



Consumer perceptions of product creativity, coolness, value and attitude



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ABSTRACT

Of the two dimensions of creativity, novelty and meaningfulness, the importance of novelty is mixed in empirical managerial research. This study extends creativity research to consumers. The model first proposed that perceived value mediates the relationship between creativity and product attitude. When early research revealed that product novelty does not influence perceived value and attitude directly and that consumers value novelty only if it leads to perceptions of coolness, the proposed model added coolness as a mediator. Results show that novelty influences coolness, which affects hedonic value which in turn, impacts consumers' attitude whereas meaningfulness influences attitude by affecting utilitarian value. Thus, for customers to appreciate a new product, it must either be meaningful or if novel, it must also be cool.

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1. Introduction

Enhancing creativity in new products is critical to the growth and survival of a firm (cf., Schumpeter, 1934). Also, creativity embedded in new products offers superior value to customers which can lead to higher profitability (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Kleinschmidt & Cooper, 1991; Robertson & Gatignon, 1986).

Academic research in business has paid scant attention to creativity until fairly recently (Amabile, 1983, 1988). Within marketing, such issues as the organizational characteristics related to new product creativity (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Im, Montoya-Weiss, & Workman, 2013; Moorman & Miner, 1997; Sethi, Smith, & Park, 2001) and the role of new product creativity as a predictor of new product performance (Im & Workman, 2004) dominate the creativity research stream. Based on Amabile's (1983, 1988) work, these researchers conceptualize new product creativity as the degree to which a new product is perceived to be uniquely different from competitors' products in a manner that it is meaningful to target customers. In other words, new product creativity comprises the dimensions of novelty and meaningfulness. Despite general support for the notion that creativity can lead to new product success, some anecdotal evidence suggests the opposite. Take for example, the smokeless cigarette, which cost RJ Reynolds \$325 million to

develop. The idea was novel and the promise of a "cleaner" alternative to cigarettes seemed meaningful to smokers. Yet it failed. So why do some creative products, judged by their novelty and meaningfulness, fail, even as others succeed? The answer may partly lie in the decisions of consumers to adopt or reject the new product. Surprisingly, despite this rather obvious point, most of the research so far examines new product creativity and its role in new product success as perceived by managers and largely ignores the customer's perspective. In two exceptions, Rubera, Ordanini, and Mazursky (2010) observe that consumers value novelty or meaningfulness depending on their level of product involvement and knowledge and Rubera, Ordanini, and Griffith (2011) note differences between American and Italian consumers in how strongly novelty and meaningfulness influences purchase intentions. Thus, consumer perspectives clearly hold promise for understanding creativity and its dimensions and their effect on new product evaluation.

Secondly, reports about the impact of creativity on new product outcomes are inconsistent. Most researchers assert that creativity leads to positive outcomes such as product performance, competitive advantage and differentiation (Amabile, 1988; Andrews & Smith, 1996); yet Im and Workman (2004) show that only meaningfulness influences new product performance. Further research is therefore necessary to understand this ambiguity; perhaps, the explanation lies in some intervening variables that influence the creativity–outcome relationship.

To address these issues, this study empirically examines the mediating variables that potentially influence the creativity–outcome relationship in the consumer context. In the proposed model, consumers'

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assessment of a new product's creativity affects their perceptions of the product's value (comprising the dimensions of utilitarian and hedonic value), which in turn determines their attitude toward the new product. This model parallels the dual routes suggested by March's (1991) theory of exploitation and exploration, such that novelty affects perceived hedonic value while meaningfulness influences perceived utilitarian value, and the two value dimensions influence attitude toward the product. Consumer attitude is the final dependent variable in this model because it typically presages a new product's adoption and sales, outcomes desired by new product managers. The focus on value follows the observation that while managers constantly try to enhance new product creativity in their quest to seek a competitive advantage, consumers are not enamored by a new product's creativity per se but will like and adopt a new product only if they find value in it. The mediating effect of value may perhaps be one explanation for the lack of consistency in the creativity–outcome relationship noted in managerial studies.

This study also introduces a new construct, new product coolness as a potential additional intervening variable in the creativity–outcome relationship. Pretest observations indicating that meaningfulness, but not novelty, influenced consumer attitudes led to a qualitative study to understand why consumers did not value novelty. Participants in the study did not care for novelty per se but appreciated a product with novel features that were also “cool.” Further investigation led to the conceptualization of the construct “new product coolness” as the degree to which a new product has trendy, hip, appealing, fascinating and attractive features. Novelty seemed like a prerequisite for coolness because cool features must start as new, unique and different ones. Additionally, participants said that a product's coolness made them experience positive emotions ranging from pleasant surprise to excitement. These positive affective responses suggest that coolness may be an important intermediary factor in the relationship between novelty and hedonic value.

