Towards a Conceptual Model of Consumer Confusion

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As consumers are provided with ever-increasing amounts of information from more products sold through more channels and promoted in more ways, the notion of marketplace confusion is becoming increasingly important. From the extant literature, we propose and define three types of confusion resulting from brand similarity, information load, and misleading or ambiguous information. This latter type can be regarded as an ‘altered knowledge state’ in which a revision of understanding occurs. We argue that confusion should be conceptualized as a state variable and that existing confusion measures have focused solely on the behavioral and cognitive outcomes of confusion, ignoring the role of affect which is also a part of confusion. The paper is the first to discuss the consequences of confusion and elaborate on consumer confusion-reducing strategies. It concludes with some research implications of the new conceptualization.

INTRODUCTION
As consumers are provided with ever-increasing amounts of information from more products sold through more channels and promoted in more ways, the idea of confusion is becoming increasingly important and has been reported as a problem in many markets, e.g., telecommunications (e.g., Turnbull, Leek, and Ying 2000), life, health and travel insurance (Roberts 1995), and retail products (West et al. 2002). Here, we make further observations regarding the extant literature in this area. First, the lack of a generally-accepted definition has contributed to very different conceptualizations of consumer confusion. Second, the existence and potential significance of an affective dimension of confusion has been neglected in previous confusion studies and definitions. Third, almost all conceptual and empirical work examining consumer confusion has disregarded how consumers cope with confusion and the idea that they employ confusion reduction strategies. The paper begins by reviewing the extant definitions of consumer confusion and relevant literature before proposing and defining three types of confusion. We then move on to provide a conceptual model of consumer confusion which examines antecedents, potential moderators and mediators, coping strategies and consequences of consumer confusion.

DEFINING CONSUMER CONFUSION
The extant literatures suggest there are three somewhat distinct antecedents of consumer confusion and have not separated confusion as a separate construct from its antecedents. Table 1 gives an overview over existing definitions which show that consumer confusion can be related to too similar, too many or unclear stimuli. The definitions view confusion as a conscious state of mind that can occur either in the pre- or the post-purchase situation and have not only a cognitive dimension, but also a behavioral one. We now review and discuss each type of confusion and its antecedents.

According to Diamond (1981, p. 52), brand similarity confusion occurs when an imitator, “(...) so resembles the mark in appearance, sound, or meaning that a prospective purchaser is likely to be confused or misled”. From our perspective, brand similarity does not necessarily cause confusion unless the consumers’ are aware of the two brands (e.g., Johnnie Walker and ‘Johnnie Hawker’ whisky). Similarity in advertisements and commercial messages can also cause this type of confusion (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994; Poiesz and Verhallen 1989). We define brand similarity confusion 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’.

Another logical basis for confusion creation is information overload. This stems from the idea that brand proliferation causes ‘confusion’ because of the ‘bounded-rationality’ of individuals in relation to the volume and diversity of the information generated by a large number of brands (Simon 1962; Miller 1956). Clearly, information overload is not only caused by a proliferation of brands, but also by an increase in the amount of ‘decision-relevant’ information on the product in the environment surrounding the purchase of a given number of goods. The greater the number of characteristics considered, the more difficult the choice will be (or the more ‘thinking cost’ incurred; Shugan 1980). We define overload confusion as: ‘a lack of understanding caused by the consumer being confronted with an overly information rich environment that cannot be processed in the time available to fully understand, and be confident in, the purchase environment’.

Some authors refer to consumer confusion from product complexity (e.g., Cohen 1999; Cahill 1995), ambiguous information and advertisements or false product claims (e.g., Chryssochoidis 2000; Kangun and Polonsky 1995; Jacoby and Hoyer 1989), non-transparent pricing (e.g., Berry and Yadav 1996) and poor product manuals (e.g., Glasse 1992), all of which directly cause problems of understanding and are related to the concept of cognitive unclarity (see Cox 1967). This is similar to the notion of miscomprehension which Jacoby and Hoyer (1989, p. 435) define as the situation in which “the receiver of the communication extracts meanings neither contained in nor logically derived from the communication and/or rejects meanings contained in or logically derived from the communication”. Jacoby and Hoyer (1989) go on to identify confused miscomprehension, which involves the consumer extracting two or more logically incompatible meanings, then realizing it but still not knowing which of the meanings is correct. The important distinction we make is that ambiguity confusion is caused by information that is at variance with that already known by the individual, e.g., positively or negatively framed product information that is inconsistent with a consumer’s beliefs about that product (e.g., Grewal et al. 1994; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990). For example, increasing instances of confusion occur in the health or ‘slimming’ food market not because there may be too many similar varieties or too much information to absorb, but because ‘credible’ sources such as television programs undermine the consumer’s confidence in the accuracy of the producer’s/retailer’s claims. From this discussion, we define ambiguity confusion as being: ‘a lack of understanding during which consumers are forced to re-evaluate and revise current beliefs or assumptions about products or the purchasing environment’.

