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Easy Like a Sunday Morning: How the Fluency of Analogies Affects Innovation Liking

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This research investigates how consumers judge innovations based on meta-cognitive experiences they draw from the processing fluency of analogies in advertisements. An online-experiment with 503 consumers tests the relationship between analogy similarity and processing fluency and the effect the fluency of analogies has on innovation liking and purchase intention.

[to cite]:

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How The Fluency of Analogies Affects Innovation Liking

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the search of successful communication strategies for innovations, authors have identified analogies (Feiereisen, Wong, and Broderick 2008). An analogy compares the novel with the familiar and helps people to utilize pre-existing knowledge to understand the unfamiliar (Gregan-Paxton and Roedder John 1997). The optimal analogy was suggested to allow the consumer to map existing knowledge from a base (e.g., diary) to a target analog (e.g., tablet-PC) to understand the key benefits of an innovation (Hoeffler 2003).

However, people may be rarely able to match each correspondence between a base and a target (Day and Gentner 2007). Instead they may also draw information from how fluent they can process the analogy and interpret these meta-cognitive experiences (Schwarz 2004) in the light of the consumption context (Pocheptsova, Labroo, and Dhar 2010).

In an online-experiment with 503 German consumers, we investigated 1) the processing fluency of analogies, and 2) its effect on innovation liking and purchase intention, testing the usual fluency-liking link and its reversal.

Findings from analogy research indicate a good and sound–and therefore fluent–analogical match as based on relational similarities as well as surface similarities (Gentner and Markman 1995). We therefore hypothesize that *participants will judge an analogy as being more fluent when the base and the target are perceived as similar* (H_1).

In a second step, we aimed at investigating the phenomenon of naïve beliefs which determine how individuals interpret their meta-cognitive experiences. Research found that stimuli which are processed fluently are perceived as familiar and elicit a positive affect in contrast to disfluently processed stimuli (Schwarz 2004). However, think of yourself at the rollercoaster park. Do you go for the well-known and slightly boring or the latest and most exciting ones? Are you better 'safe than sorry' or is your motto 'no risk, no fun'? Authors found that, dependent on the consumption context which may activate a specific naïve belief, consumers prefer a disfluent stimulus, if the disfluent experience is, for example, attributed to adventure (Song and Schwarz 2009), product exclusivity (Pocheptsova et al. 2010) or quality (Galak and Nelson 2010). A similar effect may be true when consumers make decisions about innovative products based on marketing information. On the one hand, they may prefer fluency and like the product better if no additional information is given about the innovative degree of the product, relying on the common naïve belief 'If it is familiar, it must be good.' On the other hand, when an advert clearly indicates the product as an innovation, individuals might prefer disfluency, attributing the feeling of novelty to the innovative degree of the product. We therefore hypothesize that *participants will show increased innovation liking when the analogy is fluent (vs. disfluent)* (H_{2a}). However, *if the advert clearly indicates the product as an innovation, participants will show increased innovation liking when the analogy is disfluent (vs. fluent)* (H_{2b}). The same hypotheses were formulated for purchase intention (H_{3a-b}).

In an online-experiment with a 2 (analogy: similar vs. dissimilar) × 2 (innovativeness claim: without vs. with) between-subjects design, 503 German consumers, consisting of 44.5 % females between 19 and 40 years, were randomly assigned to one of the advertisements and asked to fill in the questionnaire.

A tablet-PC and all-in-one media player device were chosen based on a round of experts (n = 10). Two analogical bases for each product were selected, one similar, containing relational as well as surface similarities (tablet-PC: diary; player: DVD-player), and one dissimilar, containing only relational similarities (tablet-PC: storage room; player: distribution room). An advert with a picture and a one-sentence copy text used the analogy (e.g., "like a diary") as a claim. To manipulate the indication as an innovation, we chose a realistic setting by using the word "innovative" in the copy text ("innovativeness claim"). The manipulation of analogy similarity was deemed successful across conditions ($ps < .05$).

Fluency was measured on a two-item scale. The scale for innovation liking was adapted from Boyd and Mason (1999), and purchase intention was measured by one item.

To test the hypotheses, several 2 (Analogy) × 2 (Innovativeness Claim) ANOVAs were performed followed by planned contrasts.

For fluency, there was a significant main effect of the type of analogy ($F(1, 499) = 27.8, p < .001$) but no effect of innovativeness claim or a significant interaction effect. Results of planned contrasts for the single products revealed that the dissimilar analogy was perceived as more disfluent across conditions and products ($ps < .05$). H_1 could be supported.

For innovation liking, a significant interaction across products was found ($F(1,499) = 4.38, p < .05$). A series of planned contrasts revealed that H_{2a} and H_{3a} could only be supported for the Tablet PC but not for the Media Player.

A significant interaction was also found for purchase intention ($F(1,499) = 5.06, p < .05$). Performing a series of planned contrasts, H_{2b} and H_{3b} could again only be supported for the Tablet-PC but not for the Media Player.

Our study supports the idea that analogies have an effect beyond the content they convey, and, at the same time, adds to the consistency of findings in fluency research. Furthermore, the partial reversion of the fluency effect by using a relatively realistic manipulation contributes to its current theoretical discussion (Galak and Nelson 2010). It further illustrates an important practical insight: explicitly claiming that a product is innovative might interfere with other parts of an advertisement.

We aimed at a somewhat realistic setting by testing true innovations, which had several drawbacks: The selection of stimuli was limited, and confounding variables, such as the visual complexity of the products, may have caused the inconsistent results in reversing the fluency effect. A replication in a more controlled setting with a stronger manipulation in indicating the consumption context and activating a naïve belief will help to produce more consistent results and define a mediating variable for a more profound explanation of the reversal.

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