

Product Manuals: Reported Reading and Beliefs

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1. Introduction

Consumer products usually come with documentation such as a product manual. Research shows that people report not reading much if any of the manuals for the vehicle that they drive (e.g., Leonard & Kames, 2000; Mehelenbacher et al., 2002). This study examines reported reading of manuals for a larger varied set of products. Additionally, manual reading was examined with respect to two product beliefs: perceived hazard and familiarity.

2. Method

Participants were university students and older nonstudent adults (N = 670). The names of 16 generic consumer products used are listed in Table 1. Participants were instructed to assume that they had just purchased each product with an accompanying owner's manual or other literature. Group 1 was asked to estimate how much of the accompanying literature they would read for each product using a percentage scale (0 to 100%). Group 2 did the same task but was *also* asked (initially) to estimate the total number of pages of documentation.

3. Results

The mean manual reading percentages by Group 1 are shown in the first column of Table 1. The corresponding means (percentage read) by Group 2 appears in the third column. The two groups' responses are highly correlated ($r=.94$).

Table 1. Mean percentage (%) estimations of how much of a product's documentation report they would read by two participant groups for 16 products. Also shown are estimated number of pages and a derived variable of how many pages they would read.

Product	Group 1 % Manual Read	Group 2 Estimated Length-in pages	Group 2 % Manual Read	Pages Read (Derived)
Car/Truck	56.0	125.9	34.7	42.5
Ink-jet printer	46.3	31.9	28.6	8.3
Garden shears	6.3	3.3	11.1	0.4
Toaster/oven	17.0	11.2	16.2	2.6
Gas outdoor grill	51.6	20.5	38.1	8.3
Hammer	2.5	1.4	5.9	0.1
Life vest	25.5	5.6	32.3	2.0
Drip coffee maker	30.1	10.9	27.4	2.9
Steam iron	23.8	7.7	20.7	1.8
Ladder	9.7	3.5	14.4	0.6
Insecticide/pesticide	67.9	8.3	53.7	4.2
Bicycle	23.4	14.9	27.3	4.5
Inflatable boat	39.3	13.9	38.4	6.5
Chain saw	61.7	19.8	51.5	10.7
Binoculars	20.3	8.3	17.0	1.4
Gas lawn mower	48.4	27.5	39.0	11.4

The last column of Table 1 shows a derived variable created by multiplying the mean estimated pages and percentage-read (converted to proportions) variables. It gives an estimate of pages that participants would read.

Of the 16 products, 14 had been examined in prior research. Data from Wogalter et al. (1991) in which ratings of perceived hazard and familiarity were collected were merged with this study's data. The extent of the manual they report they would read was positively correlated with perceived hazard ($r=.70$) and negatively correlated with familiarity ($r=-.61$). A multiple regression showed that both variables accounted for significant variance in predicting manual reading ($R=.81$; $R^2=.66$).

4. Discussion

People read different amounts of manuals depending on product type. A derived variable was created that indicates the amount of time and effort that people expect to give to reading product documentation. Using data from earlier research it was found that the greater the perceived hazard, the greater the amount of estimated reading, and the greater the familiarity, the lower the estimates of reading.

References

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