The vast majority of previous research has viewed confusion predominantly as either behavioral or cognitive, with no suggestion that confusion includes an affective component (see Table, 1). We add to this by conceptualizing the state of confusion as having three consequences, i.e., cognitive, affective or behavioral, which we
suggested are positively correlated, irrespective of the antecedents confusion experienced. Apart from some of the cognitive and behavioral consequences already mentioned, we propose confused consumers are likely to experience unpleasant emotions which may include: frustration, irritation, anxiety, or even anger.

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual model which we will be discussing. Research on consumer confusion has mainly focused on identifying causes and effects of confusion paying little attention to its moderators and mediators. In addition to the three antecedents of confusion, moderators, mediators, confusion reduction strategies and consequences are depicted (see Figure 1). Mediator variables, such as mood, can change while influencing the relationship between two variables, while moderator variables (e.g., gender) can affect the relationship, but do not change themselves.

Confusion Moderator Variables

Within any exchange process, it is either the stimulus itself, created by the marketer, which is inherently confusing or is it some inability on the consumer’s part to process marketing stimuli. Individual characteristics exert a moderating influence because they are often linked to the consumer’s ability to rationalize and process stimuli. Age may reduce confusion through an experience framework or may increase confusion as processing competence decreases with the ageing process. Gender differences may also be related to the experience framework since females tend to have more experience in different product classes than men. Females are also reported to perceive more advertisement clutter and miscomprehension (e.g., Elliott and Speck 1998). Turnbull et al. (2000) found that more females were ambiguity confused than males in the mobile phone market, suggesting that product category interrelates with gender.

In cognitive psychology, tolerance for ambiguity is concerned with the degree to which people can restrain their need for a perfect, clear view of the environment (e.g., Goldstein and Blackman 1977; Feather 1969). Individuals with low tolerance for ambiguity may prematurely close their information processing activities, and are rigidly impervious to new information. The way tolerance is discussed in the literature suggests that consumers go through a stage of ambiguity if they intend to clarify the choice environment and make a more considered purchase. Ambiguity confusion then occurs when the error band, and uncertainty within the information, exceeds the error and uncertainty tolerance of the consumer.

Pinson’s (1978) work on cognitive styles distinguished between sharpeners and levelers, which are similar to Cox’s (1967) clarifiers and simplifiers. Foxman et al. (1992) found sharpeners commit fewer errors than levelers when distinguishing between similar stimuli. Such consumers use more discriminant criteria and are less likely to be deceived when buying an imitator instead of an original brand.

Based on Kolb’s (1976) exploratory work, Sproles and Kendall (1990) examined the relationship between learning style and decision-making styles and identified three learning styles which could be particularly overload confusion inducing; namely, (1) the passive, accepting learning characteristic, (2) the concrete, fact-oriented characteristic, and (3) the non-adaptive, struggling learning characteristic. Indeed, in addition to a confused by over-choice factor, Sproles and Kendall (1986) identified several decision-making factors which have links with confusion, namely: Perfectionism, Novelty-Fashion Consciousness, and Price-Value Consciousness. We now discuss and explain some of these relationships.

The perfectionistic consumer usually tries to buy products of superior quality (Sproles 1985). This can involve a great deal of thorough and systematic search for alternatives and comparisons because few products meet their demanding criteria. This thoroughness is also likely to enhance an individual’s ability to distinguish between similar stimuli. Hence, we argue that a perfectionistic approach to shopping might be an effective shield against confusion caused by similarity and overload antecedents.

