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Making the store a place of learning: The effects of in-store educational activities on retailer legitimacy and shopping intentions

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the store as a place of learning and builds on institutional theory to examine whether the implementation of educational activities in the store environment has a positive effect on consumer perceptions of retailer legitimacy and whether such legitimacy in turn has positive effects on shopping intentions. Findings from a study conducted in a real retail setting reveal that although in-store activities do not exert main effects on legitimacy and shopping intentions, corporate attributions play a major role. Precisely, the value that consumers derive from practicing an in-store educational activity increase retailer legitimacy and shopping intentions only when consumers do not perceive any corporate goals behind the implementation of the activity. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Retailing is a complex and multifaceted cultural activity that includes not only experiential (Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001), ludic (Kozinets et al., 2004), or esthetic (Joy, Wang, Chan, Sherry, & Cui, 2014) dimensions but also social dimensions (Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Handelman & Arnold, 1999). In a customer-oriented industry such as retailing, consumers pay strong attention to how retailers observe some moral and societal obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997). In a context where firms have to behave in a socially appropriate way (Humphreys & Latour, 2013) and comply with obligations to society that go beyond profit-making activities (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004) to be perceived as legitimate, adopting such social actions may help retailers to increase their legitimacy and reach social acceptance by the constituents of their environment (Chaney & Marshall, 2013; Suchman, 1995). Such legitimacy gained by retailers is emphasized as a necessary condition for success: organizations that implement legitimization strategies receive more support from their stakeholders (Handelman & Arnold, 1999), which makes success easier to achieve (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Yang, Su, & Fam, 2012).

Although the endorsement of different social roles – among which social supportive roles (Rosenbaum, 2006), coordinators of community (Kim, Ha, & Fong, 2014a), and second home (Debenedetti, Oppewal, & Arsel, 2014) – has been highlighted as a source of social acceptance for retailers, the effects of the educational role remain largely under-investigated. The literature studies the educational role of retailers only in the case of flagship stores and brand museums where consumers can learn about the history of the brand (Hollenbeck, Peters, & Zinkhan, 2008). Yet, retailers can also implement more pedagogical in-store additional services and turn their stores into places where people can engage in and learn from different activities (Sands, Oppewal, & Beverland, 2015), such as painting, scrapbooking, playing music, or even exercising. For instance, in the United States, retailers such as Lowe's, Michael's Craft, Lakeshore, A.C. Moore, Pottery Barn, and Home Depot offer free classes for kids where they learn to build wooden toys, birdhouses, picture frames, and treasure boxes (<http://freebies.about.com/od/freestuffforkids/tp/classes-for-kids.htm>). In Europe, the French retailer Cultura has implemented a similar added service whereby shoppers can learn painting, sculpturing, or scrapbooking in-store (<http://www.cultura.com/ateliers-43.html>). The implementation of this specific kind of social action suggests that stores should not be considered only as marketplaces (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994) but also as places of learning where consumers go to discover, practice, and increase their knowledge through courses provided by the retailers.

However, although the effect of different social actions of retailers on their legitimacy and consumers has been studied in the literature

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(Arnold, Handelman, & Tigert, 1996; Arnold, Kozinets, & Handelman, 2001; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Kim et al., 2014a), the way these in-store educational activities affect consumer perceptions and subsequent behavior remains unknown. Yet, education refers to universal values (Mason, 2001) and leads to positive social and ethical perceptions (Waples, Antes, Murphy, Connelly, & Mumford, 2009). Because the implementation of such activities might lead consumers to consider retailers to be knowledge providers, consumers might see retailers as extending their social roles to that of educators that are beneficial to the whole society (Handelman & Arnold, 1999). In-store educational activities developed by retailers may thus increase their social acceptance and legitimacy (Carroll, 1991; McGuire, 1963; Suchman, 1995). Therefore, this study proposes and tests a framework whereby the implementation of in-store educational activities increases retailer legitimacy and in turn shopping intentions. Notably, this research also investigates the conditions under which in-store educational activities are beneficial for retailer legitimacy. Specifically, this research examines the crucial role played by corporate attributions, that is, the motives inferred by consumers about the implementation of these activities (Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005; Coulter & Pinto, 1995). When consumers believe the activities are implemented by retailers more in a profitable view (that is, to make money) rather than for their well-being, the value consumers derive from their participation in the activity has a negative effect on legitimacy and subsequent shopping intentions.

