If It'S Hard to Read, It'S Worth It: When Metacognitive Effort Enhances Product Value

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We examine the effect of metacognitive effort on consumers’ evaluations in domains in which skill is an important driver of value. We find that describing a service provider less fluently enhances perceptions of its expertise, increasing willingness to pay and perceived value. Avoidance goals reverse the effect.

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When is disfluency desirable? The Effects of Metacognitive Effort on Product Evaluations and Forecasting Behavior

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

“If it’s Hard to Read, It’s Worth It: When Metacognitive Effort Enhances Product Value”

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Extensive research demonstrates that people’s attitude toward a product becomes less favorable when product information is hard to process. Song and Schwarz (2008) showed that people misread the difficulty of reading a description of a target behavior as indicative of the difficulty of executing it. For instance, lowering the processing fluency of a description of an exercise routine or a cooking recipe significantly increased perceptions of required effort and skill and decreased one’s willingness to engage in these tasks. Recent research (Pocheptsova, Labroo, and Dhar 2010) shows that in the context of special-occasion products, disfluency increases product attractiveness by making it appear unique or uncommon. Building on this research, we propose that disfluency has a positive effect on consumers’ evaluative judgments in domains in which skill is an important driver of value. Consumers frequently hire professional agents or contract services because of their specialized skills and expertise. In such contexts, will product valuations increase when processing is less (rather than more) fluent? We examine this hypothesis in two studies.

In study 1, fifty-eight students were randomly assigned to either a low or high fluency condition. All participants were presented with a description of a service that helps students apply to college. Processing fluency was manipulated via background contrast (light blue font vs. black font). As expected, participants in the low fluency condition rated the service description as more difficult to read than participants in the high fluency condition. More interestingly, those in the low fluency condition reported higher willingness to pay ($191.2 vs. $76.4) for a one-subscription ($1, 56)=3.7, p =.058), and perceived greater value in the target service (5.0 vs. 4.1) than those in the high fluency condition ($1, 56)=6.9, p <.05). Lowering processing fluency increased participants’ perceptions of how much expertise the target service provided. Notably, expertise ratings were a significant predictor of perceived service value ($\beta=.47, p <.01$).

Recent research indicates that disfluent stimuli are perceived as riskier because they are viewed as more novel/less familiar than fluent stimuli (Song and Schwarz, 2009). Thus, in study 2, we predicted that when an avoidance goal is made salient, disfluency will reduce consumers’ valuations, despite its positive effect on skill inferences. One hundred and nine undergraduate students were randomly assigned to a 2 (goal: approach vs. avoidance) x 2 fluency (high vs. low) between subjects design. Participants were asked to imagine that they had relatives coming to visit and that they were searching for a restaurant for dinner on a Saturday evening. In the approach goal condition, participants read that they could be adventurous in their restaurant choice, as their relatives like trying new things. In contrast, in the avoidance goal condition, participants read that they should be conservative in their restaurant choice, as their relatives avoid trying new things. All participants then read a description of a local restaurant. The manipulation of processing fluency was the same as in study 1. As expected, there was a significant goal by fluency interaction on participants’ willingness to pay for the restaurant ($\beta (1, 104)=8.3, p <.01$). While in the approach goal condition disfluency enhanced evaluations of the restaurant; this effect was reversed in the avoidance condition. Moreover, those in the low fluency condition expected the restaurant’s chef to be more skilled ($\beta (1, 104)=3.9, p =.05$), and the restaurant to be more novel/less conventional than those in the high fluency condition ($\beta (1, 104)=5.6, p <.05$). In the approach condition, ratings of the chef’s skills were a significant positive predictor of restaurant evaluations ($\beta =.41, p <.01$). In contrast, when avoidance goals were made salient, perceived novelty was a negative predictor of restaurant evaluations ($\beta =-.27, p <.01$), while the effect of perceived skill became nonsignificant ($\beta =.41, p <.01$).

A third study will test whether the positive effect of disfluency extends to domains in which convenience, rather than skill, is the primary benefit sought by consumers (e.g., home cleaning, laundry services, etc.). We expect consumers’ willingness to pay for such products or services to increase when they are described in a less fluent manner because of consumers’ naïve theories about the amount of effort that is required to perform them. Overall, our findings point out to a different consumption domain in which experiences of disfluency can enhance consumers’ evaluative responses.

“Is What You Feel What They See?”

