

Determinants of Consumer Confusion: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Consumer Confusion becomes a relatively less researched subject but very essential with respect to pre & post consumption consumer behaviour is concerned. In the era of fierce competition and the scenario of monopolistic competition, all firms try to differentiate their offering than that of the competitors. In an attempt to this, all the players come up with so many brands and so many models of those brands with constant load of advertisements. As a result a consumer may not be able to make right choice before the purchase of any product. In the case where the decision is very complex and demands high involvement from the consumers; consumers gets confused. Here the role of marketer becomes crucial in reducing such confusion from the minds of customers. And many a times it so happens that such kind of confusion makes negative impact on post purchase behaviour of consumers. This paper attempts to identify determinants of confusion among consumers through various reviews.

Keywords: *Consumer Confusion*

INTRODUCTION

What is Consumer Confusion?

Customer Confusion is relatively new concept in the field of consumer behavior. Customer Confusion occurs when a consumer fails to correctly understand or interpret the products or services. This confusion sometimes results in reduced sales or reduced satisfaction. Customers are bombarded with tons of information related to products or services with one or the other promotional media or communication media. And so therefore a mental problem called “confusion” arise in the minds of the customers & is becoming the interesting concept in marketing.

Some Definitions of Consumer Confusion

- “Confusion results from information processing errors caused by information overload.”
- “Confusion as a conscious state of mind that can occur either in the pre- or the post-purchase situation and has not only a cognitive dimension, but also an affective and behavioral one.” – (Mitchell, Walsh & Yamin) (2004)

Dimensions of Consumer Confusion

- Similarity Confusion (Clancy & Trout, 2002)
- Overload Confusion (Foxmann, Meuhling, D. D. and Berger N.W., 1990)
- Unclarity Confusion (Mitchell, Walsh & Yamin, 1999 & 2004)

Similarity Confusion

Similarity confusion can be defined as “a lack of understanding and potential alteration of a Consumer’s choice or an incorrect brand evaluation caused by the perceived physical similarity of products or services” (Mitchell et al., 2004). Similarity confusion can be caused by brand similarity when competitors imitate the brand or when quality or product attributes of different alternatives are identical or are perceived to be identical.

Overload Confusion

Overload confusion may be the result of an information and variety rich environment. Information overload relates to the fact that the number of alternatives on the one hand and decision-relevant information on these alternatives on the other hand are growing.

Unclarity Confusion

Unclarity confusion may occur when customers are “forced to re-evaluate and revise current beliefs or assumptions about product or purchasing environment” (Mitchell et al., 2004).

SOME IMPORTANT REVIEWS

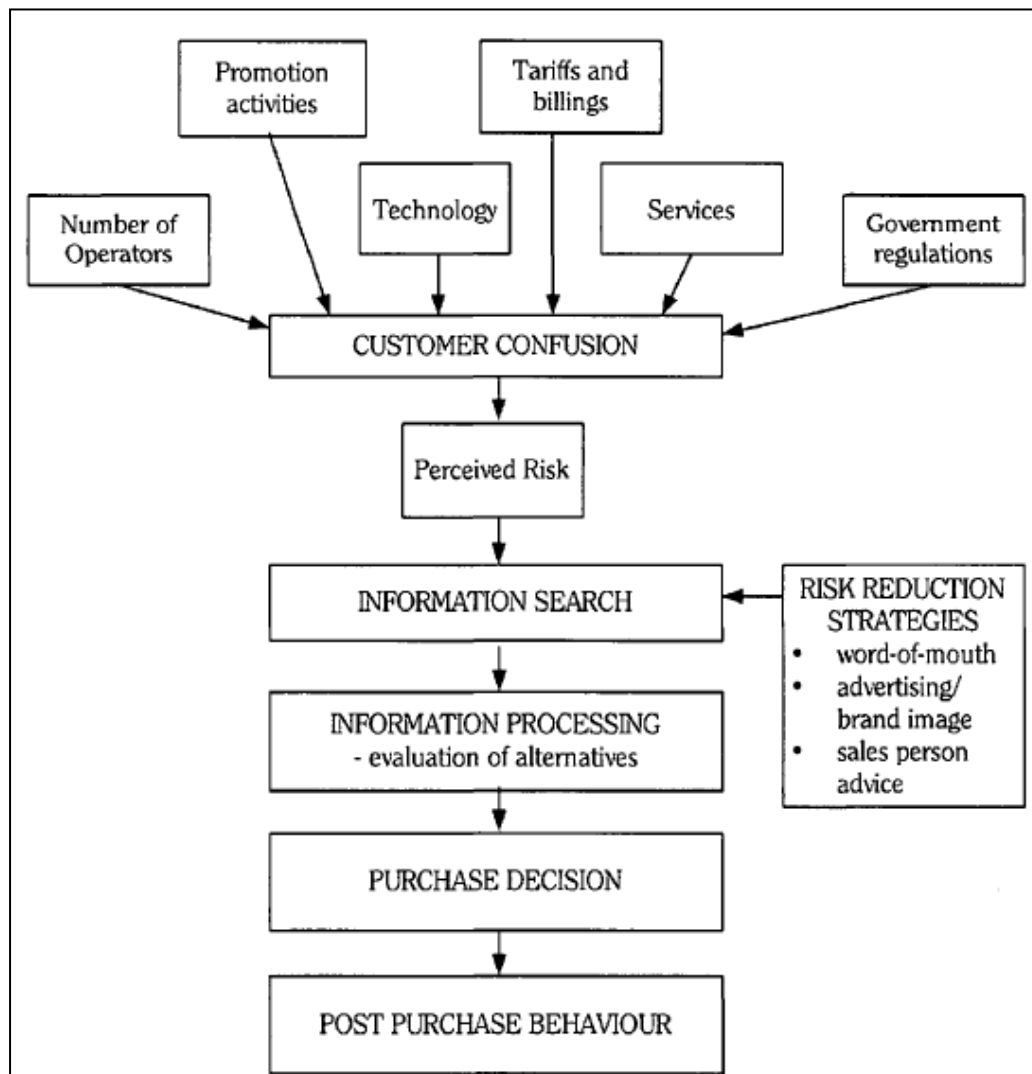
(Turnbull, Leek, & Ying, 2000) have provided a conceptual model indicating factors causing confusion in the mobile phone market. According to the Researcher ...

