



“First in first out” or “last in first out”: Presentation of information order on evaluation of utilitarian products



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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how the presentation order of information may affect the evaluation of utilitarian products. Three experiments with different conditions (hedonic/utilitarian product; experience/search advertisement; unattractive/attractive packaging) were conducted with a total of 334 participants in Macau. This study tests both the affective and cognitive product evaluation. The findings indicate that assimilation effect occurs if the search advertisement of a utilitarian product is presented before and if the consumers have better cognitive evaluation. When an experience advertisement is presented before, contrast effect occurs and affective evaluation is reduced. However, when unattractive packaging is presented before, assimilation effect occurs, and cognitive evaluation is increased. When attractive packaging is presented before, the consumers demonstrate a positive cognitive and affective evaluation for the utilitarian product. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the role of presentation order on the consumers' evaluation of utilitarian products from theoretical and managerial perspectives.

1. Introduction

When consumers first view a product, its physical appearance may influence the consumers' perception based on their global beliefs and personal preference. This initial impression may be distinguished and influenced by additional details and information provided later. This direct emotional reaction could create either favorable or unfavorable feelings, but if this feeling is muddled with the information provided later, the product evaluation will be affected as well (Smith, 1993; Yeung and Wyer, 2004). Several studies have investigated whether additional product information shown before or after sampling can enhance the product evaluation (e.g. Biswas et al., 2010; Biswas et al., 2009; Wilcox et al., 2011). Interestingly, presenting undesirable information after sampling a hedonic product such as chocolate and wine, received better evaluation than presenting before sampling (Yeung and Wyer, 2004). By contrast, if the desirable information is presented, the results are inverted (Biswas et al., 2010). Bagchi and Davis (2012) demonstrate how presentation order influences package evaluations and decision under multiple levels of package size and unit price calculation difficulty. Theoretically, utilitarian products are very different from hedonic products (Babin et al., 1994). They are more cognitive in nature, and their judgment should be more based on information content, and if the information are the same, the evalua-

tion should be the same. The question then arises as to whether utilitarian product evaluation is influenced by information order in a similar way. Also, do the consumers evaluate the utilitarian products for different types of advertisements and packaging?

This study addresses the aforementioned research gap and contributes to the marketing literature in the following ways: (1) extant literature largely focuses on the hedonic products in the investigation of information order effect (Biswas et al., 2009, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2011). This study therefore expands on product category by testing utilitarian products. (2) Previous studies paid attention to the likelihood evaluation of the tested product (Biswas et al., 2009; Ge et al., 2012). This study includes both affective and cognitive product evaluation, which may generate more complete ideas to the product information order effect on utilitarian product. (3) This study includes two more conditions (search/experience advertisement and unattractive/attractive packaging), which is scarcely researched, but often occurs in real life and business practice.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Product information order effect

In seeking the effect of information order on product evaluation,

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several studies have examined the order effect with a set of multiple information. The belief adjustment theory explains the role of primary, recency, and no effect when consumers are presented with a series of information in a particular order. Studies find that when multi-product information is provided, primary effect will result in better recall of information that is received first; while recency effect will lead to the latest information to be better recalled (e.g. Smith, 1993; Shteingart et al., 2013; Gürhan-Canli, 2003). Buda and Zhang (2000) find that recency effect has a stronger impact than primacy effect on consumer product evaluation. Wilcox et al. (2011) introduce the assimilation and contrast effect. They show that the assimilation effect influences the consumer product evaluation better when information is desirable as compared to when it is undesirable. On the other hand, contrast effect influences the evaluation more negatively. Further, the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests that a stimulus can influence the persuasion process in two major ways; either as the peripheral cues, which may serve as persuasive arguments or as the direction of message elaboration (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In our study, we are interested in examining how the information order might influence the extent to which the consumers evaluate the utilitarian products.

The message framing may vary across different conditions and context of product types (Woodside and Singer, 1994). Wilcox et al. (2011) conducted the experiment to examine the effects of (1) the nature of product information (good or bad) and (2) the timing of information provided (before sampling or after sampling) on the affective evaluation of food product quality. The result shows that desirable information presented before sampling can elicit an assimilation effect and encourages consumers to make a positive evaluation of the product. By contrast, desirable information presented after sampling may reduce consumer's favorable evaluations of the product.

