than other shopper types, but rather that they are enjoying the shopping experience and are willing to search far and wide for the right products. On the other hand, they are less price sensitive in comparison to functional shoppers, and seem to attach a higher importance to store appearance. One respondent noted: "I'm very particular on how a store should present itself, classier is better, pleasing colors not overwhelming to the eye: no stark whites for walls or floors". This type of shoppers has also been identified in earlier retailing studies. For example, Brown et al. (2003) called them "recreational shoppers", while Arnold and Reynolds (2003) as well as Cox et al. (2005) labeled them "enthusiasts". Some of these shoppers considered the social interaction available in SL as an added value over 2D online shopping and the lack of crowds and strong perfumes as an advantage over traditional shopping. While acknowledging that in the VW one doesn't have to try on clothes before purchasing, one shopper reported to miss the help of real salespeople in SL in comparison to traditional stores.

(2) Role-Players:

This VW user type constitutes of people that enjoy being someone else in-world, different from their real character/role. "It is fun being someone different here". The character they are playing defines the products to be purchased as well as their shopping behavior in-world. Five respondents were identified as role-

players. This is similar to the "role playing" factor of the "immersion" motivation to use game-oriented Virtual Worlds where users enjoy story-telling and creating characters that fit in these stories (Yee, 2006).

'Value Oriented Role Playing Shoppers': Role players shop for their avatars to reflect their in-world personal character and image. They usually have a SL job that is very different from their RL job/character. "I work as a dancer in-game so my image has to look good". They buy products that fit with the character they are playing in-world: "We need a lot of costumes for the job". Their in-world shopping behavior reflects their avatar's character and life style, too. They separate their real life from their virtual one. Most of them are not open to shopping for real products in the VW. One respondent explained: "SL should stay SL". The dancer in SL (a book-store keeper in RL) explained her SL shopping behavior in the following way: "when I have some Lindens (i.e., the SL local currency), I decide what I am looking for, and then go to get it", "I don't play enough to make that kind of money to buy a car or a house". In comparison to the previous VW user type, role-players are found to spend more time and money shopping in SL. Nevertheless, role-playing VW users were found to be very '*value oriented*'. Because they only seem to spend the money they earn in SL, they are more '*price conscious*' when shopping. They look for products that are not only fashionable and up-to-date, but also reasonably priced. One respondent pointed out: "a lot of us are on a budget and have to limit spending". They are willing to spend time to find the right deal. One respondent reported: "I'm also quite specific in what I'm looking for and will shop until I find the closest possible". Such '*value oriented shoppers*' have in previous retailing literature been termed as 'bargain hunters' (Cox et al., 2005) and 'economic shoppers' (Brown et al., 2003). According to our study, 'value oriented shoppers' in the VW are predominantly found among 'Role Players'.

(3) **Freedom/Compensation Seekers**:

These are people who log in to SL to live free of real life restrictions, whether it involves money, social/ethical, or appearance related issues. "Things I wouldn't do or wear in RL I am free to do in SL". SL for them is a second chance to live their lives the way they always wished. And thus they are buying items that help them to be and live the way they want or to reach what they wish to accomplish in RL and thus to realize their "wish-life". Seven respondents were identified as freedom-seekers. This motivation to reside in a free-form VW is similar to one identified in a game-oriented VW context, where Yee (2006) used the term '*escapism*' to denote the condition where the VW is being used to temporarily avoid, escape and forget about real-life stress and problems.

Freedom Seekers enjoy shopping in SL free of RL restrictions. They spend a lot of time in-world and are heavy shoppers as this is their dream life. One of the respondents reported logging in 2-3 times a day. They don't shop as much in RL and don't even enjoy RL shopping. One of the respondents noted: "I do tons more shopping in SL than in RL,… SL shopping is fun, and RL shopping is work". They enjoy the shopping experience in itself; it gives them a sense of freedom and accomplishment. Depending on their RL restrictions, Freedom Seekers can be further classified into: '*Status Seekers*', '*Relaxation/Gratification Seekers*', and '*Relationship Seekers*'.

Status Seekers: these people are in SL to enjoy living their dream without any RL *money* constraints. They express themselves and their dreams through their shopping behavior by means of the virtual items they buy. They shop for (RW) expensive items that are only affordable to them in SL. These VW users were also found to be either '*Functional*' or '*Hedonic Shoppers*'.

'Functional Status Shoppers': These shoppers care most about the products that make up their dreams but they are not shopping lovers. A respondent who is an active person in RL (i.e., likes to go camping and hunting), shops for motorcycles, cars, and horses in SL, which he can only afford in the VW. He identifies stores by the SL search engine and shops for one or two items on a regular shopping trip.

