Mood and the Decision to Purchase High-Tech Products

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Asian Conference on Psychology & the Behavioral Sciences 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract
The article describes the results of study of the influence of mood when people assessed different attributes of tablet computers. We assumed that the characteristics which people pay attention to when making a decision on a purchase, depend on their mood. The respondents (40 men, 24 women, the average age = 26,2 y.o., SD = 4,5) were randomly divided into two groups. The first group was put in a positive mood and the second group was put in a negative mood by means of two different videos from The Lion King cartoon. The first one was a comic scene with Timon and Pumbaa and the other one was a sad scene featuring the Lion's death. After watching the emotional state of the respondents was measured. Then they were asked to estimate the given list of characteristics for tablet computers and to rate each of them. The results showed that the respondents in a negative mood were more likely to make a cautious and rational decision and to opt for good quality and simple models at a lower price. Alternatively, the respondents in a positive mood were more likely to value a physical aspect such as an interesting design some extras, such as a free gift with purchase or a wide range of accessories, and other people's recommendations. The respondents in a good mood chose new models. This finding coincides with other studies which show that people in a good mood are risk-seeking than those who are in a bad mood.

Keywords: mood, information processing, consumer's decision making, evaluation of product attributes.

Introduction

The modern market of high-tech products is in constant motion. Thanks to the development of new technologies new products always appear in the market. At the same time an existence of a big amount of producing companies leads to market overloading and consequently to further competition between them. Under these conditions companies face the problem of determinants of the consumer's behavior in the high-tech market.

Traditionally there was an assumption made by economists that the level of income and the price of a product were the only determinants of the consumer's purchasing behavior. However recently this point of view has been criticized. That is the reason why the researches begin to study specific psychological mechanisms of regulation of the consumer's behavior. Among theses mechanisms we can note an emotional state which influences different stages of purchasing process, from the moment the one identifies the need in a product, to its actual purchase (Blackwell et al., 2007). The results of the study of the influence of mood on a decision to purchase high-tech products will let us develop more effective sales strategies for companies. It also can be successfully used in consulting services regarding problems with various disabilities in the consumer's behavior.

Influence of an Emotional State on the Choice of Attributes

The influence of mood on general assessment of a product gained the greatest empirical support. The studies showed that people in a good mood evaluated products more positively than people in a bad mood. This regularity appears in the Consumer's behavior such as the evaluation of products which have just appeared in the market (Forgas, 1995), of products which are about to appear in the market (Barone, 2005), as well as of products which has already been purchased (Isen, 1987).

One of the key stages in a purchasing decision making process is the evaluation of product attributes. At this stage the consumer decides which product features are important for him, and then he uses these criteria to choose the right product.

The studies made in different psychological areas determined the three possible directions of influence of an emotional state on the choice of attributes.

Firstly, people in a good mood tend to perceive and remember positive things about an item, while people in a bad mood tend to see and remember negative things. There are two main explanations for these patterns. Some specialists suggest that emotions have the function of priming, i.e. availability of information correspondent to emotional increase in consciousness (Abele, Petzold, 1994). In other opinions, people in a good mood try to keep on their emotional state as long as possible, so they pay attention to the positive aspects of surrounding (Bagotsti, 2008).

Secondly, people who experience positive emotions tend to spend less time and efforts for researching information about a product, compared to those who experience negative emotions; the former respondents are more likely to use heuristic,

i.e. experience-based strategies for information processing and are less likely to research some product information in a thorough and systematic way (Bless et al., 1990; Forgas, 1998; Greifeneder, Bless, 2008; Ruder, Bless, 2003).

And thirdly, people who experience positive emotions tend to make more optimistic projections and are more likely to take risks, particularly, if the potential loss is not too high, as opposed to the people who experience negative emotions (Nygren et al., 1996; Johnson, Tversky, 1983).

Nevertheless, in the existing studies of the influence of mood on the consumer's decision the attention towards the process of assessing the significance of product attributes was not paid sufficiently. In addition, these studies don't take into account the category of goods. However, there is some evidence that people guide by different factors and rules when choose products of different categories (Dittmar et al., 1995).
This study examines the consumer's decisions in the field of high-tech goods production. This market has unique characteristics associated with a rapid development of technologies, a high level of innovation and fast product updates. These factors involve high risks for the consumer associated with use of new products as well as with their high price. For example, tablet computers recently have come into the Russian market and very quickly have become necessary gadgets for many people. Now almost all big companies which work in the high-tech area, produce tablet computers. It can be suggested that the choice of a tablet computer will be made under the influence of rational factors when functional parameters of a device will be compared with the customer's needs and income. However, the studies identified that the Consumer's attitude towards high-tech products is determined both by rational and emotional factors of choice.

The target of the study is to investigate the influence of mood in situation when people assessed different attributes of tablets. We assume that due to the mood people look for certain characteristics of a product when making purchasing decisions.

Method

The study consisted of two stages: the preliminary and main research.

The development of the technique for evaluating the strategies people use to research some product information before a purchase was the target of the preliminary stage of the research. . The participants were asked about their purchasing experience including the product characteristics they had looked for and the evaluation criteria they had used. It was found out that when purchasing a tablet computer the respondents had assessed the following product characteristics: functionality (quality, reliability, memory, processor speed); appearance (screen size, weight, design, colour); cost and service (price, discounts, warranty, customer support); popularity (brand awareness, advertising, friends' opinions). These parameters were used later in the main phase of the research.