Novelty-fashion seekers may be particularly prone to overload and ambiguity confusion antecedents because: they tend to obtain more information from the mass media and outside their social system (Midgley and Dowling 1978); fashion is ever changing and contradictory (Mead 1993); of the uncertainty surrounding the longevity of such trends and the ambiguity of defining what is fashionable; they cannot be certain whether their products or styles will ever become widely accepted (Winakor et al. 1980).

Economic/price-value conscious consumers want the best value for money, tend to have clear purchasing criteria and their approach to shopping is systematic, thorough and efficient (Darden and Reynolds 1971). This makes them less likely to experience similarity, overload or ambiguity confusion antecedents.

Field independent individuals impose organization upon visual stimuli and are able to locate a sought-after component. The ability to better organize stimuli makes field independent consumers less likely to experience confusions from overload and ambiguity antecedents.

Equivalence range refers to the extent to which individuals generalize about stimuli presented to them (Foxman et al. 1992; Gardner, Jackson and Messick 1969). An individual with broad equivalence (or low conceptual differentiation) considers stimuli to be the same, even when they are only marginally similar. Thus, broad equivalence consumers are more likely to become confused from similarity antecedents.

Playing environment relates to the store layout, variety of products on offer, arrangement of the merchandise, music, colors, lighting, etc. It might be expected that constant product moving, combined with poor signage, will increase ambiguity antecedents of confusion. Overload antecedents are likely to be exacerbated when too many products are placed on the shelves. Also, when look-alike brands are placed side-by-side to the original brand, consumers are more likely to detect that they are different brands and similarity antecedents of confusion are less likely.

Confusion Mediator Variables

Situational variables, such as shopping under time constraints, can lead to rushed decision-making, shortened information-processing and inference-making time which is expected to increase confusion caused by similar stimuli (Balabanis and Craven 1997; Foxman et al. 1990). Time constraints should increase overload confusion antecedents because of decreased processing time, but it might also reduce overload confusion in certain circumstances because, knowing the time constraints, consumers might seek to acquire and process less information (Walsh 1999). Confusion from ambiguity antecedents can be expected to be negatively correlated with the amount of available shopping time because it allows more time to clarify what the information actually means.

The social environment refers to the presence of others and their interactions with the consumer. For example, others’ opinions could add too much information and create confusion or could be in conflict with existing beliefs and create confusion. Expectations of a situation can also influence how much confusion is generated. For example, if consumers expect a situation to be confusing, they may be more resistant to confusion causing stimuli or more prepared to deal with it by using coping strategies which might reduce their incidence of becoming confused.
### TABLE 1
Definitions of Consumer Confusion and their Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Quasi-Definition</th>
<th>cognitive/ knowledge</th>
<th>affective/ emotional</th>
<th>cognitive/ behavioral</th>
<th>conscious</th>
<th>non-conscious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacoby, Speller and Kohl (1974, p. 66)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) feelings of confusion, of not having obtained the best buy, and feeling that another brand was better.&quot;</td>
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<td>Masulis and D'Amato (1978, p. 49)</td>
<td>&quot;We take the position here that &quot;confusion&quot; is in effect stimulus generalization.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diamond (1981, p. 52)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) so resembles the mark in appearance, sound, or meaning that a prospective purchaser is likely to be confused or misled.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sproule and Kendall (1986, p. 274)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) physical similarities between products may result in the misattribution of source of origin or identity by the consumer.&quot;</td>
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<td>Loken et al. (1986, p. 196)</td>
<td>&quot;Brand confusion is a phenomenon that occurs at the individual level (...) and is predominantly non-conscious in nature.&quot;</td>
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<td>Poiesz and Verhallen (1989, p. 233)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) consists of one or more errors in inferential processing that lead a consumer to unknowingly form inaccurate beliefs about the attributes or performance of a less-known brand based on a more familiar brand's attributes or performance.&quot;</td>
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<td>Kohli and Thakor (1997, p. 213)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) confusion, when respondents may pick confusingly similar names, instead of the target names.&quot;</td>
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<td>Huffman and Kahn (1998, p. 492-493)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) may be confusing&quot; and &quot;The confusion a consumer experiences with a wide assortment of options, however, is due to the perceived complexity, not necessarily to the actual complexity or variety.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacoby and Morris (1998, p. 97)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) confusion is a state of mind which affects information processing and decision making. The consumer may therefore be aware or unaware of confusion.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mitchell and Papavasiliou (1999, p. 327)</td>
<td>&quot;Confusion (...) is a state of mind which affects information processing and decision making. The consumer may therefore be aware or unaware of confusion.&quot;</td>
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<td>Walsh (1999, p. 24)</td>
<td>&quot;Confusion is: an uncomfortable state of mind that primarily arises in the pre-purchase phase and which negatively affects consumers' information processing and decision-making abilities and can lead to consumers making sub-optimal decisions.&quot;</td>
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<td>Turnbull et al. (2000, p. 145)</td>
<td>&quot;(...) consumer confusion is defined as consumer failure to develop a correct interpretation of various facets of a product/service, during the information processing procedure.&quot;</td>
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FIGURE 1
Conceptual Model for Antecedents, Moderators, Mediators, Coping Strategies and Consequences of Confusion

