

The Impact of Existential Anxiety on Attitude Toward Product Innovation: An Abstract



Benjamin Boeuf

Abstract By allowing individuals to think about their future, temporal consciousness enables *existential anxiety*, the awareness and fear of one's own mortality (Becker 1971; Routledge et al. 2008). Prior work has suggested that individuals may protect themselves from existential anxiety through state nostalgia (Routledge et al. 2011), defined as "sentimental longing for one's past" (Sedikides and Wildschut 2017). Individuals' ability to reflect on past events as a compensatory strategy in response to existential anxiety is likely to foster a defensive and reassuring looking-backward mindset, thereby in opposition to a looking-forward mode necessary to favor product innovation adoption (Castellano et al., 2013). Zhao et al. (2012) showed that the evaluation of new products is less favorable when consumers have difficulties in mentally projecting new uses. Conversely, forward-looking consumers adapt their buying behavior by anticipating future product improvements (Krishnan and Ramachandran, 2011).

Because newness encompasses uncertainties and risks (Conchar et al. 2004), product innovation implies the potential disruption of an individual's reassuring values and habits. Hence, since innovative products are likely to be in conflict with the nostalgic mindset triggered by existential anxiety, state nostalgia is predicted to mediate the negative impact of existential anxiety on consumers' attitude toward product innovation.

The present paper examines in finer detail the relationship between existential anxiety and nostalgia by measuring its impact on consumers' attitude toward product innovation. The findings of three experimental studies using various technology-based products that were expected to be introduced to market in the near future (see Truong et al. 2014) suggest that by triggering nostalgia, existential anxiety may negatively affect the evaluation of product innovation.

The present research adds to the growing body of literature on innovation by showing that existential anxiety can inhibit new product adoption. These results also

B. Boeuf (✉)
IÉSEG School of Management, Paris, France
e-mail: b.boeuf@ieseg.fr

offer a glimpse of how existential anxiety impacts the various facets of the consumption of new products by contrasting the effect of the awareness of mortality on innovative and retro-innovative products. Prior work has argued that the success of retro-innovation depends on how the celebration of the past can represent a way of looking forward (Castellano et al. 2013).