

Novice or expert: How do consumers increase their knowledge about products?

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Consumers seek out novel consumption experiences to increase their knowledge about products but do so selectively based on their level of expertise, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"It has been said that experience is the best teacher. Perhaps the lessons learned through trying [new experiences](#) can help explain the reason consumers seek out novel experiences that do not necessarily offer the greatest satisfaction?" write authors Joshua J. Clarkson (University of Cincinnati), Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida), and Melissa D. Cinelli (University of Mississippi).

Consumers regularly try new foods and beverages—even new leisure activities—and while these novel consumption experiences are often satisfying, rarely are they as enjoyable as our favorites. In fact, we often choose novel experiences instead of a preferred option. For instance, we might choose a new flavor of ice cream instead of our favorite flavor. Why do we choose these novel experiences?

In a series of experiments, the authors found that consumers only seek out novel experiences that enhance their current level of expertise. For example, when consumers were presented with choices of different music samples, novices preferred to sample a few new songs from multiple genres while experts preferred to sample multiple new songs solely from their preferred genre.

Novices seek out novel consumption experiences that broaden their

existing knowledge (atypical and diverse [products](#) such as a unique salad dressing or a type of beer they've never tasted before), while experts seek to deepen their existing knowledge (typical but different products such as a more robust Italian dressing or a beer implied to be novel within a specific category of beers).

"Consumers desire the knowledge acquired through novel experiences. However, this desire for consumption knowledge is selective for novices and experts and depends on whether the experience broadens or deepens their [knowledge](#). Companies can emphasize these aspects of novel products to aid [consumers](#) in identifying the experiences they desire—experiences they will choose even if it means forgoing their preferred experience," the authors conclude.

More information: Joshua J. Clarkson, Chris Janiszewski, and Melissa D. Cinelli. "The Desire for Consumption Knowledge." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2013.

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