The Use of 'Internal' Knowledge in Differentiating among Fiction Titles[1]

Hugo Verdaasdonk, Professor
Tilburg University

Hugo Verdaasdonk *is professor of Marketing and Sociology of Books at Tilburg University. His research interest focuses on institutional and individual appraisals of cultural products.*

Abstract
In comparing fiction titles, consumer weight these on two dimensions, one featuring information about authors' notoriety, the other containing information about the positive or negative appraisal of an individual title. This information is used differently, according to whether titles are weighted that stem from authors who are known or from authors who are unknown to consumers. In the first condition, the two dimensions are used separately; in the second condition, they are used jointly. This leads to different solutions of the major problem book buyers face, i.e., that of identifying titles that are sufficiently distinct from others to be eligible for being purchased.

Keywords
Consumer behavior, choice behavior, book buyers, network analysis.

Attributes of Fiction Books

As all other cultural products, fiction books are valued for their idiosyncrasy, i.e., for what makes them seem different from all other fiction books. A long tradition in literary criticism and aesthetics, fully endorsed by secondary education, has taught consumers to see 'uniqueness' as the major characteristic of fiction that appeals to them and that they judge to be of superior quality.

This emphasis on idiosyncrasy has made the language of literary criticism, even that of academic literary scholarship, ill-suited to provide descriptions of individual texts and to make general statements (Verdaasdonk 1979).

It does not surprise that there is little knowledge about the attributes of fiction books that affect preferences and about the way in which alternatives of choices are weighted in making purchase decisions.

Sociological research (Bourdieu 1984) explains tastes ('manifested preferences') for specific cultural products in terms of socioeconomic characteristics consumers share as members in a specific social group. Little attention is paid to attributes exhibited by preferred products.

Although in analyzing consumer behavior economists and economic psychologists always pay due attention to product attributes, studies of cultural consumption hardly focus on characteristics of products entering in choice processes. The econometric analysis of the demand for theater

undertaken by Lévy-Garboua and Montmarquette (1996) considers the decision to attend the performance of a play as conditional on the positive or negative surprise sprung by the last play seen. The study deals with the decision to engage in a particular cultural activity, not with the decision to attend a particular play. Therefore, no attributes of plays, such as the names of the author, the director or the actors, are taken into account. However, the authors emphasize that cultural products are seen as unique and that preferences for particular items vary across individuals. Moreover, their study conveys the insight that current cultural consumption depends on past consumption, and that cultural consumption is a long and unsystematic learning process resulting in the discovery of one's individual taste.

In his pioneering inquiry, Leemans (1994) addresses the question what information consumers use in determining whether or not an individual fiction title is a candidate for choice.

Leemans views books as hedonic products: their consumption primarily fulfills emotional needs, whereas utilitarian products serve functional objectives. He argues that the choice of hedonic products is not based on their physical ('objective') characteristics, but on attributes reflecting the type of experience that was made with them or that is expected from them (Leemans 1994: 89f.).

Two assumptions are central to his investigation: (i) consumer experience and knowledge regarding books is individual in nature, i.e., independent of the experience and knowledge of other consumers; (ii) information items used by consumers to characterize individual books reflect their perception of these titles.

These assumptions led to the use of a procedure in which subjects were free to produce information items they deemed applicable to the titles that were submitted to them. On average, subjects used more than 20 items to distinguish between titles they judged eligible or ineligible for being purchased.

The set of information items that was obtained showed substantial heterogeneity which was reduced by using a special technique, i.e., Generalized Procrustes Analysis (Leemans 1994: 120ff.). With the help of this technique, the dimensions underlying the set of items were extracted.

