Exploratory Behavior: a Portuguese and British Study

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Exploratory Behavior (EB) designates behavior aimed at modifying environmental stimulation. It has been used to explain a diversity of consumer behaviors carried out with the objective of searching for variety and diversity across numerous products and situations (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 1996; Raju, 1980). Despite its potential relevance, research on EB across cultures is lacking. In this paper, the concept of EB is reviewed and a nomological model of antecedent and outcome variables is proposed. Results from a cross-cultural empirical study mostly substantiate the hypotheses based on the proposed model.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Exploratory Behavior (EB) concept was introduced in the early 1980’s (Raju, 1980; Raju and Venkatesan, 1980) to designate behavior aimed at modifying environmental stimulation. This concept originated in the psychology field with studies of individuals’ internal need for stimulation. This literature suggests that individuals have a preferred (or optimal) stimulation level (OSL). When stimulation (complexity and/or arousal) falls below this level, individuals become bored and try to increase it to the desired level. Applied to marketing, when in this situation, consumers tend to seek more diversity in their information search activities and buying decisions. In contrast, when stimulation surpasses the optimal level, individuals try to reduce it to a more comfortable level (Hoyer and Ridgway, 1984; Price and Ridgway, 1983; Raju, 1980; Raju and Venkatesan, 1980).

EB and OSL have been researched in numerous marketing contexts. However, the extant literature has some gaps that this paper seeks to address. First, we develop a nomological model that uses individual-level OSL-related antecedents to perceptions of risk. Raju’s exploratory tendency scale (1980), one of the most popular operationalizations of EB, has been tested mostly in single countries (e.g., USA: Ganesh, Arnold, and Reynolds 2000; Goodwin and Etgar 1980; Mehrabian and Russel 1974; Raju 1980). Relatively few have examined EB and OSL cross-culturally or in non-US settings (for exceptions, see Faison, 1980; Murray and Manrai, 1993). This study develops a model for EB and tests it with data from two countries, namely Portugal and the UK. In sum, to the best of our knowledge, our study is the first test of the nomological model, with two countries.

In our paper a review of the concept of Exploratory Behavior, Optimum Stimulation Level and Perceived risk is provided. The following hypotheses are proposed regarding the nomological relationships between these constructs:

H1: OSL is related positively to EB.
H2: EB is related negatively to consumers’ perceived risk.
H3: OSL is related negatively to consumers’ perceived risk.

Based on these hypotheses, a nomological model of the relationships of EB and related concepts is proposed. An empirical study was conducted in two nations representing differing cultures to validate the proposed model. Two high-involvement products were used (cars and laptops) as previous research on perceived risk shows that it is related to high-value, high-involvement purchases.

Results from the cross-cultural empirical study mostly substantiate the hypotheses based on the proposed model. Regarding EB antecedents, H1, suggesting that OSL is positively related to EB, was confirmed. This suggests that the level of homeostatic arousal predicts the disposition to engage in information- and acquisition-related exploratory consumer-related behaviors, such as seeking information, talking/reading about new products, and experiencing or buying them. In what concerns EB outcomes, the negative impact of EB on perceived risk (H2) was also confirmed for both EB facets, for both products, in both countries. OSL was hypothesized to negatively affect perceived risk (H3). However, results differed across OSL operationalizations.

These results emphasize the usefulness of the EB construct, capturing the disposition for engaging in exploratory, varied, and novel consumption- and information seeking-related activities in different cultures.

References


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