What Do Novice Consumers Remember?

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ABSTRACT - A recall advantage has been found for consumers with expert domain knowledge when searching, comprehending (i.e. Brucks 1985; Huffman and Houston 1993; Roehm and Sternthal 2001; Spence and Brucks 1997; Sujan 1985), and remembering (i.e. Cowley and Mitchell 2003; Maheswaran 1994) product information. The to-be-learned information is generally a written description of functional attributes (information about how a brand performs) for hypothetical brands or products (i.e. Cowley and Mitchell 2003; Huffman and Houston 1993; Johnson and Russo 1984; Srull 1983). In these studies, memory performance was calculated by accurate recall of the attributes: higher knowledge consumers (HKCs) consistently outperformed lower knowledge consumers (LKCs). Since HKCs are generally categorized as experts by their knowledge of functional attributes, it is not surprising that they would more effectively learn and remember this information. Less attention has been paid to what novices learn when they are exposed to brand or product information.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/9115/volumes/v32/NA-32

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ABSTRACT
A recall advantage has been found for consumers with expert domain knowledge when searching, comprehending (i.e. Brucks 1985; Huffman and Houston 1993; Roehm and Sternthal 2001; Spence and Brucks 1997 Sujan 1985), and remembering (i.e. Cowley and Mitchell 2003; Maheswaran 1994) product information. The to-be-learned information is generally a written description of functional attributes (information about how a brand performs) for hypothetical brands or products (i.e. Cowley and Mitchell 2003; Huffman and Houston 1993; Johnson and Russo 1984; Srull 1983). In these studies, memory performance was calculated by accurate recall of the attributes: higher knowledge consumers (HKCs) consistently outperformed lower knowledge consumers (LKCs). Since HKCs are generally categorized as experts by their knowledge of functional attributes, it is not surprising that they would more effectively learn and remember this information. Less attention has been paid to what novices learn when they are exposed to brand or product information.

CONSUMER EXPERTISE
Higher Knowledge Consumers
We hypothesize that if information concerning both descriptive attributes (how a brand looks) and functional attributes (how a brand works) is provided, HKCs are more likely to recall functional attribute information than descriptive attribute information, and more functional attribute information than LKCs. Consumers have been shown to transfer functional attribute knowledge from other related domains when learning about brands or models in new product categories (Gregan-Paxton and Roedder-John 1997), and specifically, when faced with new technologies (Moreau, Markman, and Lehmann 2001). We expect more functional knowledge in a specific domain when learning about brands or models in new product categories.

Lower Knowledge Consumers
Since LKCs tend to store physical attribute information (Mitchell and Dacin 1996), and since they are more likely to rely on surface structures when making judgments (Chi, Feltovich, and Glaser 1981), specifically when deciding how well a product will serve a need (Alba and Hutchinson 1987), it is possible that the physical attributes of a new product are used by LKCs to bring meaning to unfamiliar products. Therefore, when presented with information about a brand, LKCs are likely to learn descriptive attributes (i.e. the camera is silver and very thin), and to use descriptive attribute information when evaluating quality.

METHODOLOGY
Sixty-two undergraduate completed a knowledge measure for both digital and film cameras. They were then provided with information about four brands of digital cameras in four separate booklets. They were presented with both functional attributes (a list of attributes) and descriptive attributes (a photo of the camera) while they answered questions about their interest in the camera, the value of the camera, and when it might be useful. After a 15 minute filler task, participants were asked to recall the information they saw earlier and their thoughts while reading about the cameras.

RESULTS
Attributes Recalled
The mean number of attributes recalled was not significantly different between the digital camera knowledge groups (LKC_{digital}=11.33, HKC_{digital}=12.60, t=0.75, p=.45). Since all idea units including attribute information were coded as either functional or descriptive, a ratio was created. The proportion of functional attribute information recalled by HKCs was .67, which is significantly larger than .5 (t=2.87, p<.01). The proportion of functional attribute information recalled by LKCs was .32 (3.63 functional attributes), which is significantly less than the proportion recalled by HKCs of .67 (8.44 functional attributes, t=4.44, p<.0001). The proportion of descriptive attribute information recalled by LKCs was .68, which is significantly larger than .5 (t=3.44, p<.001).

The digital camera knowledge groups were subdivided by film camera knowledge. An ANOVA with both digital and film knowledge as independent factors reveals a significant effect for both digital camera knowledge (F(1, 56)=21.57, p<.0001) and film camera knowledge (F(1, 56)=5.79, p<.01), and the interaction between the two (F(1, 56)=6.69, p<.01). Respondents with film camera knowledge, in the low digital knowledge group, were more likely to recall functional attribute information than their counterparts with low film camera knowledge.

Benefits Recalled
The mean number of benefits recalled was not significantly different between higher and lower knowledge digital camera consumers (LKC_{digital}=3.68, HKC_{digital}=4.20, t=0.61, p=.55). The proportion of functional benefit information recalled is not different for LKCs compared to HKCs (LKC_{digital}=.85, HKC_{digital}=.85, t=0.96, p=.35). Although LKCs are not able to explicitly remember functional attributes, they are able to report functional benefits.

DISCUSSION
The results reveal that when LKCs recall the same amount of information as HKCs, but LKCs remember the descriptive attribute information. This type of attribute information may be used by LKCs when evaluating brands since they were most interested in the camera that had the fewest features, but the latest design. The findings reported here contribute to our knowledge of what novice consumers remember about product information and what information they use in their decisions. This is important because the past research emphasizes what expert consumers remember, or what novice consumers do not remember (with the exception of Huffman and Houston 1993).

Another notable finding is that knowledge of a previous technology improved memory for functional attributes of a new technology. LKC_{digital}/HKC_{film} participants were better able to recall the functional attribute information for digital cameras than LKC_{digital}/LKC_{film} participants. Past research has demonstrated that knowledge about previous technologies can affect expectations for a new product (Moreau, Markham, and Lehmann 2001),...
and that HKCs use analogies in brand evaluations (Roehm and Sternthal 2001), but not that previous technology knowledge can affect what information is recalled.

REFERENCES


