The Role of Creative Cognition on Consumer Feature Reliance

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When certain creative cognition (generative or exploratory) is salient, consumers tend to focus on brand information with distinct levels of abstraction. This differential focus eventually results in categorization and memory differences. Specifically, when the generative type of creative cognitions is salient, consumers rely more on abstract information, whereas when the exploratory type of creative cognitions is salient, they are more likely to attend to concrete information. Two experiments with different manipulations of creativity and distinct judgment tasks were conducted. We found converging evidence for our theory across these two experiments: 1) consumers with generative (exploratory) creativity are more likely to use goal-based (feature-based) categorization; 2) when generative (exploratory) creativity is salient, consumers have better recognition of abstract (concrete) information.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Creative thinking is prevalent in consumers’ daily life. The existing creativity literature, has focused on identifying the antecedents of creativity (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Forster, Friedman, and Liberman 2004). This paper goes beyond by exploring the consequences of a creative process. Specifically, we predict that the types of creative process consumers utilize (generative or exploratory) affect consumers’ reliance on various levels of product features, and ultimately their performance on categorization and memory tasks.

Theory and Hypotheses

The cognitive approach of creativity is built on the Geneplore model, in which creative thinking is composed of the top-down generative and the bottom-up exploratory processes (Finke, Ward, and Smith 1992). When the generative type of creative cognition is in use, individuals generate a preliminary mental representation of a solution, or a “preinventive structure,” as a primary element that guides the search for final solutions (Finke et al. 1992). The preinventive structure, which may appear in the form of an idea, a concept, a picture, a sound or even just a feeling, points out the direction to solve a particular problem. On the other hand, when the exploratory type of creative cognition is employed, individuals evaluate different contexts or perspectives, and search for limitations and meanings that may attach to potential solutions. Such evaluations and searches will lead individuals toward certain directions and away from others (Moreau and Dahl 2005).

Types of creative cognitions consumers have can either be determined by situational factors or individual intrinsic preferences. For example, Moreau and Dahl (2005) show that, depending on the specific creative task, generative or exploratory creative cognitions may become dominant. In addition, difference can also be observed at an individual level. When looking for solutions for a problem, some consumers emphasize on coming up with ideas via a generative process, others focus on examining the existing resources and limits via an exploratory process. We expect that once an alternative cognition (generative or exploratory) is adopted, through either intrinsic personal preference or situational priming, it will trigger reliance on different types of brand or product features.

The generative type of creativity process often relies on abstract thinking. Individuals will focus on the ideals and goals that need to be achieved and come up with an abstract concept or idea that could represent the solution of the focal problem. Consumers engaging in the exploratory type of creative process, however, evaluate and interpret the preinventive structure from a concrete or specific perspective. They delve into the details in order to use the existing information/resources to the maximal degree. Therefore, generative creativity attracts attention to abstract features while exploratory creativity triggers reliance on concrete features. Accordingly, we expect that when generative versus exploratory creative cognition becomes salient, consumers will exhibit differences in categorization and memorization.

Categorization

The categorization literature suggests two broad approaches of categorization: goal based (i.e., products that serve the same goal or objective are grouped together) versus feature based (i.e., products that share similar features are grouped together) (Loken and Ward 1990; Ratneshwar et al. 2001). Since goal-based categories are constructed based on the abstract overall values or benefits (e.g., healthiness, cleanliness, happiness), we expect that it occurs more often with consumers who emphasize on abstract information. On the other hand, since feature-based categorization is constructed based on specific concrete product features (e.g., dairy content), it is more likely to be adopted by individuals who attend to concrete information.

Consumers who are chronic adopters of generative creativity construe solutions at an abstract level, and we expect that their reliance on abstract information will lead them to utilize more of goal-based categorizations. Consumers of the exploratory creativity type rely more on concrete information and tend to engage in feature-based categorization.

Memory

Literature has shown that the more attention consumers pay to a particular piece of information, the better it will be registered in consumers’ memory, and the more likely it will be retrieved later ( Craik and Lockhart 1972). When generative (exploratory) creativity cognitions are salient, consumers tend to pay more attention to abstract (concrete) features, which will result in better recognition of abstract (concrete) information.

Experiments and Analysis

Two studies were conducted to test the effect of creative cognitions on the level of product information consumers rely on. In the first study, we examine the first hypothesis in the context of product categorization. Individual preference of types of creativity is measured using a personality scale adapted from existing literature (Moreau and Dahl 2005). In the second study, we examine the second hypothesis in the context of memory of abstract versus concrete brand information, and creativity type is manipulated by asking participants to perform tasks that involve more of generative versus exploratory cognitions. Through a) using both situational prime and measure of individual preference of creativity types, and b) testing the robustness of the theory in both product categorization and memory contexts, we found consistent support for our proposed theory that whereas generative creativity leads to reliance on abstract information, exploratory creativity increases the use of concrete features.

References


