

Modeling the selection of fast-food franchises among Japanese consumers

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Abstract

By linking the Brisoux–Laroche Model and the Extended Competitive Vulnerability Model, this study offers a more complete understanding of the brand choice process in the Japanese fast-food industry. The existence of the four sets of awareness, proposed by the Brisoux–Laroche Model of brand categorization, was first established using fast-food brands and then the causal relationships among brand cognition, attitude, confidence, and intention in each of the sets were examined. After finding direct effects among the constructs in the consideration, hold, reject, and foggy sets, the Extended Competitive Vulnerability Model was tested using the two most popular fast-food brands in consumers' consideration sets. Our results empirically validate the proposed model of brand competition, thus providing new insight into how consumers select one fast-food brand over another. Following a demonstration of the interrelatedness of brand evaluations, a discussion of our findings, with respect to brand management in the fast-food industry, ensues.

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1. Introduction

“How consumers make their choice of brands in multi-brand situations is one of the least understood yet important phenomenon in the marketing of QSRs” (Quick Service Restaurants—hereafter, fast-food restaurants; Laroche and Parsa, 2000, p. 219). Among the limited number of studies that have examined the process of choosing among multiple fast-food brands, Laroche and Parsa (2000) empirically validated the Brisoux–Laroche model of brand categorization, and Laroche and Toffoli (1999) brought together the Brisoux–Laroche model and Bliemel's (1984) theory of price–quality choice behavior (Brisoux and Laroche, 1980). This study extends previous research on brand choice in the fast-food sector by exploring the consumer brand selection process in the Japanese fast-food industry, where

multibrand choice is common. Like their North American counterparts, Japanese consumers are faced with a plethora of domestic and foreign fast-food brands (e.g., McDonald's, Lotteria, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Mos Burger, Matsuya, and Yoshinoya). Although young Japanese consumers have wholeheartedly adopted foreign brands like McDonald's, their loyalty to national brands such as Mos Burger remains unwavering (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1997).

In studying consumers' brand selection processes, researchers have demonstrated the existence of both direct and competitive effects between consumers' cognitive evaluations, attitudes, confidence levels, and intentions (see Laroche et al., 1994, 1995, 1996, 2001; Laroche and Sado-kierski, 1994). However, no one has previously modeled brand choice within each of the four sets of awareness put forth by Brisoux and Laroche (1980). Also, researchers have not yet examined both the direct and competitive effects within consumers' evoked sets (hereafter, consideration sets), where competition among leading brands is quite intense. This study fills the void by testing the link between the Brisoux–Laroche Model of brand categorization and the Extended Competitive Vulnerability Model of brand competition using Japanese fast-food brands. Our test involves a three-step approach: (1) the Brisoux–Laroche Model of

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brand categorization is validated, (2) the relationships among brand cognition, attitude, confidence, and intention in each of the four sets of awareness are examined, and (3) the Extended Competitive Vulnerability Model is tested using the two most popular brands in consumers' consideration sets. Based on the findings, useful marketing strategies that allow managers to differentiate their brand from the nearest competitors, especially in consumers' consideration sets, are suggested.