'Hedonic Status Shoppers': These shop for their dream life while enjoying every aspect of shopping. A woman seeking to experience living a luxury life in SL stated: "SL shopping is great, I can buy things here I could get no way in RL, I can live like a millionaire". For her, shopping for luxury items is the only way to make this dream come true. She is a heavy shopper. She shops for 6 – 20 items on a regular shopping trip and buys a wide range of virtual items: avatar-appearance related (i.e. she owns more than a 1000 hair items at the time of the interview) as well as dream-life related (e.g., houses, furniture, cars, helicopters). She shops at famous SL stores and product quality is of the utmost importance. She likes to shop at expensive places, but at the same time she enjoys bargain hunting: "free gifts tempt me to a store" and her ideal store offers sales regularly.

Relaxation/Gratification Seekers: These people are in SL to relax, away from their RL problems (which may be appearance related or other) and have fun. One respondent noted "recently divorced, I am here to relax". They also look for relaxation and gratification while shopping in SL.

'Relaxation/Gratification Shoppers': For these people, shopping is a way to "relax" and/or "have fun". They enjoy the fact that they can shop without any restrictions. What matters to them, are the products that fill their needs and desires. They simply enjoy the fact that they can buy whatever they want when they want to, free from any RL restrictions. They like to shop in a relaxing and/or enjoyable environment and thus store design seems to highly affect their attitude towards the stores and their shopping behavior. One respondent mentioned: "my ideal SL store would be simple, detailed pictures and or models wearing the clothes, soothing colors and music while you shop". They also don't like crowds in store or sales people, they just want to enjoy shopping and relax. Another respondent mentioned preferring "empty" stores. This type of shoppers corresponds to the "escapist shoppers" identified by Jamala et al. (2006) in a traditional retailing context.

For relaxation/gratification seekers with body/appearance problems, shopping was found to constitute the main part of their in-world activities. These people are dissatisfied with their RL body, and are mainly in SL to enjoy having the perfect body/appearance they always wished for. One respondent reported that shopping accounts for about 75% of the time she is in SL. They mainly buy avatar-appearance items (i.e., clothes, body parts, hair, skin etc.). They shop every time they are in SL and buy up to 5 items during each shopping trip. The products and how they look are of highest importance. The quality of products displayed and their presentation in-store determines store choice and approach/avoidance behavior. "If it (i.e., the product range) doesn't catch my eyes in the first few seconds I pass it by" one respondent noted.

Relationship Seekers: these people are in SL to live free from any social/ethical restrictions preventing them from forming relationships in RL. What their shopping behavior is concerned these can be classified as 'Social Shoppers'.

'Social Shoppers': These people see the shopping experience as a social one: to acquire the products that help them find and maintain in-world relationships, as a way to meet new people, and to enjoy in-store entertainment facilities with friends. These shoppers care about the beauty 'how it looks' and the capability of the products they are buying to draw the attention of others, hoping to form relationships. "It's fun to dress up and I love men to notice me and think I am cute or sexy". These shoppers are willing to pay higher prices for better items, and at the same time care about socializing with other store patrons, while enjoying entertainment facilities available in-store. These shoppers find *current* SL store employees a distraction. "They are green dots that don't mean they are shopping,… they have no idea of products, they are present just to increase the traffic count". Social Shoppers miss the availability of "real" fitting facilities and salespeople in SL shops. They are heavy shoppers in SL; for instance one respondent reported shopping about 5 times a week and owning 19,320 virtual items in SL at the time of the interview. Social shoppers have been identified in the retailing literature, for example, by McDonald (1996) and Jamala et al. (2006).

See table 1 for a summary of the main findings of this study.

5. Conclusions and Future Research Directions

The current paper is the first to provide the findings of an empirical investigation on shopping motivations in free-form Virtual Worlds. Avatars' shopping perceptions, motivations, and behavior were examined and compared with shopping via traditional and online retail channels. Furthermore, different types of Virtual World users and shoppers were identified. While shopping perceptions across retail formats vary between different shopper types (e.g., Lepkowska-White, 2004; Rajamma et al., 2007), a mainly positive perception was observed for Virtual World shopping. This can be explained by the fact that VW stores share features/benefits with both the traditional channel (e.g., store environment, social interaction) and the online channel (e.g., convenience). This positive perception, however, was attributed not only to the channel's special characteristics (e.g., entailing a 3D environment), but also to the fictitious possibilities offered by the Virtual World (e.g., unlimited product possibilities and no RL restrictions) and to the fact that purchased products are virtual and thus more affordable. Therefore, such a positive perception need not be expected in case the purchased product is for real life use.

