

“An Empirical Study of Consumer Confusion on Decision Postponement”

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ABSTRACT

In today's atmosphere decision-making getting very complicated to choose one from various alternatives. In the present era, many moderns' consumers facing one of the biggest problems they haven't having too limited varieties, but having countless. Consumer confusion is initiated through product similarity, choice, and the existence of unclear information, can negatively affect consumer's decision making, and thereby also company's profitability. This research aims to examine the three variables of consumer confusion, which are similarity, overload, and ambiguity, and the effect of each variables on decision postponement especially on the low involvement product category like laundry detergent powder. The purpose of this research is to recognize the probable effects of consumer confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category. This research is casual in nature and a quantitative method using the questionnaire as a tool to gather data and analysis done through regression analysis. In total 250 respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire. This research found the significant impact of dimension of confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category and suggested that the decision postponement while purchasing laundry detergent powder occur due to over variety of products. It indicated that overload as the main confusion in this context since there are a lot of brands and advantages available in the market. This paper did not ask respondents' income on the questionnaire, there might be a possibility that income can be a factor that influence purchase decision.

Key words : Similarity, Overload, Ambiguity, Postponement, Decision Making.

Introduction

We can better understand consumer confusion while entering in to a supermarket to buy a simple product like laundry detergent. When approaching supermarket, you will immediately find a very large set of categories, and every category has a variety of options, the options are dissimilar brands. At the same time as buying detergent, you can choose between powder, liquid and solid or in combination form. You can also purchase flavors such as a softener, spot-cleaner, and starch. Apart from this, you will also have to come to a decision whether to buy a detergent for colour, white or combination of both and for the white or colour clothes. And it also necessary if you need a product for sensitive skin or not. The fact that each detergent works in a different way with a different type of water is also matter of importance, and as you notice, a simple product as detergents is unexpectedly not as easy as one first thought it to be.

And it is observed that 50 detergent alternatives are available to decide from the medium sized supermarket. However, there is research telling that special, or too many varieties, can be de-motivating and leave people indecisive (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Schwartz, 2000). Customers may discover a lot of

similar product that more or less looks similar with each or share the similar function and capability but still a different brand. It is also not surprising that a number of companies choose to reproduce characteristics of their successful enemy product, and it causes a similarity in a product.

Consumer goods turn into a very attracting business today. One of the examples is laundry detergent, from which people cannot live without needs of it in daily life. The selection of laundry detergent as the example product for this research was authenticated by numerous factors. First of all, previous studies have found that consumer confusion existing within this product category (Alarabi and Gronblad, 2012). And since detergent is classified as a low involvement product is a perfect object to help investigate this study.

People are affected by low involvement product purchases more often and on a wider scale than that of high involvement products, it could be argued that the effects of consumer confusion in such a category would be a reoccurring issue, and therefore worth acknowledging. Therefore, a study of the effects of consumer confusion on consumer behavior when purchasing a low involvement product, is aimed at through this thesis. This is to be fulfilled by focusing on the detergent market, which has been proven by previous research to be of low involvement nature (Hoyer, 1984), and also to have a degree of consumer confusion (Kelly, 1997; Benady, 1997).

According to Walsh et al. (2007) identified three dimensions with which they based their consumer confusion proneness model on. These dimensions were (1) similarity confusion proneness, (2) overload confusion proneness, and (3) ambiguity confusion proneness. As earlier mentioned, decision postponement is the most commonly mentioned and most damaging outcome that has been discussed in terms of consumer confusion, and therefore decision postponement chosen as the dependent variable for the proposed model. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the three different dimensions, and also their individual influence on the decision postponement. (as indicated by the arrows).