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People frequently use products to express their identity and infer the identities of others. In this paper, building on the body of research on subjective experiences, we propose that people will use feelings of ease or difficulty of information processing when evaluating products that signal in-group or out-group identities.

A body of research on subjective experiences shows that these experiences can serve as information for decision-making, and that the interpretation of such experiences is context dependent. Ease of processing (fluency) is often interpreted to mean that a product is familiar, more common, and this perception leads to increased liking (Schwarz 2004). Recent research also illustrates that less fluent products are seen as less common and more unique. This leads to a preference for these products in consumption domains where uniqueness adds to the perceived value, such as special occasion goods (Pocheptsova, Labroo and Dhar 2010). Applying these findings to the context of identity signaling, we propose that less fluent products will be seen as better signals of identity compared to more fluent ones. People often use products to communicate about themselves to others. To ensure that these exchanges are effective, signaling products must effectively associate users with other people who have the same identity, as well as differentiate them from outsiders (Berger and Heath 2007). We propose that less fluent products will be more effective signals when one tries to differentiate an in-group from other groups, as low fluency would indicate that the product is less common and more unique.

In our first study, we tested the effect of fluency on the perception of signaling quality of a product. Participants imagined they were buying a t-shirt that was described as being very popular on their campus. Participants were presented with either a low or
high fluency t-shirt, and rated its signaling quality of either a low or high fluency t-shirt. In addition, half of the participants read a short article describing their university’s success in a sporting event against a rival school. This was designed to get participants to focus on associating with their university community rather than differentiating themselves from others. Consistent with our predictions, we find that the low fluency t-shirt was viewed as a better signal of one’s identity compared to the high fluency t-shirt. However, when participants were motivated to identify with their university, they focused on the common usage of the product among group members, and fluency did not affect the perceptions of the signaling quality of the product.

The second study addresses the extent to which the desire to differentiate the self from others demonstrated in the first study affects the perception of processing ease or difficulty of signaling products. In this study, participants were shown an advertisement for a coffee mug that was described as popular among an in-group (their campus), an out-group (a rival school), or was generally popular (control). Consistent with the results of study 1, participants viewed the in-group mug advertisement as less fluent compared to the out-group and control conditions. This suggests that the perception of self-relevant identities as being more unique can carry over to affect perceptions of signaling products. Moreover, no significant difference in perceived fluency between the out-group and control conditions implies that the results were not driven by a desire to denigrate a disliked out-group, but instead were influenced by the participants’ views of signals of their own identity.

By showing the role that fluency can play in identity communication, this research is the first to our knowledge to connect these two lines of research. Our results suggest that low fluency products are perceived as better identity signals because they are more unique and thus more effective in differentiating members from non-members. Further, peoples’ beliefs about their uniqueness may carry over to affect their perceptions of the fluency of products that signal their identity.

“Choice Difficulty Moderates Inferences about Preference Generalizability”

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Consumers may often draw upon choices as a source of information for gauging their preferences. Self-perception theory posits that people learn about their preferences by observing their own behavior (Bem, 1972). More recently, Bodner and Prelec (2003) have argued that people’s choices signal something about their traits and dispositions to themselves and others.

Although the impact of choices on self inferences is well-documented, relatively little is known about the impact of the metacognitive experiences that accompany those choices. The present research explores how the metacognitive experience of choice difficulty impacts the inferences people make about the generalizability of their preferences. Holding all else constant, people who easily prefer one option to another are likely to have a stronger underlying preference for the features of the chosen option and are more likely to make similar choices in the future than people who struggle with the decision. Decision-makers who are asked to predict the likelihood that they will make similar choices in the future are likely to focus on extracting what information choice difficulty provides about their underlying preferences. They are likely to infer that the easier a choice feels, the stronger their underlying preferences, and the more likely they are to choose similar options in the future.

When choices feel difficult, decision-makers may infer that their underlying preference is weaker and that they are less likely to make similar choices in the future. The metacognitive experience when choices are difficult is likely to include competing emotions, preferences, motives, and values. Making salient a person’s multiple motives and values may cast doubt on any one unified set of decision rules, set competing expectations for future behavior, and lead decision-makers to discount the diagnosticity of a particular choice for predicting their future choices. This may lead decision-makers to make less extreme predictions about their future behavior.

