

## Consumer Ambivalence, Dissonance, and Indifference - Apples, Oranges and Pears or Peas in the same pod?

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7<sup>th</sup> AIM-AMA Doctoral Consortium  
MICA, Ahmedabad  
4-5 Jan 2019

## Consumer Ambivalence

- ▶ **Conceptual Definition (Otnes et al. 1997)**
  - ▶ *Simultaneous or sequential experience of multiple emotional states, as a result of interaction between*
  - ▶ *Internal factors and external objects, people, institutions, cultural phenomena in market-oriented contexts,*
  - ▶ *with direct and/or indirect effects on pre-purchase, purchase or post-purchase attitudes and behaviors*
- ▶ **Different types of consumer ambivalence**
  - ▶ **Psychological:** experience of mixed emotions, focusing on the internal feelings toward an object or person
  - ▶ **Sociological:** social structure (e.g., social norms and social roles) as triggers of mixed feelings
  - ▶ **Cultural:** result of conflicting cultural values held by people

Have you experienced mixed feelings or attitudes about something?



## Ambivalence - Applications

- ▶ Consumer researchers have explored the influence of attitudinal ambivalence in many behavioral domains.
- ▶ Smokers with ambivalent attitudes towards smoking show greater desire to quit (Lipkus et al. 2001).
- ▶ Purchase of condoms evoked a combination of negative beliefs about the lifestyle and positive beliefs about the personal confidence of the target consumer (Dahl et al. 2005)
- ▶ Ambivalence has a negative effect on satisfaction, repurchase loyalty and involvement for various food products (Olsen, Wilcox, and Olsson 2005; Tuu and Olsen 2010)
- ▶ Ambivalence can be used to segment the convenience food market (Olsen, Prebensen, and Larsen 2009).
- ▶ Ambivalence also affects the pre- and post-purchase stages of the decision process for consumer durables replacement (Roster and Richins 2009) and moderates consumer responses to green advertising (Chang 2011).

## Attitudinal Ambivalence

- ▶ Most studies use attitude as a unidimensional, univalent, bipolar construct (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Kraus 1995).
- ▶ People are likely to engage in behaviors for which they have negative attitudes and avoid those with negative attitudes.
- ▶ Others have argued that individuals may simultaneously hold both negative and positive attitudes that may not correlate with one another (e.g., Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson 1997)
- ▶ This notion has been conceptualized as attitudinal ambivalence (Priester and Petty 1996; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995) or consumer ambivalence (Otnes et al. 1997).
- ▶ Ambivalence may originate from different types of conflicts, including cognitive ('mixed beliefs'), affective ('mixed feelings'), and cognitive-affective ('incongruent beliefs and feelings') conflict (Thompson et al. 1995)

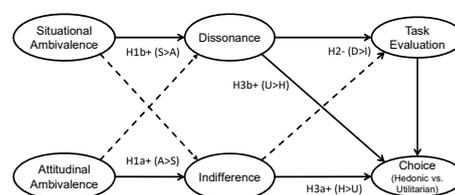
## Ambivalence - Antecedents

- ▶ **Individual characteristics**
  - ▶ Need for Cognition (NFC) has a negative and Personal Fear of Invalidity (PFI) has a positive effect (Thompson and Zanna 1995)
  - ▶ People with higher preference for consistency (PFC) experience greater ambivalence (Newby-Clark, McGregor, and Zanna 2002).
- ▶ **Situational factors & task characteristics**
  - ▶ Interpersonal perceptions (Priester and Petty 2001), deadline pressure (Jewell 2003), familiarity (Brooks et al. 2003), anticipated conflict (Priester, Petty, and Park 2007),
  - ▶ Personal relevance and information source (Tormala and DeSensi 2008), source credibility and message consistency (Clarkson, Tormala, and Rucker 2008),
  - ▶ Discrepancies between actual vs. desired attitudes, consumer uncertainty and anticipatory emotions (Bee and Madrigal 2013)
  - ▶ Cultural differences (Ng, Hynie, and MacDonald 2011; Park (2005)

## Ambivalence - Outcomes

- ▶ Ambivalent attitudes tend to be less stable over time, less predictive of behavior, more pliable, and to have less influence on information processing, compared to univalent attitudes that are either strongly positive or negative (e.g., Bargh et al. 1992; Sparks et al. 1992)
- ▶ Does this imply 'Indifference'?
- ▶ Others show exactly the opposite results wherein ambivalence decreases the confidence in the attitudes toward behaviors involving the target object and leads to greater systematic processing of the relevant information (Jonas et al. 1997)
- ▶ Does this imply 'Dissonance'?