The question may be posed whether Leemans' two assumptions do not lead to an overestimation of the idiosyncrasy of consumers' perception of individual book titles. The assumption that the use of a particular information item reflects a highly individual perception of this titles seems unwarranted. The conditions under which terms used to characterize texts express readers' experiences are unknown as are the conditions under which terms apply to texts (cf. Verdaasdonk 1979). Leemans was unsuccessful in establishing a link between the number of information items subjects used and consumer characteristics, in particular experience acquired with books. Furthermore, the way in which subjects proceeded could not be interpreted in terms of a specific choice heuristics (cf. Leemans 1994: 148).

The question this paper addresses is, how do consumers proceed in differentiating among fiction titles? We are interested in the attributes of fiction titles and in the characteristics of consumers that shape this process.

Current models of consumer information processing (e.g., Van Raaij 1984, McGuire 1985, Pieters and Van Raaij 1992) assume four stages: after being exposed to a stimulus, consumers pay

attention to it; the subsequent stage, that of cognition, involves comprehension and elaboration of information, after which preference formation occurs followed by choosing.

Our research question pertains to the 'cognition stage' in which consumers identify individual fiction titles as being distinct from one another.

What attributes are used to distinguish between fiction titles?

When fiction titles are valued for their idiosyncrasy, consumers will differentiate among them along numerous dimensions. Some of these dimensions, however, will reflect to a greater extent than others knowledge shared by consumers. One such dimension is the notoriety of authors. Consumers have considerable agreement about the renown an author has acquired. Media attention to cultural products focuses heavily on makers. This attention is very unevenly distributed: it concentrates on a tiny part of all makers. This increases the likelihood that this small group will be known by the majority of consumers.

The renown of an author affects the utility his or her work has for consumers. Since the number of cultural products stemming from famous makers forms but a small part of the total supply, the more often buyers choose, the greater the chance that a product is acquired that comes from a maker who is less well-known or even unknown to them. Conversely, consumers who make infrequent choices will tend to focus on products stemming from well-known makers.

Another important dimension is consumers' appraisal of an author's work. Appraisals may vary more strongly across consumers than their knowledge of authors' notoriety. However, valuation will exhibit a pattern. The less well-known an author is, the greater the likelihood that his or her work will be negatively appraised by a majority of consumers. Similarly, when an author has acquired only a modest amount of notoriety, most consumers probably will be indifferent to his or her work.

It seems unwarranted to assume a positive and linear relationship between authors' notoriety and the positive appraisal of their work.

New book releases by established authors do not stand a better chance of being positively reviewed than new books by their less reputed counterparts (Verdaasdonk 2001). As far as consumers are concerned, it seems doubtful that preferences for books by well-known authors will be uniform. From the assumption that the work of very well-known authors is perceived as manifesting the strongest difference from that of all other authors, it follows that divergence of appraisal will most readily occur with regard to individual titles by this group of authors.

The problem book buyers have to solve is to identify titles that seem sufficiently distinct to be considered as candidates for choice. Information about authors' notoriety and about the positive or negative appraisal of their work will be used to attribute distinctiveness to individual titles. This task is easier when consumers are dealing with titles by authors who are known to them. They have more information about such authors, and this information can be quickly activated. This relative wealth of information enables consumers to make refined and varied distinctions. We hypothesize that, in differentiating among titles by authors who are known to them, consumers will weight some titles against each other on the dimension of authors' notoriety, and that they will weight other titles predominantly on the appraisal dimension. A substantial score on one of these dimensions will add

to the distinctiveness of a title.

In our view, this highlights the uncertainty under which book buyers make their choices. Perceiving similarity between a title by a well-known author and a title that is positively appraised, although it is by a less famous author, bodes well for the chance that the latter title will be purchased. However, when diversity of tastes is likely to occur with regard to books by authors with substantial of notoriety, then similarity may also be perceived by a book by a well-known author and a book that is negatively appraised by most consumers.

Attributing distinctiveness to titles by authors who are unknown to consumers is very difficult. Such titles will appear very similar to each other, also in that most of these will be negatively appraised by a majority of consumers. In practice, consumers will tend to shy away from this burdensome task.

