A Structural Look At Consumer Innovativeness and Self-Congruence in New Product Purchases

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Consumer innovativeness and product satisfaction literature is replete with solid, yet unrelated theories that have not been considered simultaneously. This oversight has limited the ability of practitioners to effectively target a valuable market segment, consumer innovators. In this study, structural equation modeling is used to empirically test existing concepts of innovativeness, self-congruence, satisfaction, perceived risk, and behavioral intention. It attempts to combine the disconnected theories, while suggesting a means of appealing to consumer innovators. A sample of 555 students is employed to examine these issues. Several notable findings are highlighted including verification of the indirect relationships between the independent variables and behavioral intent. Model fit is excellent and results are consistent across the music and home entertainment industries.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Conceptualization

While consumer perceptions and responses to product launches have been studied extensively, a major gap remains. Specifically, there is a need for a larger nomological network of innovativeness. A key contribution of this study is to help marketers leverage the relationship between innovativeness and product/image self-congruence. This research expands on a set of disjointed concepts by empirically testing a model that considers the effects of several independent variables on behavioral intentions.

Bagozzi (1982) extended the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) by considering the role of cognitive and affective self-regulatory mechanisms in determining behavioral intentions. Our proposed model is inspired by this work. A consumer’s evaluation of a new product can be seen as what Bagozzi refers to as an “outcome-desire unit,” defined as “an event that happens to one, that one produces, or that one can take steps to influence in the future (Bagozzi 1992, p. 187).” Consumers’ appraisals of new products may be shaped in part by individual difference traits such as innovativeness, as well as more situational states such as self-congruence and perceived risk. This process may lead to an emotional reaction, represented in our model by satisfaction, which in turn may lead to a coping response, represented in our model by behavioral intentions. Beginning with this essential framework, the relationships in the model were constructed based upon a review of the literature on each of the constructs.

Innovativeness refers to the tendency of some individuals to adopt new products early. Consumer innovators are valuable resources to firms introducing new products, as they perform essential roles in innovation diffusion. Researchers have also shown direct links between consumer innovativeness and behavioral intentions across several domains.

Interaction between a product-user image and a consumer’s self-concept can result in a subjective experience termed self-congruence (Sirgy, et al. 1997). Through the consumption process, consumers utilize brands to project images of themselves to others (Chang 2005). Within this framework, purchase intentions for new products should also depend directly on self-image congruence. Innovativeness may play a role in a consumer’s construction of self-concept.

Perceived risk is consistently linked with behavioral intentions (Howard & Sheth 1969). Low perceived risk should promote behavioral intentions. Innate innovativeness is a tendency to make risky and innovative decisions (Midgley and Dowling 1978). Park et al. (2005) suggest that higher risk is associated with lower purchase intentions. Innovators must be less risk averse to purchase new products.

Satisfaction is an affective state. Self-congruence can regulate satisfaction such that consistent messages can cause positive emotion (Markus and Wurf 1987). Satisfaction can also impact consumer behavior (Park et al. 2005) and aspects of product encounters can impact satisfaction. Consistent with Schwarz’s (1990) findings, people who are satisfied should evaluate new products more favorably than those who are dissatisfied. Satisfaction is also recognized as a key driver of behavioral intentions (Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1996). Satisfaction can also alter perceived risk. Johnson and Tversky (1983) reported that positive affect may reduce perceived risk, whereas negative affect can elicit the opposite reaction. New products, though inherently riskier, have been shown to elevate affect and decrease perceptions of risk (Park et al. 2005).

H1: Innovativeness positively affects behavioral intentions for new products.
H2: Self-congruence with a product positively affects behavioral intentions for new products.
H4: For new product purchases, innovativeness negatively affects perceived risk.
H5: For new product purchases, perceived risk negatively affects behavioral intentions.
H6: In new product purchases, self-congruence positively affects satisfaction.
H7: In new product purchases, satisfaction positively affects behavioral intentions.
H8: Satisfaction negatively affects perceived risk for new product purchases.

Method

Students were asked to describe their purchase behavior for home electronics (342), new music releases (213), and electronic handheld devices (191). Online surveys were used. Respondents’ names were checked across samples to ensure independence of the individual observations. Duplicates and respondents who incorrectly answered a quality check were purged. The three samples were combined, yielding a total of 741 respondents. The sample was 57% female with a median age of 21. Seventy-three percent of the sample was Caucasian, 12% African-American, 9% Hispanic-American, and 4% Asian-American.

Existing scales were adapted to measure innovativeness, self-congruence, perceived risk, satisfaction and behavioral intentions in the two new product consumption settings. All measures utilized a seven-point Likert or semantic-differential scale. The final model consisted of three items from Sirgy et al.’s (1997) self-image congruence scale, two items from Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra’s (2005) behavioral intentions scale, three items from Goldsmith and Hofacker’s (1991) domain specific innovativeness scale, two items from Heijden et al.’s (2003) risk perception scale and three items from Zhu et al.’s (2002) consumer satisfaction scale.

The psychometric properties of the five constructs were evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in accordance with Anderson and Gerbing (1992). Results of the combined CFA indicate excellent measurement fit and establishment of convergent and discriminant validity in accordance with Fornell and Larker (1981).

Major Findings

This study’s objective was to clarify the relationships among innovativeness, self-congruence, satisfaction, perceived risk and...
behavioral intentions. The results provided strong support for the proposed model. Results were robust across three industries. All hypotheses were supported, indicating that the research model best described the nomological network surrounding consumer innovativeness and behavioral intentions for new products. Innovativeness affects perceptions of perceived risk and self-congruence and it also directly impacts behavioral intentions. Findings indicate that there is considerably more confluence among the variables than indicated by existing literature.

The relationship between innovativeness and self-congruence suggests innovativeness is part of a consumer’s self-concept. New products can play an important role in the construction of self-image and can be used to define one’s innovative personality aspects. Findings suggest that innovators’ tendencies to diffuse innovation can be leveraged by focusing more on the image creation aspects of new products than utilitarian aspects. Managers can improve results by carefully managing the relationship between their respective brands and images of being modern, unique, and expert.