This article begins by reviewing research on legitimacy to draw hypotheses on how in-store educational activities may affect consumer perceptions of retailers. A field study in a real retail setting is then described. Following the two-step procedure, the analyses surprisingly demonstrate in the first step that in-store activities do not exert main effects on legitimacy and shopping intentions. In the second step which focuses only on shoppers who participated in an in-store educational activity, the findings show that the value derived from the activity increases retailer legitimacy and shopping intentions. However, this effect occurs only when corporate attributions are low and thus when consumers do not perceive that retailers are seeking to make profit from the implementation of the activity. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research and its limitations.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. In-store educational activities and legitimacy

Institutional theory posits that firms exist within a system of common understanding wherein the constituents share values and norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These norms define the social reality and are rules used to appraise whether firm behaviors are acceptable (Scott, 2013). Institutional theory deals with the process by which social expectations of proper behavior affect the practices of organizations. In this context, the survival of a firm depends on its acceptance by the constituents of the environment (Humphreys & Latour, 2013; Tost, 2011). Legitimation refers to this process of acceptance resulting from the organization's fit with the environmental norms.

Extant research highlights the need for an organization to be considered legitimate to achieve performance and survival (Bianchi & Arnold, 2004; Reast, Maon, Lindgreen, & Vanhamme, 2013). Legitimacy refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). By its nature, legitimacy is thus a perception that “represents a reaction of observers to the organization as they see it” (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). The adoption of socially appropriate practices provides a show of cultural allegiance and the organization is thus likely to be legitimized (Chaney & Marshall, 2013; Humphreys & Latour, 2013). Conversely, a lack of legitimacy implies a lack of social support and resources from stakeholders because of low recognition (Scott, 2013; Yang et al., 2012). The legitimacy acquired by the organization includes

social and pragmatic aspects (Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Suchman, 1995). Social legitimacy occurs when people deem that the organization's business will benefit society as a whole. An organization will be judged to be socially legitimate on the basis of how much it can be considered to show an altruistic nature whose aim is the welfare of others. Pragmatic legitimacy results from the perception that the firm is able to satisfy consumer needs.

While the constituents of the environment confer legitimacy, institutional theory depicts organizations as active agents and thus considers legitimacy to be a status that organizations have to acquire (Deephouse, 1999). The way for organizations to gain legitimacy lies in the adoption of socially recognized behaviors. This definition implies that consumers perceive the legitimacy of a retailer based on all its actions in relation to what is socially responsible (Arnold et al., 2001; Campbell, 2007). In this regard, Kim et al. (2014a) show that retailer community-oriented CSR practices lead to an increase in legitimacy. Arnold et al. (2001) explain Walmart's performance through the legitimacy obtained by its complying with the institutionalized values of American society such as family or nation value. Handelman and Arnold (1999) demonstrate the positive effect of social actions aimed at employees (such as referring to them as “family”) and the community (such as donating to local charities) on legitimacy.

However, although the effect of a diverse set of social actions on legitimacy has been studied in the literature (Arnold et al., 1996, 2001; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Kim et al., 2014a), the influence of educational activities remains unexplored. Drawing on institutional theory, the effect of such activities may be a function of how well they are the right thing to do for the individual and for society. Education, or the learning in which knowledge is transferred (Dewey, 1916), is a universal value that leads to positive ethical outcomes (Carroll, 1991; Waples et al., 2009). Education deals with ideas such as overcoming handicaps, achieving greater quality, and acquiring wealth and status (Sargent, 1994). As a consequence, the implementation of in-store educational activities by retailers intends mainly to help individuals build and create. These activities are thus beneficial from a societal and an individual standpoint (Mason, 2001; McGuire, 1963). Hence, in-store educational activities may increase retailers' social acceptance and subsequently their legitimacy. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Consumers who participate in in-store educational activities will have a higher perception of retailer legitimacy than consumers who don't participate.

2.2. The price of in-store educational activities and retailer legitimacy

The retailing literature uses new institutional theory to highlight that retailers endorse different social roles with the goal to increase their legitimacy (Arnold et al., 1996, 2001; Bianchi & Arnold, 2004; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Kim et al., 2014a). However, proposing that consumers engage in and learn from different activities such as painting, sculpting, or exercising is a very specific action that deals with education. A communal notion posits that education – similar to other values such as health – should be widely accessible (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Article 13 of the United Nations' 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of everyone to have an education (www.ohchr.org). Education is a fundamental right of democracies (Dewey, 1916; Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004). Free access to education is thus an institution according to institutional theory (Scott, 2013), that is to say, the status of unwritten rules to respect. Education represents a value of transcendental significance and is deemed “sacred” by consumers (Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). This sacred status leads consumers to believe that culture and, more broadly, education should be priced according to communal-sharing principles (McGraw, Schwartz, & Tetlock, 2012). Such status mandates

accessibility and affordability (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). Thus, the effects of in-store educational activities may differ according to their price such that higher-priced in-store educational activities lead to a decrease in legitimacy. In relation to the principle of accessibility of education, consumers will perceive higher-priced in-store educational activities as going against the socially accepted norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). We thus propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Consumers who participate in higher-priced in-store educational activities will have a lower perception of retailer legitimacy than consumers who participate in lower-priced in-store educational activities.

