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The Moderating Effect of Deal Proneness on the Influence of Involvement on Restaurant Group-Buying Purchase

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KEYWORDS

Group-buying,
Involvement,
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ABSTRACT

The increased popularity of group-buying deal promotions has made research efforts grasping the importance of involvement on the positive reactions of consumers. This is due to the fact that consumer purchasing behaviors are highly likely to differ depending on a particular consumer's involvement level, referring to the basic interest in or importance of a group-buying purchase. In this regard, this paper (1) investigated the effects of involvement on purchase behaviors; and (2) examined whether the proposed relationships may vary depending on a consumer's deal prone propensity. Results revealed that a consumer's cognitive involvement in a restaurant promotion affects emotional involvement, ultimately leading to purchase intention. In addition, a consumer's deal proneness tendency was revealed to moderate the relationship between cognitive involvement and emotional involvement. Compared to low deal-prone consumers, high deal-prone consumers tended to have a higher level of emotional involvement resulting from cognitive involvement. Managerial implications and directions for future research are provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

Online-group buying, as a revolutionary form of e-commerce, has gained remarkably in popularity in recent years. Online group-buying is a new online platform resulting from a merging of the communication functionality of Social Networking Sites' (SNSs) with the purchasing functions of e-commerce (Marsden, 2011; Stephen & Toubia, 2010). While online group-buying can manifest itself in a number ways, it is a predominantly group oriented purchasing activity focused on products and services (Amblee & Bui, 2012; Curty & Zhang, 2011; Cho & Lee, 2016). Such social shopping creates an optimal shopping experience by offering substantially discounted

prices in the form of "daily deals" or "flash deals" (Marsden & Chaney, 2012; Zhang, Zhang, Wang, Law, & Li, 2013).

Food and restaurants are one of the most popular and well-known group-buying purchases (Kimes & Dholakia, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Restaurants provide an online business model through which both consumers and sellers can benefit; consumers are able to purchase products at a discounted price, and sellers, although selling at lower prices, can secure competitiveness by increasing sales and maximizing demand. The recent trend of group-buying is attracting consumer attention by presenting mobile discount promotions using the location-based information of consumers (Cho & Lee, 2016). Additionally, based on consumer purchase history information,

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more sophisticated personalized information is provided in the form of push notifications.

However, a group-buying promotion using discounted prices or coupons cannot play a role unless the customer accepts the discount information. Thus, it is vital important to understand the deal consumer purchase behavior paradigm by understanding what factors affect consumer purchasing decisions and the nature of the process. However, most of the research related to group-buying purchase promotions attempts to understand the such purchasing behavior based on the characteristics of web and mobile sites, such as perceived quality, interaction or trust, while only limited research efforts have focused on personal traits such as value, emotion, or interest (Bosnjak, Galesic, & Tuten, 2007). In addition, related research has merely shown an interest in the moderating role of such individual characteristics concepts.

In general, a consumer's importance or interest, as a value or motivation, constitutes consumer involvement. Involvement in the process of information adoption could be a primary stimulus as a consumer show some interest or relevance in given information (Boanjak et al., 2007; Drossos, Kokkinaki, Giaglis, & Fouskas, 2014). Within a variety of settings, much research has largely examined involvement as a precedent concept that explains consumer information processing and determines whether to accept such information. In particular, consumer involvement in a group-buying promotions can be an essential condition, since such promotions act as the price discount information (Cho & Lee, 2016; Lee, 2011). Unless there is special interest in group-buying bargaining at discounted prices, or in restaurant products, the information delivered is highly likely to be treated as spam information.

Therefore, this study investigates the purchase behavior of restaurant group-buying consumers by examining the critical role of involvement in group-buying. Specifically, two types of involvement (i.e., cognitive involvement and emotional involvement) are proposed as prerequisite variables, according to the suggestion of Park and Young (1986) and Huang (2006). In addition, consumer deal proneness is also considered in an effort to deepen the knowledge of restaurant deal purchases, since consumer interest in and demand for deal promotions may vary according to consumer deal-proneness levels (Kimes & Dholakia, 2011). Even for the same restaurant deal promotion, consumers with different levels of deal proneness may exhibit different responses. Thus, the moderating effects of consumer deal proneness on the proposed relationships

are also tested based on the fact that price-based promotions are more attractive to bargain shoppers or deal seekers (Kimes & Dholakia, 2011; Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Burton, 1990).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Involvement

Involvement refers to the level of importance, relevance, and interest perceived by the consumer of a given subject in a given context. Mitchell (1979) defined involvement as the degree of personal relevance to the subject, and Zaichkowsky (1985) defined it as the level of intrinsic desire, interest, and value perceived for a particular object under specific circumstances. Within the context of online group-buying, it refers to the individual's interest in purchasing at a discounted price and in the specific product, and the level of involvement depends on the individual's characteristics, product or situation.

