Situation Variation in Consumers' Media Channel Consideration

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The authors investigate consumers’ consideration of media channels during different usage situations. They develop a model that explains consumers’ media channel consideration as a function of the media channel’s perceived benefits. In addition, they hypothesize that the usage situation affects consumers’ media channel consideration and that situation-based benefit requirements moderate the effect of the benefits on their channel consideration. The hypothesized relationships are tested using survey data on consumers’ consideration of 12 different media channels used by manufacturers to communicate product information across three product-related usage situations. The results support the proposed model structure and confirm the expected relationships.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Recent advances in communication technology such as the Internet have changed managers’ and consumers’ ideas about how firms and customers should interact (e.g., Watson et al. 2000); increasingly, consumers are viewed as active participants in supply chain value-creation processes (e.g., Wind and Rangaswamy 2001). An important consequence of this new perspective is that it has become more important for firms to provide their consumers with information about their offerings. For example, in the case of online customization (e.g., Dell), consumers must be able to understand the details of many product variants to judge which variant is most suitable for them and provide their made-to-measure specifications (Huffman and Kahn 1998). In the case of food products, consumers need to understand how they can use the manufacturer’s product enjoyably and safely.

In turn, manufacturers are faced with new questions about how to communicate with their consumers. First, in the context of specific media channels, how should product information be designed to communicate effectively with consumers? For example, recent research highlights the interactive nature of new media channels such as the Internet, as well as the requirements this places on communication design (Stewart and Pavlou 2002). Second, which media channels should be used to communicate with consumers? Even if product communications are well designed, they may be ineffective if the messages are sent through media channels that consumers do not consider.

We address this second question in the current study. In particular, we analyze consumers’ consideration of media channels by investigating which channels they find acceptable for use. Furthermore, we propose that the concept of a consideration set can be extended to the field of media channels and investigate how consumers’ media channel consideration is related to the communication benefits (e.g., trustworthy, detailed) they perceive these various media channels to possess. In our analysis, we also investigate the notion that consumers’ consideration of media channels depends on the specific usage situation (e.g., Seybold 2001). This phenomenon has been well supported by previous work on the effect of situational variations on consumer preferences for products and services (Srivastava, Leone, and Shocker 1981). We hypothesize that situational differences in consumer preferences exist in consumers’ media channel consideration and argue that the usage situation influences which benefits consumers require from a media channel. Specifically, it is expected that consumers’ media channel consideration will shift according to the usage situation and that this shift is due to differences in the requirements they have for the media channels.

We formulate a random coefficient binary logit model to test the proposed relationships of respondents’ perceptions of various media channel benefits, usage situation-specific requirements, and media channel considerations in their search for product information. We use survey data from 453 consumers who had the responsibility for food purchases in their household.

The survey was constructed on the basis of the Association Pattern Technique (APT) (ter Hofstede et al. 1998; ter Hofstede, Steenkamp, and Wedel 1999) to investigate the different relationships between media channels, media channel benefits, and situations. The APT was originally developed to study the relationships consumers perceive between different products, product benefits (e.g., low in calories), and their personal objectives (e.g., to be healthy). Unlike qualitative approaches to collecting data, the APT approach allows us to quantify the relationships between the media channels and their perceived benefits, as well as between the situations and benefits in which we are interested in.

Based on three focus groups and discussions with industry experts, we identified 14 relevant channels and 8 media channel benefits that were most relevant in the context of food product information. Of the 14 media channels in the survey, 3 were Internet-based channels: the manufacturer’s website, a third-party website about cooking, and a food information website created by an independent agency. We also included 11 more traditional media channels, including television advertising, television programs, radio advertising, radio programs, magazine advertising, magazine articles, newspaper advertising, newspaper articles, in-store magazines, product labels, and educational brochures. The 8 media channel benefits included in the study were whether a media channel was trustworthy (“trustworthy”), provided detailed information (“detailed”), took little time to use (“time saving”), was easy to use (“easy”), was tailored to the individual user (“personal”), was exciting and arouses (“stimulating”), was informative (“informative”), and was relaxing to use (“relaxing”). The following three hypothetical usage situations were identified: (1) a food scare in which an ingredient in one of the manufacturer’s food products was contaminated, (2) a new product introduction in which the consumer is interested, and (3) a search for a recipe so the consumer can prepare a meal that includes one of the manufacturer’s food products.

Our model provides strong support for the fact that most media channel benefits have a significant effect on media channel consideration. We find significant positive results at the 0.05 level for all media channel benefits except “trustworthy” and “informative.” Furthermore, we investigated the role of usage situation as a driver of media channel benefits that consumers require. The results reveal that consumers’ required media channel benefits differ significantly across the three usage situations (food scare, new product introduction, and recipe search). In case of a food scare, we observe significant differences from the average at the 0.05 level for almost all required benefits except “easy” and “stimulating,” whereas in case of a new product introduction, we find significant effects for the benefits “trustworthy,” “detailed,” and “informative.” Our results also provide support for the hypothesized interaction of consumers’ required and perceived media channel benefits on media channel consideration. We find significant positive results at the 0.05 level for the media channel benefits “trustworthy,” “easy,” “stimulating,” and “informative.” Furthermore, the results of the random coefficient estimates indicate significant coefficient heterogeneity across consumers’ evaluations of the perceived media channel benefits, as well as across the media channel intercepts.

REFERENCES


