Disfluency As a Desirable Cue of Novelty

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Recent research has shown that processing fluency and disfluency both enhance consumer attitudes however no explanation has been proposed as to the conflicting effects. Across two experiments we provide evidence suggesting that disfluency serves as a signal of novelty that evokes interest—an outcome distinct to the fluency-liking association.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The positive effect of fluency—the subjective experience of ease in processing information—on consumer attitude has been widely supported. Fluency may increase the perceived believability, accuracy, familiarity, value, liking, and even preference of an advertisement (see Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009 for a review). Contrary to this, recent consumer research has shown that disfluency can also be considered desirable. In fact, disfluency may enhance the perceived instrumentality of goal fulfilling objects (Labroo & Kim, 2009), the competence of professional services (Thompson & Ince, 2013), and the uniqueness of special-occasion products (Pocheptsova, Labroo, & Dhar, 2010). To our knowledge, no study has provided an adequate account of the desirable effect of disfluency and the competing effects of fluency and disfluency.

A review of the psychology literature suggests that fluency is highly associated with the feeling of familiarity. People perceive easy-to-read words as more familiar than words that are hard-to-read (Whittlesea & Williams, 1998). Moreover, non-famous or unfamiliar celebrity names seem more familiar and famous if ease of processing is enhanced (Jacoby, Woloshyn, & Kelley, 1989). Disfluency—the opposite of fluency—should therefore signal novelty. Although the association between fluency and familiarity is not novel in the extant literature, no research has examined whether disfluency is associated with novelty. Accordingly, we hypothesized

Hypothesis 1: Disfluency is associated with the perception of novelty.

Decades of research in psychology and marketing have shown that consumers associate familiarity with positivity (see Bornstein, 1989 for a review). Given this, why is disfluency desirable to consumers if it is associated with novelty. Novelty is an antecedent of interest—an evolutionarily adaptive emotion that motivates people to approach new information and experiences (Silvia, 2006). Interest is not necessarily positive in affective valence; for instance, people are more interested in novel and disturbing pictures than pleasant pictures (Turner & Silvia, 2006). Interest is therefore distinctive from enjoyment and liking. Following this, fluency may lead to enjoyment and liking whereas disfluency may result in interest. Thus, consumers may perceive both fluency and disfluency as desirable. The current research is the first to investigate and differentiate the effect of disfluency on fluency and disfluency. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Disfluency may serve as a novelty cue that evokes the emotion of interest.

Hypothesis 3: Disfluency has an indirect effect on behavioral intention through novelty and interest.

Hypothesis 4: Disfluency has an indirect effect on product innovativeness through novelty and interest.

Hypothesis 5: The indirect effect of disfluency hypothesized in hypothesis 5 increases behavioral intention toward the advertised product.

We conducted two experiments and a follow-up study to examine the above hypotheses. In Study 1, 118 participants (68 males) from an online consumer panel were introduced to a new product—the Leap Motion Controller. Participants read a vignette that described the functionality, the usage, and the specifications of the product. The vignette was randomly displayed either in a difficult-to-read (disfluent) font (i.e., 10-point Times New Roman in grey; Sample) or an easy-to-read (fluent) font (i.e., 14-point Times New Roman in black; Sample). Subsequently, participants completed Alexander, Lynch, and Wang’s four-item product innovativeness scale (2008).

Drawing from previous conceptualization of novelty, we developed a four-item scale to measure the novelty appraisal. The participant rated the extent to which they perceive the controller as novel, unfamiliar, complex, and unique on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The validity of the scale was confirmed by an exploratory factorial analysis with varimax rotation. At the end of the study, a memory test of the product information on the vignette was administrated. Participants also completed a manipulation check for the fluency manipulation by rating whether the information on the vignette was easy-to-read on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The disfluency manipulation was successful ($p < .001$). The fluent condition and the disfluent condition, however, performed equally well on the memory test for the product information ($p = .456$). Using the bootstrapping approach, we conducted a mediation analysis based on 10,000 bootstrapping samples. In support of hypothesis one and four, disfluency had a significant indirect effect on product innovativeness through novelty ($b = .062, 95\% CI [.010, .157]$).

In Study 2, 107 (22 males) undergraduate students viewed and evaluated products in four different advertisements. The printed text in the advertisements was manipulated to either be a difficult-to-read or easy-to-read font. Participants rated each product’s novelty on the novelty scaled used in Study 1 and completed Olshavsky & Spreng’s two-item product innovativeness scale (1996). Participants then rated whether they felt confused, interested, fear, happy, sad, surprised, and bored after viewing the advertisement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). After viewing all the advertisements, participants completed a manipulation check where they reported whether the information on the advertisements were difficult to read. A memory test of the advertisement content was also administrated.

Using the bootstrapping approach, we conducted a mediation analysis based on 10,000 bootstrapping samples. The full mediation regression model significantly accounted for 37% of the variance in behavioral intention, $F = 14.75, p < .001$. Supporting hypothesis one to five, disfluency had a significant indirect effect on behavioral intention through novelty, interest, and perceived innovation, $b = .002, 95\% CI [.0001, .011]$. In fact, disfluency had significant indirect effects on intention through: (1) novelty, (2) novelty and interest, and (3) novelty and innovativeness, $b = .040, 95\% CI [.006, .112], b = .020, 95\% CI [.003, .065]$, and $b = .021, 95\% CI [.005, .056]$, respectively. These results were replicated in a follow-up study that involved a consumer panel sample and the same procedures.
porting our hypotheses, disfluency had a significant indirect effect on behavioral intention through novelty, interest, and product innovativeness, \( b = .031, 95\% \text{ CI [.001, .148]} \). These findings show that disfluency can be desirable for consumers as it may serve as a novelty cue that evokes interest and in turn, enhance the perceived innovativeness and behavioral intention of a product.

REFERENCES