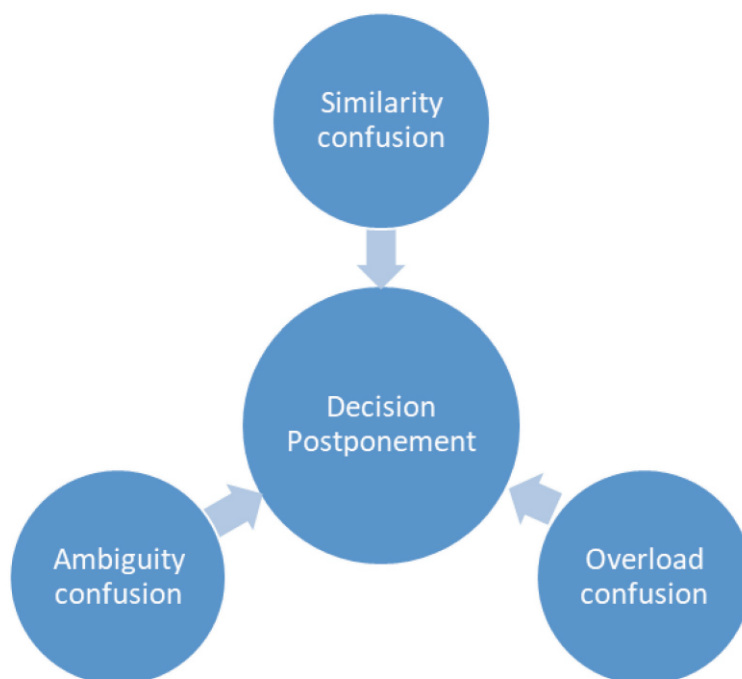


FIGURE 1. Consumer confusion proneness model

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 Low involvement product category : The concept of low involvement products is that an individual regularly purchase the product with less surveillance and consideration, having not a major impact on their lifestyle, expenses, and self-concept. These products generally have low cost and that is the cause customers pay less attention and habitually choose the items to buy or for day-to-day use e.g. laundry detergent, toothpaste, milk, soap, pen, etc.

1.2 Decision postponement : The action or procedure of deciding something which had been planned for a specific time will be done in future time in its place.

1.3 Similarity confusion: The feeling of confusion when the options of purchasing products are similar in nature.

1.4 Overload confusion: The feeling of confusion when the options of the products are more than required.

1.5 Ambiguity confusion: The feeling of confusion when there is lack of information about the product.

1.6 Consumer Confusion: The concept of consumer confusion can be defined, it can be viewed as a state that individuals may be prone to and which causes them to act in a different way and / or affects their decision-making activities. Consumer confusion is a reason and it arises from a wrong description of individual markings. Consumer confusion is also can be distinct as a result that comes from information giving out errors caused by information overload but may not rise only through information. In other words, stated consumer confusion as a misunderstanding or false impression of the marketplace due to the consumer failure to develop a correct explanation of various facts of a product or service, during the information processing procedure.

2. Motivation of the study

This study is being conducted for the awareness of shop's owner that what does customer want during the selection of low involvement products and understand to the owner about how customers perceive the product attributes, their importance, and performance when compared with other competitors.

This study is helpful for the customers to select various attributes while selecting the products in low involvement category wherever they go to purchase the products in any part of the world. The study also useful to the shopkeepers who sell various low involvement products to think about basic attributes like the confusion between the products, quality, price, etc.

3. Scope of study

The scopes of the study are as follows.

- i. This study enables the customer to understand the basic attributes better while purchasing low involvement product category.
- ii. This piece of research will be utilized by shopkeepers, supermarket owners who sell low involvement product as they want to deliver superior quality to their customers. This study will help them to understand the needs of the customers.

4. Research gap

The purpose of this research is to identify how the three variables of consumer confusion proneness affect consumer's decision postponement in low involvement product category, by studying their purchasing

process of detergent. The derived results will aid in the discussion of marketing implications for researcher and practitioners. This research would serve as a complement to the literature on consumer's decision making within the extensive field of consumer behavior. The focus on low involvement products will help generate more empirical findings for consumer confusion within a market besides the ones of high involvement products, which has been a great focus within consumer confusion literature so far.

Literature review

Tamburian, (2013) found in his research, consumer confusion exists in low involvement product category but in the other way consumer confusion proneness, similarity confusion, overload confusion, ambiguity are proved to have no significant influence on consumer brand loyalty of low involvement product category like toothpaste. Overall none of similarity, overload, and ambiguity confusion influence brand loyalty significantly. That is why there's still a need to investigate the connection between each consumer confusion proneness and perhaps if the scale was not simply measuring brand loyalty as a repetitive buying activity and instead considered actual consumer attitudes or behavioral loyalty towards preferred brand it would be easier to see how similarity, overload and ambiguity affecting brand loyalty. The other factors that affect brand loyalty for example are price, brand variety and attractiveness, size and brand reputation.

Alexander, (2014) believe that *“Consumer confusion as a huge number of choices, a surge of marketing communications, decreasing inter-brand differences, increasing the complexity of information and its sources which increase search costs. Low involvement context will put less effort to look for information and alternatives, especially for daily products, experience, brand familiarity and brand loyalty might be important factors in this case.”* And he find that the student samples in D.I Yogyakarta indicated even in low involvement purchase, consumers may experience confusion, consumers feel that similarity confusion is the main problem in their buying decision. This study also finds that male respondents tend to be more struggles with all aspects of consumer confusion rather than female respondents.