Shopping motivations for virtual products in free-form VWs appeared to share more elements with real life shopping motivations rather than with the motivations to purchase virtual items in game-oriented VWs. This can be explained by the fact that users of game-oriented VWs are mainly aiming at winning the game, while in free-form VWs avatars are living a virtual life rather than gaming. As the shopping experience offered by free-form Virtual Worlds is more similar to the one offered by traditional retail stores in comparison to online stores, the shopping motivations of these retail formats had more in common. Moreover, this study offers insights in the shopping motivations that are specific to the Virtual World shopping experience.

Table 1. Free-form Virtual World Shopper Typology

VW User Type	Shopper Type	Shopping Perceptions	Main Shopping Motivations	Shopping Behavior		Store preferences
				Frequency	Type of products	
Socializers/Explorers	*Functional Self-Expressionist Shoppers*	Positive	- Community acceptance - Self expression	Light shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products	Prefer stores with a complete range of products Wishing for a 2D store interface that allows for price comparisons
	Hedonic Self-Expressionist Shoppers	Very Positive	- Community acceptance - Exploration	Intermediate shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products	Attach high importance to store appearance
Role-Players	*Value Oriented Role Playing Shoppers*	Positive	- Avatar-role-playing - Bargain Hunting	Intermediate shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products Skill-enhancing products	Fashionable products that are reasonably priced
Freedom/Compensation Seekers						
- **Status Seekers**	*Functional Status Shoppers*	Positive	- Shopping for freedom - Shopping for gratification - Shopping for compensation - Self expression	Intermediate shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products Status related (cars, helicopter houses,..)	
	Hedonic Status Shoppers	Very Positive	- Shopping for freedom - Shopping for gratification - Shopping for compensation	Heavy shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products Status related (cars, helicopter houses,..)	Famous VW stores
- **Relaxation/ Gratification Seekers**	*Relaxation/ Gratification Shoppers*	Very Positive	- Shopping for freedom - Fun seeking	Heavy shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products	Store design is important. Relaxing/enjoyable environment: simple store, detailed pictures and or models wearing the clothes, soothing colors and in-store music
- **Relationship Seekers**	*Social Shoppers*	Very Positive	- Shopping for freedom - Social shopping - Self expression	Heavy shoppers	Avatar-appearance related products	Enjoy entertainment facilities available in-store Like to socialize with other store patrons

5.1 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The current study is an important first step towards understanding the phenomenon of shopping for virtual items in free-form Virtual Worlds. While shopping for virtual items in game oriented Virtual Worlds is derived only from Virtual World needs, shopping in free-form Virtual Worlds is found to be derived from both real life needs and Virtual World needs. Furthermore, this study enhances our knowledge regarding the motivations for using and residing in free-form Virtual Worlds. Users are not only there to escape real life, but rather, for some people the Virtual World is a chance to try a different character, or an extension to their real life. The users' motivation to reside in the Virtual World was found to directly affect their shopping motivations. Store preference and shopping behavior in-world also seem to be influenced by customers' shopping motivations.

Virtual World business owners and real companies who are using the Virtual World platform for business purposes should benefit from this study. The current paper helps to better understand the reasons behind using free-form Virtual Worlds as well as users' VW shopping behavior (i.e., what, how, where, and why they shop). Companies doing business in the VW should study the different user/shopper types and target the right/most appropriate VW users with the right marketing mix. Particularly, our results suggest different store preferences for each type (See Table 1). Virtual World store managers targeting '*functional shoppers',* for instance, should make shopping at their stores as easy and time efficient as possible (e.g., by offering a complete range of products, or having a 2D web presence), while organizing entertainment activities in the store may rather attract *'social shoppers'.*

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Some limitations of this study may provide suggestions for future research. While this exploratory study offered some initial insights with regard to shopping perceptions, motivations, and behavior in free-form Virtual Worlds, it should be noted that a quantitative study is still needed to address the generalizability of the results and to determine the segment sizes of the different VW shopper types. Another potential limitation is that the findings of the current study are based on the responses of a sample of avatar shoppers in Second Life, as it is currently the most popular and advanced Virtual World. Future studies should consider other Virtual Worlds offering other/more shopping possibilities. Finally, as the popularity of shopping for real products in free-form Virtual Worlds increases, future studies should extend the results to include shopping for real products in the Virtual World.

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