Consumer Emotional Intelligence: Conceptualization, Measurement, and the Prediction of Consumer Decision Making

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This research details the development of the “Consumer Emotional Intelligence Scale” (CEIS) designed to measure individual differences in consumer’s ability to use emotional information. Scale development procedures confirmed the theoretical higher-order model with 18 items representing the managing, facilitating, understanding, and perceiving dimensions. Additional results are reported that support the scale’s reliability, discriminant and nomological validity. Our domain-specific measure predicted consumer food choices better than a more domain-general alternative. Furthermore, consumer emotional intelligence predicted food choices beyond cognitive knowledge.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Despite the importance of emotion in decision making (e.g., Gohm and Clore 2002; Luce 1998; Pham 1998; Ruth 2001), research has yet to fully understand how consumers’ use emotional information to make effective decisions. A growing body of research continues to focus on the emotions present in consumption situations, however a better understanding of emotional processing abilities can have important effects on consumer performance outcomes. The current research focuses on emotional intelligence in the consumer domain in light of past research focusing solely on general emotional intelligence. Consumer emotional intelligence is defined here as a person’s ability to use emotional information to achieve a desired consumer outcome, comprised as a set of first-order emotional abilities that allow individuals to recognize the meanings of emotional patterns that underlie consumer decision making and to reason and solve problems on the basis of them (Mayer and Salovey 1997). A better understanding of emotional ability can have considerable value in extending our knowledge of consumer behavior. For example, it can provide answers to questions such as: how does emotional processing influence purchase decisions; which decisions do high vs. low EI consumers more readily make; how might EI influence relationships between key consumer variables such as impulsivity and purchase intention? Additionally, with this knowledge of emotional ability, we may be able to identify those consumer’s who make the highest (and lowest) quality consumer decisions. For instance, consumers with high levels of nutrition knowledge who lack the emotional ability to understand which emotions are important and how to manage those emotions toward unhealthy eating, are likely to make poor quality decisions. Understanding these emotional deficiencies can provide a means to subsequently improve the quality of consumption decisions.

In this research, we develop and validate a measure of emotional intelligence (the Consumer Emotional Intelligence Scale—CEIS) in hopes that these and other consumer issues might be thoroughly examined. In the next sections, we provide an overview of emotional intelligence (EI), ability-based models of EI, and the four dimension structure underlying this model, along with a rationale for how the consumer domain provides a unique context in which domain-specific EI measurement is needed. Data from studies 1 and 2 was used to select items based on corrected item-to-total correlations. Study 3 data is subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to provide evidence of the factor structure, scale reliability, and discriminant validity of the dimensions. Evidence is provided in study 4 for construct validation in a food choice context. The general nature of the MSCEIT, along with the length, cost of administration, and the difficulty of adding follow-up instruments and/or items, adds to the contribution of the newly developed CEIS which provides an effective and psychometrically sound means of assessing emotional ability in the consumer context. Understanding the role of emotional ability could lead to a variety of favorable outcomes including a richer knowledge of how consumers think and feel when making a variety of decisions including the selection of foods, restaurants, and products, and when interacting with other consumers. Further, understanding consumer emotional ability can lead to consumers making higher quality decisions related to their health and to product choices that might facilitate or be detrimental to health. A summary of our research findings are provided next.

Findings regarding the development and assessment of a consumer EI scale called the CEIS were detailed in this paper. It is important to note that this instrument is not intended as a replacement for more general measures of emotional ability, but rather as a more domain-specific instrument that can be used to assess consumer outcomes. The CEIS was created and compared with the leading instrument of EI in the psychological literature called the MSCEIT (Mayer et al. 2003). Both instruments moderately correlated, suggesting that both are measures of EI, although different enough to support the domain-specific utility of the CEIS. After a series of tests confirmed the scale’s structure and yielded acceptable reliability, the CEIS’s validity was assessed in several additional studies. In study 1, the CEIS was found to display adequate nomological validity in predicting compulsive consumption. Findings from study 2 indicated that the CEIS successfully predicted consumer performance better than MSCEIT for this consumer food choice task. These results provide further validity support for the CEIS. In addition, two alternative explanations were ruled out in study 2. We tested for effects across the order of administration and found no evidence of bias. Further, we examined the goal level of consumers to insure that respondent’s decision making on the performance task was not biased by their intentions to select foods for reasons other than maintaining a healthy diet. Findings in study 4 indicated that emotional ability predicts consumer performance beyond the effects of cognitive ability, supporting the importance of the emotional ability construct in consumer behavior and the nomological validity of the CEIS.

References


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