2.2. Hedonic and utilitarian products

The evaluation of hedonic products is highly contingent on the consumer experience and the affective reactions from the experience (e.g. Dhar and Wertenbroch, 2000; Madzharov et al., 2016). Evaluations of utilitarian products tend to be based on functional cues like product information, whereby consumers utilize a more cognitive assessment process (Biswas et al., 2010). Hence, the cognitive structure is the key component in assessing the consumption of the utilitarian products. Although utilitarian products are more related to cognitive evaluation, some studies find that when search information is presented before sampling of the product (e.g. quality, duration, country of origin, etc.), there is added value in the affective evaluation of the product (Micu and Coulter, 2012). Considering the role of cognition in the utilitarian context and effect of presentation order, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. For hedonic products, providing information after presentation will positively influence affective evaluations; while for utilitarian products, it will negatively influence the affective evaluation.

H2. For utilitarian products, providing information after presentation will negatively influence cognitive evaluations; while providing information before will positively affect cognitive evaluations.

2.3. Product information presentation

For hedonic products, the focus is on affective evaluations, defined here as the direct feeling consumers get from the experience (Voss et al., 2003). Studies argue that cognitive evaluation occurs alongside affective evaluation for hedonic products, depending on the information provided to the consumer (Yeung and Wyer, 2004). Literature further suggests that the order in which information is provided will result in differing cognitive and affective evaluation interactions (Yeung and Wyer, 2004). Consumers often make a product judgment after they have acquired product information (Park, 1995). Previously, Peterson

et al. (1997) indicate that different product types need different information to promote. The first step is to classify products and services as being either search good or experience good. Features of a search good can be evaluated from externally provided information, whereas an experience good needs to be personally inspected or tried. If the features of a search good can be objectively assessed using readily available information, the Internet could serve significant transaction and communication functions, hence affect transaction channel and communication channel intermediaries involved with the good. Past studies also find that people who are presented with an advertisement containing utilitarian cues would judge from cognitive consideration without affective influence; while hedonic advertising cues would elicit emotional considerations (e.g. Yeung and Wyer, 2004). Hence, we expect emotional advertising cues should have a similar relationship with the experience attribute, and it should add no value to cognitive evaluations but to benefit affective evaluations. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. For utilitarian products, advertisements with experience attributes will positively influence affective evaluations after consumers are presented with the product; while there will be no significant difference when providing cognitive information, regardless of information order.

H4. For utilitarian products, advertisements with search attributes will positively influence cognitive evaluations before consumers are presented with the product; while there will be no significant difference when providing emotional information, regardless of information order.

2.4. Product first impression

Research suggests that consumers presented with any product would conduct an automatic appraisal and develop a first impression of the product through the experience (Nowlis and Shiv, 2005; Shteingart et al., 2013). Yeung and Wyer (2004) indicate that product picture and product attitude information could elicit emotional reactions from consumers for both hedonic and utilitarian products. They find that consumers' emotions have a strong positive effect on hedonic product evaluation, but has a slightly contrasting effect on utilitarian product evaluation. Drawing on these findings, this present study proposes that product packaging could elicit emotional reactions upon consumers' formation of first impressions. It is proposed that unattractive packaging may elicit negative impressions of the product. However, when presented with a utilitarian product, this negative impression may contradict the cognitive evaluation based on the product functionalities resulting in the existence of information order.

H5. For utilitarian products, providing information after presenting attractive packaging will positively influence consumers' affective evaluation of the product; while there will be no significant difference when presenting unattractive packaging, regardless of information order.

H6. For utilitarian products, providing information before presenting unattractive packaging will positively influence consumers' cognitive evaluation, while there will be no significant difference when presenting an attractive packaging, regardless of information order.

3. Experiment 1

3.1. Hedonic and utilitarian product selection and pretest

The first experiment aims to test the information order effect on hedonic and utilitarian products (H1 and H2). Firstly, we distinguished hedonic and utilitarian products. Based on two dimensional multi-item scales from Voss et al. (2003), a pretest with 77 white collar employees aged from 25 to 36, who did not participate in the main experiment,

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