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How Persuasion Knowledge Creates Differences in the Role of Self and Functional Congruity on Predicting Customers' Attitude and Behavioral Intention

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the role of self-congruity and functional congruity in predicting customer attitudes and behavioral intentions in different branches of a chain store in the city of Tehran, Iran. Also, the study considers the moderating role of persuasion knowledge in the relationship between self-congruity and functional congruity with customers' attitude. The findings suggest that managers can develop certain strategies to improve customer attitudes and buying intentions.

Keywords

Image congruity (IC), Self-congruity (SC), Functional Congruity (FC), Customer Attitudes (CA), Behavioral Intentions (BI), Persuasion Knowledge (PK).

Introduction

IC is one of the important theories in marketing studies. IC includes cognitive and emotional evaluations in which the congruity of the main characteristics of a store are evaluated with the consumer's image from himself (Breazeale & Ponder, 2013). The theory of IC distinguishes two congruities from each other: SC and FC. SC is defined as a state of congruity between the self-image of the consumer and the psychological characteristics of the store image (Sirgy, 1982); While, FC is defined as the match between consumers' expectations and ideal functional characteristics of a store image (Kang, Tang, Lee, & Bosselman, 2012). In various studies, SC is considered as a direct determinant of consequences such as satisfaction, positive perceived value, commitment, positive relationship and loyalty (Cowart, Fox, & Wilson, 2008; Edson Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fleck & Quester, 2007; Ha & Im, 2012). In this study the role of SC and FC on CA and FBI was investigated in the chain stores area. Since previous studies have paid very little attention to investigate the effects of SC and FC on CA and FBI in retail stores and also, no studies were found on this issue in Iran, the present study aims to fill this gap.

Studies have shown that FC and SC both influence the buying behavior of retailing and different weights have been given to each in this area which depends on a number of situational characteristics and consumer related characteristics (Kim, 2004). PK is one of the consumers' characteristics that defines consumers' awareness of the strategies and tactics that companies use to persuade them to purchase and the underlying motives for these strategies (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Based on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) and heuristic-systematic model (HSM) by Chaiken (1980) that distinguished between central and peripheral processing (Kim,2004), it is assumed that customers with a higher PK are motivated to get involved in central processing and customers with lower PK get involved in peripheral processing. Therefore, this hypothesis was formed that customers with a high PK compared to those with a low PK, give more weight to FC than SC in forming their attitude.

Empirical methods and analysis frameworks

The study sample consists of 250 customers regularly visiting different branches of Shahrvand Chain Stores in Tehran. The branches and the customers were selected via cluster sampling and simple random sampling techniques, respectively. Mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients are laid out in table 1. SC and FC were shown to have a significant effect on CA whereas SC was shown to not directly affect FBI. In addition, SC was shown to affect CA directly and also indirectly through FC. The conceptual model of the study is presented in the figure 1. An analysis of the moderating

role of PK showed that SC influenced the formation of attitudes only in customers with low PK scores. The relationship between the variables at three levels of PK is displayed in figure 2.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients between the research variables

Variable	Descriptive statistics		Correlation coefficients				
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 .future behavioral intention	4.04	0.72	1.00				
2 .self-congruity	-0.033	0.89	0.41**	1.00			
3 .functional congruity	3.76	0.47	0.61**	0.54**	1.00		
4 .customer attitude	3.85	0.61	0.76**	0.54**	0.72**	1.00	
5 .persuasion knowledge	2.45	1.29	0.03	-0.16**	0.08	0.07	1.00

N=250 ; 0.01 <α <0.05 * ;·α<0.01 **

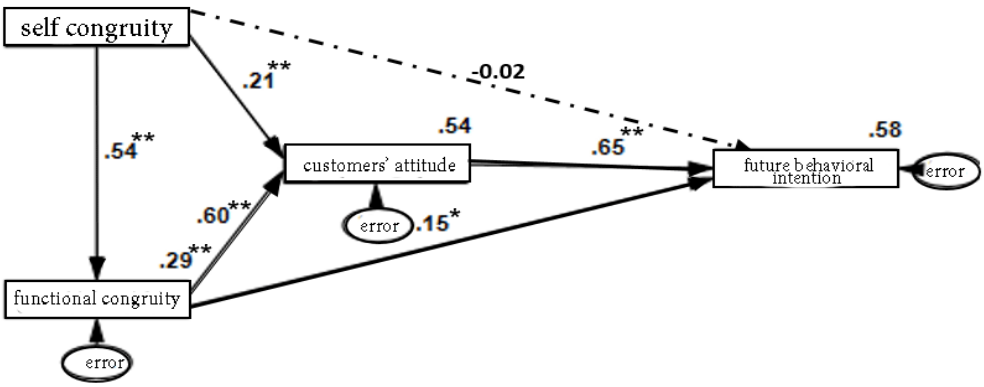

Figure 1: The conceptual research model. The dotted path was removed from the model due to its insignificance. CMIN/Df = 0.21; p = 0.65; SRMR = 0.005; AGFI = 0.99; CFI = 1.00; RFO = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.0005; PCLOSE = 0.73; N = 250; α <0.01 **, 0.01 <α < 0.05.

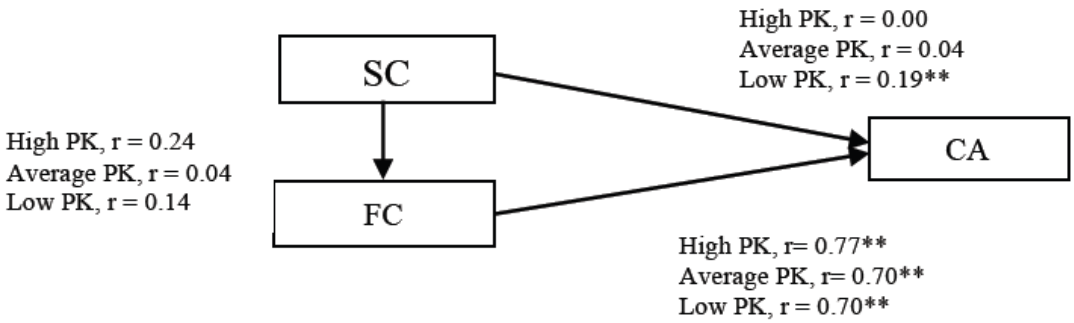

Figure 2: The relationship between SC, FC and CA at three levels of PK. A < 0.01, 0.01 < α < 0.05. At high persuasion knowledge n=120; At average persuasion knowledge n= 39; at low persuasion knowledge n= 49.**

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