Although charging consumers to generate some return on investment from these in-store educational activities may be advantageous from a financial standpoint, consumers may engage in a cognitive process regarding the cost of the activities (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When priced, in-store educational activities may therefore change the perception consumers have of the retailer. A retailer that charges for education may not be seen as benevolent but as trying to make profits, that is, to achieve corporate goals (Coulter & Pinto, 1995). Because education is a right that should be widely accessible and priced according to communal-sharing principles (Darling-Hammond, 1997; McGraw et al., 2012), retailers that implement higher-priced in-store educational activities won't be considered to be acting for the public good but rather to be seeking to serve their own interests. Thus, legitimacy may be higher in the context of a free or low(er)-priced activity because consumers could consider it an authentic benevolent gesture, a non-market activity for the good of shoppers and more broadly for the good of society (Handelman & Arnold, 1999). Conversely, high(er)-priced activities may be seen as cross-selling activities (Vyas & Math, 2006) and therefore generate lower legitimacy. Consumers may view this high(er)-priced additional activity as an attempt to make more money and thus attribute bad intentions to the retailer or corporate attributions according to the literature (Cotte et al., 2005; Coulter & Pinto, 1995). This discussion suggests the following hypothesis:

H3. Consumers who participate in higher-priced (versus lower-priced) in-store educational activities will ascribe higher (versus lower) corporate attributions.

2.3. The value of in-store educational activities and retailer legitimacy

Institutional theory posits that consumers will support retailers that are legitimate, that is, that adopt socially responsible practices (Campbell, 2007; Deephouse, 1999; Humphreys & Latour, 2013; Suchman, 1995). But to increase legitimacy, these social actions must be beneficial from an individual and societal standpoint (Handelman & Arnold, 1999). In other words, the implementation of in-store educational activities must enrich the retail offering and create value for consumers to affect positively the legitimacy of the retailer (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Kim, Lee, & Park, 2014b; Woodruff, 1997). Otherwise, if consumers do not perceive the interest of the educational activities, they won't attribute more legitimacy to the retailer. An activity that would not create value would be perceived as useless and therefore would not generate support from consumers (Handelman & Arnold, 1999). Thus we propose the following hypothesis:

H4. The value derived from participating in in-store educational activities will increase legitimacy.

However, the impact of value on legitimacy may benefit from being examined in a corporate attribution perspective. As highlighted, education is a right that should be widely accessible (Darling-Hammond, 1997; McGraw et al., 2012), and a retailer that charges for educational activities may not be seen as willing to help consumers to enhance their knowledge; rather, such a retailer may be perceived as trying to make more profit (Coulter & Pinto, 1995) from its in-store activities.

These attributions may interact with the value people derive from the activities (Woodruff, 1997). Specifically, consumers may not only base their perception of legitimacy on the sole value they derive from the in-store activities but also on their appraisal of the motives that retailers may have for the implementation of such activities. Corporate attributions could thus play a major role in the effect of value on legitimacy. More precisely, the value consumers derive from educational activities may lead to higher legitimacy when consumers ascribe low corporate attributions, whereas value may not lead to such an increase in legitimacy when consumers ascribe high corporate attributions.

Further, given the widely accepted role of legitimacy on positive outcomes (Arnold et al., 1996; Bianchi & Arnold, 2004; Scott, 2013) and considering this expected moderating role of corporate attributions on the effect of value on legitimacy, corporate attributions may also moderate the sequence whereby value leads to an increase in legitimacy and shopping intentions. More specifically, when corporate attributions are low, value may result in higher legitimacy and shopping intentions, whereas such a positive mediating effect of legitimacy on the effect of value on shopping intentions may not be found when corporate attributions are high. From the preceding, we propose the following hypotheses:

H5. Corporate attributions will moderate the effect of value on legitimacy: specifically, value will increase legitimacy when corporate attributions are low whereas it will have no effect when corporate attributions are high.

H6. Corporate attributions will moderate the mediating effect of legitimacy: specifically, when corporate attributions are low, legitimacy will mediate the effect of value on shopping intentions, whereas such a mediating effect will not be found when corporate attributions are high.

The framework is presented in Fig. 1.