- They laid emphasis on Information acquisition as a prime factor causing confusion in the minds of consumers.
- High volatility in market characteristics as well as industry characteristics, the situation becomes more complex.

- Further information about changing factors and market factors is obtained from word of mouth, advertising, salesperson advice, television programs, newspapers, magazines, consumer groups etc. Further how these sources are being examined by consumers will vary person to person. And processing of information will cause ambiguities, misinterpretations and misunderstandings that will again result in confusion.
- If people are aware that they are confused they may perceive an element of risk in making purchase decision and refer to their original source of information or new ones. And once element of perceived risk and confusion is eliminated, purchase decision is made.
- Confusion is also prevailing in mobile phone market due to variety of brands and services are being offered.
- One more reason for confusion is that companies are failing to differentiate their brands than that of the competitors' brands. Also, companies are constantly trying to showcase their brand image but fail to show their services. As a result, there is lack of brand recognition among the consumers of mobile phones. Salesperson must reinforce such brands in order to make these brands aware in the market.

(Drummond, 2004) has pin-pointed excessive number of promotional efforts and excessive commercialisation of higher education. The author has shown negative impact of excessive promotion in the form of very high amount of confusion in the minds of consumer and ultimately led to wrong choice. He has given some remedial actions to persons responsible for marketing and implementation of strategies. Educating potential educational customers is one of the strategies to make them well informed. Author suggests providing customers some illustrations of how service will be translated into consumer benefits, offering 'tester' sessions where potential customers can try out experience.

A Conceptual Model showing relationship between consumer confusion, perceived risk and post-purchase behaviour



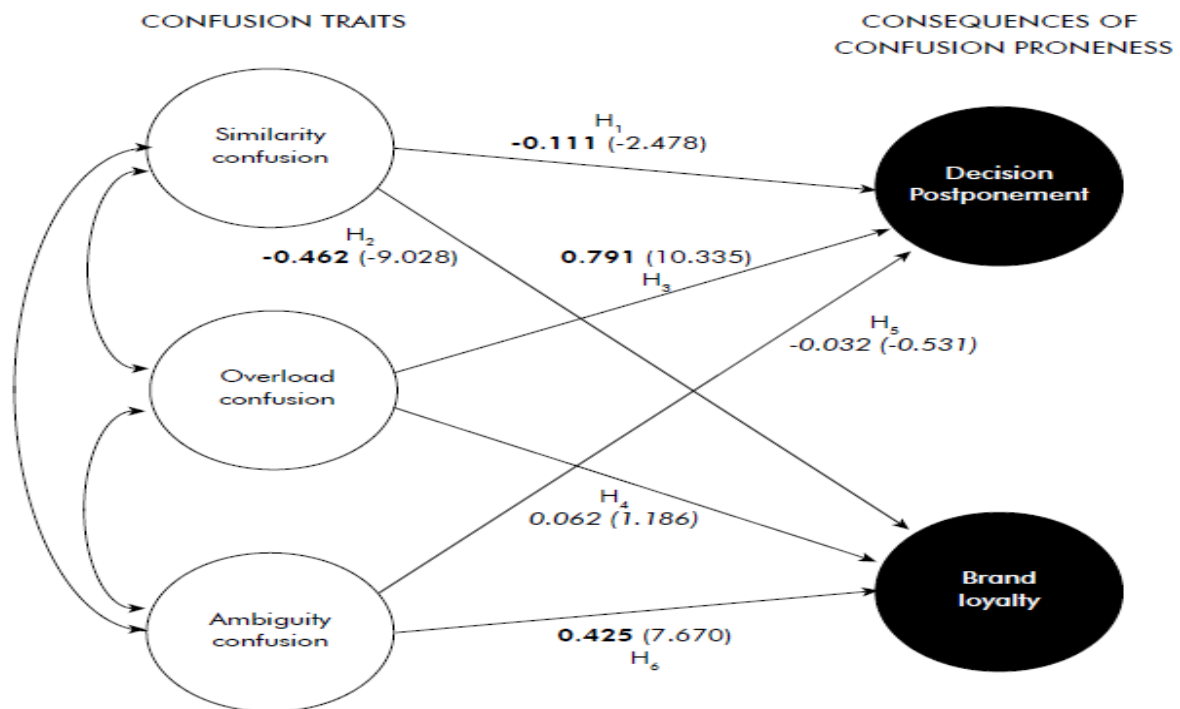
Source: Turnbull, P. W., Leek, S., & Ying, G. (2000). *Customer Confusion: The Mobile Phone Market*. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 143-163.