## Conceptual Model



## Ambivalence → Dissonance

- ▶ Ambivalent attitudes tend to be more pliable because they consist of both positive and negative components, which are inconsistent with each other (Armitage and Conner 2000).
- ▶ This inconsistency could lead to cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), negative affect and emotional stress (Hass et al. 1992), which may motivate people to resolve the inconsistency, making their ambivalent attitudes less stable.
- ▶ As a result, people with ambivalent attitudes are persuaded more easily compared to those with less ambivalent attitudes, (Maio, Bell, and Esses 1996).

## Methodology

- ▶ Two lab-experiments with UG students (n=120 each)
- ▶ Manipulated situational ambivalence and consumer choice (hedonic vs. utilitarian), using imaginary scenarios
  - ▶ Choice of an automobile (Study 1)
  - ▶ Choice of a group member (Study 2)
- ▶ Measured attitudinal ambivalence of the participants at beginning of a new semester and conducted the actual experiment one month later during tutorials.
- ▶ During the experiments, described the two options using a mix of hedonic and utilitarian attributes and asked the participants to choose one of the options.
- ▶ Recorded demographics information e.g. age, gender

## Hypotheses

- ▶ Attitudinal ambivalence has a significantly stronger positive effect on indifference, compared to situational ambivalence
- ▶ Situational ambivalence has a significant stronger positive effect on dissonance, compared to attitudinal ambivalence
- ▶ Dissonance has a significantly stronger negative effect on task evaluation, compared to Indifference
- ▶ Indifference has a stronger positive effect on the preference for hedonic compared to utilitarian choice
- ▶ Dissonance has a stronger effect on the preference for utilitarian compared to hedonic choice

## Findings

- ▶ Attitudinal (vs. situational) ambivalence has a significantly stronger positive effect on indifference ( $\Delta\beta = .26, p < .001$  and  $.37, p < .001$ ),
- ▶ Situational (vs. attitudinal) ambivalence has a significant stronger positive effect on dissonance ( $\Delta\beta = .32, p < .001$  and  $.27, p < .001$ ).
- ▶ Dissonance (vs. Indifference) has a significantly stronger negative effect on task evaluation ( $\Delta\beta = -.38, p < .001$  and  $-.29, p < .001$ ).
- ▶ Indifference has a stronger positive effect on the preference for hedonic choice ( $\Delta\beta = .21, p < .001$  and  $.23, p < .001$ )
- ▶ Dissonance has a stronger effect on the preference for utilitarian choice ( $\Delta\beta = .31, p < .001$  and  $.34, p < .001$ ).

## Conceptual Contribution

- ▶ Attitudinal and situational ambivalence vary in their effects on consumer choice between hedonic and utilitarian options but dissonance and indifference play roles in this process.
- ▶ We aim to extend past research on consumer ambivalence by distinguishing between the roles of the two types of ambivalence and introducing dissonance and indifference
- ▶ We also aim to extend past research on consumer choice by studying the influence of ambivalence, dissonance and indifference on the choice between hedonic and utilitarian options.

## Managerial Implications

- ▶ Marketers of hedonic products and services should try to reduce the level of indifference by providing more hedonic cues in the shopping or the service environment, such as attractive posters and displays, and attractive looking well-dressed sales or service employees.
- ▶ In contrast, marketers of utilitarian products and services could reduce the dissonance and situational ambivalence by providing more utilitarian cues such as price labels, product information booklets, and serious looking, knowledgeable employees.

Thank You!

Questions?  
Suggestions?