It should be noted that this characterizes the situation of patrons of bookstores and users of public libraries. These agencies feature huge collections in which the overwhelming majority of titles stem from authors with little notoriety or none at all.

When urged to differentiate among such titles - which will rarely happen in real life - consumers will try to optimally use the scant information that is available. We hypothesize that in attributing distinctiveness to titles by authors who are unknown to them, consumers will weight these titles jointly on the dimension of authors' notoriety and on that of appraisal.

When consumers deal with titles by authors who are known to them, the number of individuals who actually compare a title to any other is indicative of the amount of notoriety an author has acquired. Conversely, when titles by authors who are unknown to consumers are weighted, the number of individuals who compare a title to any other is indicative of the lack of notoriety of the author concerned. Somewhat paradoxically, then, maximal distinctiveness will be associated with minimal notoriety, and with strongly negative appraisal. It goes without saying that this does not bode well for preference formation.

Differentiating is a process in which similarities and differences are perceived between individual items. Such perceptions become observable when consumers put items they judge to be similar into the same group, and when they put items they regard as different from each other in separate groups.

In light of what has been said about the way in which consumers use information in differentiating among titles by authors who are known or unknown to them, we expect that in the first condition pairs will be formed of a title by an author who is known to consumers and a title that is appreciated positively or negatively by the majority of consumers. In grouping titles by authors who are unknown to consumers, pairs will be formed of titles that stem from authors with least notoriety and that also are negatively appraised by most consumers.

When several subsequent grouping tasks are performed, in what respects would the outcomes be different according to whether these tasks pertained to titles by authors who were known or unknown to consumers?

The relations that are established between individual titles may be conceived of as constituting a

network. From this point of view, a number of statistical properties may be assessed that inform us about the nature of the links between titles.

One such property is the density of a network. This is the percentage of all possible lines which are present in a network. This measure is dependent on the size of a network, i.e., on the number of items (vertices) it contains. Alternatively, we may look at the number of relations in which each vertex is involved. This is called the degree of a vertex. The average degree of vertices measures the structural cohesion of a network.

When considerable distinctiveness is assigned to a title, it will be paired with relatively few other titles. A network featuring such titles will have lower density and a lower average degree than a network containing titles that are judged to be less distinctive.

Performing network analysis also enables us to calculate the association between the two dimensions on which titles are weighted. Cramer's V measures this association. We hypothesize that for a network containing titles by authors who are known to consumers, Cramer's V will be much lower than for a network including titles by authors who are unknown to consumers. As contended, in the latter network consumer will relate titles to one another by weighting them on two dimensions at the same time.

Not only the conditions in which consumers differentiate among fiction titles - by authors who are known or unknown to them - but also the experience they have acquired with books will affect the outcome of the differentiation process. The experiential factor may call for a modification of sociological approaches to consumer preferences. As noted, Bourdieu's (1984) influential study explains tastes for individual cultural products and for categories of these products in terms of the socioeconomic characteristics consumers share as members in a specific social group. In models accounting for cultural participation and for preferences for particular (types of) product variables measuring experience with sector specific products may have greater explanatory power than socioeconomic variables.

We hypothesize that the conditions in which similarities are perceived between fiction titles will have a strong effect on consumers' use of information, However, we also expect that consumers' experience with books will also substantially affect the use of the information they have about authors' notoriety and about the strong positive or negative appraisal of the titles that are grouped. The effect of consumer experience on their information use is independent of the conditions in which groupings are undertaken.

Since experienced book buyers share more knowledge than less experienced buyers of authors' notoriety and of titles that are positively or negatively appraised by the majority of consumers, they will use this information to a larger extent in differentiating among titles. That experienced consumers are knowledgeable about how others appreciate individual titles might indicate that they form preferences for authors and their work in relation to one or more reference groups. If this should be the case, consumer preferences may be interdependent (cf. Hayakawa and venieris 1977; Hayakawa 2000).

