Affect Without Cognition

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Focusing on the relationship between Chinese young consumers’ brand buying intention and cognitive and affective variables, this study empirically tests brand attitude formation mechanism, which is generally recognized as a concept model. Brand personality identification, as an affective variable, significantly influences Chinese young consumers’ brand buying intention. Brand personality cognitive strength and brand personality distinctiveness, as cognitive variables, have significant influences on their buying intention of a domestic brand, but not an American brand.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Do you find young fellows emotional? Do you think that their decisions are often whimsical? Have you noticed that they often buy brands and products that they have no idea of? Then why do they buy? These are the questions regarding brand attitude formation mechanism that is universally accepted as a concept model: cognition-affect-conation. This study tests the model using Chinese young consumers as a sample.

Hypotheses

One question this study seeks to answer is whether brand personality identification, as an affective factor, significantly influences brand buying intention, a conation factor. Nowadays Chinese young generation’s value system has changed dramatically. Traditional Chinese notions, such as “Restraint and Obedience” and “Connotation and Introversion” have been replaced by “Do what you like” and “Show your own personality”. As a result, the consumption notion of Chinese young generation has also changed. Young consumers pay much attention to products that can show their own personality and demonstrate their own life styles. Then our first hypothesis is: For Chinese young consumers, brand personality identification significantly influences their brand buying intention.

The second question this study seeks to answer is whether Chinese young consumers’ buying intention of foreign brands is influenced by brand personality cognition. Since late 1970’s, Chinese have more contacts with the west and therefore known more about western world. Chinese young generation has grown up with western products and values. As frequently pointed out by both media and academia, foreign brand personality cognition significantly influences Chinese consumers’ brand buying intention. Therefore our second hypothesis is: Chinese young consumers’ cognition of foreign brands personality significantly influences their foreign brand buying intention.

Method

Thirty college students enrolled in a well-known university located in Beijing were randomly chosen as participants. In-depth interviews were conducted before a questionnaire was developed. The purpose of the interviews was to identify a pair of brands that could best reflect American culture and Chinese culture respectively. Questions were asked for each of the interviewees: 1) Which American drink/restaurant/apparel brand do you think that can best reflect American culture? 2) Which Chinese drink/restaurant/apparel brand do you think that can best reflect Chinese culture? Results showed that Coca Cola (90% responses) and Xihulongjing tea (70% responses) were thought to best reflect the two distinct cultures by the interviewees. Thus Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea were finalized as the stimulators for the following survey.

A draft questionnaire was developed based on the interviews and relevant literatures. A pilot test was conducted to check the wording and time span for filling up the draft questionnaire. A questionnaire was then finalized. It comprises measurements of brand personality cognitive strength, brand personality distinctiveness and brand personality identification of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea (independent variables), and measurements of buying intention of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea (dependent variables).

Questionnaire survey was conducted in six major universities located in Beijing. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed and 932 usable ones were returned, with a response rate of 93.2%?

Results

Our first hypothesis is supported. The regression results show that brand personality identification significantly influences buying intention of both Coca Cola and Xihulongjing tea. Young consumers would like to buy the brands that can reflect their personality. This result is consistent with many psychology and marketing theories and research findings. Meanwhile it reveals that popular values of Chinese young generation such as showing their own personality, having their own life styles and expressing themselves influence their buying intention significantly.

Our second hypothesis is rejected. Results show that brand personality cognitive strength and brand personality distinctiveness, as cognitive variables, do not have significant influence on buying intention of foreign brand Coca Cola. It is generally accepted by the academia that cognition is the premise of affect and cognition and affect influence conation. However, buying intention of Coca Cola is only influenced by the affective factor, brand personality identification, not by cognitive factors. Here affect functions independent of cognition. On the contrary, buying intention of Xihulongjing tea is significantly influenced by both cognitive and affective factors, fitting the cognition-affect-conation model perfectly.

Discussion

This research comes up with two very interesting findings: brand buying intention of Chinese young consumers is significantly influenced by their brand personality identification, no matter whether the brand is foreign or domestic. However their brand buying intention is significantly influenced by their cognition of the domestic brand but not the foreign brand. The findings suggest that for Chinese young consumers, the impacts of brand cognition and affect on buying intention may vary between domestic and foreign brands. In the discussion section we will explore the underlying reasons of these findings and the conditions under which they happen. We will also discuss theoretical and managerial implications of this research for consumer behavior and marketing strategies.