Note:
Abbreviations in parentheses indicate for which type of confusion a reduction strategy is relevant.
SC = Similarity Confusion; OC = Overload Confusion; UC = Unclarity Confusion
Experience can work for or against the consumer with respect to confusion. Although Foxman et al. (1990) suggest that new triers and occasional buyers may be especially vulnerable to confusion, Brengman et al. (2001) found no statistical differences in the proclivity to similarity antecedents of confusion between light and heavy product category users. Experienced consumers are less likely to thoroughly compare the products they buy regularly and are less likely to be overloaded than inexperienced ones. This is partly because although they consider a greater number of information dimensions, heavy users look at fewer brand alternatives (Jacoby 1977), and partly because the knowledge that stems from experience facilitates information processing. Also, firmer product beliefs, accrued from experience, make consumers selectively perceptive and reduce consumers’ scope of search (Neisser 1976). As consumers gain brand experience their knowledge base expands, choice alternatives and evaluative attributes become fewer and they should become less susceptible to all three types of confusion.

Foxman et al. (1992) suggest that the task definition can influence the propensity to become confused because it is related to the importance of a purchase. For example, consumers can be scrupulous and attentive when buying a gift and thus be less likely to be confused from similarity antecedents (Balabanis and Craven 1997).

With a low-involvement purchase, confusion from information overload is less likely to occur because less information search and processing takes place. Confusion from ambiguous market stimuli should be positively correlated with quicker decision making because the consumer is less likely to thoroughly examine ambiguous product information. In high-involvement contexts, the decision maker will put greater effort into making choices by adopting decision styles that involve more deliberation and evaluation and this may help to avoid confusion (Foxman et al. 1992). However, greater effort is only likely to reduce the incidence of confusion if two conditions hold, namely, 1) that the information is available and comprehensible, and 2) that the consumer has the processing ability to analyze the information. If either of these two conditions is not met, consumers could easily become more confused as they increase the purchase evaluation effort.

Consequences of Confusion

We suggest that attribution theory serves to determine some of the consequences of confusion. The more consumers attribute their confusion to external company sources, the greater will be the effect on company-related consequences. Although no study has systematically investigated the outcomes of consumer confusion, it has been associated with several unfavorable consequences, such as, negative word-of-mouth (Turnbull et al. 2000), dissatisfaction (Zaichkowsky 1995; Foxman et al. 1990), cognitive dissonance (Mitchell and Papavassiliou 1999), decision postponement (e.g., Jacoby and Morrin 1998; Huffman and Kahn 1998), shopping fatigue (Mitchell and Papavassiliou 1997), reactance (Settle and Alreck 1988), decreased loyalty and trust and confusing other consumers (Foxman et al. 1992; 1990). We propose that there are two temporally-distinct consequence categories. The first relates to the immediate effects of confusion. The second relates to actions aimed to cope with, reduce or eliminate confusion.

Overload-confused consumers are likely to interrupt decision making in order to take measures that allow them to deal with the information load by separating important from less important information, narrowing the choice set or reducing the number of attributes on which the decision is based (e.g., Iyengar and Lepper 2000). The situations in which no decision postponement takes place are when a consumer unknowingly acts because of subconscious confusion, e.g., buying an imitator brand believing it is the original.

