

Summer 6-30-2018

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Recommended Citation

Liu, Xinyan and Hu, Cheng, "Will the Recommendation Information be Sure to Improve the Brand Evaluation: The Impact of Distrust" (2018). *WHICEB 2018 Proceedings*. 34.

<http://aisel.aisnet.org/whiceb2018/34>

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Will the Recommendation Information be Sure to Improve the Brand Evaluation: The Impact of Distrust

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Abstract: In the process of consumption, consumers will come into contact with all kinds of information related to the goods they want to buy. At this time, the consumer's trust of the information that they contact with will greatly affect the consumer's evaluation and attitude towards the alternative products. In the psychology field, the psychological state of distrust will activate the alternative explanation of the given information. This article expands the research field about distrust from psychology to the marketing field, and finds that when consumers see the recommended information, if they do not trust it, it will lead to lower evaluation of the brand in the recommended information. At the same time, consumers' evaluation of the competitive brand in the information will be reduced, too.

Keywords: distrust, alternative explanation, brand evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

At present, people are increasingly keen on online shopping. Without seeing the physical goods, consumers can only understand the product through the information given by others. Imagine such a scene: you want to buy a mobile phone on the Internet, and hesitate in brand A and brand B. At this time, someone strongly recommends the mobile phone of brand A to you. In general, people's purchase intention at this time is inclined to brand A. But if this person has deceived you or has hurt your interests, many people may not accept this person's recommendation without hesitation, but will have doubts on the recommendation of brand A, even in the alternative situation will tend to buy brand B.

Therefore, the initial point of this article is that in the decision-making process of consumption, if the information is distrustful to a consumer, the recommended information will reduce his evaluation of the original brand in the recommended information, and will improve his evaluation of the competitive brand. In fact, this is a problem that has been studied in the field of psychology.

In the psychological field, distrust has been defined as a “lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act so as to harm one, that he does not care about one's welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile^[1](Kramer RM, 1999).” Psychologists believe that the psychological state of distrust is a warning signal to people that others' motives, intentions and future behaviors may be ambiguous, and the information they convey may be fictive and misleading. There is a basic conclusion about distrust that, when an individual believes in a source, the receiver tends to focus on congruent messages; however, if the source is suspected to be unreliable, the receiver spontaneously activates the incongruent messages, because they are thinking about what will happen if the message is invalid. Psychologists have concluded that when individuals think that specific information sources are not credible, their natural response is to consider alternative explanations of information provided by them. Alternative interpretation is information that is incongruent with the given information. That is to say, when individuals distrust sources of information, they will consider information that is different, or even opposite, from the one given.

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However, in the marketing field, few scholars take "distrust" as an independent variable, but more often use it as a mediate variable. According to Margaret's research in 2000, if persuasion scenario is considered to have ulterior motives, it will cause consumers' distrust of salespeople, so consumers' persuasive knowledge will affect their evaluation of salespeople^[2]. The study of GuangXin Xie and David M in 2015 also concluded that when consumers realize that a product is implicitly sold, they will have poorer brand attitude and lower purchase intention^[3]. In this process, the psychological state of distrust is also a mediating mechanism.

In this paper, distrust is taken as an independent variable, and the hypotheses are tested by the experimental method. The final conclusion is that when a consumer is in a distrust state, recommended information will reduce his evaluation of the original brand, and at the same time, it will reduce his evaluation of the competitive brand, too.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Distrust in psychology

Distrust, as a relative concept of trust, was rarely ever studied by 1990 alone, but more often regarded as the antithesis of trust. In the traditional view of psychology, trust is an attribute of individual differences, and distrust is the same concept as trust. They are the two ends of a continuum. Therefore, the low trust represents a distrust of high. Someone distrust a person means that he is not thought to does not think that person will act for his own best interests, and may even engage in potentially harmful actions against him, and also means that this person will produce a variety of non-cooperative behavior^[4].

Later, some scholars questioned the opposing views of trust and distrust. Research on positive and negative emotions shows that these two emotions are not the same two ends of the continuum, but two different concepts. Therefore, the view that "positive and negative attitude is the two ends of a continuum" needs to be reexamined. In 1979, Luhmann proposed that the effect of trust and distrust is achieved in different ways^[5]. As the opposite of trust, distrust should be a negative expectation of a person's ability and goodwill. But Luhmann's research found that distrust is the act of unacceptable behavior, or even the determination of positive expectation for harmful behavior. That is to say, trust is the expectation that an individual will take a favorable course of action, while distrust is the expectation that an individual will harm others. In 1999, a literature review of Kramer RM on trust and distrust gave a proper definition of distrust. He defined distrust as "lack of confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act so as to harm one, that he does not care about one's welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile." That is to say, distrust is not only a lack of trust, but also an early warning that the individual will harm someone's interests.

