

Salience of Utilitarian versus Hedonic Criteria in Attitude toward Product and Purchase Intention

This study uses structural equation models to reveal the salience of hedonic versus utilitarian evaluative criteria in product attitude and purchase intention. The results show that consumers weigh hedonic criteria more heavily than utilitarian criteria in product attitude; whereas they weigh two criteria equally in purchase decisions. However, public self-consciousness is found to have no effect on the use of two types of evaluative criteria in either product attitude or purchase intention. Practical implications are also presented.

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Utilitarian criteria refer to the usefulness or performance-related attributes. Hedonic criteria concern the experiential affect associated with the product and may range from emotion (pleasure, happiness, fun), to esthetic (beautiful, nice), to symbolic or value-expression (self-concept, self-expression). As consumers make choices based on both utilitarian and hedonic needs, utilitarian and hedonic evaluation criteria are usually used simultaneously. But salience or relative dominance of the evaluative criteria differs. We propose that (1) Hedonic evaluation is as equally salient as utilitarian evaluation in attitude toward product and purchase intention, respectively (H1), (2) Hedonic evaluation is as equally salient in attitude toward product as in purchase intention; utilitarian evaluation is as equally salient in attitude toward product as in purchase intention (H2), and (3) Hedonic evaluative criteria either in attitude toward product or in purchase intention will be more salient for those individuals with a high level of public self-consciousness than for those with a low level of public self-consciousness (H3).

Catalog pages were designed, each portraying a certain commodity. A convenience sample of two hundred and two college students participated in the study. Asked to view a catalog page first, respondents then evaluated the product, indicating their overall attitudes toward the product, and their purchase intention.

In the first stage of data analysis, measurement models were tested to find the best indicators for each latent variable to be included into further model testing. This was done via confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation. Undesirable items or indicators were excluded and the new model was resubmitted to retest until the best fit of the measurement model was reached.

The second stage of data analysis involves hypothesis testing with LISREL. This analysis follows a nesting approach in which models are sequentially compared to one another. The results show that utilitarian evaluation and hedonic evaluation are equally important in the consumer's intention of purchasing the product, but neither is considered a significant determinant of purchase intention. Furthermore, the two types of evaluation play different roles in the consumer's overall attitude toward product. Hedonic evaluation is found to a much stronger predictor of attitude toward product than utilitarian evaluation. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is partly supported.

Hypothesis 2 was rejected, implying that utilitarian criteria may not necessarily be given more weight in influencing purchase intention just because it is more predictive of the consumer's attitude toward product. The same conclusion applies to hedonic criteria. Hypothesis 3 was tested with multigroup comparison via LISREL. The results showed no difference between consumers high in public self-consciousness and consumers low in public self-consciousness in terms of the effect of hedonic evaluation on attitude toward product in general or purchase intention. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Jikyeong Kang for her involvement in the early stage of this study, most particularly, for her shaping of my development of initial research questions and her collaboration on the development of the questionnaire. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the early draft of this paper.

Endnotes

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