3. Method

3.1. Procedure and store selection

The hypotheses were tested using data from consumers in a real retail setting. To ensure that the retail setting was relevant to the current research, the researchers contacted the best-known retailer specializing in cultural goods and creative leisure in France that has already implemented in-store educational activities: Cultura. The researchers made this choice because this retailer provides customers with a relevant set of in-store educational activities, including scrapbooking, patchwork, jewelry design, painting and modeling (i.e., sculpting material), objects design, and mosaic. Concretely, customers register for one of these activities and can thus attend work sessions in specific places of the store dedicated to the practice of this kind of activities. The sessions are conducted by an instructor who shows and explains the basic techniques and supervises practical hand work. The choice of this retailer for the study was also made because Cultura propose two distinct types of in-store educational which are highly relevant to testing the hypotheses. The first type of activity refers to "workshops," which last one or two hours and customers are asked to pay the price of €6.90 to participate (lower-priced activity). The other type of activity consists of "academy classes," which require greater commitment than the workshops because customers register for at least three months with a total average cost of €85 per month (higher-priced activity). These two types of activities that differ in their price thus allow for the testing of the hypotheses that pertain to the price of the activity (H2–H3). The researchers obtained authorization to collect data in a Cultura store in Bègles, in the suburb of Bordeaux, France. A questionnaire was administered in-store in May and June 2014. To minimize potential biases, the administration of the questionnaire took place in-store on different days of the week and at different hours.

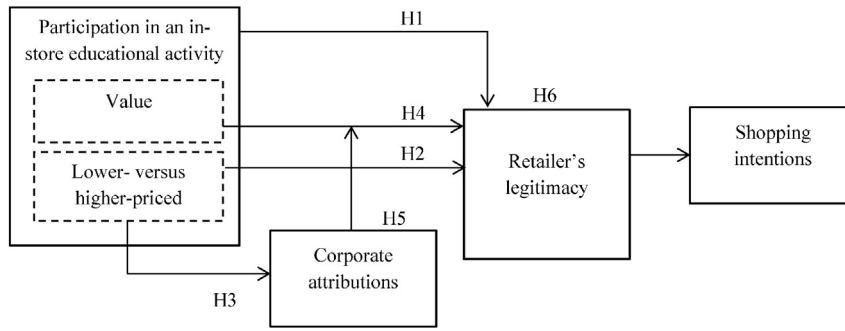


Fig. 1. The theoretical model.

3.2. Sample

To appraise the effects of participation in in-store educational activities, the questionnaire was administered to shoppers that either had or had not previously participated in an activity. The final sample is thus composed of 221 customers, 49 having participated in a workshop (lower-priced activity), 58 having participated in a class of the academy (higher-priced activity), and 114 not having taken part in any in-store educational activity. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents were women, consistent with the percentage of women who participate in the retailer's in-store educational activities. Hence, although women might be seen as overrepresented, the sample is thus representative of the targeted population, thus contributing to the validity of the current research. Fifty-six percent are between 35 and 44 years old, and almost half the sample (48.9%) has an annual income of between €15,000 and €45,000. Finally, only a few respondents reported either a really high (once a week; 4.5% of respondents) or a really low (9.5% reported visiting the store once a year) visit frequency to the store. Of note, the mode was the frequency "once a month" (46.6% of the respondents).

3.3. Measures

Respondents first answered questions asked to know if they had already participated at least once in a workshop or class of the academy. If affirmative, the remainder of the questionnaire asked them the type of activity they participated in and the value they derived from the activity.

They also rated their shopping intentions and their perception of the retailer. If they had not participated in any in-store activity, the questions related only to their shopping intentions and their perceptions of the retailer.

The scales used to measure the key constructs of the model all came from extant literature and were adapted to the present context. Unlike respondents who did not participate in either a workshop or class of the academy, those who did rated the value they had derived from this activity, using a three-item measure from Sweeney, Soutar, and Jonson (1999) ("The quality of the activity was excellent"; "I found the activity of great value"; "Compared to the efforts and sacrifices I've made to participate, it was worth participating"; $\alpha = .86$). All participants rated their shopping intentions using the three positively framed items from Kaltcheva and Weitz (2006; $\alpha = .90$). Thereafter, participants rated legitimacy using seven items from the scale developed by Handelman and Arnold (1999). The item "It requires quite a bit of effort for me to shop at this store" was deleted because of its negative effect on reliability. A factorial analysis revealed scale unidimensionality, with one factor accounting for 62% of variance ($\alpha = .90$). Since these constructs are those of primary interest for the model whereby value has a positive impact on legitimacy and then on shopping intentions, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the data obtained from participants. The analysis provides good fit ($\chi^2 = 94.33$, $df = 62$, $p < .01$; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .07; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2014) and evidence for the construct validity of the measures.

A three-item measure from Coulter and Pinto (1995) and adapted to the retail context was selected to assess corporate attributions.

Table 1 Summary and psychometric properties of scales.

