

Research Paper for the Mita Festival (2018)

**JILTING EFFECT IN CUSTOMIZATION SYSTEMS
CAUSED BY MASS CONFUSION**

**The 16th Term Members of Prof. Ono's Marketing Seminar
The Faculty of Business and Commerce, Keio University**

**The Research Project Team for the Mita Festival
(The Interdisciplinary Interseminar Congress of FBC, Keio Univ.)**

THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Many manufacturers introduce mass customization systems via Internet, in which they match their products to each consumer's individual needs (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2006). Mass customization allows customers to order their own products from abundant choices. However, on the other hand, customers sometimes abandon customization due to “mass confusion”, caused by the complexity of selecting maximal solutions (Huffman and Kahn, 1998). To solve the problem, some firms recently offer “hybrid system” in which they offer not only customized products, but also ready-made products. Using the new system, they expected that customers who find that they are less satisfied with any ready-made products move into the customization system, whereas customers who find that they get confused in the customized system get back to the ready-made products. But, based on the new notion of “jilting” effect (Garvey, Meloy, and Shiv, 2017), customers may not come back to any products under the same brand as the customized products. In this paper, we conduct five studies to investigate the issue.

STUDY 1: THE EMERGENCE OF JILTING EFFECT

Garvey et al. (2017) found that consumers switched one of two products to the other product if they found that a highly desirable aspirant product was inaccessible in spite that they once believed that the highly desirable product was available and so they would like to switch the incumbent product to that product. That is “jilting” effect. In the context of this research, the effect may occur in the hybrid customization system because customized products can be regarded as aspirant product than ready-made products and, due to “mass confusion”, it is sometimes difficult to order them. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious aroma brands. All respondents were given one out of two aromas *A* and *B* from different brands for trial and, then, asked to answer which brand was preferred. Then, we randomly assigned the respondents into two groups, of which Group 1 was exposed to more attractive customization brand *C*, whereas Group 2 was exposed to another ready-made aromas *C*, which may or may not be preferred. Respondents in Group 1 tried to make their better aroma than the chosen incumbent brand (*A* or *B*). However, some of them abandoned the customization due to “mass confusion” and thus felt “jilted”. Finally, we asked respondents to choose a brand

again. As a result, respondents who felt that they were “jilted” in Group 1 were more likely to switch their brand to the other brand than those who did not experience “jilting” in Group 2.

STUDY 2: THE MODERATING EFFECT (1)—THE EXISTENCE OF ANTICIPATION

Jilting effect may occur if and only if customers anticipate receiving an aspirant once before it proves to be unavailable (Garvey et al., 2017). In the context of this research, jilting effect may not occur unless the customization system is perceived as available and customers were aware of anticipated succeeding in customizing their products. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious aroma brands. Again, all respondents were given one out of two aromas *A* and *B* and asked to answer which was preferred. They were then exposed to the highly desirable customization brand *C*. We randomly divided the respondents into two groups, of which Group 1 (Anticipation group) was asked to try to make their better aroma than the chosen incumbent brand (*A* or *B*), whereas Group 2 (No-Anticipation group) was asked to read a scenario “The customization brand *C* is now under construction and therefore unavailable until next year.” Some respondents in Group 1 abandoned the customization due to “mass confusion” and thus felt “jilted”. In contrast, respondents in Group 2 did not experience “jilting” because brand *C* was inaccessible for the group members. Finally, we asked respondents to choose a brand again. As a result, respondents who felt that they were “jilted” in Group 1 (anticipation group) were more likely to switch their brands than those who did not experience “jilting” in Group 2 (no-anticipation group).

STUDY 3: SWITCHING FROM THE PREFERRED BRAND

In both Study 1 and Study 2, respondents were exposed to a couple of indifferent products and a more attractive product, in turn. In this study, we ask respondents to form preference toward a particular ready-made product before they are exposed to an aspirant customized product. According to Garvey et al. (2017), even preferred brand can be switched to a less preferred brand if “jilting” occurs. In the context of this research, respondents are likely to switch incumbent brand to another alternative brand that was

comparable to the incumbent after they abandon the customization. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious wrist watch brands. All respondents were exposed two different styles of wrist watch (Brand *A* and Brand *B*) and asked to answer which was preferred. Then, we randomly assigned the respondents into two groups, of which Group 1 was exposed to more attractive customization brand *C*, whereas Group 2 was exposed to another ready-made watch *C*, which may or may not be preferred. Like Study 1 and Study 2, respondents in Group 1 tried to make their better watch than the chosen brand (*A* or *B*). However, some of them abandoned the customization due to “mass confusion” and thus felt “jilted”. Finally, we asked respondents to choose a brand again. As a result, respondents who felt that they were “jilted” in Group 1 were more likely to switch their brand to the less preferred brand than those who did not experience “jilting” in Group 2.