Greenleaf and Lehmann, (1995) has stated that The result of studies give considerable support to the proposed typology of delay reasons. Postponment delayed reason is related to the amount of time the subject reported delaying, either to total delay or to a particular stage of the decision-making process.

Alarabi, S., & Grönblad, (2012) the results revealed the presence of consumer confusion in a low involving product category. The strength of the relationships, however, disclosed that overload confusion was the single variable that statistically could be said to affect decision postponement and brand loyalty. However, was not supported since it was found that overload confusion proneness, in a low involving product category, caused an increase in decision postponement. On the other hand, proved correct in a manner predicted by theory; overload confusion proneness caused a decrease in brand loyalty

Walsh and Mitchell, (2008) have stated that the definition Consumer confusion as a conscious condition or “state” that individuals may be prone to, we see this as causing them to act differently and/or to affect their decision-making ability. And explained that the consumer confusion proneness scale has sound psychometric properties and that the three dimensions of similarity, overload, and ambiguity have a differential impact on word of mouth behavior, trust, and customer satisfaction.

Oliveira and Reis, (2016) they stated that the level of confusion has as its antecedent the individual's maximization degree and his level of involvement with the product. The demographic profile acts a moderator of the relationship between the involvement and the consumer's confusion. As a consequence there is a purchasing intention, the search for more information, the decrease of the number of alternative, the search for help from a third party and the decision's postponement.

Kuester and Buys, (2009) explained that *If the number of products in a product line increases, the amount of information increases as well. Therefore, the information carried by a large product line can exceed the customer's information processing capacity. Consequently, information overload can occur and trigger customer confusion.* They found that customer confusion increases with the number and the complexity of products in a product line. The moderating effect of product complexity indicates that the confusion causing effect of product line size increases with product complexity. Thus, the problem of customer confusion is especially evident for companies offering large, highly complex product lines. Furthermore, we identified customer confusion to totally mediate the negative effects of product line size on purchase intention and positive word of mouth intention. Therefore, a large product line does not necessarily cause lower levels of these variables itself. Only in those cases, where customers were suffering from confusion, purchase intention and word of mouth intention were affected negatively.

Hamlin and Welsh, (1999) there is no doubt that the Theory of Planned Behavior and all its antecedents, derivatives and variants (hereafter collectively referred to as TPB) can be used as a model for low involvement decisions, because it already is being used in these roles. However, to do so, and to maintain that high and low involvement evaluations are fundamentally different at the same time, is in itself irrational, and leads to the theoretical discomfort so clear in the passage. There are three logical requirements that any model of low involvement evaluation must satisfy:

1. The evaluation must occur before purchase
2. The evaluation must be structured / rational
3. The evaluation must be driven by unstructured passively acquired knowledge

Bian and Moutinho, (2011) has shown that Product involvement is commonly defined as consumers enduring perceptions of the importance of the product category based on the consumer's inherent needs, values, and interests. The results of this study reject the proposed relationship between product involvement and perceptions of CBP, and the relationship between product involvement and purchase intention of CBP, because there is a negative relationship.

Hasan, Subhani, & Osman, (2012) have concluded that various marketing principle of high and low involvement grid, consumers have different behavior towards purchasing high and low involvement but this result signifies that the consumers' purchase intention has become more cautious towards buying both kinds of products, which is due to the economic crises and recession. As the prices have hiked of all kinds of products, consumers while maintaining their lifestyle are attentive towards their expenses and convenience and specialty products. An alert for marketers to divest the old kind of consumer behavior and should focus on consumers' vigilant behavior. Real-life marketing strategy is a sound strategy, which uses common-sense to analyze the environment. This helps the marketers to comprehend the similar non-linearity of high and low involvement products by 'gut-reaction', experience, rational and irrational processes to understand the consumer purchase and consumption to attain their satisfaction, retain them and also to keep the products revenue generation streamlined.

Iqbal, Ahmad, Iqbal, & Ahmad, (2015) in their book reviewed, in Pakistan consumer's confusion exists due to overload and ambiguity about any brand of mobile phones. And due to collectivist social culture source of income of various consumers is autocratic and are served by their parents. So consumers enjoy the leisure of risk and adopt new brands for self-satisfaction and maintained status quo. Therefore, perceived risk as moderator is found insignificant in results. While, in Pakistani mobile phone market most of the market share is occupied by young individuals and their income is originated from family groups. Therefore, in this mode rational analysis such consumers felt confused when they are ambiguous

about any brand. But mostly, such consumers are well aware due to cheap and reliable source of information availability. Therefore, role of sales representative regarding informational transmission is reduced.

