Temporal Instability in Consumers’ Acquisition Intentions For Really New Products

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In the current research, we examine how characteristic differences between really-new products (RNPs) and just-new products (JNPs) alter people’s formation of long-term product-adoption intentions and affect the likelihood that people will then acquire new products. In two field studies, we find that people form fewer long-term adoption intentions and follow through on those intentions less often for RNPs than for JNPs. We also find that as time passes after intention formation, people become more likely to acquire JNPs and less likely to acquire RNPs. In a further two longitudinal field studies, we find support for our expectation that this difference in the likelihood of acquiring RNPs and JNPs as time passes results from differences in the state of the information networks for RNPs and JNPs and the differences in new product attitude accessibility that result. As time passes after intention formation, we find people encounter less new information for RNPs than JNPs and that the accessibility of their attitudes for RNPs decays at a faster rate than that for JNPs.

[to cite]:

[url]:
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PREDICTING CONSUMERS’ ADOPTION OF REALLY NEW COMMUNICATION AND ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTS*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current research is to examine how characteristic differences between really-new products (RNPs) and incrementally-new or just-new products (JNPs) influence people’s formation of long-term new product adoption intentions and affect the likelihood that people will ultimately acquire those new products. Hoeffler (2003) distinguishes the psychological newness of products along four dimensions. He notes that newer products are characterised by greater uncertainty in consumers’ estimates of the utility of the new product and their ability to assess cost-benefit tradeoffs, by more changes in consumers’ behavior required to realise the products’ benefits, and by the products’ ability to deliver more new or enhanced benefits.

We reason from this framework that when consumers consider RNPs and JNPs, they generate fewer potential benefits and more potential costs and constraints for newer products. Thus, when considering adoption of new products well in advance of an acquisition opportunity, we expect consumers are less likely to form intentions to adopt newer products. Moving from long-term intention formation to acquisition opportunities, consumers who intend to adopt new products construe those products differently—giving increased weight to products’ potential costs and constraints (Trope and Liberman 2000, 2003). With potential costs and constraints receiving greater weight, we expect consumers now evaluate new products less favorably than when forming intentions to adopt them and so are less likely to follow through on those intentions. With consumers generating more potential costs and constraints for RNPs, we expect that consumers are less likely to follow through on their intentions for newer products.

We also explore the effect of characteristic differences between RNPs and JNPs on when consumers actually acquire new products after forming an adoption intention. We find that after stating an intention to adopt a JNP in the next six months, consumers become more likely each month to follow through if they have not done so already. For RNPs, the opposite is true. Consumers are progressively less likely to follow through each month after stating an intention to adopt in the next 6 months.

We find support for an explanation of this latter finding. We present evidence that the rate of exposure to new information is less for RNPs than for JNPs. We hypothesise that forming an acquisition intention temporarily increases attitude accessibility (Morwitz and Fitzsimons 2004), producing the classic findings of selective perception of attitude-consistent new information (Fazio and Williams 1986). If this state of heightened attitude accessibility is maintained, the positive intentions underlying an intention to adopt a new product will become stronger over time. If, on the other hand, attitude accessibility dissipates shortly after forming an acquisition intention, this makes the consumer less selective in processing new information, so that those who had positive attitudes and intentions will “regress to the mean” and become less likely over time to follow through. We find support for our conjecture that people are less frequently exposed to information about RNPs than for JNPs. Consequently, attitude accessibility dissipates at a faster rate over time for those forming intentions for RNPs than for those forming intentions for JNPs. The implication of this set of findings is that marketing techniques that encourage consumers’ to form long-term adoption intentions build momentum toward product acquisition for JNPs, but these techniques have little longer-term effect on acquisition of RNPs.

We examine the temporal stability of consumers’ new product adoption intentions in a set of four field studies. In Study 1, we examine the likelihood that consumers form intentions to adopt new products by surveying 12,237 members of the CBS Television City online panel on their actual intentions to acquire each of a set of 28 new products (e.g., plasma flat screen television, blogging service, DVR, digital camera, cell phone with walkie-talkie feature) in the coming six months. For each new product, we measured average product newness among participants actually in the market for that product using a formative measure developed from Hoeffler (2003). Using this average product newness measure as a predictor, we find that participants were less likely to state an intention to acquire newer products. In Study 2, we examine the likelihood that consumers actually follow through on their intentions to adopt new products by resurveying a group of Study 1 intentioners four months after Study 1 on whether they actually acquired the new products they had earlier said they would buy in the next six months. As we expected, we find that product newness had a negative effect on the likelihood that participants reported acquiring the new products they stated an intention to acquire. That is, participants followed through on their acquisition intentions less often for newer products.

In Study 2, we also examined our expectation that the likelihood that consumers will acquire JNPs increases relative to that for RNPs as time passes after intention formation. As expected, we found a significant interaction between product newness and the months since intention formation on the timing of intention follow through. Put differently, the hazard rate for follow-through changed over months, with a different pattern for psychologically newer versus. less new technologies. Participants became more likely to acquire the JNPs they stated intentions to acquire as time passed since intention formation while they were less likely to follow through on acquiring RNPs as time passed.

In Study 3, we tested our conjecture that this difference in follow-through rates for JNPs and RNPs across time resulted because of differences in the state of their information networks and so differences in exposure to new information. As expected, we found that participants reported encountering more new information for JNPs than RNPs in the weeks after forming acquisition intentions. These differences in exposure to new information were also
expected to affect the rate of decay in consumers’ attitudes towards the products they intended to acquire. We expected that consumers’ attitude accessibility would decay at a faster rate for RNPs than for JNPs. In Study 3 and Study 4, we found support for our expectations as attitude accessibility decayed at a faster rate for RNPs in a one-and-one-half-week period commencing with intention formation and in a four-week period commencing 24-48 hours after intention formation.

These results extend our understanding of the link between consumers’ adoption intentions and their actual acquisition of new products. They highlight for marketers that the newer a product is positioned to be, the less likely consumers are to want to adopt it (Hoeffler, Moreau, and Malhotra 2005). Similarly, our findings have implications for market research methods that use intentions to forecast demand. It is common in new product forecasting models (e.g., BASES) to deflate intention to buy measures. Our findings show that the more psychologically new the product, the more adoption intentions require deflating. Our findings also highlight the effect of differences in new products’ information environments. Marketers of JNPs are able to build adoption momentum with consumers by marketing well in advance of product launch while marketers of RNPs may not.

These results also offer clear distinctions between the newness of a product and the newness of the technology underlying the product. For example, PDAs – a chronologically old technology – scored high on psychological newness for those who had not yet acquired one. We hope that these results serve as a catalyst for research on the effect of psychological newness on consumers’ use of the new products they acquire, on how consumers then share their new product experiences within their social networks, and on the effects of this word-of-mouth communication on subsequent new product adoption within the social network.

REFERENCES


