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 impact 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.

Short Bio

Jeff Inman joined the faculty of the Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh in 2000 and in 2008 assumed the position of Associate Dean of Research and Faculty. He is President-Elect of the Society for Consumer Psychology, former President of the Association for Consumer Research. His research focuses on behavioral science and consumer decision-making. He is on the editorial board of the leading marketing journals, including the Journal of Marketing Research, the Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Consumer Research, Marketing Science, the Journal of Consumer Psychology, IJRM, and the Journal of Retailing. He is also an associate editor at JMR and JM. He teaches a course in retail analytics, a doctoral seminar in Market Behavior, and leads a session on patient satisfaction in the UPMC-Katz Physician Leadership Program. Jeff received his BSME from General Motors Institute (now Kettering University), his MBA from Indiana University, and his Ph.D. from the University of Texas. He has published over 50 journal articles, 34 of which have appeared in the top marketing journals (Journal of Marketing Research, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Consumer Research, and Marketing Science).