Many researchers have classified specific types of involvement depending on the subject and other characteristics. For instance, Houston and Rothchild (1978) classified involvement into situational involvement, persistent involvement, and response involvement. Zaichkowsky (1986), based on the object of interest, presented three specific types of involvement into advertising involvement, purchase involvement, and product involvement. Richins and Bloch (1986), who were interested in the persistence of interest in objects, tried to distinguish involvement between persistent involvement and situational involvement.

Involvement can be a useful concept in grasping consumer online group-buying behavior, since group-buying consumers must first be interested in the transaction method of group-buying, which enables the purchase of products at discounted prices. If there is no basic interest or relevance, then it is very unlikely for there to be a group-buying purchase transaction, and as a result, the likelihood of purchasing a product will also be low (Berthon, Pitt, & Watson, 1996; Chen & Tsai, 2008; Shang, Chen, & Liao, 2017). The selection of a particular medium among the various selectable media can be the sign of an interest in a particular medium. In addition, consumers need to be interested in some product categories or individual brands that are sold in group-buying. Interest in detailed products becomes a stimulant to complete the group-buying. Low consumer involvement further lowers the likelihood of purchase (Huang, 2012; Lee, 2011).

In addition, it is very desirable to divide the involvement from the viewpoint of information processing. Depending on consumer values (i.e., utilitarian motives vs. affective motives), the involvement to explain information processing can be divided into cognitive involvement and emotional involvement (Park & Young, 1986; Huang, 2006). Cognitive involvement herein refers to evaluating an object based on information related to practical benefits, practical motivation and opportunity or cost, while emotional involvement refers to emotional, affective or aesthetic meaning (Mittal, 1987). Such two types of involvement can be useful in understanding the group-buying behavior paradigm. Discounted price information affects the level of cognitive involvement, and communication among consumers, including interactions, can further stimulate the level of emotional involvement (Shang et al., 2017).

Several researchers have examined the role of involvement in various online shopping settings. For example, Bosnjak et al. (2007) attempted to understand online shopping behavior through the lens of involvement. They found that consumers' affective involvement level, evoked by cognitive involvement, consequently leads to online shopping intention. Mowen (2000) attempted to express the consumer's purchase behavior structure as the characteristics of the individual, centering on the consumer's values, and revealed that surface characteristics such as purchase behavior are influenced by situational value structures such as involvement. Hong (2015) also examined that, though specific involvement has been separated, the situational involvement of consumers increases the level of risk perception associated with mobile shopping. Further, he found that involvement increases trust expectation in mobile shopping sites, leading to an increased purchase intention. Huang (2012) stated that consumers' cognitive involvement and emotional involvement induce consumers to purchase through online shopping. Similarly, Shang et al. (2006) emphasized the importance of emotional involvement besides the cognitive involvement of consumers in the context of online communities. It is suggested that information sharing behavior, which is started by cognitive involvement in information acquisition, is fortified by an emotional involvement expressing self-concept. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Cognitive involvement will be positively related to affective involvement.

H2: Affective involvement will be positively related to deal purchase intention.

2.2. Deal Proneness

Deal proneness, as an innate tendency, encapsulates the manner in which consumers respond to prices being in the form of a deal (Bailey, 2008). Lichtenstein et al. (1990, p.56) defined deal proneness as "an increased propensity to respond to a purchase offer because the form of the purchase offer positively affects purchase evaluations." Related research suggested that, in comparison to non-deal-prone consumers, deal-prone consumers are more favorable to price promotions and are more apt to utilize such promotions in daily purchase (DelVecchio, 2005; Kumar, Karande, & Reinartz, 1998; Sigala, 2013; Wirtz & Chew, 2002).

