

Prior Knowledge, Epistemic Motivation and Retail Search Behavior: A Proposal

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Abstract

Occasionally, consumers confront complex decisions which require that they use prior knowledge and/or search for relevant additional information in order to make informed choices in the marketplace. However, the results from previous research into the nature of the relationship between prior knowledge and search activity have been inconsistent. The relationship has been reported as both negative and positive, as well as having an inverted U shape, indicating a negative relationship with both high and low knowledge. Additionally, previous research makes it clear that search activity is influenced by individual differences in motivation. This paper proposes to investigate the relationship between prior product category level knowledge, one particular type of motivation to search, and search activity.

The proposed project differs from previous research in three important ways. First, it operationalizes motivation utilizing a well investigated concept from the psychological literature, the Need for Cognitive Closure, which is defined in terms of desire for an answer on a given topic, *any* answer. Secondly, respondents will be a sizeable number of actual shoppers in a retail store environment. Lastly, we will analyze the resulting data in a manner seldom, if ever, used in extant search research.

Since search activity has been reported as positive, negative and U shaped, we will use a 2x2x3 ANOVA with Low, Medium and High levels of search activity to understand its relationship to prior knowledge. This method will plot the resulting curve, of any shape.

Keywords: retailing, search, epistemic, motivation, knowledge

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners:

This study will provide insight into the relationship between prior knowledge, motivation to search, and search activity in an actual retail environment. As such, it will offer insight in to actual customer behavior in the marketplace.

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