

Novelty as Risk and Opportunity: Opposite Effects of Low Personal Control and Low Predictability on Novelty Seeking

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Abstract

Novel products can present unknown risks worth avoiding as well as unknown opportunities worth exploring. Past research on the influence of control on novelty seeking emphasized the risk aspect and found that feelings of low personal control reduce the adoption of novel products. We show that this is not the case when control is manipulated through perceptions of unpredictability. Across six studies, novelty seeking was lower after consumers thought about instances of low rather than high personal control, but higher after consumers thought about instances of unpredictability rather than predictability. Explicitly framing the choice of a novel product as an opportunity versus risk paralleled the influence of perceptions of unpredictability versus low personal control. In combination, these findings highlight the need to distinguish between (un)predictability and personal control, which are often treated interchangeably in the control literature. Whereas low personal control benefits familiar products, seeing the world as unpredictable benefits novel products. Theoretical and applied implications are discussed.