Items	Step 1 (overall dataset, $n = 221$)				Step 2 (participants dataset, $n = 107$)			
	Factor loading	Mean (SD)	AVE	CR	Factor loading	Mean (SD)	AVE	CR
Legitimacy								
This store sets an example for how other retailers should conduct their activities.	.84	5.78 (1.06)	.62	.90	.86	5.57 (1.18)	.70	.87
This store is committed to meeting the standards that people expect of retailers.	.80	4.95 (1.33)			.82	4.69 (1.37)		
This store genuinely listens to the demands that people put on it.	.86	5.46 (1.22)			.87	5.16 (1.29)		
This store sets an example for how retailers should behave.	.83	5.20 (1.35)			.86	5.22 (1.40)		
This store carries products that satisfy my needs.	.84	5.25 (1.23)			.84	5.07 (1.29)		
This store is the kind of place where I can get my money's worth.	.78	5.27 (1.32)			.83	4.96 (1.36)		
This store carries the latest trends in products and services that meet my needs.	.88	5.09 (1.32)			.88	4.98 (1.33)		
Shopping intentions								
I enjoy shopping in this store.	.90	6.05 (1.06)	.83	.90	.94	5.99 (1.13)	.78	.86
I am willing to buy things at this store.	.91	5.96 (1.07)			.92	5.88 (1.12)		
I am willing to recommend this store to my friends.	.85	6.28 (.97)			.97	6.22 (1.05)		
Value								
The quality of the activity was excellent.	-	-	-	-	.93	5.82 (1.59)	.78	.86
I found the activity of great value.	-	-			.93	5.55 (1.65)		
With regard to the efforts and sacrifices I've made to participate, it was worth participating.	-	-			.79	5.47 (1.74)		
Corporate attributions								
This retailer is primarily concerned with making money.	-	3.66 (1.63)	-	-	-	3.76 (1.79)	-	-

Table 2
Convergent and discriminant validity (participant dataset, $n = 107$).

	Value	Legitimacy	Shopping intentions
Value	.78		
Legitimacy	.046*	.70	
Shopping intentions	.039*	.58**	.78

Note: In the diagonals are the average variance extracted for each construct. In the cells are the squared correlations between constructs.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

However, two of the original items were reversed and degraded the scale's unidimensionality (Herche & Engelland, 1996). They were thus removed from the analysis, leading to a final single-item scale ("This retailer is primarily concerned with making money"; $M = 3.66$; $S.D. = 1.64$). Although mono-item measures may be perceived to be less accurate than multi-items scales, they may be of interest to measure concepts that are concrete and well established in the literature (Rossiter, 2002). The researchers thus decided to retain this single-item measure as the one for corporate attributions.

A 7-point Likert scale anchored at "Do not agree at all" to "Totally agree" measured all the constructs. Table 1 provides a description of the scales.

In addition of the CFA providing evidence for the validity of the measures, the procedure suggested by Hair et al. (2014) in which variance extracted from among a set of construct items must be higher than 0.5 was used. All the multi-item scales showed convergent validity. To test the discriminant validity among value, legitimacy and shopping intentions, the researchers used the procedures suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to these authors, the average variance extracted for each construct must be higher than the squared correlation between this construct and any other construct. The measures showed discriminant validity. Table 2 provides the results of the convergent and discriminant validity.

4. Results

The results are presented following a two-step procedure. We first start with the test of H1–H3 to investigate if participation in in-store educational activities has an effect on legitimacy. The whole sample of 221 consumers is utilized to test these hypotheses. Then, we test H4–H6 and the proposition that the value derived from such in-store activities has a positive effect on legitimacy and subsequently on shopping intentions according to the level of corporate attributions. The sample used here is thus that of respondents who participated in an activity ($n = 107$).

4.1. Step 1. The overall effect of participation (versus no participation) in in-store educational activities (Hypotheses 1–3)

Since H1 posits a higher mean of legitimacy for consumers who participated (versus did not) in an in-store educational activity, a one-tailed t-test for independent samples was conducted. This test was conducted with overall participation (i.e., participation in either a lower- or higher-priced activity) as the independent variable and legitimacy as the dependent variable. Results reveal no significant differences of legitimacy between consumers who participated in an in-store educational

activity ($M = 5.22$) and those who did not participate ($M = 5.34$; $t = .84$, $p > .05$). This result thus does not support H1.

Since H2 investigates the effect of participating in a higher (versus lower)-priced in-store educational activity, the test of H2 was conducted from an ANOVA and a post-hoc test. The type of activity (workshop as the lower-priced activity versus academy class as the higher-priced activity) was included as the independent variable and legitimacy as the dependent variable. Results from a Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc test reveal that legitimacy is higher when consumers participate in a lower-priced activity ($M = 5.39$) as opposed to a higher-priced activity ($M = 5.08$, $p = .06$). These results marginally support H2. Table 3 presents the means across conditions of participation.

