Undecidable? Categorization and its effects

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Summary

The main aim of this thesis is to gain a better understanding of the effects of categorization when products can be categorized into multiple categories or cannot be clearly categorized into an existing category. This thesis focuses on products or producers that cannot be easily categorized because they are new. Insight from studies in organization theory and marketing literature on categorization are structured through four themes. The first theme involves the phenomenon of category spanning and the consequences of spanning multiple categories. Theme 2 relates to the phenomenon that different types of market actors might disagree on the categorical membership of the same product or producer. Theme 3 deals with the fact that categories are dynamic and evolve over time. The fourth theme relates to communicating categorical membership by providing – or not providing – visual and textual category cues. These four themes are addressed in four different chapters.

In Chapter 2 a framework for developing effective product service systems that span multiple categories is described and empirically tested. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of category cues and describes how producers’ decisions to use these category cues are influenced by their competitive context and their competitive position. Chapter 4 explains how providing category labels that vary in their degree of matureness affect consumers’ newness perceptions and willingness to pay. Finally, Chapter 5 proposes the concept of a classification gap and describes how such a classification gap has a negative effect on the market performance of a product. Based on these findings, practical implications are provided that will help producers to manage categorization issues, during the development and marketing phase of new products.
Samenvatting

Het voornaamste doel van dit proefschrift is om inzicht te krijgen in de effecten van categorisering wanneer producten gecategoriseerd kunnen worden in meerdere categorieën of wanneer producten niet duidelijk gecategoriseerd kunnen in een bestaande categorie. Dit proefschrift richt zich op producten en producenten die nieuw zijn en om die reden mogelijk niet gemakkelijk kunnen worden gecategoriseerd. In dit proefschrift zijn de inzichten uit studies in organisatietheorie en marketing literatuur over categorisering gestructureerd in vier thema’s. Het eerste thema gaat over het fenomeen ‘category spanning’ en de gevolgen van het combineren van meerdere categorieën. Thema 2 heeft betrekking op de mogelijkheid dat verschillende soorten marktactoren het niet eens zijn over het categorie lidmaatschap van een product of producent. Thema 3 betreft het feit dat categorieën dynamisch zijn en evolueren in de tijd. Het vierde thema richt zich op het communiceren van een categorie lidmaatschap door middel van het al dan niet verstrekken van visuele en tekstuele categorie signalen. Deze vier thema’s komen aan bod in vier verschillende hoofdstukken.

In Hoofdstuk 2 wordt een raamwerk gegeven en empirisch getoetst voor het ontwikkelen van effectieve product-dienstcombinaties die in meerdere categorieën geplaatst kunnen worden. Hoofdstuk 3 introduceert het concept ‘category markers’ en beschrijft hoe de beslissingen van producenten om deze categorie signalen te gebruiken worden beïnvloed door de competitieve context en de concurrentiepositie van deze producenten. In Hoofdstuk 4 wordt uitgelegd hoe het verstrekken van categorie labels, die variëren in de mate van volwassenheid, een invloed heeft op de perceptie van nieuwheid en de betalingsbereidheid van consumenten. Tenslotte, Hoofdstuk 5 introduceert het concept ‘classificatie kloof’ en beschrijft hoe een classificatie kloof een negatief effect heeft op het marktsucces van een product. Op basis van deze bevindingen worden in dit proefschrift praktische implicaties gegeven die producenten zullen helpen bij categorisering problemen tijdens het ontwikkelen en tijdens de marketing fase van nieuwe producten.
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For someone with an attention span of a fruit fly, it was quite challenging and risky to start a PhD. I could not have imagined that I would be able to study one single topic for four years and write a book. Apparently I managed. However, this achievement can’t be entirely attributed to me. It is also due to the effective supervision of my supervisors Nachoem and Gerda. Nachoem, thanks for your supervision. I’m inspired by your ability to approach things with a crystal clear line of reasoning in combination with a high degree of integrity. Gerda, also thanks for your effective supervision. I admire your pragmatism and your writing skills. In addition, I valued your hospitality during my visits in Melbourne. Oh, and congrats on beating Nachoem in terms of speed of providing feedback. At most I had to wait one night for your feedback, which helped me a lot in staying focused – despite all distractions – in the final stages of finishing my dissertation.

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About the author

Bram Kuijken is an Assistant Professor in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the Amsterdam Business School, University of Amsterdam. In 2008 he received his Master’s degree in Business Administration at the University of Amsterdam. After finishing his studies he worked for two years at the Marketing and Communication Department of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Amsterdam, where he was responsible for the marketing and recruitment of international MBA students. In 2011 he decided to start his PhD at the Amsterdam Business School as part of the research program ‘Creative Industries Scientific Program’. Bram has presented his work at international conferences on management and organization such as the European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium and the Academy of Management. In 2014 he was a visiting scholar for two months at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. In 2015 Bram received the Take-Off grant from Technology Foundation STW to further develop his online research platform www.alleeup.com, which focuses on gaining market insight for producers by selling their new products through an online sealed bid auction. The Take-Off program focuses on facilitating and stimulating entrepreneurship among entrepreneurial researchers from Dutch universities.

Grants and Awards

2015 Take-Off grant from STW, ‘Sales-based research: a new way to gather consumer insights’.

2014 First prize Insight Innovation Competition, IIEX North America 2014, for the most innovative online market research platform.

Journal papers under review

Kuijken, B., Leenders, M.A.A.M., Wijnberg, N.M., & Gemser, G. Mind the gap: differences in classification by the production and
consumption side of the market and music festival success. Under review (second round) at *European Journal of Marketing*.
Kuijken, B., Gemser, G., & Wijnberg, N.M. Effective Product-service systems. Under review (second round) at *Industrial Marketing Management*.

**Organized conferences**

13th PREBEM Conference 'Creativity and Innovation – Roadmap to the Future’. Hosted by the Amsterdam Business Research Institute (ABRI) from the VU University Amsterdam, and Amsterdam Business School (UvA). The PREBEM conference is organized for PhD researchers in Business Economics and Management.

**Refereed conference papers**


