Brand Commitment and Size of the Consideration Set

Sekar Raju, State University of New York at Buffalo
H. Rao Unnava, The Ohio State University

EXTENDED ABSTRACT - This research focuses on the effects of brand commitment on consumers' consideration sets. In particular, we investigate the differences between high and low commitment consumers on the size of their consideration set, and the possible reasons for the differences in size. We test three competing hypothesis to identify which explains the data best.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/9059/volumes/v32/NA-32

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the effects of brand commitment on consumers’ consideration sets. In particular, we investigate the differences between high and low commitment consumers on the size of their consideration set, and the possible reasons for the differences in size. We test three competing hypotheses to identify which explains the data best.

Multiple brands exist in most product categories but consumers rarely consider all the available brands when making a purchase decision. Consumers limit the number of brands they would consider purchasing to a smaller, manageable number. This smaller set of brands is called a consideration set (Kardes 2001).

While discussing consideration sets, researchers have speculated that the size of the consideration set depends on the commitment (or brand loyalty) that consumers have toward the brand. Specifically, high commitment consumers are expected to have a smaller set size than low commitment consumers. We tested this hypothesis in the first study by having subjects recall all the brands they would consider purchasing if they were in the market to buy the product category. As expected, high brand commitment consumers were found to have a smaller consideration set size compared to less committed consumers.

We next turn our attention to understanding the process by which committed consumers were restricting the number of brands in the consideration set. A review of the past literature suggests that the consideration set size is affected by memory factors (e.g., inhibition effects) or through one’s attitude toward the brand.

It is known that memory plays an important role in determining the size of one’s consideration set when it is elicited by a recall measure (e.g., Lynch and Srull 1982; Nedungadi 1990). If a brand does not come to one’s mind, it cannot be part of the consideration set in a memory-based task. On the other hand, even when a brand is recalled, it has been shown that this activation of the brand name in memory can inhibit the recall of other brands (e.g., Alba and Chattopadhyay 1985). In the first study, subjects with higher levels of brand commitment listed fewer brands than subjects with lower levels of commitment. This effect may be explained in terms of an inhibition effect. Since the preferred brand is more accessible for high commitment consumers, it is possible that this creates an inhibitory effect on the recall of other brands (Fazio 1995). For low commitment subjects the preferred brand is not likely to be as strongly accessible, thereby limiting the inhibition effect.

We utilized a stimulus-based task to test the inhibition explanation. We propose that if the difference persists in this task, inhibition effects can be ruled out as an explanation for the set size difference. The results revealed that the set size difference between the high and low brand commitment consumers continued to exist, indicating that the set size difference was not attributable to inhibition effects.

We now turn to the attitude explanation. Brands that are evaluated positively are more likely to be included in the consideration set compared to those that are not evaluated positively. Thus, a high commitment individual may limit the size of the consideration set in one of two ways. First, because of the attachment to the preferred brand, the attitude toward the brand may be polarized (Petty and Krosnick 1995). Therefore, for other brands to be considered as viable alternatives, those evaluations have to match that of the preferred brand. Several brands may fail to reach this high threshold level, and thus may not be included in the consideration set.

A second approach may be to evaluate other brands less positively. In this case, the evaluation of the brands in the marketplace are altered or biased to be less favorable. Therefore, given the same brand, high commitment subjects may rate it less positively than low commitment subjects, thereby restricting the potential candidates for inclusion in the consideration set. This issue is investigated in study three.

We test these two alternative explanations by identifying and comparing the evaluations that high and low commitment subjects had for the lowest ranked brand within the consideration set (WCS) and the highest ranked brand outside the consideration set (OCS). If high commitment subjects have a higher threshold of acceptance into their consideration set than low commitment subjects, the evaluation of WCS brand for high commitment subjects should be significantly greater than the evaluation of WCS brand for low commitment subjects, while there should be no difference in the evaluations of the OCS brand between high and low commitment subjects. On the other hand, if high commitment subjects have smaller consideration sets because of lower evaluations of competing brands, we would expect to see a less favorable OCS brand attitude for the high compared to the low commitment subjects and find a non-significant difference in the attitude between high and low commitment subjects for the WCS brand. The findings from this study support the explanation that high commitment subjects have smaller consideration set because of lower evaluations of competing brands.

To summarize, we find that brand commitment affects the number of brands consumers include in their consideration set. Of the three potential explanations for the difference in the consideration set size—inhibition, raising the threshold, and lowering the ratings of competing brands, we find that high commitment consumers seem to be restricting the set size by holding biased ratings of the competing brands.

REFERENCES