Beyond providing results obtained when testing H2, Table 3 shows significant differences of corporate attributions ($F(2, 219) = 3.56$, $p < .05$) according to participation conditions (no activity versus lower-priced activity versus higher-priced activity). These differences indicate that consumers attribute different corporate attributions according to the type of activity (lower-priced versus higher priced). Precisely, and turning to the test of H3, a post-hoc test reveals a significant difference of corporate attributions between consumers who participated in a lower-priced activity ($M = 3.33$) and those who participated in a higher-priced activity ($M = 4.12$, $p < .05$). This result supports H3. Interestingly and albeit not hypothesized, post-hoc tests also show a difference between the higher-priced activity condition and the no-participation condition ($M = 3.57$, $p < .10$), such that corporate attributions are significantly higher in the higher-priced activity condition (Table 4).

These results shed light on two effects. First, they reveal the effects of in-store educational activities on consumer perceptions of retailer legitimacy. The results indicate that from a broad perspective and regardless of the type of activity (lower-priced versus higher-priced) educational activities do not exert an effect on legitimacy. However, when the type of activities is taken into account, results show that legitimacy is higher in the case of lower-priced activities as opposed to higher-priced activities. Second, these results also shed light on the role that corporate attributions may play in the effects of in-store educational activities. Specifically, they indicate that when in-store educational activities are not free, people believe they help retailers make profits, that is, achieve corporate goals. The following step of the analyses thus focuses on corporate attributions and their role in the effects of the value that consumers derive from participating in in-store educational activities.

4.2. Step 2. Focusing on value derived from participation in in-store educational activities ($n = 107$; hypotheses 4–6)

Because only participants can observe value, hypotheses H4 to H6 pertaining to the effects of value – and its interaction with corporate attributions – on legitimacy were tested on only the sample of participants.

Specifically, with regard to H4 and H5, the test was conducted using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012). The researchers conducted a regression with legitimacy as the dependent variable, value as the independent variable and corporate attributions as the moderator. As expected, the results show that value derived from participation increases legitimacy ($\beta = .42$, $t = 3.51$, $p < .001$). This result brings support to H4. Interestingly, a value \times corporate attributions interaction on legitimacy

Table 3
Means across conditions of participation.

Variables	Participation			F	p
	No activity ($n = 114$)	Lower-priced activities (workshop, $n = 49$)	Higher-priced activities (academy class, $n = 58$)		
Legitimacy	5.34	5.39	5.08	1.56	.213
Corporate attributions	3.57	3.33	4.12	3.56	.030
Shopping intentions	6.16	6.15	5.92	5.06	.269

emerged ($\beta = -.08, t = -2.40, p < .05$). As shown by Fig. 2, the value that consumers derive from in-store educational activities increases (versus does not increase) legitimacy when corporate attributions are low (versus high) (Fig. 2). More precisely, the Johnson–Neyman point for $p < .05$ occurs at a corporate attributions value of 3.56 (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013), indicating that the positive effect of value on legitimacy occurs only for levels of corporate attributions that are below 3.56. These results offer full support for H5.

Turning to corporate attributions as a moderator of the mediating effect of legitimacy between value and shopping intentions, a moderated-mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS (Model 8) with 5000 bootstraps (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Legitimacy was included as the mediator, value as the independent variable, shopping intentions as the dependent variable, and corporate attributions as the moderator of the mediation. The results show that value exerts a significant indirect effect on shopping intentions through legitimacy when corporate attributions are low (1 S.D. below the mean of 4.02; the confidence interval of this indirect effect excluding 0: .06; .40) (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). On the contrary, this indirect effect is not found when corporate attributions are high (1 S.D. above the mean of 4.02; the confidence interval of this indirect effect including 0: $-.17; .16$). These results show that legitimacy mediates the effect of value on shopping intentions only when corporate attributions are low, that is when customers attribute no corporate goals to the activity. Conversely, when people attribute some corporate goals to the activity, this positive effect of value on legitimacy and subsequently on shopping intentions is not observed. These results thus support H6. These results are presented in Fig. 3.

Overall, these results provide a clear explanation for the effects of in-store educational activities. Given the results showing a lack of significant direct effect of value on shopping intentions, the results highlight the crucial role of corporate attributions and legitimacy in the effects of value on shopping intentions. In-store educational activity can increase value and consequently shopping intentions provided that shoppers do not attribute corporate goals to the activities. Such low corporate attributions are needed to make value enhance perceived legitimacy and consequently shopping intentions.

Table 5 proposes a summary of the hypotheses tests.

