A Three-Factor Model of Consumer Preference For Self-Designed Products

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In this research, we develop a three-factor (i.e., outcome accuracy, mere authorship, and process affect) model of consumer preference for self-designed products. We propose that the preference structure for self-designed products can be determined by one, two, or three of the factors. A study involving 512 participants designing, in different task formats, a Nike iD sports shoe and then evaluating, after different lengths of delay, their self-design embedded in a set of 30 different designs provides preliminary support for this model.

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Major Findings

Data was subjected to a 2 x 2 ANOVA, with likelihood of sharing and affective response as the primary dependent measure. Affective response was calculated by creating an index of the above three items ($\alpha=.93$). The analysis showed a significant interaction of cost and time expenditures, such that individuals in the high cost condition were most likely to share only when they had also invested the greater amount of time in preparing the software to share ($M_{\text{LowCost,LowTimeExpenditure}}=3.34, M_{\text{LowCost,HighTimeExpenditure}}=3.78, M_{\text{HighCost,LowTimeExpenditure}}=3.91, M_{\text{HighCost,HighTimeExpenditure}}=5.92, F_{(1, 102)}=5.93, p<.02$). An analysis of the affective response index suggests that this increased propensity to share among participants who paid the higher cost for the software is associated with a more positive affective response to sharing attributable to their time investment ($M_{\text{HighCost,LowTimeExpenditure}}=9.46, M_{\text{HighCost,HighTimeExpenditure}}=11.61, F_{(1, 52)}=2.82, p<.1$). No similar relationship between time expenditure and affective response existed among participants who had paid less for the software ($F<1, p>.8$).

Future Studies

Future studies will address specific rationales consumers use for justifying their unlawful actions and suggest potential remedies. Moreover, the extant literature on sharing suggests that these rationales may vary significantly across cultures (Belk 2007). Given the multi-cultural and multinational nature of online communities, we believe it would be of extreme importance to study the present phenomenon in a multicultural setting.

References


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In this research, we develop a three-factor (i.e., outcome accuracy, mere authorship, and process affect) model of consumer preference for self-designed products. We propose that the preference structure for self-designed products can be determined by one, two, or three of the factors. A study involving 512 participants designing, in different task formats, a Nike iD sports shoe and then evaluating, after different lengths of delay, their self-design embedded in a set of 30 different designs provides preliminary support for this model.

We define outcome accuracy as the extent to which the customized product created by consumers in the self-design process maximizes their pre-existing enduring preferences. When creating their self-design, consumers need to transfer their needs and wants into a concrete product specification by making a series of choices. Although finite, the solution space within which consumers make sequential design decisions can still be enormous. For example, the design task carried out in our study involved 60,374,160 different possible designs. As the solution space enlarges, the accuracy with which a solution within this space matches the pre-existing ideal point of an individual consumer increases. However, the effort that needs to be made by that consumer to find such a solution also increases. We expect that an accuracy-effort tradeoff is likely to be made by consumers. We thus consider outcome accuracy as the extent to which consumers’ pre-existing ideal point is approximated by the outcome of the self-design process wherein consumers perform an effortful but not exhaustive search within the design solution space. We propose that as outcome accuracy increases during self-design, subsequent evaluations of the self-designed product will also increase (even after a delay), Consumer preferences can be stored evaluations or context-sensitive constructions (e.g., Wilson, Lindsey, and Schooler 2000). By assuming consumers make accuracy-effort tradeoffs, we allow for the existences of both types of preferences at the time of creating the self-design. Likewise, by proposing that outcome accuracy can partly or completely determine consumers’ preference for their self-design, we also allow for the existences of both stored evaluation (as outcome accuracy) and context-dependent construction (as mere authorship) at the time of evaluation.

Mere authorship is the extent to which consumers prefer products that are believed to have been self-designed, regardless of the validity of that belief. People have been found to infer attitudes from observations of their own behavior (e.g., Fazio 1987). We propose that, at the time of evaluation (i.e., after the self-design process and in a different context), consumers might construct their preferences for a product based on whether they believe they self-designed the product or not. According to the positivity bias in human cognition (Heider 1958), this contextual inference can bias preference such that “I like it merely because I designed it.”

Process affect is the extent to which the self-design process generates positive emotions that are associated with the self-designed product. The self-design process usually operates in an interactive online environment wherein consumers are allowed to work on different product components in a one-by-one, back-and-forth, self-paced fashion. As a result, they can gain a certain level of familiarity with their self-design. Companies also try to make the self-design process as user-friendly, intriguing, and entertaining as possible. According to research conducted on sensory affect (e.g., Schimmack and Crites 2005), such a process can give rise to positive emotions that are similar to innate sensory affect, classic conditioning, and mere exposure. They are also similar to integral emotional responses (Pham 2007). We