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Jeffrey Inman, University of Pittsburgh (US)

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Digital Distraction:

Consumer Mobile Device Use and Decision Making

Abstract

The rapid growth of mobile devices has provided firms with an unprecedented opportunity to engage consumers. However, firms are struggling to adapt to and understand the impact of mobile devices on consumer outcomes. One common but understudied area is the role that mobile devices play in consumer decisions. Building upon prior research investigating consumer technology use during decision situations, the authors classify mobile device use into two defining categories (task-related and task-unrelated) and examine the role these differing usage types have on consumer decision quality. Across an in-store field study and two experiments, the authors demonstrate that depending on use, mobile devices can act as a double-edged sword with either positive or negative implications for consumers and marketers. The authors find support for their predictions that task-unrelated mobile device use degrades consumer decision making and is associated with an increase in unplanned purchasing, forgetting planned items, and a reliance on heuristics during the decision making process. Conversely, task-related mobile device use can help consumers make better decisions, including purchasing fewer unplanned items and selecting more efficient alternatives. Implications for research and practice are discussed.