In the early days, scholars mostly focused on the behavioral aspects of distrust, but little on the intention, motivation and other aspects. Later, with the development of distrust research, some scholars suggest that distrust reflects the recipients' perception of the misleading intentions of information sources^[6] (Schul, Mayo, 2007). Distrust is related to concealing the truth and lack of transparency. It is an indefinite state in which this state of mind conveys a warning sign that the motives, intentions and future actions of others may be ambiguous, and the message they convey may be fictitious and misleading.

Therefore, the development of the concept of distrust has gone through a series of evolution process. Scholars finally put forward that distrust and trust are two different concepts. And distrust arouses great concern in academic fields.

Psychological studies have found that, when people are in a state of distrust, the information processing mechanism of them is more complex than in the state of trust. When in a state of trust, people directly accept the content of the message; but when in a distrust state, people will consider that the information itself may be

correct, and also consider that the opposite of information may be right^[7] (Kruglanski, 1989). Because distrust is related to concealing the truth, when distrust is arisen, people tend to look for informational content that is incongruent with the given information. Such incongruent information is called alternative explanation.

In 2000, Galinsky and Moskowitz proposed that when counterfactual thinking patterns are activated, people are more likely to propose new ways of using objects or test the opposite results of a given hypothesis^[8]. Counterfactual thinking is a kind of thinking process that individuals replace the unreal conditions or possibilities. When the mental state of distrust is activated, it has the effect similar to counterfactual thinking^[9] (Schul, Mayo, 2004). The recipient will avoid being misled by testing potential alternative explanations. When a source of information is not trusted, information is questioned, so the "unconventional" concept that is incongruent with the information will be conveyed to the recipient spontaneously. For example, when a person is in a state of distrust, if you give him a stimulus word "dark", he may think of the word "light". Or when someone is trying to sell something, he would say that this is the last inventory, or that price will be doubled tomorrow, in the distrust condition, people may think that such things are likely to have a large amount of inventory, or tomorrow the price is likely to remain unchanged, or even falling.

Based on the mechanism that distrust will activate in congruent alternative explanations, many scholars conduct further studies. In the underlying mechanisms of distrust, one considers the opposite of the given message. Due to the vigilance of the reverse relationship, distrust people will be more likely to find rules when they are more suitable for the less common condition^[10] (Schul, Mayo, 2008). And the sensitivity to unconventional events means an increase in the accessibility of uncommon and remote events, which is consistent with the flexibility of thinking and represents a creative enhancement. So distrust inspires creativity^[11] (Thomas Mussweiler, 2011). Thomas Mussweiler also studied the relationship between distrust and the reduction of stereotypes in 2013. Distrust stimulates the unconventional process of information processing, then the unconventional process of information processing turns to reduce stereotypes, so distrust can reduce stereotypes^[12].

2.2 Distrust in marketing

In the field of marketing, there is little studies use distrust as a single concept and studies it as an independent variable. However, in the process of persuasion, the use of persuasive knowledge is actually related to the mental state of the distrust, and the distrust acts as a mediator. In the research of persuasion knowledge, the basic mechanism is: when consumers have persuasion knowledge, they will doubt the intention of marketers, resulting in a lack of positive evaluation for marketers and even products. In 1980, Mona and Robert found that subjects will try to get rid of the advice of disliked or unbelievable communicators^[13]. If the consumer considers that the salesperson have motivate to persuade him, then the salesperson will be thought insincere. If persuasive scenes are considered to have ulterior motives or consumers have an unlimited cognitive ability, persuasion will affect consumers' evaluation of salespeople (Margaret, 2000). When consumers realize that some kinds of products are sold recessively, their attitude to the brand will be poorer and the purchase intention will be lower (GuangXin Xie and David M, 2015). In such marketing scenarios, like salesmen are believed to have persuasive motivation, persuasive scenes are considered to have ulterior motives, and some products are sold recessively, all of these conditions stimulate consumers' distrust.