To summarize, this study contributes to current literature by extending current, managerially-oriented new product creativity research to the consumer domain and testing a model of new product creativity and evaluation, in which (1) coolness is an intermediary variable between novelty and hedonic value and (2) hedonic and utilitarian values are intervening variables between coolness and meaningfulness on the one hand and attitude toward the product on the other. Furthermore, the addition of these intervening variables may help shed light on inconsistencies in the link between creativity and product outcomes noted in prior research. Finally, the present article introduces the concept and a measure of new product coolness which has the potential to clarify the relationship between a new product's creativity and its acceptance in the marketplace.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Creativity in psychology, management, and marketing literature

For some time, psychology researchers have been interested in understanding creativity and its dimensions (Besemer & O'Quin, 1986; Besemer & Treffinger, 1981; Mumford & Gustafson, 1988). One popular theory of creativity, Amabile's, presents novelty and meaningfulness as its two dimensions. Organizational behavior researchers have also been exploring the nature of creativity and its relationship with various organizational variables and outcomes (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009; Koberg & Chusmir, 1987; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

Recently, some marketing scholars have been investigating creativity in the context of new product development (Im & Workman, 2004; Sethi et al., 2001) and marketing programs (Andrews & Smith, 1996). In this research stream, creativity, comprising the dimensions of novelty and meaningfulness, has been rated by new product managers. Despite the dominant argument that creativity positively influences new product outcomes such as differentiation and profitability (e.g., Andrews & Smith,

1996; Moorman & Miner, 1997), a recent study by Im and Workman (2004) argues that of the two creativity dimensions, only meaningfulness enhances new product performance.

2.2. Consumers' perceptions of new product creativity and product evaluations

Researchers have shown little interest in consumers' perspective of the creativity of new products and in particular, how consumer creativity assessment influences outcomes such as perceived value or attitude toward the product. However, because the fate of new products ultimately depends on consumers, examining how their creativity perceptions drive product evaluations should be important for practitioners. Some studies speculate that novelty and meaningfulness result in superior perceived product value (Andrews & Smith, 1996; Kleinschmidt & Cooper, 1991). And in one of the few relevant consumer-centric creativity studies, Rubera et al. (2010) find that novelty is more relevant in consumers' assessment of creativity when they are very involved or have little knowledge of the product whereas meaningfulness is more important when consumer involvement is low or their knowledge high. However, their research focuses on the interaction between the two dimensions of creativity and does not consider how creativity affects other consumer product evaluations. Also, Rubera et al. (2011) find a greater influence of novelty on purchase intentions among U.S. consumers relative to Italians, but a greater influence of meaningfulness in Italy compared with the U.S. This study attempts to fill this gap in the new product creativity literature through empirical research in the consumer domain.

Managers tend to think of a product in terms of features and attributes and how these give them a competitive advantage but consumers are not interested in the creativity of the attributes or features per se but rather in how the attributes translate into benefits that help satisfy their needs. Consumer perceptions of a product's value in turn drives attitude formation. To summarize, consumers' assessment of a new product's creativity is expected to influence judgment of its value which then influences attitude toward it. The following section describes a pretest which examines the general validity of the proposed relationships and assists in developing construct measures.

3. Pretest

3.1. Study design

The pretest with university student subjects used two product categories — sports shoes and cell phones. These product categories would be appropriate in the context of this study because of their familiarity to the subjects and their frequent addition of features. Each product category had four hypothetical new products with a new feature not yet available in the market. In the sports shoes category, the four new features were greater durability, automatic deodorizer, fire resistance and colored insoles. In the cell phone category, the four new features were greater durability, free from radiation, fire resistance and changeable color keypads.

Im and Workman's (2004) paper and a focus group in an MBA class at a U.S. university inspired the scales measuring new product novelty and meaningfulness. Six measurement items each represented the constructs of novelty and meaningfulness and each item had seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The utilitarian and hedonic value scales were adapted from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) and used five seven-point semantic items each. To measure overall attitude toward the new product, the survey asked participants to evaluate their attitudes toward the described new product on two seven-point semantic scales (1 = very unfavorable, 7 = very favorable; 1 = very negative, 7 = very positive) and to indicate whether they agreed with the Likert statement “I like this product very much.” Appendix A contains details of the questions.

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