

ABSTRACT

Consumer dissatisfaction is determined by product performance through an appraisal process in which the performance outcome is evaluated and then emotions are elicited. The dominant appraisal framework in marketing literature is disconfirmation, in which product performance is appraised in terms of whether it fulfills certain standards. However, the established disconfirmation models do not distinguish consumer dissatisfaction from satisfaction and thus cannot depict the appraisal process of consumer dissatisfaction well.

Different from the previous research, this dissertation developed a conceptual model for consumer dissatisfaction in a motivational system with withdrawal as the orientation. This new appraisal model was developed based on two-factor theory, appraisal theory, and Weber's Law. A dispositional construct, tolerance to inferiority, was introduced to intervene in the appraisal process.

A laboratory experiment with a 2 (high versus low tolerance to inferiority) x 2 (high versus low product performance) between-subject factorial design was conducted with two hundred and forty-two undergraduate students. The results suggested that product performance affected consumer dissatisfaction partially

through performance inadequacy, that consumer tolerance to inferiority moderated the relationship between product performance and performance inadequacy and so moderated the relationship between product performance and consumer dissatisfaction. In addition, a reversed covariation between tolerance to inferiority and consumer dissatisfaction was also found. The covariation strength, however, decreased as product performance increased.

This dissertation introduced a new dispositional construct and extended our understanding of consumer dissatisfaction beyond satisfaction. The research also contributed managerial implications on product failure.