When the marketing scene took place online, the mental state of distrust may appear more obviously. Low trust clues will lead to high vigilance to the motive behind the persuasive incident. When shopping online, the consumers who are in the state of distrust will doubt the motivation, intention and behavior of network sellers, even think they are malicious, thereby terminate the purchase behavior^[14] (Carol and Choon, 2009). When people browse online reviews, many comments may have some boastful content. When people are in the state of

trust, boast is acceptable for the reviewers with strong professional knowledge, leading to more convincing. However, when people are in the state of distrust, boast will stimulate the reader's high vigilance about the motivation of the review, resulting in a decline in the persuasiveness of the commentary^[15] (Grant, 2016).

Through reviewing the literature in marketing field, we can find that when studying distrust in marketing, most studies regard distrust as an intermediary mechanism, and concluded that some behaviors can lead to results of non-cooperation, no-dependence or cancellation of transactions because of distrust. But according to the basic mechanism in psychological research, distrust can be studied as an independent variable. When the consumer receives the recommendation information, if it is in a state of distrust, the content of information that is incongruent with the recommended information will be activated spontaneously. Distrust activates the alternative interpretation of the proposed concept, which makes the accessibility of the substitution concept and the original concept to the same degree, and reduces the influence of the original concept^[16] (Tali Kleiman, Noa Sher, 2015). That is to say, in the state of distrust, when the consumer sees a recommended product information, the alternative explanation, which is incongruent to the recommendation, is immediately activated. In other words, consumers will consider this product is unworthy to be recommended. At this point, the effect of the recommended content in the information is weakened. According from these, this paper puts forward following hypothesis:

H1: When consumers distrust the sources, the recommendation information will reduce the consumer's evaluation of the recommended brand.

In fact, alternative interpretations can come from many aspects. For example, apart from “this product is not recommended”, other alternative explanation to the information above can be the alternative brand of the recommended product. That is to say, in the state of distrust, mentioning a brand name in an advertisement may remind people of the competitive brand, weakening the influence of the brand in advertisement, and enhance the influence of the competitive brand. The same is true for the other recommended cases. Therefore, this paper makes other hypothesis:

H2: When consumers distrust the sources, the recommendation information will improve the consumer's evaluation of the competitive brand.

3. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The purpose of this experiment is to test the two hypothesis mentioned above, that is, when people distrust the source, recommendation information will reduce people's evaluation of the brand and improve the evaluation of consumers' competitive brand. The main contents of the experiment include the manipulation of distrust and the measurement of brand evaluation.

3.1 Experimental process

118 college students participated in the experiment, and the subjects were randomly divided into four groups. In the end, 12 participants were excluded because their manipulation tests were not passed. The experimental conditions were the inter group experiment of 2 (the vs control group of the group of distrust) × 2 (the original brand vs competitive brand).

All participants were asked to imagine the following scenario:

You want to buy a camera, and after comparison, you finally think that the camera of brand A and the brand B are in line with your expectations. And in the process of collecting information before, you find there is no significant difference in the evaluation of the two cameras. At this point, you see an organization assessing the camera of the brand A.

The organization has made a comprehensive assessment of the brand A camera, and the final conclusions

are as follows:

1. The camera of brand A has top quality.
2. The camera of brand A has unbeatable performance.
3. The camera of brand A has more features than other brands.
4. No other camera gives you more value than the camera of brand A.

In the distrust condition, the participants would be told that there was news exposure that the evaluation organization had written false advertisements before. Several products' quality was not consistent with the evaluations from this organization. And there is no such hint in the control group.

Under the condition of original brand, participants were asked about their attitudes towards the brand A, while under the competitive brand condition, they were asked about their attitude towards the brand B camera.

3.2 Experimental measurement

3.2.1 Brand attitude

In order to understand the participants' attitudes toward the two brands under different scenarios, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire (Table 1). One to five represents very disagree to very agree.

Table 1. Brand attitude test

	1	2	3	4	5
The camera of brand A/B is good					
The camera of brand A/B is satisfactory					
The camera of brand A/B is useful					
The camera of brand A/B is favorable					
The camera of brand A/B is appealing to me					

If the experimental condition is original brand, the participants were asked about their attitude towards the brand A's camera. If the experimental condition is competitive brand, then they are asked about their attitude towards the brand B's camera.

3.2.2 Manipulation test

In order to test whether the manipulation of distrust in the experiment was successful, participants were asked to fill in another questionnaire (Table 2). One to five represents very disagree to very agree.