5. Conclusion and discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study presents two main theoretical contributions. First, the idea that firms have social obligations that go beyond economic and legal responsibilities and that they must take an interest in the welfare of the community and in education has long been argued (e.g. Carroll, 1991; McGuire, 1963) but receives little empirical attention. In the retailing literature more specifically, the examination of the educational role of retailers is very scarce (Hollenbeck et al., 2008; Sands et al., 2015). This study thus contributes to retailing literature with this empirical study conducted in a real retail setting that is the first to provide

Table 4 Results of the Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc tests.

	Participation conditions		
	Low-no	Low-high	High-no
Legitimacy	.048	.299 ⁺	-.251 ⁺
Corporate attributions	-.244	-.794 ^{***}	.551 [*]
Shopping intentions	-.004	.231	-.235 ⁺

Note: results represent the means of the first variable minus that of the second variable. Participations conditions: low = lower-priced activity; high = higher-priced activity; no = no activity.
⁺ $p < .10$.
^{*} $p < .05$.
^{**} $p < .01$.

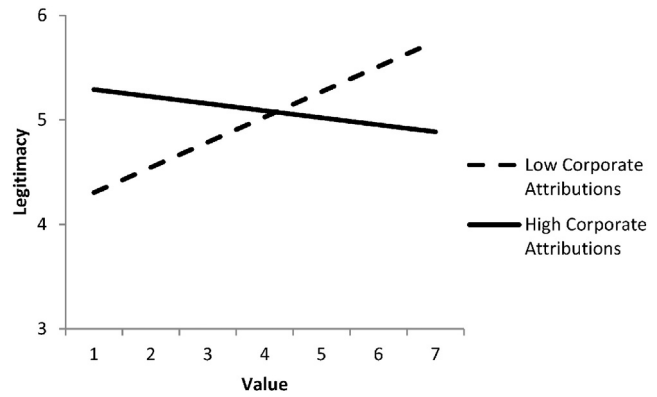
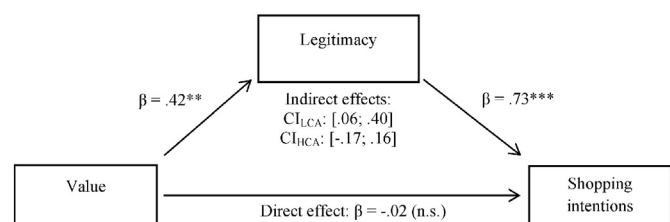


Fig. 2. Legitimacy as a function of value and corporate attributions.

clear field evidence of the effects of educational in-store activities. The results suggest that a store is not only a place of exchange and social relationships (Bloch et al., 1994) but also a place of learning where consumers can go to discover, practice, and increase their knowledge through courses provided by the retailer. As such, implementing in-store educational activities can't be considered to be any other social action because these additional activities lead retailers to broaden their social roles and to endorse the role of educators. Because education is widely considered a universal value (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Mason, 2001), this research argues that implementing such educational activities may help retailers increase their legitimacy, that is, the extent to which they are socially accepted and embedded (Arnold et al., 2001; Suchman, 1995). Nevertheless, the first important result of this study highlights the absence of positive main effects of in-store educational activities. A comparison of the levels of legitimacy and shopping intentions across conditions of participation indicates that practicing an educational activity in the retail setting does not have any positive effects. However, an interesting result is that practicing a lower-priced activity leads to an increase in legitimacy as compared to a higher-priced activity. In other words, when consumers engage in a higher-priced (versus lower-priced) activity, they perceive the retailer as less able to provide services that meet their own needs and those of the society compared to other retailers (Handelman & Arnold, 1999).

The second step of the procedure followed to test the hypotheses then investigates this negative effect of higher-priced in-store educational activities under the light of corporate attributions, or the perception that the activity is not a benevolent gesture but a marketing tool implemented to achieve corporate goals (Cotte et al., 2005; Coulter & Pinto, 1995). In this regard, the second contribution of importance lies in the enrichment of the legitimacy literature through the highlight of the key role played by corporate attributions. Although the retailing literature considers legitimacy as a variable of interest (e.g. Arnold et al., 1996, 2001; Bianchi & Arnold, 2004; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Kim et al., 2014a), the mechanisms that lead to this legitimacy remain unknown. This research stresses the importance of corporate attributions.



Note: n.s.: $p > .05$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
 LCA: low corporate attributions; HCA: high corporate attributions.

Fig. 3. The moderated-mediating effect of legitimacy.

Table 5
Summary of the hypotheses tests.