When choice rather than abandonment is the result of confusion, the same possible negative consequences for all three types of confusion on choice can be: a) a known alteration in brand choice caused by a lack of understanding, b) the same choice, but made with undue amounts of uncertainty, misunderstanding, frustration and dissonance, c) the same choice, but poor or non-maximal product utilization caused by inadequate understanding, d) the same choice, but an inability to inform others about the product or misinform them which may create problems for others, e) the same or different choice depending on the outcome of a delay designed to clarify the choice by using confusion reduction strategies. Finally, there is a tendency in the literature to regard confusion as akin to (a reverse) ‘hygiene’ factor in the consumer decision-making; its presence causes dissatisfaction, but its absence does not motivate consumers to purchase and does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. This is likely because the experience of confusion can be rather unpleasant, the eventual outcome or consequences flowing from it can be negative. The ‘hygiene’ analogy gives a negative view of confusion, which we contend for the most part to be correct. However, it is conceivable that confusion will have positive consequences. For example, if a consumer employs confusion reduction strategies and successfully copes with his/her confusion, it could lead to decreased pre-purchasing dissonance or increased satisfaction. In the following section we offer further specific insights into the potential impact of confusion from all three types of antecedents on consumers’ behavior.

Confusion from Similarity Antecedents and Related Outcomes

Stimulus similarity is likely to lead to a delay or abandonment of decision making because when consumers are aware that there is at least a possibility that they are about to buy a brand they did not intend to, they are likely to take more time to find out whether the (two or more) alternatives are actually the same. Consumers may also abandon a purchase altogether (‘no-choice option’) because they want to avoid making difficult trade-offs (e.g., Dhar 1997). Other studies have reported similar findings that consumers are more likely to select a no-choice option when both alternatives are attractive (e.g., Luce 1998). The relevance of confusion from similarity antecedents to social interaction is because consumers sometimes feel ashamed of being unable to differentiate between brands. Consumers who are duped are not always likely to share their negative experience which they see as their own fault.

We expect consumers’ inability to differentiate between stimuli (i.e., perceived stimulus similarity) to cause dissatisfaction directed towards one manufacturer that clearly imitates the other. This is partly because of the time and effort needed to assess the authenticity of the alternatives and these opportunity costs yield no utility (Foxman et al. 1990). What is worst still for the original manufacturer, is if the consumer does not realize that he/she has bought an imitator brand and attributes any resultant dissatisfaction to the original brand.

Brand loyalty is also likely to be affected by confusion caused by similar stimuli (Mitchell and Papavassiliou 1999) because consumers, who perceive stimulus similarity and have trouble distinguishing products and manufacturers, will find it difficult to reward a manufacturer with their trust. In this context, Zaichkowsky and Simpson (1996) argue that perceived brand similarity can change consumers’ attitudes about the uniqueness of the national brand. Consumers’ trust is likely to reduce because they will not know which the ‘right’ alternative is and which manufacturer to trust (Lau and Lee 1999).
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Confusion from Information Overload and Related Outcomes

Overload-confused consumers are likely to interrupt decision making in order to take measures that allow them to deal with the information load by separating important from less important information, narrowing the choice set or reducing the number of attributes on which the decision is based. Since stimulus overload can be attributed to a lack of (processing) time, delaying the purchase decision can be interpreted as an attempt to gain more processing time. However, expending a greater effort to arrive at a decision without gaining a perceivable utility can lead to consumer dissatisfaction (Turnbull et al. 2000). Perceived overload, caused by too many stimuli, can cause stress on part of the consumer and dissatisfaction.

As brand loyalty reflects habitual purchasing and requires less decision making, information seeking and brand evaluation, the prospect of having to do less information processing and comparison is likely to be appreciated by those consumers who are prone to stimulus overload confusion. Therefore, loyalty can be viewed as a strategic (conscious or non-conscious) reaction to overload. Moreover, Chern of (2003) found that when consumers select a product from a large assortment it often leads to weaker preferences.

Irrespective of cognitive abilities, consumers tend to feel better prepared for purchase decisions with a greater amount of information (Jacoby, Speller, and Berning 1974; Jacoby, Speller, and Kohn 1974). Since consumers tend to prefer larger stores, with a greater assortment, to smaller stores with a small assortment (Hoyer and MacInnis 1997), the over-abundance of products and information which today’s consumers encounter is unlikely to decrease trust per se.