Sadasivan, Rajakumar, & Rajinikanth, (2011) the results that emerge from the study are

- (i) Involvements play a significant role in the decision making for apparels and influence the brand loyalty.
- (ii) Consumer's evaluation towards the extension from apparel store brands is influenced by relevance and similarity.

Further, the outcome also indicates that consumer's reaction towards the extension product category (non-durable or durable) is influenced by brand association.

Lotfizadeh and Lotfizadeh, (2015) completed a study that the focal high-involvement product was laptop and the low involvement product, shampoo. The results indicated similar awareness of high-involvement product brands and low-involvement product brands. Advertising played an equal role in the awareness of Laptop brands and Shampoo brands. The brand names which are easy to pronounce was far important for both Shampoo and Laptop brands. The item of best-selling brands had the most roles and the item of high quality had the least effect on consumer decision making. In addition, the results showed that the higher price brands are more important than well-known ones.

Karani, Fraccastoro, & Shelton, (2013) this study examined the effect of numerous retailers offering similar products at different prices and the consumer's ability to recall and pick the best 'value' deal. The study also assesses (1) if the consumer encounters the lowest price early in the search, the consumer is unlikely to purchase due to a lack of confidence whereas if the lowest prices are encountered mid to late in their search, consumers accept it as a good deal and make the purchase; and, (2) when multiple prices encountered by consumers are close to their internal reference prices with low deviations, consumers stop searching earlier and accept the price they see without too much searching. Based on theory related to consumer confusion, the effects of information overload due to over choice are proposed to reduce confidence in the purchase which lead to increased confusion and decreased satisfaction from the purchase.

Nayak, (2015) concluded that the word consumer confusion is used frequently as a basic label for phenomena that cannot be explained with existing constructs, it is not shocking that no commonly accepted conceptualization of consumer confusion proneness is available. Sometime the consumer confusion has been broadly defined by various authors in different context. The objective of this paper was to conceptualize the consumer confusion dilemma

Research Methodology

For achieving the efficient with the study research methodology is proposed to employ. The skeleton of the proposed methodology is presented here.

Objectives of study

The objectives of the study were:-

1. To identify the effects of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
2. To identify the effects of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

3. To identify the effects of ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

Hypothesis

- H_{01} There is no significant effect of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
- H_{A1} There is significant effect of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
- H_{02} There is no significant effect of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
- H_{A2} There is significant effect of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
- H_{03} There is no significant effect of ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.
- H_{A3} There is significant effect of ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

Research Design

Type of Study

The purpose of this research is to recognize the probable effects of consumer confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category. This research is casual. Casual meanwhile the purpose is to determine if one variable causes another variable to occur or change. This research is a quantitative method of using the questionnaire as a tool to gather data and analysis.

Sampling Design

Following sample design was proposed to employ for this research study:

- **Population** : All individual who have visited the showrooms, malls for purchasing low involvement product category were the population of this study. The population was from Gwalior region only.
- **Sampling frame** : A list of items or people forming population for which a sample was taken.
- **Sampling elements** : Any customer who have purchased low involvement product category.
- **Sample size** : In total 250 respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire.
- **Sampling methods** : Judgmental sampling method was utilized for data collection.
- **Geographical spread of sample** : Gwalior

3.4 Tools for data analysis

All the data analysis has been completed through the SPSS software. Following are the statistical tools which were employed for different experimental analysis:

- **Reliability** : It is the degree to which a calculation tool produces unchanging and constant results. Reliability would be checked through Cranach's Alfa by SPSS.

- **Regression** : Regression is a Statistical measure tool used for determining the relationship between the two variables.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Reliability

The value of Cronbach's Alpha is .860 i.e. greater than 0.7 hence the data is reliable.

Table 1 Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.860	13

2. Regression

H₀₁ There is no significant effect of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

H_{A1} There is significant effect of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.614 ^a	.377	.374	.63682

a. Predictors: (Constant), OC_MEAN

b. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	60.288	1	60.288	148.660	.000 ^b
	Residual	99.764	246	.406		
	Total	160.052	247			

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

b. Predictors: (Constant), OC_MEAN

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.140	.186		6.119	.000
	OC_MEAN	.645	.053	.614	12.193	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

Table of model summary has come up with one model where $R=0.614$, it suggests about correlations. $R^2=0.377$, indicated that overload confusion explains 37% of variance in decision postponement.

Overload confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, $b= 0.614, t(250)=12.193, p<0.05, 0.000$. Overload confusion also explained a significant proportion of variance for Decision Postponement 37%, $R^2= 0.377, F(1,246)=148.660, p<0.05, 0.000$

Overload confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, $b=0.614, t(250)= 12.193, p<0.05, 0.00$.

