



I See Myself in Service and Product Consumptions: Measuring Self-transformative Consumption Vision (SCV) Evoked by Static and Rich Media

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Abstract

When consumers encounter uncertainty regarding their purchase decisions, they tend to perform a mental visualization process of creating a self-involved imaginative future incident about a product/service in which the consumption outcome is envisioned. The current study proposes a new measurement instrument to capture the process, namely *self-transformative consumption vision* (SCV) scale. Although similar theoretical constructs have been introduced, validity tests in more diverse media platforms and more elaborated measurement approaches are required. As today's marketing communications are increasingly oriented toward stimulating SCV through diverse rich and interactive media, it is considered scholarly and practically meaningful to propose a new scale. To this end, several pretests are conducted for initial item generations and stimuli developments. Studies 1 and 2 identify valid items that capture SCV and Study 3 establishes the SCV construct's nomological validity. Studies 4 and 5 apply this scale in an empirical study, thereby comparing it to existing scales to identify scale superiority.

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Keywords: Self-transformative consumption vision; Marketing communications in rich media; Information processing; Mental interaction; Mental imagery

Introduction

When consumers encounter uncertainty regarding their purchase decisions, they tend to employ mentally simulated processes to evaluate products/services by asking themselves questions such as, “If I purchase this size of wrench, can I fix the problems in my kitchen plumbing?” or “Will it really taste good?,” or “Will this tablet PC be a better choice than other options?” In considering answers for these intriguing questions, the brain generates mental pictures of how to personally use or consume the target product in their specific situations/contexts. This self-included mental process

of anticipating and envisioning oneself in the product/service use is called *consumption vision* (CV). This construct has been generally defined as a consumer's product-related mental images that enable him or her to anticipate the self-relevant consequences of product use (Walker and Olson 1994). Prior studies demonstrated that such mental imagery processes would reinforce confidence about a recent purchase decision (Phillips 1996; Smith and Swinyard 1988), enhance the attitudes toward the advertisement (Phillips 1996) or information sources (Shiv and Huber 2000), and stimulate their sensory fantasy and adventure for new things (Christensen, Olson, and Ross 2004).

Accordingly, it is a practically and scholarly imperative to formulate a scale that best identifies and measures a consumer's mental process of this sort. Prior scholars have proposed and empirically tested diverse measurement tools to capture this

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mental process. There are, however, some limitations in those attempts. First, the existing CV-type scales have been mostly tested using response to print advertisements which are embedded within the traditional static media (e.g., Chang 2012; Escalas 2004; Phillips 1996; Walters, Sparks, and Herington 2007; 2012). Little is known about whether this scale would be still reliable and valid in other richer media contexts (e.g., streaming video or interactive image ads). Second, the lack of a unified measurement tool for assessing a consumer's mental process of this type has resulted in few research applications that compare effectiveness across the increasingly diverse media contexts of current forms of marketing communications. In addition, researchers have mainly focused on the “imagery vividness” to measure the underlying CV construct (e.g., Phillips 1996; Walters, Sparks, and Herington 2007). The existing CV scales have failed to adequately measure other dimensions of a person's mental ability to transform self-relevant consequences based on anticipatory product use into more engrossing forms of immersive media environments. Instead, they captured it as a unidimensional construct. Thus, it is essential that a richer, more accurate form of the CV construct is required to assess multiple dimensions of CV.

To address all these issues, we postulate a theoretically-based CV construct and empirically test it for reliability and validity. In operationalizing this CV scale, we seek to assess the multidimensional CV construct in the context of more diverse and rich media forms that lead themselves to what we will call “self-transformative consumption visions” (SCV). Following the guidance suggested by Churchill (1979) and Gerbing and Anderson (1988) for scale development, we implement five subsequent studies – excluding pretests – to identify a parsimonious set of items that can most effectively and accurately operationalize the SCV construct.

Literature Review

What Is Self-transformative Consumption Vision?

Grounding it in theories of mental imagery (Christensen 2002), simulation theory (Gordon 1992), associative network theory (Keller 1993), and the availability-valence hypothesis (Anderson and Bower 1980), we define a self-transformative consumption vision (SCV) as a person's mental visualization process of creating a self-involved imaginative future incident, story or narrative about a product or service in which the consumption outcome is envisioned. The self-transformation occurs as a person allows himself or herself to mentally experience the personal consumption to such a degree that the incident may in some cases be so vivid as to be perceived as having actually occurred.

To operationalize the SCV construct, two important premises need to be established. First, this SCV construct is distinguishable from other general mental imagery processes in that it creates mental imaging of the self-envisioned actual or expected sensory experiences with the product and/or consumption behavior (Green and Brock 2000; Krishnamurthy and Sujun 1999). It would be possible for consumers to visualize an object or event without connecting it to the self in the imaging process (e.g., fantasizing;

Klinger 1990). In this case, it could weaken the validity of the gauging imagery process relative to future consumption, when compared to consumers actually projecting themselves into the mental scenario. Thus, we see the importance of self-transformation to the context in which response to marketing communications takes place. Second, the SCV construct consists of multiple sub-dimensions such as imagery processes about self-related product/service uses (e.g., vivid mental image about product use) and relevant physiological mental states and conditions (e.g., engagement in stimuli). Both imagery and sensing are based on the same operational psychological mechanism and in turn the same physiological effects accompany it (MacInnis and Price 1987). That is, the greater richness of mental imaging requires self-engagement accompanying of diverse physiological outcomes in generating this type of “mental video” about self-actualized future consumption. We proceed now to present a more detailed, theoretically-based development of the components of this construct.

Self-projection in Self-transformative CV

Prior theoretical constructs used in defining consumers' mental envisioning processes have not adequately captured the broad scope of imagery processes required to measure the projection of the self into the imaging of consumption of a product or service. This has resulted in too broad a range of imagery measures (e.g., Miller, Hadjimarcou, and Miciak 2000). For example, when a cue such as the Eiffel Tower is incorporated in an online priceline.com website ad touting touring Paris that includes the copy, “Project yourself here!” a person would not only envision the beautiful historic buildings in Paris but would further expand their imagination to include personal interactions with other elements presented in or generated by the online message. This may include elements not particularly relevant to the travel in Paris, such as new friend whom they have previously met in Paris or the news about recent terror in Paris. As a result, although many scholars have reported that mental imagery explains purchase intention (e.g., MacInnis and Price 1987; Schlosser 2003), others have reported that it does not (e.g., Petrova and Cialdini 2005; Yim et al. 2017).

In a similar way, the existing theoretical explanation of mental imagery also fails to include the missing part of a media user's self-transformativeness in the envisioned consumption of a target object from an information processing perspective. Among the numerous ways of defining mental imagery, common salient perspectives of mental imagery are threefold: 1) a subset of experiences similar to the sensory experience (Sommer 1978), 2) a process that is constantly held in our working memory (MacInnis and Price 1987), and 3) newly reconstructed information obtained by retrieving and modifying previously stored information and experiences (Kosslyn, Ganis, and Thompson 2001; Thomas 2004). This explanation demonstrates that although mental imagery is a process that engenders sensory representations of ideas, feelings, objects, or product experiences (MacInnis and Price 1987), all are relevant to previous product encounters, fantasied or factual. In this sense mental imagery is not concerned with how much a user transfers themselves into

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