Hypotheses	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Expected effect	Result
H1	Participation in an in-store educational activity	Legitimacy	Positive	Rejected
H2	Lower- and higher-priced in-store educational activities	Legitimacy	Negative	Marginally supported
H3	Lower- and higher-priced in-store educational activities	Corporate attributions	Positive	Supported
H4	Value	Legitimacy	Positive	Supported
H5	Value	Legitimacy	Moderated by corporate attributions	Supported
H6	Value	Shopping intentions	Mediated by legitimacy	Supported

The results obtained from the sample of consumers who engaged in an educational activity indicate that corporate attributions exert two important effects. First, they moderate the effect of value on legitimacy. The results indicate that the value derived from practicing an in-store educational activity has a positive effect on consumer perceptions of retailer legitimacy only when corporate attributions are low. When corporate attributions are high and the activity is seen as a marketing tool, the value derived from the activity has no effect on the perception of legitimacy. The second important effect of corporate attributions lies in their moderating role on the mediating effect of legitimacy. Consistently with the theoretical framework of the research, the results indicate that legitimacy mediates the effect of value on shopping intentions. However, this effect occurs only when corporate attributions are low and thus when consumers consider the activity to be a free gesture from the retailer. When corporate attributions are high, the mediating effect of legitimacy does not hold. In other words, the value that consumers derive from practicing an in-store educational activity will increase the perception of retailer legitimacy and shopping intentions only when consumers do not perceive any corporate goals behind the implementation of the activity. When the activity is seen as a corporate tool, such positive effect of value on perception of legitimacy and shopping intentions do not hold.

5.2. Managerial implications

Because the space that retailers assign to such activities is subtracted from the space available for sales and corporate performance, retailers face a challenging task in attributing space to educational activities. The space that retailers lose for sales must lead to some other kind of benefit. One potential benefit may be an increase in legitimacy. The question that retailers thus face is whether it is worth losing some sales space for the implementation of educational activities. Overall, this research suggests that the answer to this question is negative. The results based on a real retail setting show that the effects of practicing such activities are mostly negative: consumers who participated in a lower-priced activity did not show higher perceptions of legitimacy or more positive shopping intentions and those who participated in a higher-priced activity showed a decrease in these variables.

Perhaps a possible solution for retailers consists of diminishing the corporate aspect of the educational activities. The results obtained from the sample of participants in the activities highlight the detrimental effect of corporate attributions: when high, these attributions decrease the positive effect of value and prevent legitimacy positively mediating the effect of value on shopping intentions. Hence, retailers may benefit from ensuring their in-store educational activities are not perceived as a tool to make money but as a benevolent gesture. Although a potential way would be to propose all activities be set at a lower price, retailers need also to obtain some return on investments from these activities. The challenge is thus to decrease the attribution of corporate goals to educational activities while continuing to charge for them. To do so, retailers must first ensure that they propose educational activities of significant value and not just an empty shell to ensure consumers feel they have learned something. Furthermore, these educational activities require providing consumers with some personalized guidance. Retailers must ensure sufficient and skilled human resources to accompany consumers and spend time providing useful advice.

5.3. Limitations and further research

Similar to any study, some limitations exist on the generalizability of the results. First, this research involves a particular retailer that has implemented a certain type of educational activity. For purposes of external validity, further research could investigate the effects of other in-store educational activities to verify whether they replicate. To this end, the readings organized by the Barnes and Noble book club in the United States would be an interesting cultural activity to examine. This club consists of participants with learning difficulties and a wide range of reading skills along with two volunteer facilitators who read aloud and discuss books with the goal of promoting social connectedness, literacy learning, and community inclusion. This activity would seem to be a free and benevolent activity that could lead to an increase in consumer perceptions of Barnes and Noble's legitimacy. Other retailers provide physical activities in their retail stores that at first glance could also lead to positive outcomes. For example, the French retailer Decathlon in 2008 launched a golf simulator to help consumers practice golf and test products in their stores. Nevertheless, some consumers may perceive this simulator as a tool to help create additional reasons to visit and enhance sales through the opportunity consumers are offered to test golf products.

Furthermore, the study conceptualizes perceived value as the consumer's overall assessment of in-store activity utility based on the perceptions she or he has of what is obtained (benefits) compared to what is given (costs). This conceptualization of value is consistent with Zeithaml (1988) but does not enable measuring more subtle aspects of the complex notion of value. Some conceptualizations of value consider it composed of utilitarian and hedonic dimensions (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). These dimensions could be measured to examine whether in-store activities exert effects on the hedonic dimension of value or on its utilitarian dimension.

Another promising avenue for future research is investigating whether the mere knowledge of a retailer's educational activities exerts an effect on its legitimacy. In other words, it would be useful to analyze whether the practice of an educational activity is necessary for consumers to perceive the retailer as legitimate or if the mere knowledge of the retailer having implemented such activities is sufficient for legitimization.

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