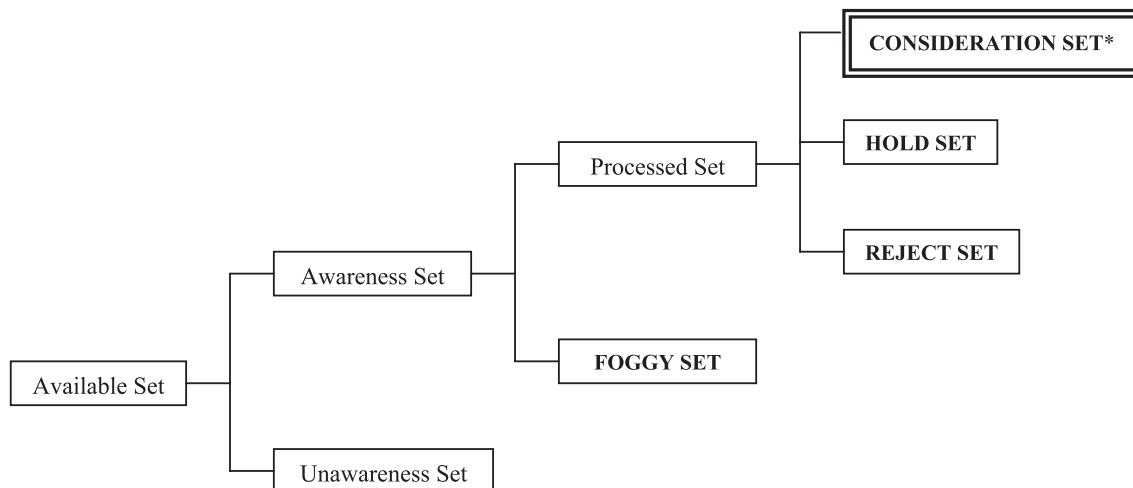
2. The Brisoux–Laroche brand categorization process

In the last decades, researchers have tried to comprehend the brand categorization process and the evaluative criteria used to arrive at a choice in a particular brand category. Howard (1963) indicated that consumers consider only a few alternatives instead of the total set when they simplify and manage their brand choice. He divided the total set into an awareness set and an unawareness set. Later on, Howard and Sheth (1969) put forward the concept of the consideration set in which only a limited number of brands are actively taken into account in the choice process. However, their model only identifies and categorizes brands that are considered as purchase alternatives. Narayana and Markin (1975) further expanded the awareness set into three subsets: the consideration, inert, and inept sets, and adopted the same definition for the consideration set (Howard, 1963). Following Howard's conceptualization, all brands in the consideration set are evaluated positively. Brands in the inert set are neither accepted nor rejected; they are neutral. In the inert set, brands are rejected from purchase consideration and are negatively judged by consumers. In 1980, Brisoux and Laroche proposed a more expanded awareness set, splitting it into two

groups: a processed set and an unprocessed (foggy) set (Fig. 1). Consumers assess the brands in the processed set on at least one salient attribute and in turn, form their opinions (i.e., attitudes, confidence levels, and purchase intentions). Conversely, brands in the unprocessed (foggy) set are not evaluated on any salient attribute. Although consumers are aware of these brands, they have no clear opinion of them.

In the Brisoux–Laroche model of brand categorization, the processed set is further divided into three subsets: consideration, hold, and reject sets. Processed on all salient attributes, consumers hold positive attitudes, confidence levels, and purchase intentions toward the brands in their consideration sets (Brisoux and Laroche, 1980) and only consider these brands when making a purchase decision. Although brands in the hold set are not considered as purchase alternatives, consumers still hold positive, negative, or neutral attitudes and intentions vis-à-vis these brands (Laroche and Toffoli, 1999). For instance, a consumer may have a positive attitude toward a brand in the hold set because of its quality, but may consider it as inappropriate for a particular consumption situation. Alternatively, a consumer may have a negative attitude toward a brand because of its price but may still keep it on hold for special occasions. Moreover, the hold set may contain brands that a consumer neither likes nor dislikes. As s/he collects new information regarding these brands, s/he will move them into her/his consideration or reject sets. The consumer may even forget about the brand, thus placing it in the foggy set. The last set is the reject set where brands are considered as unacceptable purchase alternatives and consumers hold negative attitudes toward these brands.

Overall, the Brisoux–Laroche model offers an expanded, better defined brand categorization process. Since its inception, several studies have empirically supported the model



Source: Brisoux and Laroche (1980). * In the original Brisoux-Laroche model, the term evoked set was used instead of consideration set. Since the latter term has gained in popularity, it is used instead.

Fig. 1. The Brisoux–Laroche Model of brand categorization.

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