Confusion from Ambiguous Stimuli and Related Outcomes

Consumers who are confused by unclear stimuli, or who suffer from partial comprehension (i.e., who extract more than one logically independent meaning), are likely to try to find information that will help them clarify their choice environment, e.g., by trying to establish which information is more credible. This will inevitably involve suspending the decision-making process. When consumers compare two or more complex products and experience confusion from ambiguous information, it could lead to choice deferral because the consumer tries to cope with what is seen as a non-comparable alternative (Dhar 1997). However, ambiguity-confused consumers are unlikely to engage in negative word-of-mouth if they attribute their inability to fully use and understand a product to themselves and not the product manufacturer.

Similar to stimulus overload, ambiguity is likely to cause consumers to seek ways to make satisfactory decisions on a more permanent basis and becoming brand loyal equates to making fewer comparisons, which means consumers are confronted with less ambiguous or unclear stimuli. Trust can help to reduce the perceived complexity in the environment (Hillmann 1994) because products that have once been positively evaluated do not need to be assessed again. From an attribution viewpoint, it is also conceivable that consumers do not blame manufacturers and retailers for their perceived ambiguity, but blame themselves, which is unlikely to entail a withdrawal of trust.

Confusion Reduction/Coping Strategies

When confusion is experienced by consumers, the same context may (or will) cause different degrees of confusion depending on the individual’s prior skill or competence in information processing and with respect to the confusion ‘strategies’ adopted to cope. An important prerequisite for the use of confusion reduction strategies (CRS) is that the consumer is aware of the confusion involved in the decision. Confusion reduction has not been studied before and this section identifies some strategies which consumers might use.

In our view, CRS are, in the main, concerned with clarifying a choice, reducing ambiguity and increasing understanding relating to a purchase decision. We propose that the confused consumer develops strategies which can be categorized into four generic approaches, namely; (1) clarify the buying goals, (2) seek additional information, (3) narrow down the set of alternatives, (4) share/delegate the purchase decision. The ‘seeking additional information’ category mostly consists of strategies which clarify the choice environment, but can also involve simplifying strategies. The reduction of confusion caused by similarity and ambiguity critically depends on the content of the information received, since additional information which is conflicting will not reduce similarity antecedents and can exacerbate ambiguity. Confused consumers can often involve other people (i.e., spouse, family member and friend) in the purchasing decision by asking a person to accompany them whilst shopping to help them comprehend the choice environment. Alternatively, they may delegate the task completely.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper stimulates a number of research questions driven by the proposed model. For example, how is confusion affected by the decision context, e.g., by the degree of involvement and how is it affected by purchaser characteristics such as; age, gender and cognitive style? The role of atmospherics and the overall physical store environment and its relationship with consumer confusion would appear complicated and requires further exploration. Indeed, basic research parameters of confusion need to be established such as identifying and measuring; antecedents of confusion; moderators and mediators of confusion; reduction strategies and outcomes of confusion. One outcome which requires further research might be shopping fatigue. Consumers who experience confusion regularly across different products categories are likely to become more frustrated with and tired of shopping. To the extent that much of the information processing and assessment of error and uncertainty are done without our conscious awareness, we can agree somewhat with Foxman et al.’s (1992) assertion that confusion is concerned with errors of which the consumer is unaware (at least partially), because sub-conscious processing of information is a basic condition driven by our mental limitations vis-à-vis a complex environment. This presents a major challenge for the measurement process.

In order to examine some of these ideas, we need to measure each type of consumer confusion which depends significantly on the development of a comprehensive confusion scale (e.g., Foxman et al. 1992). Thus far, no comprehensive scale exists, although some existing scales may capture elements of the overload confusion concept, e.g., Reilly’s (1982) ‘Role Overload of the Wife’. Childers, Houston and Heckler’s (1985) ‘Style of Processing Scale’ and Sproles and Kendall’s (1986) confusion factor in their ‘Consumer Styles Inventory’. There is therefore a need to devise a completely new scale to measure the degree of confusion caused by similarity and ambiguity.

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