Deal proneness has also been used extensively to explain how consumers respond differently to sales promotion offers. Several researchers have attributed differences in attitudes toward sales promotions as well as patronage behaviors to consumer deal proneness. Specifically, high deal-prone consumers are more receptive to the value offered by promotional deals, while low deal-prone consumers exhibit a lower propensity to evaluate promotional details (DelVecchio, 2005; Palazon & Delado-Ballester, 2011). Relative to non-deal-prone consumers who may need incentives to engage in WOM, deal-prone consumers are more likely to freely and voluntarily generate more WOM (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). In addition, high deal-prone consumers rely less on deal types in the formation of brand attitude than do low deal-prone consumers (Bailey, 2008).

Related hospitality research has also confirmed the role of deal proneness in consumer responses to promotional deals. Christou (2011) revealed that online hotel deals and promotions are more attractive to hotel guests who are more price-conscious. High deal-prone hotel guests viewed themselves as smart shoppers who seek both monetary savings and value (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). Similarly, Kimes and Dholakia (2011) argued that restaurant daily deal shoppers are also conscious of quality and show similar brand loyalty as regular shoppers, despite being price sensitive high deal-prone consumers. Some studies noted that discount promotions reduce the potential risk related to actual purchase and boost brand awareness (Kwun, Hwang, & Kim, 2013; Park & Gretzel, 2010; Sigala, 2013). Deal-prone consumers showed more interest in online hotel or restaurant discount promotions since they focus more

on the transactional value from the deals than non-deal-prone consumers do (Christou, 2011; Kwon & Jang, 2011).

Likewise, consumer responses to a restaurant daily deal would vary depending on a consumer's personal sensitivity to deal proneness since such online deals, accompanied by heavy discounts, seem naturally attractive to consumers with high deal proneness. Higher discounts on restaurant service tend to increase high deal-prone consumer interest and demand (Amblee & Bui, 2012; Kimes & Dholakia, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Moreover, in justifying their purchases, high-deal prone consumers seek relatively simpler cues than do low deal prone consumers. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H3: The relationship between cognitive involvement and affective involvement will be different for high deal-prone consumers and low deal-prone consumers.
- H4: The relationship between affective involvement and deal purchase intention will be different for high deal-prone consumers and low deal-prone consumers.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Participants and Procedures

The research data was collected from consumers who had purchased casual dining restaurant products through a group-buying promotion. Three trained undergraduate students visited a restaurant that was selling a group-buying product and approached consumers. Considering the different time periods for the purchase experience of the consumers, the selected consumers were asked to look at the actual group-buying deal promotion through a smartphone or tablet. Respondents completed the section not based on their purchase experience, but based on their searching experience (Wu, Liao,

Hung, & Ho, 2012). After finishing their browsing activities, consumers were requested to answer regarding their cognitive and affective involvement, purchase intention, and deal proneness. A total of 300 consumers participated in the study, of which 295 responses were used for the final analysis, after excluding five responses that were deemed incomplete.

3.2. Measurement

All of the measurement variables of this study were developed based on previous research, with some being modified according to the common purchase environment. The items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. First, cognitive involvement and affective involvement, referring to the degree of interest, importance, or relevance of group-buying promotions from functional and emotional aspects, respectively, were measured with three items, respectively, based on Zaichowsky (1985), Dorosso et al. (2014), and Huang (2012). For deal purchase intention, reflecting consumer's purchase and recommendation intention, was measured with three items from Tuten and Ashley (2011)'s study. Lastly, deal proneness, referring to a consumer's personal tendency to positively respond to discount promotion deals, was measured with three items based on Kimes and Dholakia (2011), as well as Lichtenstein et al. (1993).

3.3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 and LISREL 8.5 programs. First, a descriptive statistics analysis was used to confirm the characteristics (i.e., mean and standard deviation) of the variables. Confirmatory factor analysis techniques were then used to confirm the relationships among the presented variables, namely cognitive involvement, affective involve-