The inferences that people draw from choice difficulty are likely to be bounded by the perceived relevance of the current choice to choices in other domains, situations, or contexts. Thus, the inferences people draw may often be domain-specific. Additionally, the inferences people draw from choice difficulty may be limited to self versus social inferences. Observers do not have direct access to a decision-maker’s feelings of choice difficulty and cannot be sure whether their own feelings of choice difficulty are representative of the individual whose preferences they are assessing. Observers, therefore, may place less diagnostic weight on choice difficulty as a cue for assessing a decision-maker’s underlying preferences and predicting that person’s behavior.

Study 1 examined the extent to which people would generalize their risk preferences from easy or difficult choices between low- and high-risk lotteries. Participants made a series of choices between lotteries that were constructed so that the low-risk options were always chosen. Choice difficulty was manipulated via relative attractiveness (i.e. the difference in relative value between the lotteries). Generalization was measured by asking participants to rate the likelihood that they would engage in risky behaviors in gambling, investment, and health/safety domains using the domain-specific risk attitude scale (Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002). Participants rated themselves less likely to gamble at a casino, in a poker game, at a horse race, or at a sporting event when choices were easy than when they were difficult. Generalization was domain specific–choice difficulty did not impact the inferences participants made about their risk preferences in the investment or health/safety domains. This finding suggests that the inferences drawn from choices have to do with the specific content of those choices and the perceived relevance of that content to other domains, situations, or contexts. To explore whether preference generalization was limited to self versus social judgments, observers were instructed to review a previous participant’s choices and predict the likelihood that the person would engage in risky behaviors in each of the three domains. Observers drew weaker inferences than did the decision-makers themselves. Furthermore, observers did not draw different inferences from easy choices versus difficult choices.

Study 2 utilized a fluency manipulation to vary choice difficulty while holding constant the actual relative value of the choice options. Fluency was manipulated by presenting choice options in an easy-to-read or difficult-to-read font. As in Study 1, decision-makers drew stronger inferences about their gambling risk preferences from easy choices than hard choices. These inferences were domain-specific and did not extend to social judgments.

Together, these studies show that people make less extreme generalizations about their preferences when choices feel difficult versus easy. Although easy choices engender confidence that similar options will be chosen in the future, this confidence may often be undiagnostic of actual choice behavior. Implications for accurately assessing preferences and predicting behavior will be discussed.
“Debiasing Effect of Fluency on Linear Trend Prediction”
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The assessment of future potential—that is, whether a certain event or characteristic will develop, continue, or stop over time—is a fundamental part of everyday judgments. For instance, people predict whether economic growth rates will continue or crash before they invest in the stock market, and employers predict whether a promising job candidate’s career will continue to rise or eventually cease. Previous research has shown that people from Western cultures tend to predict that linear trends will continue into the future rather than change direction (Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001). The present research suggests processing disfluency can attenuate this heuristic by disturbing the feeling of momentum.

Processing fluency is the metacognitive experience of ease or difficulty associated with processing information and can be affected by incidental variables such as exposure duration, high or low figure-ground contrast, and easy or difficult-to-read fonts. Recent research identifies simulation as a mechanism underlying fluency effects. When people process information, they oftentimes mentally simulate the content; the nature of this simulation influences their subsequent judgments. For instance, people predict a task will require more time when the instructions are printed in difficult-to-read font than in easy-to-read font, presumably because simulation requires more time for the former (Song & Schwarz, 2008). Moreover, fluency increases liking for repeatedly presented stimuli (Zajonc, 1980); but blocking simulation of the presented oral stimuli (words) by chewing gum actually attenuates this traditional fluency effect (Topolinski & Strack, 2009).

These results suggest that judgments regarding a trend can be influenced by fluency. When people process information about a trend, fluency may lead to faster simulation of the trajectory, feeding the sensation of momentum, whereas disfluency may disrupt simulation and contribute to feelings of discontinuation. Therefore, we predicted that fluent processing of a trend will increase judgments that the trend will continue into the future. Specifically, we hypothesized that people who read descriptions of increasing or decreasing trends in easy-to-read font would be more likely to predict that the trend would continue into the future, compared to people exposed to difficult-to-read font.

In study 1, one-hundred thirty participants read a passage about a psychology professor’s career trajectory from graduate student to assistant professor, including funding information. In each stage of his career he received one more grant. This vignette was presented in either an easy-to-read font (Arial) or a difficult-to-read font (Mistral). Afterwards, participants answered a question regarding career trend continuation, specifically, whether the professor would receive more grants in his next career stage (1=Not at all likely; 8=Very likely). An independent samples t-test revealed that participants who read the passage in an easy-to-read font predicted that the professor was more likely to continue getting more grants in his next career phase \((M=7.08, SD=1.56)\), compared to participants who read the passage in a difficult-to-read font \((M=6.14, SD=1.82)\), \(t(126)=3.12, p \text{ rep}=.98, d=.56\).

