



Do time constraint and emergency purchase situation exert same influence on shopping? A study under haptic touch influence



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 August 2015

Accepted 9 February 2016

Keywords:

Task definition

Time constraint

Haptic touch

ABSTRACT

Marketing literature has identified emergency purchase situation and time constraint as important situational influences. However, both of them are often equated with each other as both require shopping to be done in a short time. This study makes an attempt to eliminate the confusion by studying the impact of two situation variables on product evaluation and purchase intention under the influence of haptic touch. Two studies conducted to test the hypotheses show that while emergency purchase situation has a significant impact under no-touch influence, the same can not be said for time constraint situation.

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1. Introduction

Marketers have recognized the potential influence of situations in consumer behavior and have made efforts to understand the role of situations in purchase situations. Belk (1974) defined *situation* as all the factors particular to a time and place of observation which do not follow from knowledge of personal (intra-individual) and stimulus (choice alternatives) attributes and have a demonstrable and systematic effect on current behavior. In order to operationalize the definition, he proposed five groups of situational characteristics namely physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspective, task definition, and antecedent stages (Belk, 1975). Belk's taxonomic structure accommodated the vast majority of situational variables typically explored within a consumer behavior context and were applicable for in-store shopping and remote shopping situations like catalog and electronic shopping (Nicholson et al., 2002).

Among the five groups proposed by Belk, two groups namely task definition and temporal perspective hold special significance. According to Belk (1975), task definition features of a situation include an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase. On the other hand, Belk (1975) suggested that temporal perspective is a dimension of situations which may be specified in units ranging from time of day to season of the year. Most of the previous research on situation variables focused on different sub-categories of these two situation variables. For example, under task definition, researchers have focused on planned and emergency nature of purchase.

Similarly, temporal perspective has been examined as absence or presence of time constraint. While findings from research helped in richer understanding of each situation variable, it has also lead to some confusion. This confusion stems from the fact that time constraint under temporal perspective has been often equated with emergency nature of purchase under task definition as both require shopping to be done in a short time.

Though Belk (1974) provided definitions, the confusion between time constraint and emergency purchase has persisted over the years among the consumers, and sometimes also among researchers. This difference should not exist as conceptually both are different constructs. While time constraint, being operationalized in seconds and minutes, is about scarcity of time (Suri and Monroe, 2003), emergency purchase is about scarcity of product (Kenhove et al., 1999). Ben Zur and Breznit (1981) suggested that time constraint puts a limitation on cognitive resources while emergency purchase is about willingness to put in efforts (Walters and Jamil, 2003). In spite of the difference among the constructs, the confusion has persisted because of constructs' association with shopping to be completed in a short time. In this case, it is worthwhile to examine whether consumers also behave in the similar manner.

This research makes an attempt to fulfill this gap by examining the product attitude and purchase intentions for products under situations of task definition and temporal perspective. To the best of our knowledge, we have not come across any study in which the research on situational variables had explored the differential impact of time constraint and emergency purchase on consumer shopping behavior. In order to answer the research questions and define the context of the study, this study has taken the context of

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products which are high on haptic salience. The context for the study evolves from the retailing scenario wherein customers are increasingly putting importance on the opportunity to touch and feel the product before making the purchase. Retailers need to take note of this and formulate their strategies and tactics in delivering value to the customer (Underhill, 1999). In this study, for the same, we have taken the context of products where touch has a role to play in purchase decision.

This paper starts with a review of the previous work done in area of time constraint and task definitions which provides basis of explanations for research hypotheses. These hypotheses are tested in two studies. This is followed by discussion of result and implications arising out of it. The paper concludes by providing area of future research.

2. Literature background

2.1. Task definition

Task definitions in a situation include an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase (Belk, 1975). These also include different buyer and user roles as anticipated by the individual. For example, a person shopping for a small appliance as a wedding gift for a friend is in a different situation than she would be in shopping for a similar appliance for personal use (Belk, 1975). Therefore, the choice of product and store may be frequently governed by situational circumstances. This forms the basis for the specific reasons that consumers may have for buying a product or service. These situational conditions and the shopping strategies that they generate, are often referred in literature as 'task definitions' (Kenhove et al., 1999). Research in task definition has sought to understand how the type of shopping trip undertaken by the consumer influences consumer purchasing behavior.