Table 2. Manipulation test

	1	2	3	4	5
This evaluation is truthful					
This evaluation is honest					
This evaluation is misleading					
This evaluation is deceptive					

3.3 Result and discussion

3.3.1 Manipulation test

To test whether the manipulation of distrust was successful, the data are divided into two groups: the distrust group and the control group. The results of data analysis showed that when distrust was manipulated, the distrust level of participants ($M=4.11$, $SD=0.46$) was significantly higher than that in the control group ($M=2.18$, $SD=0.65$; $F=287.18$, $p<0.01$). That was to say, the manipulation test of this experiment was successful, and the

distrust level of the participants under the distrust condition is higher than that of the participants under the control condition.

3.3.2 Attitude towards brand A

The results of data analysis showed that the participants' evaluation of brand A in distrust condition ($M=1.88$, $SD=0.55$) was lower than those who were in control condition ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.62$; $F=143.64$, $p<0.01$). This result validates the first hypothesis of this paper.

3.3.3 Attitude towards brand B

The results of data analysis showed that the participants' evaluation of brand B in distrust condition ($M=2.29$, $SD=0.74$) was lower than those who were in control condition ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.73$; $F=28.37$, $p<0.01$). This data result is contrary to the second hypothesis of this paper.

In summary, the following statistical analysis can be obtained (Figure 1):

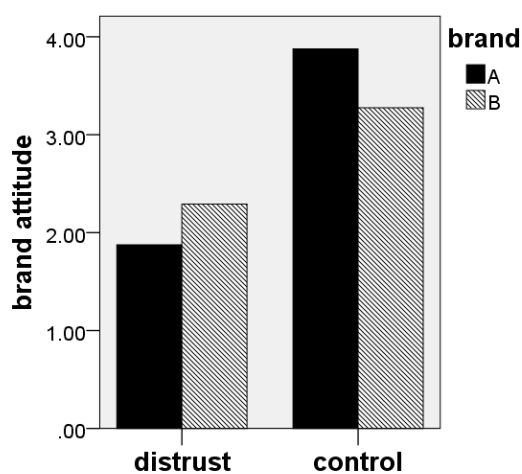


Figure 1. Experiment result

When individuals are in a distrust mental state, they will consider the alternative explanation of the given information, so when consumers distrust the source, recommendation information will reduce the consumer's evaluation of the recommended brand. The reason why the evaluation of competitive brands is also reduced may be that consumers' awareness of self-protection will lead to defensive bias. Because the original and competing brands are belong to the same category, this defensive bias will make negative evaluation on original brand spill over, leading to the reduced evaluation of competitive brands.

4. GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the experiment above, this paper verifies that when consumers distrust the source, compared to the undisturbed condition, they will reduce the evaluation of the original brand in the recommendation information. It is proposed in the psychology field that when the individual is in the state of distrust, an alternative explanation which is incongruent with the given message is activated spontaneously. However, the experimental results also indicate that when consumers are in the distrust condition, they will reduce the evaluation of the competitive brand in the recommendation information, which is contrary to the original hypothesis. The possible reason for such a result is that consumers have defensive bias and the spillover effect of the negative evaluation.

The main theoretical contribution of this paper is to expand the research and conclusions in psychology field to marketing field, and find that the mental state of distrust really activates people's alternative explanations. In the marketing field, this paper no longer regarded distrust as an intermediary mechanism, but studied it as an

independent variable. The dependent variable also extends from non-cooperative and other distrust behaviors to attitude towards competitive brands. The study found that when consumers read recommendation information, distrust could activate their alternative explanation of recommendation information, so that consumers can reduce the evaluation of original brand in recommendation information.

At the same time, the conclusions of this paper also have some reference for enterprises and businesses. Because consumers will have a negative evaluation of the original brand and the competitive brand in the recommendation information when they are in the state of distrust, the enterprises and businesses need to be careful when they choose the advertising media. At the same time, when consumers are generally distrust a type of advertisement or an advertising medium, the enterprises need to stop the advertisement in time. And the competitive brands of the advertiser also need to take measures to weaken the effect of spillover of distrust and reduce the negative attitude of consumers to the competitive brand.

Of course, there are some limitations in this paper. Firstly, the control of the product category is relatively simple. This paper only select the camera as a representation, which may not be universal. Secondly, after discovering negative effect of the competitive brand, no further experiments are designed to explore the reasons and influence mechanism. Therefore, the future research can explore that for different categories of goods, if there is the same conclusion. At the same time, distrust has negative impact on competitive brands, so for different categories of alternative commodity brand, will distrust have a positive effect on it or not? These problems can be used as the future research direction to do further exploration.

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