Study 1 suggests that processing fluency increases people’s predictions that a trend will continue into the future. It could be argued, however, that processing fluency elicits positive affect (Zajonc, 1980), which results in a general positive: in this case, perceptions of a better career. To rule out this alternative hypothesis, Study 2 featured a decreasing career trajectory. Since decreasing career trends are negative in nature, if fluency increases judgments that negative career trends are more likely to continue, this will demonstrate that the effect is not merely driven by mood. In Study 2, one-hundred thirty-two participants read about a professor’s career in either easy-to-read font (Arial) or difficult-to-read font (Mistral). In this version, however, the professor first received six grants and in each successive career stage, he received one fewer grant. Participants rated the likelihood that the professor would continue to receive fewer grants (using the same response scale from Study 1). Replicating the results from Study 1, we found that participants who read the passage in an easy-to-read font predicted that the professor would receive fewer grants in the future \((M=5.14, SD=1.65)\) compared to participants who read a difficult-to-read font \((M=4.55, SD=1.58)\), \(t(126)=2.07, p \text{ rep}=.89, d=.37\).

Two studies suggest that processing fluency influences people’s perceptions of whether a trend will continue into the future. Every day, people derive predictions about the future across many domains including sports statistics, medical reports, weather patterns, and market performance. Varying the presentation of these materials through print clarity, background noise, or repeated exposure to news reports may influence public opinion regarding the future direction of a trend. Additional research may address these possibilities.

REFERENCES
“Now it is time to read the passage. As you read, think about the answers to the questions I asked you earlier. I want to hear you thinking as you read. If you were right about something, let me hear you softly say ‘yes.’ Kuhn defined metacognition as, “Enhancing (a) metacognitive awareness of what one believes and how one knows and (b) metastrategic control in application of the strategies that process new information” (p. 178). This awareness is developmental and lies on a continuum. Proficient readers use one or more metacognitive strategies to comprehend text. Even though metacognitive strategies are considered to be of value for adequate text comprehension, classroom teachers often fail to teach this process. Pressley et al. Thompson, Debora, and Elise Chandon Ince (2010), "If itâ€™s Hard to Read, Itâ€™s Worth It: When Metacognitive Effort Enhances Product Value", Vol. 38, Advances in Consumer Research, Special Session, Association for Consumer Research. Chandon Ince, Elise and Chris Janiszewski (2008), â€œThe Role of Alternative Causes and Disabling Conditions on Consumersâ€™ Acceptance of Product Claims.â€ Vol. 36, Advances in Consumer Research, Competitive Paper, Association for Consumer Research. PDF | More than 200 studies suggest that metacognitive difficulty reduces the liking of an object. In contrast to those findings, the authors | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. (special vs. everyday). We use hard-to-read font as our manipulation of fluency in Study.1 and ease of thought generation as a fluency manipulation in Study 2. Second, Study 3. manipulates the product context by using a word jumble task to prime special vs. but it could be understood with some effort. The remaining participants read the same. description in a regular easy-to-read font. After reading the description of the cheese the. participants were asked to rate the likelihood of buying this cheese (1 = not at all likely, 9. PDF | Metacognitive reading strategy awareness plays a significant role in reading comprehension and educational process. In spite of its importance, | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. whether "meta-cognitive reading strategy awareness" enhances EFL studentsâ€™ reading comprehension. Furthermore, it attempts to detect the relationship between metacognitive reading strategy awareness and reading. comprehension. This paper focuses on the four main issues. First, it discusses the definition of metacognitive. reading strategy, the significance of metacognitive reading strategy. Second, it reviews the process of. Everything, it seems, is open to scrutiny. Recently, the focus has been evaluating the visual acuity of cyclists and long distance runners but they also focus on the more traditional areas of sports research, among them psychology, nutrition, anthropology, biochemistry and odontology1. This apparatus is used to enhance oxygen recovery after a vigorous physical workout. Says Squares, â€œWhen you breathe the air while inside a hyperbaric chamber the natural state of the oxygen does not change.â€ E. When pushed to the limit, the true indicator of fitness is not how hard the heart operates, but how quickly it can recover after an extreme workout. Therefore, another focus area of study for the team in Mexico has been the endurance of the heart.