H₀₂ There is no significant effect of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

H_{A2} There is significant effect of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.578 ^a	.334	.331	.65817

a. Predictors: (Constant), SC_MEAN

b. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	53.488	1	53.488	123.476	.000 ^b
	Residual	106.564	246	.433		
	Total	160.052	247			

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN
 b. Predictors: (Constant), SC_MEAN

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.622	.162		10.034	.000
	SC_MEAN	.513	.046	.578	11.112	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

Table of model summary has come up with one model where $R=0.578$, it suggests about correlations. $R^2=0.334$, indicated that similarity confusion explains 33% of variance in decision postponement.

Similarity confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, $b=0.578, t(250)= 11.112, p<0.05, 0.00$. Similarity confusion also explained a significant proportion of variance for Decision Postponement 33%, $R^2=0.334, F(1,246) =123.476, p<0.05, 0.000$

Similarity confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, $b=0.513, t(250)= 11.112, p<0.05, 0.00$.

H₀₃ There is no significant effect of Ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

H_{A3} There is significant effect of Ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.612 ^a	.375	.372	.63790

a. Predictors: (Constant), AC_MEAN

b. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	59.950	1	59.950	147.328	.000 ^b
	Residual	100.102	246	.407		
	Total	160.052	247			

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

b. Predictors: (Constant), AC_MEAN

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.899	.207		4.354	.000
	AC_MEAN	.697	.057	.612	12.138	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DP_MEAN

Table of model summary has come up with one model where R=0.612, it suggests about correlations. R²=0.375, indicated that ambiguity confusion explains 37% of variance in decision postponement.

Ambiguity confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, b= 0.612, t(250)= 12.138, p<0.05,0.000. Ambiguity confusion also explained a significant proportion of variance for Decision Postponement 37%, R²= 0.375, F (1,246) =147.328, p<0.05, 0.000

Ambiguity confusion has a significant effect on Decision Postponement, b=0.612, t(250)= 12.138, p<0.05,0.00.

Hypothesis Summary

SR. NO	HYPOTHESIS	P<0.05	STATUS
H ₀₋₁	There is no significant effect of overload confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.	0.000	Failed to Accept
H ₀₋₂	There is no significant effect of similarity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.	0.000	Failed to Accept
H ₀₋₃	H ₀ There is no significant effect of ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category.	0.000	Failed to Accept

Findings

A linear regression test was conducted to measure the effect of overload confusion, similarity confusion and ambiguity confusion on decision postponement and the results clearly indicate the positive effect of overload confusion, similarity confusion and ambiguity confusion on decision postponement in the low involvement product category. These results provide empirical support for the proposed relationships between overload confusion, similarity confusion and ambiguity confusion with decision postponement and its impact in low involvement product category.

These findings lead to the effective understanding of Consumer confusion proneness model. This study supports the customer to understand the basic attributes better while purchasing low involvement product category.

Suggestions

Consumer's difficulty when confronted with more product information and alternatives than they can process in order to get to know, to compare and to comprehend alternatives. Choice overload (sometimes called over choice in the context of confusion) occurs when the set of purchasing options becomes overwhelmingly large for a consumer. So it can be recommended that the decision postponement while purchasing laundry detergent powder occur due to over variety of products (i.e. detergents like ariel, surf excel, tide, rin, nirma, ghadi, henko, wheel, pooja, sunlight, etc.

The second confusion occurs due to ambiguity confusion, so the recommendation for this is, the stores must provide sufficient information about the detergents (any product).

Limitations of the study

The research has numerous flaw concerning about the limitation that happens naturally. Nevertheless, several works were done in this study to minimize the problems. These are the list of limitations that this study encountered:

- The data were collected only by the male candidate.
- The geographical area for this study was Gwalior region only.
- This paper did not ask respondents' income on the questionnaire, there might be apossibility that income can be a factor that influence purchase decision.

Conclusion

This research found that consumer confusion apparent in an even in a low involvement purchase. Consumers may feel confused especially with the similarity of the products. The results of the study of consumer confusion in low-involvement product among sample people in Gwalior region can be completed as

Follows :

1. The samples indicated that similarity overload and ambiguity confusion does exist on low-involvement product. It indicated that overload as the main confusion in this context since there are a lot of brands and advantages available in the market.
2. The samples indicated that they forgot their initial purchase because they are distracted by other function. It seems that the number of functions offered by manufacturers may become a big problem for consumers instead of advantages since it has the lowest mean rating (the highest degree of confusion) amongst other aspects of ambiguity confusion.

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