(Matzler, Bidmon, Faullant, Fladnitzer, & Waiguny, 2005) have tried to study dimensionality and consequences of consumer e-confusion in online buying behaviour. Rather than studying consumer confusion in offline buying, author has tried to study the same in online scenario. The paper explores and tests the dimensionality of online customer confusion and its impact on three coping strategies i.e. Do nothing and ignore confusion, share the decision, abandon the online purchase. In the empirical part of the study, the relationship between consumer confusion and different “reduction” strategies is investigated for online purchase decisions of DVD-players with a sample of 128 persons using structural equation modelling. To provide empirical evidence for the dimensions of consumer confusion and the related reduction strategies online-purchase behavior for DVD-players has been investigated. Using a convenience sample, the survey was undertaken at an Austrian Airport. 128 travellers have been interviewed in the waiting areas of the airport while passing the transition time for the flight connection. Before the self-administered questionnaires were handed out, interviewees were asked whether they had experience with internet purchases

and DVD-Players. Only those who affirmed both questions were invited to complete the questionnaire. Author found that consumer confusion is also relevant in online purchase settings and that each dimension of consumer confusion influences strongly the decision to abandon the purchase. The other two reduction strategies are also applied; however, the relationship is relatively weak. These results suggest that online retailers should pay particular attention to this phenomenon as it can potentially harm their business.

(Walsh & Mitchell, 2010) on their concept of consumer confusion proneness, this paper seeks to examine consumers' general tendency to be confused from marketplace information and its effect on three relevant outcome variables – word of mouth, trust, and satisfaction. The reliability and validity of the consumer confusion proneness scale was tested based on a sample of 355 consumers, using confirmatory factor analysis. The study employs structural equation modelling to examine the hypothesised relationships. The results show that the consumer confusion proneness scale has sound psychometric properties and that the three dimensions of similarity, overload, and ambiguity have a differential impact on word-of-mouth behaviour, trust, and customer satisfaction. The results give an indication of generality of most scale items and support the proposition that consumer confusion proneness is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that has a significant impact on key variables such as marketplace trust, general marketplace related word of mouth and macro satisfaction, but not always in ways which could be predicted.

(Walsh, Hennig-Thurau, & Mitchell, 2007) did a research with purpose of conceptualising consumer confusion proneness, provide a new scale to measure it, and provide empirical evidence on how it affects consumer behaviour. The research contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of the dimensions and outcomes of consumer confusion proneness and builds on previous work which has focused on specific situations of either stimulus similarity or overload. The results showed proposition that consumer confusion proneness is a multidimensional phenomenon that has a significant impact on purchase postponement and loyalty behaviour. The findings have implications for marketing management and research, which should be treated as indicative and not definitive.



(Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999) have tried to elaborate the concept of consumer confusion, why it arises, how customers react to it and how marketers influence it. Information overload, product confusion, product misleads, incompatible standards, price confusion, promotional confusion, special offers are the prime causes of confusion according to the author. As a part of confusion reduction strategies, author provides six generic approaches viz. do nothing, postpone / abandon purchase, clarify goals, share / delegate the decision, narrow down the choice set, seek additional information.

DISCUSSIONS

To sum up, majority three factors are there which are prime stimulators of confusion among consumers viz. Similarity Confusion, Overload Confusion, Unclarity Confusion. To add to this emphasis on Information acquisition is also a prime factor causing confusion in the minds of consumers. Besides High volatility in market characteristics, information about changing factors and market factors is obtained from word of mouth, advertising, salesperson advice, television programs, newspapers, magazines, consumer groups etc. also lead to confusion in consumer's mind. Variety of brands and services are being offered, failing to differentiate their brands than that of the competitors' brands and excessive number of promotional efforts and excessive commercialisation of higher education are also considered to be as source of confusion in consumers' minds.

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