Belk (1975) suggested that task-defining features of a consumer purchase situation arise from goals relating to information gathering or product selection, and from the usage situations envisioned for products as relevant to these goals. In other words, the task is defined by the consumer's intentions at a particular time and place. In a consumer behavior context, a task definition comprises of the set of goals a consumer forms to resolve needs deriving from a specific situation (Marshall, 1993). Kenhove et al. (1999) explained that task definitions for purchase situations may also differ in aspects such as involvement, difficulty, specificity, and complexity. For example, the task may be highly involving either because it entails important immediate goals, or because the intended usage situation involves important goals.

Earlier studies on task definition focused on consumer's purchase behavior for planned and unplanned buying decisions (Stern, 1962; Kollat and Willett, 1967). Stern (1962) classified the unplanned buying as synonymous with impulsive buying and suggested a "mix" of different categories of impulsive buying. Kollat and Willett (1967) showed that a consumer's proneness to unplanned purchasing varies depending upon the nature of the shopping trip, i.e., whether the trip is a major trip or a fill-in trip. Kahn and Schmittlein (1992) termed major and fill-in trips as regular and quick trips respectively. Major shopping trips require much time and effort to be expended by the consumer because a large number of items are to be purchased to fulfill short and long-term needs (Frisbie, 1980; Kahn and Schmittlein, 1992). Fill-in shopping trips are designed to meet more pressing product needs with less time and effort being expended by the consumer during the trip compared to a major shopping trip (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1992).

Research in role of task definition on consumer behavior has

examined the influence of different task orientation on product related choices (Clarke and Belk, 1979; Miller and Ginter, 1979), on marketing mix variables (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1992), choice of stores (Kenhove et al., 1999; Thelen and Woodside, 1997; Reutterer and Teller, 2009), and share of unplanned purchases (Nordfalt, 2009). Miller and Ginter (1979) discovered that different choice criteria were used according to four different usage situations. Clarke and Belk (1979) examined the manner in which product involvement and situational task importance affect anticipated consumer purchase effort. While examining the effect of marketing mix variables on shopping trip, Kahn and Schmittlein (1992) stated that relationship exists between shopping trip and promotions on offer at store. On choice of store, Thelen and Woodside (1997) discovered that the type of task definition influences primary store choice. Kenhove et al. (1999) investigated the impact of task definition on store attribute salience and store choice and found that different task definitions were related to store choices. Reutterer and Teller (2009) identified store format attributes which impacted on store format choice when consumers conducted fill-in or major trips to buy groceries. According to Nordfalt (2009), major trips were found to have smaller share of unplanned purchase whereas fill-in trips had larger unplanned purchases. This literature review showed that task definition influenced shopping decisions in many ways.

2.2. Time constraint

After Belk (1975) introduced temporal perspective as a situational variable, its importance in marketing was highlighted by Jacoby et al. (1976) who suggested that not only non-consumer-related activities and events demand portions of our limited time resources, but even the ownership and utilization of goods require a variety of time expenditures. However, initially other areas like psychology and the study of decision making dealt more extensively with time and its effects (Iyer, 1989). In the seventies few empirical contributions appeared in the marketing literature that treated time as a major variable of interest. This changed in later years as marketers recognized the increasing importance of time with respect to consumer behavior.

Mattson (1982) was the first one to suggest that time scarcity can be an important situational determinant of shopping behavior. Amount of information available for evaluating and choosing among purchase opportunities also increased (Suri and Monroe, 2003) as economies advanced and consumers had the option to spend time on other activities (Gross and Sheth, 1989). Consequently, many decisions were being made under time constraint, with insufficient time to collect complete information and to weigh all pros and cons extensively (Pieters and Warlop, 1999). As only a finite amount of information could be processed in a given time period, time available for processing became a critical factor in determining choice outcomes. Therefore, time constraint, in which consumers processed messages under conditions of obligation and varying constraints of time, became a key determinant of consumer decision making (Suri and Monroe, 2003).

While talking about time constraint, it is important to distinguish time constraint vis-à-vis consumer's perception of time constraint. Park et al. (1989) defined time available for shopping as consumers' perceptions of the time required to perform the intended shopping tasks relative to the actual time available to perform such tasks. Iyer (1989) also defined time constraint similarly as the perceived constriction of time available for an individual to perform a given task. Spears (2001) viewed time constraint as a perceived limitation on the time available in which to consider information or to take action of some type. In all these definitions, emphasis was placed on perception of time constraint that would alter an individual's information processing mode.

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