DECISION DILEMMAS: EXAMINING CONSUMER CONFUSION AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN WHITE GOODS PURCHASES

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Abstract
Consumer electronics are kind of consumer durables which are of very high involvement products as well as risky and costly goods. Moreover, in the situation of monopolistic market, each firm tries to differentiate its offer than that of the competitors. Besides, the differentiation must be communicated with required effectiveness and as a result, all the firms shall communicate their products and prices heavily and this will ultimately lead to excessive information and a pool of brands. This excessive information and lots of brands shall create a psychological trauma in the minds of consumers known as consumer confusion. In this study, an author has tried to identify some antecedents of consumer confusion using exploratory factor analysis and an attempt was made to make grouping of consumers on the bases of various demographic profile of consumers. Descriptive cross sectional study was undertaken having the sample of 785 consumers of selected electronic / electrical appliances and the resultant outcome was achieved in the form of various factors affecting consumer confusion.

Keywords: *Consumer Confusion, Cognitive Dissonance, White Goods, Exploratory Factor Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Consumer confusion is a concept that is of high relevance nowadays in the era of competition when each firm tries to differentiate their offer from others. When information gets overloaded and constantly bombarded towards consumers, it will lead to confusion in the minds of consumers and that can ultimately lead to a psychological problem called cognitive dissonance. (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. 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 back to their original source of information or new ones. And once element of perceived risk and confusion is eliminated, purchase decision is made. **(Drummond, 2004)** has pin-pointed excessive amount 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.

(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. **(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. **(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.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives:

- To identify the factors that affect consumer confusion.
- To know the relationship among factors affecting consumer confusion and cognitive dissonance.

Research Design:

Descriptive Single Cross Sectional Research design was used to study.

Sampling Design:

Sampling Method	Non-Probability Convenience
Sampling Size	785
Sampling Elements	Consumers who own electronic product / Electrical Appliances at their homes
Cities covered	Ahmedabad
	Surat
	Vadodara
	Rajkot
	Bhavnagar
	Navsari
	Anand
	Gandhidham
Products Covered	Air-Conditioner
	Digital Camaera
	LCD / LED
	Refrigerator
	Laptop / Desktop
	Microwave
	Washing Machine
	Mobile Phone

DATA ANALYSIS

Correlation between factors affecting consumer confusion with cognitive dissonance

Correlations					
			Mean of Wisdom of Purchase	Mean of Concern over Deal	Mean of Emotional Dissonance
Kendall's tau_b	Psychological Factors	Correlation Coefficient	.221**	.154**	.218**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	Information & Similarity Confusion	Correlation Coefficient	.290**	.321**	.354**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	Overload Confusion	Correlation Coefficient	.025	.062*	-.028
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.352	.019	.289
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).					
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Table 5.8.2 Correlation between factors affecting consumer confusion with cognitive dissonance

From the correlation table above, some interesting results were achieved. Before calculating correlation with factors affecting consumer confusion and cognitive dissonance, non-parametric correlation was decided to find out. Kendall's tau-b value was supposed to be calculated to find non-parametric correlation assuming multiple ties between the responses. For interpreting Kendall's Tau-b values, sign indicates direction of relationship whereas absolute value indicates strength of the relationship. Out of 6 significant relationships 5 relationships are significant at 99% confidence level and 1 relationship is significant at 95% confidence level and 2 values are insignificant in the table.

Results from the table are showing that for all the combinations of correlations, positive relationship between two variables was achieved. In other words, it can be inferred that as and when confusion increases, dissonance also increases. In other words, higher the confusion more would be the dissonance and vice-a-versa. As far as strength of the relationship was concerned there seems to be low to moderate level of strength was found in dissonance.

Correlation between Factors Affecting Consumer Confusion and Cognitive Dissonance

Correlation between	**Kendall's Tau-b**	**Strength**
Information & Similarity Confusion & Emotional Dissonance	0.354	Strong
Information & Similarity Confusion & Concern over Deal	0.321	Strong
Information & Similarity Confusion & Wisdom of Purchase	0.290	Strong
Psychological Factors & Wisdom of Purchase	0.221	Moderate
Psychological Factors & Emotional Dissonance	0.218	Moderate
Psychological Factors & Concern over Deal	0.154	Low
Overload Confusion & Concern over Deal	0.062	Low

From the above table, it can be inferred that Information and Similarity confusion holds strong relationship with cognitive dissonance. In other words, when consumer is confused by similarity between brands and products as well as a when a consumer receives ample of information before purchase, he will feel high amount of dissonance post-purchase.

Psychological factors hold moderate relationship with cognitive dissonance. When a consumer is psychologically confused before purchase, he will feel dissonance up to moderate level.

DISCUSSSION AND CONCLUSION

Confusion is a phenomenon that can take very serious form in the name of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance if avoided earlier cannot harm the manufacturer but if it persists, it can lead to switching behaviour from consumers.

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