People were invited to participate in the study of the consumer's behavior when buying tablet computers in the main part of the study. The respondents were randomly put into two study groups.

The members of the first group were put in a positive mood and the second group was put in a negative mood by means of two different videos from The Lion King cartoon. The first one was a comic scene with Timon and Pumbaa, and the other one was a sad scene featuring the Lion's death, After watching the emotional state of the respondents was measured. These episodes were estimated by the experts due to their ability to create a mood. After the watching of one of the two episodes each respondent filled in the HAM (Health-Activity-Mood) questionnaire (by A.Doskin et al). The further study involved only those respondents who scored no more than two points on the mood scale after watching the sad episode or at least six points after watching the funny video.

The respondents were then asked to imagine as if they were planning to purchase a tablet and had to decide which model to buy and where. They were given a list of product characteristics and asked to rate each of them on the following scale:

- not at all important;
- quite unimportant;
- not sure;
- quite important;
- very important.

Thus the respondents' mood was the independent variable while their assessment of relative importance of different product characteristics in choosing a tablet was the dependent variable.

Sample

The respondents who have recently purchased a tablet computer took part in the preliminary stage of investigation (7 men and 3 women, age from 23 to 31 y.o. (the average age = 26.4, SD = 3).

The sample of the main study included 64 respondents (40 men and 24 women, age - from 20 to 35 y.o. (the average age = 26.2 y.o., SD = 4.5). All respondents were going to buy a tablet, but had never done it before, so they had no experience in purchasing such a product.

Results

Mann-Whitney U test was used for the data processing. The results of evaluation of tablet attributes made by the respondents in various emotional states, were compared to each other.

Table 1 shows the significant mood-related differences in the perceived importance of tablet's attributes.

Table 1. Significant mood-related differences in the perceived importance of a tablet's attributes

Product characteristic	Average value		Value of the criterion
	Positive mood	Negative mood	
Attractive design	37.77	26,89	337.5 *
A wide range of accessories	40.58	23.9	245 **
Promo (free gift with purchase)	36.7	28.03	373*
Fashionable brand	38.83	25.76	302.5*
Popular model	38.45	26.16	315*
New model	41.11	23.34	227.5***
Advertisement	37.42	27.26	349*
Friends' advice and opinion	37.44	27.24	348.5 *
Ease of use	27.76	37.55	355*
Simple design	25.11	40.37	267.5**
Relatively low price	27.33	38	341*
Extended warranty	27.39	37.94	343*
Good customer support	28.18	37.1	369*

P <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001.

It follows from the findings that the respondents in a negative mood were more likely to make a cautious and rational choice and to opt for good quality, simple models at a lower price.

Alternatively, the respondents in a positive mood were more likely to value a physical aspect, such as an interesting design; some extras, such as a free gift with purchase or a wide range of accessories, and others people's recommendations.

Conclusion

According to the results, mood has the following influence on the consumer's decision at the stage of evaluation of attributes of a product in the high-tech market:
1) The physical aspect of a product, i. e. an interesting design, free gifts with purchase and accessories were more important for people with positive emotions, whereas people in a bad mood valued simple models. One of the possible explanations is that they associated these attributes with fun that let them stay in a good mood. This fact illustrates the strategy of staying in a good mood (Bagotstsi, 2008), when the respondents do not value the functional attributes, but take into account external emotional attributes, which are known to increase positive emotions.

2) The tendency to take risk - seeking behavior. In a positive mood the respondents are more likely to overestimate the "emotional" product characteristics related to external characteristics, such as attractive design, etc., also they more likely to prefer

new models, in a negative mood they are at the forefront of "rational" characteristics, aimed at avoiding the risks associated with price, quality and warranty. This finding is consistent with the other studies showing that people who are in a good mood are more likely to take risks than those who are in a bad mood. (Nygren, Isen, Taylor, & Dulin, 1996).

3) The importance of external sources of information, It was found out that people in a good mood were more likely to trust advertising and other people's advice, and to prefer popular and trendy models as well. In contrast, the people in a negative mood focused more on functionality and ease of use. Such results can be explained by reducing of cognitive activity of a person who experience positive emotions. The respondents don't waste their energy on thinking, and use heuristics and others opinions and stereotypes. (Bless et al., 1990).

4) The importance of popular models. The attribute "fashion brand" is more significant for the respondents who are in a positive state. As noted in literature, brand attachment, the customer's idea about brand compliance with his self-concept and lifestyle are main factors in the Consumer's choice (Folomeeva, 2010). This attachment is more important for a positive emotional state, based on the concept of keeping on a mood.

5) Sales promotion was equally important for the two groups of the respondents. However, there were differences in promotion techniques of evaluation. For example, for the consumers in a bad mood the important aspect for buying a product is a low price, discounts and various free gifts with purchase that stimulate sales when they are in a positive emotional state.

At the same time the emotional state did not affect the evaluation of functional characteristics of a tablet computer, which determine its quality, such as memory, processor speed, type of operating system, screen resolution, sound quality, size and weight. These results suggest that mood influences on the importance of peripheral parameters of high-tech products, but doesn't affect its key characteristics.

Limitations

This study had some limitations. The experiment was carried out in the laboratory in isolation from the actual situation; the real samples of products were replaced by written descriptions on paper. Moreover, the differences between the various positive and negative emotions were not studied. Elimination of these limitations in the future studies will let us clarify the understanding of mood influence on assessment of high-tech products.

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