Combining High-Scope and Low-Scope Retail Cues: an Integrative Perspective

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This research assesses how consumers combine low- and high-scope cues in forming evaluations. We develop a congruity-based framework that not only predicts the integration of cues found across the three studies in this research, but that also serves to resolve apparent equivocal results found in earlier research. By examining the joint role of cue congruity and valence, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of multiple cues on consumer’s evaluations. Results support that a positive low-scope cue enhances a retailer’s high-scope reputation when it is moderately incongruent with that high-scope cue in terms of its focus or its valence, but not both.

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friends, and/or significant others. Whereas, profiles were rated low on the MAS dimension if the profile section the individual primarily wrote very emotionally, writing about “liking” or “loving” their family, friends, and/or significant others but with little or no mention about “liking” or “enjoying” their career, cars, and/or school.

In strong Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) societies people attempt to predict the future in order to minimize the possibility of new, unfamiliar, unexpected, unusual circumstances (Kale 1991). Therefore if the individual wrote about their future goals and plans whether it concerned the immediate future, a month, six months and/or a year, or their long term/ life goals they were considered high on UAI. Conversely the individual was considered low on UAI if the person made no mention of any future goals and plans.

To establish reliability, a test of reproducibility was applied to the coding system (Mueller 1987). A total of 90 MySpace profile were selected randomly from the original sample by two new experimenters. Next each of the two new experimenters independently coded their random selection of 90 MySpace profiles (Mueller 1987). The results of the reproducibility test showed that the two new experimenters coded their 90 MySpace profile with an 84.2 percent similarity as the original judge.

As expected, the results showed that the US and Australia’s were not significantly different on the dimensions of Individuality and Masculinity ($p$'s >.2). Surprisingly, there was also no significant difference on the dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) ($p$>.2). When compared to Ireland both the US and Australia showed differences in these cultural dimensions. For Ireland, their Individuality rating was significantly lower ($M$= 2.07) than the US’s ($M$=2.44; $t$(198)=2.918, $p$<.005) and marginally significant to Australia’s profiles ($M$= 2.33; $t$(198)=−1.779, $p$<.1). For Ireland, their Masculinity rating was significantly higher ($M$= 1.19) than the US’s ($M$=0.89; $t$(198)=2.909, $p$<.005) and also significantly higher to Australia’s profiles ($M$= .89; $t$(198)=−2.321, $p$<.5). Lastly, for Ireland, their Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) rating was not significantly higher ($M$= 1.85) than the US’s ($M$=1.65; $p$>1) but was significant to Australia’s profiles ($M$= 1.61; $t$(198)=1.973, $p$<.05).

Since these results, for the most part, paralleled the similarities and differences among cultural dimensions in personal profiles as they do among the countries, these results confirm our expectations that culture is indeed present in individual’s personal descriptions. This research helps to build a better understanding of this growing phenomenon of social networking and we hope to build upon this knowledge base in future research.

References

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While consumer research has paid significant attention to how product cues signal product quality (e.g., Bakamitsos 2006; Roggeveen, Grewal, and Gotlieb 2006; Zhang and Sood 2002), researchers have allocated fewer resources investigating how cues affect the places where consumers procure these goods. This relative lack of focus is surprising because consumer research into retail cues has a rich history (e.g., Grewal et al. 1998; Gupta and Cooper 1992; Srivastava and Lurie 2001). Yet in the past ten years, the number of publications examining how consumers react to product cues outweighs those on consumers’ reactions to retailer cues by a wide margin. The issue becomes even more important when one considers the expanding channels of retail, including the internet, kiosks, and mobile shopping to name but a few. Thus, examining how recent theories and applications in consumer behavior apply to consumers’ reactions to retailers is a timely issue. We take on that challenge by integrating research on cue-scope, congruity, and valence to test consumers’ reactions to multiple retail cues.

More specifically, our research examines how low-scope cues interact with high-scope cues to affect consumers’ evaluations. Previous research in schema-based processing suggests that the manner in which these cues interact in determining evaluations may not
be straightforward. For instance, when a stimulus is moderately incongruent with an evoked schema, consumers engage in more extensive processing of the stimulus and often form more extreme evaluations (e.g., Campbell and Goodstein 2001). In our case this suggests that when a low-scope cue is moderately incongruent with a high-scope cue, the low-scope cue may have more impact on evaluations than when it is congruent with the high-scope cue.

In addition, earlier research suggests that the valence of a high-scope cue affects when a low-scope cue is used in attitude formation (e.g., Biswas et al. 2002; Lurie and Srivastava 2005; Miyazaki, Grewal, and Goodstein 2005; Purohit and Srivastava 2001). The results of these studies, however, are equivocal with some research indicating that low-scope cues are used only when the valence of the high-scope cue is positive (Purohit and Srivastava 2001, Miyazaki et al. 2005) and other research indicating that the low-scope cue is only used when the valence of the high-scope cue is negative (Biswas et al. 2002; Lurie and Srivastava 2005). We develop and test a processing model that reconciles these conflicting findings by examining the joint impact of cue-scope, congruity, and valence in a series of related experiments. More specifically we propose and test:

**H1**: When a low-scope cue is congruent with an accompanying high-scope cue, it will improve evaluations when the high-scope cue is negative but have no impact on evaluations when the high-scope cue is positive.

**H2**: When a low-scope cue is moderately incongruent with an accompanying high-scope cue, it will improve evaluations when the high-scope cue is positive but have no impact on evaluations when the high-scope cue is negative.

Results of three experiments support these hypotheses indicating that cue congruity affects attitudes and thoughts such that a low-scope cue enhances evaluations of a retailer associated with a positive high-scope cue when the two cues are moderately incongruent. Further, the low-scope cue offsets the effects of a negative high-scope cue when the cues are congruent.

In Experiment 1 (n=320), we paired our low-scope cue (price matching guarantee, PMG) with each of the high-scope cues in order to manipulate congruity. Specifically, a price-based low-scope cue is congruent for a retailer whose reputation is based on price (cf. Srivastava and Lurie 2004), but would be somewhat incongruent for a firm whose reputation is based on service. Thus, we examined two types of reputations (congruent/moderately congruent with PMG), two levels of valence associated with the reputation (poor/excellent), and two levels of PMG (absent/present) in a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental conditions and asked to read a brief scenario describing the reputation of a retailer selling home electronics and they then either read about the retailer’s PMG policy or saw nothing about a PMG. After reading the scenario participants rated their perceptions of the retailer in terms of service quality and prices. In support of our hypotheses, the results revealed a three-way interaction for both price and service perceptions.

Experiment 2 followed the same general format as Study 1. However, in this study, the new high-scope reputation cue was related to the retailer’s history concerning inventory availability. Following the logic on congruity, the new low-scope cue was an in-stock guarantee (ISG). We again examine two types of congruity (congruent/moderately congruent with ISG), two levels of valence associated with the reputation (poor/excellent), and two levels of ISG (absent/present) in a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design. Participants (n=93) then read a scenario which described the type and valence of the retailer’s reputation and either informed them about the retailer’s ISG or contained no information about an ISG. Results again supported the hypothesized three-way interaction. Finally, Experiment 3 (n=86) provides evidence as to the process accounting for the results.

In sum, by examining the joint role of cue meaning congruity and the valence of the high-scope cue, our framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of multiple cues on consumers’ evaluations. This framework was supported in three independent studies that manipulated multiple instantiations of each type of cue, as well as two very different retail contexts.

**References**