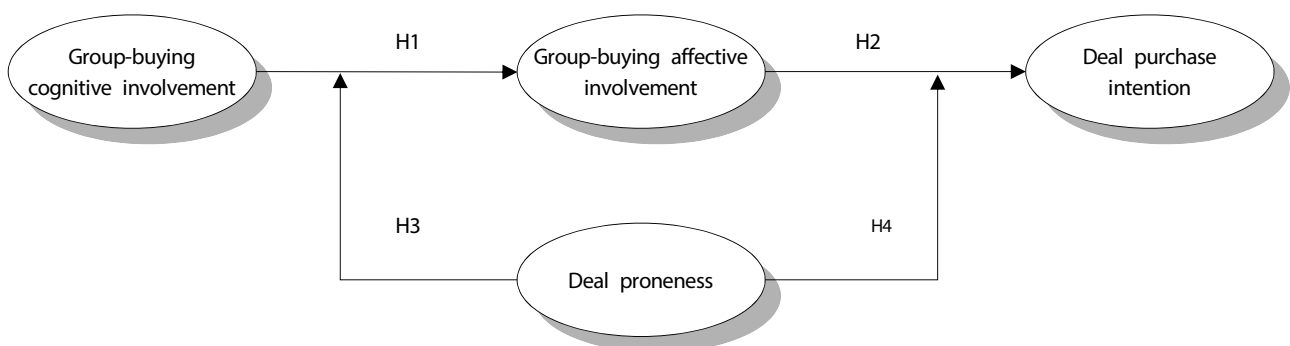


Fig. 1. Research model.

ment, deal purchase intention, and deal proneness. In addition, in order to confirm the suitability of the variables with the factor structure confirmation, a reliability analysis and a validity analysis using composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's α values were added, respectively. The two-way ANOVA is a useful statistical technique for verifying the interaction effect between two variables, in addition to verifying the main effect of the independent variables (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2011). Specifically, the main effects of cognitive involvement (A) and emotional involvement (B) were identified first, and the moderating effect of consumer's deal proneness (Z) was examined by focusing on interaction terms (A x Z, and B x Z).

4. RESULTS

As presented in Table 1, descriptive statistics were conducted to characterize the measurement variables. The mean score for deal proneness was the highest ($M=3.94$), followed by deal purchase intention ($M=3.36$), and cognitive involvement ($M=3.35$), while affective involvement ($M=3.27$) had the lowest mean value. In addition, demographic results showed that respondents were 48.7% male and 51.3% female. The majority were in the 20 and 30 age groups (86.0%) and had a four-year college degree (74.2%).

Two separate two-way analyses of variances (ANOVAs) and simple effect contrasts were performed to test the study hypotheses (Morgan et al., 2011). Specifically, the main effects

and the interaction effects of cognitive involvement and deal proneness on deal purchase intention were first analyzed, followed by simple pairwise comparisons. The interaction effects were further examined through simple pairwise comparisons which compared the mean differences between cell means (Morgan et al., 2011). For affective involvement, significant interaction effects were found between cognitive involvement and deal proneness ($F[1, 291]=3.66, p<.05$), thereby supporting H3. Cognitive involvement appeared to be positively related to affective involvement ($F[1, 291]=19.21, p<.001$), in support of H1. Furthermore, simple pairwise comparisons revealed that consumer deal proneness levels influence the relationship between cognitive involvement and affective involvement. High deal-prone consumers tended to be more influenced by the level of cognitive involvement than those with low deal-prone consumers ($F[1, 291]=29.87, p<.001$). Specifically, high deal-prone consumers ($M=3.78$) had higher levels of emotional involvement as their level of cognitive involvement increased, in comparison to low deal-prone preference ($M=3.12$).

For deal purchase intention, no significant interaction effects were detected between affective involvement and deal proneness ($F[1, 291]=.40, n.s.$). Thus, H4 was not supported. However, the main effect of affective involvement was significant ($F[1, 291]=97.76, p<.001$), thereby supporting H2. As expected, there were significant differences in affective involvement, suggesting that consumers with high emotional involvement ($M=3.79$) showed a higher deal purchase intention

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities for measures

Scale	Number of measures	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Group-buying cognitive involvement	3	3.35	.96	.84
Group-buying affective involvement	3	3.27	.96	.89
Deal proneness	3	3.94	.74	.73
Deal purchase intention	2	3.36	.86	.87

Table 2. Two-way analysis of variance result for affective involvement

Variables	df	Mean square	F-value	Partial eta squared (η^2)
Group-buying cognitive involvement (A)	1	15.10	19.21***	.06
Deal proneness (Z)	1	11.73	14.92***	.05
A x Z	1	3.66	4.66*	.02
Error	291			

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$, n.s.=not significant.