STUDY 4: THE MODERATING EFFECT (2)—THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ANTICIPATION

Jilting effect may occur if and only if a highly desirable product proves to be blocked (vs. pending) after it is available (Garvey et al., 2017). In the context of this research, jilting effect may not occur if the customers believe that it is difficult but still possible (pending) to order their best products via the customization system. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious aroma brands. All respondents were given one out of two aromas *A* and *B* and asked to answer which was preferred. They were then exposed to the highly desirable customization brand *C* and asked to try to make their better aroma than the chosen incumbent brand (*A* or *B*). We randomly divided the respondents into two groups, of which Group 1 (blocked group) was asked to make an order with no time limits, whereas Group 2 (pending group) was asked to do so within twenty minutes. Some respondents in both groups abandoned the customization. We asked such abandoning respondents to choose a brand out of two brands, *A* and *B*, again. As a result, respondents from Group 1 (blocked group) were more likely to switch their brands than those from Group 2 (pending group).

STUDY 5: SPILLOVER JILTING EFFECT

In previous studies in this research, respondents were exposed to a customization system under the third brand (*C*) different from two ready-made brands (*A* and *B*) that were previously shown. This experimental design was based on Garvey et al. (2017). On the other hand, Litt, Khan, and Shiv (2010) imply that jilting effect may occur even if the highly desirable aspirant product was launched under the same brand as one of two ready-made brands (*A* or *B*). In the context of this research, jilting effect can occur in the hybrid customization system. To test the hypothesis, we conducted a laboratory experiment using fictitious wrist watch brands. All respondents were exposed two different styles of wrist watch (brand *A* and brand *B*), asked to answer which was preferred, and, then, exposed to a customization system. Now, we randomly assigned the respondents into two groups, of which Group 1 was asked to read a scenario “the system provide you a chance to get more attractive, custom-made watch launched by the brand that you preferred (*A* or *B*)”, whereas Group 1 was asked to read “This system provides you with a chance to get more attractive, custom-made watch launched by the brand that you preferred (*A* or *B*)”, whereas Group 2 was asked to read a scenario “This system provides you with a chance to get more attractive, custom-made watch launched by the third brand that you were exposed (*C*)”. Then, respondents in both groups were asked to try to build their own watch. Some respondents abandoned the customization due to “mass confusion” and thus felt “jilted”. Finally, we asked respondents to choose a brand (*A* or *B*) once again. As a result, some jilted respondents in Group 1 as well as Group 2 switch their brands to a less attractive brand, and the number of brand switching is higher in Group 1 than in Group 2.

DISCUSSION

The results show that consumers may incline to switch their brands even to less attractive brands when they try to customize an aspirant product but fail it due to “mass confusion”. It is confirmed if the consumers once anticipated that it is possible for them to make better products via the customization system, but they perceived that it is impossible after that. And such kind of brand switching is more likely to occur in the hybrid customization system. As mentioned in the introduction, more and more firms

introduce the hybrid customization to make it easier for customers to upgrade (vs. downgrade) their purchased products to custom-made (vs. ready-made) products under the same brand. However, the switching to any competitive brands.

Managers should not induce their customers to try customization without considering jilting effect. Companies offering customization service are required to make effort to find those who are tolerant to mass confusion and capable of completing customization. When companies find that there already exist customers who have difficulty customizing products, they should support such customers. There may not be much hope of getting customers with the experience of jilt back to ready-made products under the same brand.

MAIN REFERENCES

- Garvey, M.A., Meloy, G.M., & Shiv, B. (2017). The jilting effect: antecedents, mechanisms, and consequences for preference. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 54(5), 785-798. doi: 10.1509/jmr.14.0373
- Huffman, C., & Kahn, B. (1998). Variety for sale: mass customization or mass confusion. *Journal of Retailing*, 74(4), 491-513. doi: 10.1016/S0022-4359(99)80105-5
- Kaplan, M.A., & Haenlein M. (2006). Toward a parsimonious definition of traditional and electronic mass customization. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 23(2), 168-182. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-5885.2006.00190.x
- Litt, A., Khan, U., & Shiv, B. (2010). Lusting while loathing: parallel counterdriving of wanting and liking. *Psychological Science*, 21(1), 118-125. doi: 10.1177/0956797609355633