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Did I Buy the Wrong Gadget? How the Evaluability of Technology Features Influences Feature Preferences and Subsequent Product Choice

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Abstract

Prior usability assessment research has paid little attention to how product and feature ratings are influenced by the evaluation context. However, the evaluability hypothesis, which guides this research, suggests that the evaluation context is a vital factor in shaping users' assessments and perceptions toward technology features. Specifically, the evaluability hypothesis proposes that technology feature perceptions, and ultimately technology choices, will change when evaluating a single technology in isolation versus when simultaneously comparing more than one. To demonstrate the evaluability hypothesis effect in the context of consumer technology product evaluations, two experiments were conducted. Both studies support the evaluability hypothesis effect, showing that when two IT products are compared, hard-to-evaluate but easy-to-compare features are perceived to be more important and therefore have a larger influence on product preferences. Alternatively, when evaluating a single product in isolation, easy-to-evaluate features are perceived to be more important and therefore have a larger influence on product preferences. Consequently, different product preferences emerge (i.e., preference reversals) in different evaluation contexts. The results demonstrate that this theoretical lens is robust to the technology evaluation context, providing important theoretical and practical insights for technology design, usability assessments, and, ultimately, product acceptance.

Keywords: Usability, evaluability hypothesis, preference reversals, technology acceptance, technology choice, technology design, technology evaluation