

1-2010

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Do Interesting Things Increase Behavioral Intentions?

A Test of the Appraisal Structure of Interest
and Relationship between Interest and Behavioral Intention:
Applications in the Hospitality Industry

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Post presentation at The 15th Annual Graduate Education & Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality & Tourism, Penn State & Virginia Tech, Washington DC (January, 2010)

Abstract

The emotion of interest has significant implications for human behavior. However, prior research in interest is limited to the domain of psychology. This study applies the appraisal theory of interest to test the inducers of interest, and the relationship between interest and behavioral intentions. An experiment with hypothetical scenarios in a restaurant setting is to be completed. Stimuli appraised as new and complex and with information about them are proposed to cause interest, and interest is expected to increase behavioral intention. Implications for hospitality managers are briefly discussed.

Introduction

The impact of human emotions on people's behaviors has been widely studied in various fields (e.g., Carlson, Charlin, and Millar, 1988). "Interest" has been recognized as an emotion – more specifically termed as a knowledge emotion (Silvia, 2009) quite recently; hence, it has been explored less than other emotions (Ellsworth, 2003). It is generally accepted that the emotion of interest is caused by two appraisal structures; novelty-complexity and coping potential (e.g., Silvia, 2009). This indicates that people perceive new and complex things or events interesting. Also, people consider things interesting when people have ability to comprehend those.

Research exploring relationship between the emotion of interest and behavioral consequences is lacking in social sciences particularly in consumer behavior literature. This study will introduce the emotion of interest to the hospitality literature and it will examine how the two appraisal structures induce the emotion of interest and the consequences of induced interest in terms of behavioral intentions in a restaurant setting.

Literature Review

Interest, an interesting emotion

Interest as an emotion had been neglected for a long time regardless of its significant functions such as motivating attention, seeking information, and learning that are central to human development (Izard, 1977; Tomkins, 1962; Turner & Silvia, 2006). Due to its cognitive character, interest is categorized as one of epistemological emotions. Recently, Silvia (2009) introduced the new term, "knowledge emotions" to explain emotions such as interest, confusion, and surprise. Because of its cognitive nature, interest is often not viewed as an emotion (e.g., Lazarus, 1991; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Many researchers, however, have provided ample evidence of why interest should be considered as an emotion (see Reeve, 1993). They argue that interest, like other core emotions, is composed of organized syndromes such as cognitive, expressive, experiential, motivational, and physiological components (Scherer, 2001).

The appraisal structure of interest

According to appraisal theories, individuals' emotional experiences are formed and produced by cognitive appraisals of events and objects (Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Evdokas, 2004; Silvia, 2005). It is supported that the emotion of interest generally comes from novelty-complexity and coping potential appraisals (Silvia, 2009). Novelty-complexity appraisal explains that people feel interested when an object or an event is perceived as new, complex, unfamiliar, and unexpected (e.g., Berlyne, 1960). Although novelty and complexity seem to be two separate concepts, they are viewed as a single appraisal according to Berlyne's analysis of collative variables (1960). Coping-potential appraisal is directly related to comprehensibility, because it provides the individual's ability, resources, power, and control to understand new and complex things (Scherer, 2001; Silvia, 2005). In sum, people perceive a thing or an event interesting when the thing or the event is a new, complex, and is potentially comprehensible (Silvia, 2008).

Interest and other emotions

Because the effects of interest would be included under an inclination to pursue things that are positively valenced, "being interested in something" entails positive feelings for the activities in general (Lewin, 1935; Silvia, 2009). Consequently, it is hard to differentiate interest from other positive emotions (Silvia, 2005). However, many empirical studies have found interest is distinctive emotion compared to other emotions (e.g., Ellsworth and Smith, 1988; Turner and Silvia, 2006). General opinions that distinguish interest from other emotions highlight its high attentional activity (e.g., Silvia, 2005). For instance, interest has a stronger relation to physiological activation than pleasure, and pleasure does not entail exploration and novelty appraisal (Silvia, 2009).

H1a. New-complexity and an individual's coping potential of an object (an event) will induce the emotion of interest respectively.

Prior studies introduced above indicate that the two appraisals are important components of interest. However, studies that explored the joint effects of the two appraisals are scant. Both appraisals might induce the emotion of interest but which of these forces will induce a higher level of interest? As a notable exception, Silvia (2005) showed that when complexity of the stimulus is high, coping potential helped to increase interest whereas coping potential did not predict interest when complexity was low. This indicates that presence of complexity or coping potential alone does not predict high level of interest.

H1b. The level of interest induced by the two appraisals together will be higher than the level of interest induced by only one appraisal.

As discussed, interest has many functions such as motivating people's activity to encounter new things (Izard & Ackerman, 2000; Silvia, 2009). Hence, we predict that the interest induce people to explore and to try new things. This would indicate that consumers are more likely to purchase or try things that seem interesting.

H2: When people perceive an object (an event) as interesting, related behavioral intentions such as purchasing (trying) that object (event) will increase.

Curiosity and openness to exploration

Curiosity is explained as an associated personality trait (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004). In addition, interest and trait curiosity are theoretically related (Silvia, 2006) as curiosity remains the most detailed study of the inducers of interest (Berlyne, 1960; Silvia, 2001). Similarly, openness to experience as a personal trait is conceived as a trait which is relevant to interest (McCrae, 1996).

H3: Curiosity and openness to explore as traits will moderate the relationship between interest stimuli and the level of getting interested.

Method

Study Designs

The experiment will examine how the novelty of a menu item (novelty-complexity) and information content about the menu item (coping potential) might increase consumers' interest in that menu item and hence their intention to try it. A 2 (new vs. familiar menu item) X 2 (information vs. no information on the menu item) factorial design is adopted to test the hypotheses. The novelty of the menu item and coping potential (providing information) will be manipulated by written scenarios. Interest level from two stimuli and intention to try introduced menu item will be measured as dependent variables. Curiosity and openness to exploration will be measured separately as covariates for the study.

Measures and Sample

Interest will be measured by 4-item scale developed by Silvia (2005). Curiosity will be measured by 7 items used in Kashdan and others in 2004, and openness to exploration will be measured by an exploration inventory scale (12-items adapted from n Costa and McCrae, 1992). Participants will be composed of college students at a state university in the U.S.

Conclusion - Expected contributions

The current study will add to the body of knowledge in consumer behavior by conducting experiments in the hospitality setting with different combinations of the two appraisal dimensions. Two moderators should provide a better understanding of the way emotions and personality traits are related to each other. This study also examines if interest enhances behavioral intentions.

The findings of this would show if a new menu item or(and) providing information for the menu induces interests from customers and gets better chance of being selected from the customers. Hence, managers will find if introducing new menus or providing information for the menu item can help them to increase the number of sales or not. Also, we might find how

important it is to provide information for the menu item for increasing sales especially when the restaurants introduce new menu items.

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