Journal of Business Research xxx (2014) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

Cognitive fit, retail shopper confusion, and shopping value: Empirical investigation ☆

Marion Garaus [a,*], Udo Wagner [a,1], Claudia Kummer [b,2]

[a] University of Vienna, Department of Management, Oskar-Morgenstern-Platz 1, A-1090 Vienna, Austria
[b] University of Applied Sciences Burgenland, Campus 1, A-7000 Eisenstadt, Austria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 1 July 2014
Received in revised form 1 August 2014
Accepted 1 October 2014
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Retail shopper confusion
Cognitive fit
Information rate
Categorization theory
Shopping value
Appropriateness

ABSTRACT

Shopper confusion represents a mental state often occurring in shopping situations. While extant research focuses on product-related consumer confusion, the current investigation examines store environmental retail shopper confusion. Combining research streams on store environment, environmental psychology, and categorization theory, the authors build a conceptual retail shopper confusion framework. An analysis of expert interviews and open-ended questionnaires distributed to grocery shoppers reveals a classification of retail shopper confusion causes into ambient, design, and social factors, as characterized by the environmental properties variety, novelty, complexity, and conflict. A mediation analysis by means of structural equation modeling confirms the mediating role of retail shopper confusion between cognitive fit with an environment and shopping value. Retail shopper confusion thus explains why shoppers experience low hedonic and utilitarian shopping values in certain shopping situations.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Have you ever failed to find products you sought while grocery shopping because misleading signage led you to the wrong aisle? Have you ever spent more time than you initially planned on your shopping trip because you were overwhelmed by the abundance of choice? In such situations, shoppers generally feel confused and frustrated, and in the past decade, the problems of consumer confusion have increased, especially in retail settings. Confused shoppers respond with negative reactions, such as purchase postponement or abandonment (e.g., Mitchell, Walsh, & Yamin, 2005), alteration of brand choice, and decreased loyalty (Walsh, Hennig-Thurau, & Mitchell, 2007). Numerous studies address the causes and consequences of product-related confusion; however, research related to store environmental confusion is scarce. To reduce confusion during shopping situations, all confusion sources must be reduced.

With extant studies describing the substantial impact of the physical store environment on shoppers' behavior, the current research follows the call to identify store environmental confusion triggers (e.g., Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999) and introduces a framework of retail shopper confusion. Retail shopper confusion represents a three-dimensional, temporary mental state consisting of the cognitive efforts necessary to deal with confusion (cognition), emotions reflecting the discomfort associated with confusion (affect), and restricted behavioral intentions (conation).

The identification of store environmental confusion triggers enables retailers to reduce confusion during shopping situations. A detailed classification of confusing in-store elements into ambient, design, and social factors, with the confusion potential described by the four environmental properties variety, novelty, complexity, and conflict, can guide managers and store designers on how to avoid confusing store environments. One aspect that confuses shoppers is cognitive misfit, produced by inappropriate in-store elements. Using categorization theory, this research explains why shoppers become confused by store factors and advances research on consumers' perceptions and processing of store environments.

In shopping situations, consumers cognitively evaluate how much an environment hinders or facilitates a shopping goal (Bitner, 1992; Stoel, Wickliffe, & Lee, 2004). Extant research demonstrates that this evaluation applies to both hedonic and utilitarian product categories. Store environments that evoke retail shopper confusion hinder shopping goal achievement and thus decrease shopping value. Research also finds that shopping value influences main outcome variables, such as satisfaction, and in turn attitudinal loyalty, word-of-mouth

☆ The authors give special thanks to the Associate Editor, Barry J. Babin, for his constructive comments and guidance. Furthermore, they thank the *JBR* reviewers for comments on previous versions of this article. They are also grateful to Elisabeth Nevins Caswell and Francesca Cooley, Effectual Editorial Services; Reinhard Grohs, University of Innsbruck; Elisabeth Wolfsteiner, University of Vienna; and Magdalena Zimprich, University of Vienna, for their useful comments.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +43 1 4277 38021; fax: +43 1 4277 838021.
E-mail addresses: marion.garaus@univie.ac.at (M. Garaus), udo.wagner@univie.ac.at (U. Wagner), claudia.kummer@fh-burgenland.at (C. Kummer).
[1] Tel.: +43 1 4277 38012; fax: +43 1 4277 838012.
[2] Tel.: +43 1 5 9010 60147; fax: +43 1 5 9010 60111.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.10.002
0148-2963/© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Please cite this article as: Garaus, M., et al., Cognitive fit, retail shopper confusion, and shopping value: Empirical investigation, *Journal of Business Research* (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.10.002

communication, share of purchases (Carpenter, 2008), customer share (Babin & Attaway, 2000), and re-patronage intention (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Jones, Reynolds, & Arnold, 2006). The current article thus highlights the importance of avoiding confusing store designs to create shopping value and desirable consumer outcomes.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Store environment

Scholars largely agree that external cues significantly determine shoppers' behavior. These external cues constitute the store environment, which refers to "a building or physical structure and all that is contained within that structure" (Baker, 1998, p. 56). Baker (1987) distinguishes design factors (e.g., architecture, colors, comfort, layout, materials), ambient factors (e.g., music, scent, light, temperature), and social factors (e.g., other customers, service personnel).