Table 3. Simple pairwise comparisons

DV = Group-buying affective involvement				Mean difference (i - ii)	Standard error	p- value	95% confidence interval for difference	
							Lower	Upper
Group-buying cognitive involvement (A)								
		Low (i)	High (ii)					
Deal proneness (Z)	Low	2.88	3.12	−.24	.18	.17	−.59	.10
	High	3.07	3.78	−.71	.13	.00	−.97	-.46

Table 4. Two-way analysis of variance result for deal purchase intention

Variables	df	Mean square	F-value	Partial eta squared(η^2)
Group-buying affective involvement (B)	1	50.05	97.76***	.25
Deal proneness (Z)	1	3.10	6.05**	.02
B x Z	1	.21	.40 ^{n.s.}	.00
Error	291			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

than those with low emotional involvement level ($M=2.89$). In addition, though it was not a major interest, deal-prone tendencies showed significant differences ($F[1, 291]=6.05$, $p < .05$). Consumers with a high deal-prone tendencies ($M=3.45$) showed a higher purchase intention level than those with a low deal-prone tendencies ($M=3.23$).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of consumer involvement in the purchase behavior of consumers in the context of group-buying discount promotions. Based on previous research, involvement was divided into two types: cognitive involvement and emotional involvement (Park & Young, 1986; Huang, 2006). Also, given that discount promotions are more attractive to bargain shoppers (Kimes & Dhoklakia, 2011; Lichtenstein et al., 1990), the moderating effects of consumer deal proneness on the proposed relationships were also examined.

The results of this study suggest that consumers' cognitive involvement affects emotional involvement, which then results in purchase intention. These results are consistent with previous studies suggesting that cognitive involvement, as an initial step, motivates customers to explore and purchase group-buying promotions (Berthon et al., 1996; Boanjak et al., 2007; Drossos et al., 2014; Cho & Lee, 2016). If a consumer

does not possess sufficient cognitive interest or a perceived relevance in a group-buying purchase, then the discount purchase information cannot be as successfully transmitted as intended (Lee, 2011). Further, in order to leading to purchasing, such cognitive discount information should evoke some positive emotion, thereby creating a connection or attachment to the group-buying purchase and restaurant product.

Therefore, promotion managers need to emphasize that the group-buying promotion is a useful tool for getting discount information. Value judgments about the usefulness to consumers will lead consumers to active information searching and purchasing. In addition, a consumer group from different product categories can be invited for restaurant purchases, since it is very likely that the interest in discount price purchase will be transferred to the group-buying of the new product group. Promotion managers should also seek ways of stimulating the emotional level of consumers to build on the transmission of information in the cognitive aspect. For the increased emotional aspects, it is necessary to develop elements that may be fun or enjoyable. Providing points or various incentives based on the customer activities would be an effective way to encourage affective feelings. Location-based information may be very effective by evoking some fun or enjoyment feeling related to affective involvement. Customized information based on individual purchase histories can also increase the level of emotional involvement and increase

the likelihood of purchase. In particular, in the context of group-buying, the level of emotional involvement is increased by the social function of consumers, so it is necessary to further promote communication and information sharing among consumers (Huang, 2012). It is also important to use consumer bulletin boards to make product reviews and reviews more easily and widely shared. It can be a very effective strategy to support consumers who share information and to raise the level of emotional involvement of new consumers.

Furthermore, a consumer's tendency to pursue a discount affects the relationship between cognitive involvement and emotional involvement, but does not affect the relationship between emotional involvement and purchase intent. In the case of emotionally engaged consumers, the propensity to pursue a discount does not play an additional role. However, the cognitive involvement was influenced by the consumer's tendency to pursue discounts in the emotional involvement stage, indicating that consumers with a high tendency toward discounts tend to be more involved in emotional involvement than consumers who do not pursue discounts. Therefore, the encouragement of a consumers' tendency to pursue a discount needs the use of a wide range of personal information acquired through product purchase histories. The tendency of consumers to pursue discounts on specific products is likely to lead to similar products. Finally, the more active the consumer is in pursuing a discount, the higher the possibility of purchase through the stage of involvement.

The limitation of this study is that consumers' personal characteristics are viewed only from one aspect of involvement. Therefore, future studies need to deal more broadly with individual characteristics such as shopping orientation, knowledge, or experience. In addition, presenting a research model that includes existing site quality, interaction, or trust would be beneficial. Such attempts would lead to an increased understanding of group-buying purchase behaviors. Second, this study did not consider the role of group-buying purchase promotional brands. Group-buying brands are very diverse, and consumer responses may differ based on each brand. In addition, the response to specific restaurant brands can also make a significant difference. Therefore, future studies will need to examine the effects of these brands. Finally, the type of social media can be further explored in future studies. As with a rapid change from online to mobile platforms, consumer responses and purchasing behaviors based on different media may be more meaningful.

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