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Compulsive Buying Questionnaire and Repression: The Impact of Hot vs Cold Data on General and Gender Scoring

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Mall intercept has been conjectured to be more precise and reliable than other methodologies such as phone surveys (Bush and Hair, 1985) in that less questions were eluded in the former, and the latter was usually yielding more “socially acceptable” answers. This could be caused by a memory priming effect (Bower, 1981) when respondents are answering in a “cold” situation (e.g. inside their homes) rather than in a “hot” situation. In other words, their cognitions could be affected by their affect at the moment when they are filling the questionnaire.

Despite a relatively important number of studies related to the measurement of Compulsive buying, the use of questionnaires through mail surveys seems to have exclusively prevailed over the use of mall intercept procedures (e.g. Faber and O’Guinn, 1992; Valence et al., 1988), and most of these studies found a significant difference in self-reported compulsive score between males and females respondents.

In a small recent study involving 49 participants in a mall intercept, self-assessing their compulsivity by answering a Lejoyeux questionnaire (Lejoyeux et al, 1996; Lejoyeux et al., 1997), we were however unable to find any significant difference in genders, even though some other elements of reliability and nomological validity with the hedonic/utilitarian value in shopping (Babbin et al, 1993) were congruent with previous studies.

We thought that the main difference between our study and the previous studies on compulsive buying was the methodology (a “mall intercept” vs mail survey) could explain the lack of significant difference between genders in respect of their scores.

We therefore undertook an exploratory meta-analysis with 4 previous studies using the same Lejoyeux questionnaire (Lejoyeux et al, 1996; Lejoyeux et al., 1997) with different methodologies (2 studies in a mall intercept condition, and 2 studies in a “cold” condition, where the interviewing process was done in the respondents’ home), totalling 490 respondents (290 in “hot” condition, and 200 in “cold” condition; 218 male respondents, and 272 female respondents).

The studies included the 20 items likert scales of the Lejoyeux test of compulsive shopping and the shopping value questionnaire (Babbin et al, 1993) was included in order to test the nomological validity of the test (Peter, 1981). The internal reliability for both of the questionnaires was very good overall, and consistent with previous literature findings (?(lejoyeux)=0.78; ?(hedonic)=0.93). Nomological validity was achieved, consistent with previous literature findings (Faber and O’Guinn, 1992) through an established correlation between hedonic value in shopping and the compulsive score (r=0.364; p<0.01)

Although we found a significant effect of gender over the variance of the compulsive score (F(1,438)=31.486; p<0.0001; males=3.1; females=4.5), showing that female respondents tend to score higher than males overall in these 4 experiments, we also found a significant effect, at the highest level, of the “heat” condition (F(1,438)=18.56; p<0.0001; hot=3.3; cold=4.3), showing that the overall levels of compulsivity are slightly higher in “cold” condition than in a “hot” one; it can also be noticed that the interaction of gender and heat is also significant (F(1, 438)=4.312; p<0.05; male-hot=2.8, male-cold=3.4, female-hot=3.7, female-cold=5.3), showing a possible effect of affect priming in female respondents.

It should be noted that the hedonic score stemming from the shopping value questionnaire are showing a small evolution that is consistent with respect to genders (F(1,486)=64.28; p<0.0001, male=2.57; female=3.33) and reverse with respect to the heat of the test (F(1, 486)=11; p<0.0025; hot=3.13; cold=2.79).

It is interesting to note that, contrary to what Bush and Hair’s (1985) findings could hint at, we do not find a higher mean score of compulsivity in the mall intercept procedure than in the “cold” procedure, but rather the contrary (albeit the overall difference is fairly small).

It is however interesting to note that females seem to be much more sensitive to the change of methodology than men, whose variation does not seem to change much. We can therefore suspect that this variation could indicate the process by which one tends to get a higher difference in compulsive scores between genders in mall intercepts. It could be possible that the females experience a better mood during shopping than at home, thus inducing an affect priming phenomenon that leads them to appraise differently the consequences of their shopping when they have been shopping and when they are in a different condition. Conversely, men could just appraise their shopping experience less emotionally, therefore leading to a more “consistent” evaluation between a “hot” and “cold” condition.

This meta-analysis should however be viewed as an exploratory study, where the results are subject to confirmation in a further study that can truly compare the two conditions in strictly similar methodological settings. We feel however that the results contained herein may foster some reflections on the overall validity of mail surveys with respect to mall intercept, as far as compulsive buying is concerned. A second potential implication of this study is that there may be more explanations to the difference in results between mall intercept methodologies and “cold” surveys than just more involved and expert shoppers in the former methodology.

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