To describe the confusion potential of design, ambient, and social factors, this study implements information rate theory. Mehrabian and Russell (1974, p. 235) define information rate as "the total amount of information per unit time." A high information rate requires comprehensive cognitive processing efforts. If a store environment conveys too much information, people's cognitive processing abilities exceed their capacities, resulting in feelings of overload and confusion (Jacoby, Speller, & Berning, 1974). In coherence with other environmental psychologists, Berlyne (1960) postulates that the following four structural properties (that positively correlate with each other) constitute the information rate of an environment: (1) variety (diversity and number of alternative options in an environment; Mehrabian, 1977), (2) novelty (change and surprise; Cupchik & Berlyne, 1979), (3) complexity (stimuli variation and number of distinguishable stimuli; Wohlwill, 1974), and (4) conflict (incompatible stimuli; Berlyne, 1960).

The conceptual framework (see Fig. 1) of this study suggests that highly confusing store environments, as characterized by high levels of variety, novelty, complexity, and conflict of ambient, design, and social factors, confuse shoppers. Furthermore, if consumers perceive these properties as inappropriate (i.e., they do not match each other or the overall store image), cognitive misfit occurs, leading to retail shopper confusion (Beverland, Lim, Morrison, & Terziovski, 2006).

2.2. Cognitive fit

The underlying assumption of information rate theory postulates that individuals perceive and comprehend environments holistically. In consumer behavior literature, recent research demonstrates that the organization of various store cues causes shoppers to evaluate a store design according to its appropriateness (Babin & Babin, 2001; Babin, Chebat, & Michon, 2004; Bitner, 1992). Babin et al. (2004) refer to mental categories or schemes in this context to explain how shoppers interpret store environments. Categorization (or schema) theory suggests that individuals assign information to categories derived from past experiences and knowledge (Sujan, 1985; Sujan & Bettman, 1989). This categorization approach enables fast and efficient information processing because new information can be interpreted on the basis of simple heuristics.

If an environmental stimulus does not match a predefined cognitive category, stimuli need to be processed piece by piece, leading to enhanced cognitive effort (Stayman, Alden, & Smith, 1992). Consumer behavior researchers refer to this theory when describing a sales person's stereotype (Babin, Boles, & Darden, 1995) or a store's prototypicality (Ward, Bitner, & Barnes, 1992). In general, extant literature finds support for the notion that the match to prior expectations of a stimulus results in positive evaluation, behavior, and affect (Babin & Babin, 2001; Babin et al., 2004; Beverland et al., 2006).

Transferring schema theory to the context of retail shopper confusion indicates that the presentation (in terms of variety, novelty, complexity, and conflict) of ambient, design, and social factors either facilitates or hinders the shopping task (Ward et al., 1992). The match of the properties of store factors with prior expectations enables the allocation of this store to some category (or, in other words, a specific schema is activated), making the usage of heuristics possible, and also results in efficient information processing (Babin et al., 2004). Mismatching or inappropriate store properties produce cognitive misfit and, as a consequence, confusion (Beverland et al., 2006). The current study employs the term "cognitive fit" to describe shoppers' individual evaluation of a store design's appropriateness.

2.3. Retail shopper confusion

Babin et al. (2004) argue that the level of appropriateness of a store influences cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of consumers' reactions. While most consumer behavior research focuses on one of these mental states, some constructs comprise all three dimensions (e.g., experiential consumption; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The consideration of the three-dimensional perspective of the human mind dates back to Plato, who describes the mind as consisting of cognition, emotion, and conation; research in psychology widely concurs with this definition (e.g., Hilgard, 1980; Mayer, Chabot, & Carlsmith, 1997). The three components provide a complete view of the human mind, and neglecting one dimension can have negative effects on the prediction of consumer behavior (Bagozzi, Tybout, Craig, & Sternthal, 1979; Mayer, 2001). The current research therefore conceptualizes retail shopper confusion as a three-dimensional, temporary mental state consisting of the cognitive effort necessary to deal with confusion (cognition), emotions reflecting the discomfort associated with confusion (emotion), and restricted behavioral intentions (conation). Feelings express changes in these three mental sub-systems during the state of confusion (Clore et al., 2001). Cognitive feelings reflect the impairment in thought-related processes and mechanisms when experiencing confusion (e.g., reasoning, encoding, storing and retrieving information; Mayer et al., 1997). Extant research suggests that confusion comprises negative emotions such as anger, frustration, self-reproach, irritation, or anxiety (Walsh et al., 2007), constituting the affective confusion dimension. Finally, the intentional component of mind represents the conation dimension. Retail shopper confusion restricts behavioral intentions because store environmental stimuli are misinterpreted, leading to feelings of loss (Dogu & Erkip, 2000) and helplessness (Massara, Liu, & Melara, 2010). In summary, consumers experience negative feelings during the mental state of retail shopper confusion that reflects changes in the three mental sub-systems of cognition, emotions, and conation. The negative feelings associated with retail shopper confusion decrease perceived shopping value (see Babin & Attaway, 2000) (see Fig. 1).

2.4. Shopping value

Shopping value represents an ultimate multi-dimensional outcome of a shopping process (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Stoel et al., 2004). Babin et al. (1994) introduce the differentiation between hedonic (experiential) outcomes and utilitarian (instrumental) outcomes. Consumers evaluate shopping in a task-oriented mind-set to find the right products, obtain desired information, or receive an intended service (Babin & Attaway, 2000; Jones et al., 2006). Shopping also includes hedonic aspects, such as entertainment and emotional value (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) describe these shopping components as multisensory and emotional and connect them with the shopping experience itself. Within each shopping trip, consumers derive both hedonic and utilitarian benefits to some extent (Stoel et al., 2004).

Extant research demonstrates the potential of a store environment to enhance (or diminish) shopping value. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) reveal that mall characteristics (e.g., cleanliness, opening

Please cite this article as: Garaus, M., et al., Cognitive fit, retail shopper confusion, and shopping value: Empirical investigation, *Journal of Business Research* (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.10.002

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10492895

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/10492895

Daneshyari.com