Consumer experience may be measured by the number of books they buy and/or borrow. However, in light of what has been said above, an alternative and probably more effective measure of experience is provided by the proportion of titles by authors who were unknown to consumers in the total number of books bought. As noted, the more one chooses, the greater the chance that a title is selected by an author who is unknown to the consumer.

Stating that reading fiction is a more favorite pastime than engaging in other cultural activities is another indicator of substantial experience with books. These two indicators relate more closely to choice behavior than numbers of books purchased or borrowed.

Hypotheses to Be Tested

H_1: When consumers group fiction titles by authors who are known to them, there is no association between authors' notoriety and a positive appraisal of their titles.

H_2: When consumers group fiction titles by authors who are unknown to them, there is a strong association between authors' lack of notoriety and a negative appraisal of their titles.

H_3: In grouping fiction titles by authors who are known to them, consumers will perceive the strongest similarity between a title that stems from an author with substantial notoriety and a title that is positively or negatively appraised by a majority of consumers.

H_4: In grouping titles by authors who are unknown to them, consumers will perceive the strongest similarity between titles that stem from authors who have least notoriety and that are negatively appraised by a majority of consumers.

H_5: Networks featuring groups of titles by authors who are known to consumers will have lower density and lower average degree than networks containing groups of titles by authors who are unknown to consumers.

H_6: Networks featuring groups of titles by authors who are known to consumers will show a lower association between the dimensions on which titles are weighted than networks containing groups of titles by authors who are unknown to consumers.

H_7 The extent to which consumers use information about authors' notoriety and about the positive or negative appraisal of their work depends on the conditions in which this information is used and also on the experience consumers have acquired with books.

Data and Method

Sixty visitors to two bookstores (one in Arnhem, the other in Nijmegen, The Netherlands) and to the Nijmegen Public Library participated. Individuals qualified as participants when they were 18 years or older, and gave an affirmative answer to the question of whether they were readers of mystery novels. To each participant color scans of the front covers of 36 mystery novels were submitted. Each novel was by a different author; all novels were Dutch translations of American or British mysteries. The scans did not bear the name of the publisher.

Mystery novels by American and British authors were selected as stimuli because, to a greater extent than authors in any other genre and from any other country, some of these authors have produced large numbers of international bestsellers. Many of these were turned into successful movies. Therefore, choosing titles by internationally famous authors enhanced the chance that subjects would attribute substantial notoriety to (at least) half of the authors whose work was submitted to them.

The 36 titles were brought out by three large Dutch publishing houses: 12 stemmed from Bruna, 12 from De Boekerij, and 12 from Luitingh-Sijthoff. These firms bring titles by blockbuster novelists, e.g., John Grisham, Robert Ludlum, Mario Puzo, and Tom Clancy. From each publishing house, experts had selected six titles by authors who were likely to be known and six by authors who were likely to be unknown to subjects. The 36 titles are listed in Appendix 1.

Subjects were asked to indicate which authors were known or unknown to them. Each subject performed three tasks: (i) grouping titles according to perceived similarity; (ii) forming two groups of titles: one containing titles they would like to posses, the other titles they did not want to own; (iii) grouping titles according to their publisher. The latter instruction served the aim of investigating whether the use of other expertise, i.e., knowledge of an author's (Dutch) publisher would lead to different groupings.

Twenty-nine subjects executed the tasks using titles by authors who were known to them; thirty-one did so using titles by authors who were unknown to them. The tasks were performed in the order indicated above. No time limit was imposed.

In order to gain insight into subjects' socioeconomic characteristics a questionnaire was administered. Questions pertained to subjects' sex, age, level of education, and profession. Questions were also asked about knowledge of the names of publishing houses, the number of books bought and borrowed per year; the percentage of these books by authors who were unknown to subjects (0-20%, 20-40%, more than 41%); subjects' favorite cultural activities (reading books, listening to music, watching movies, museum/gallery attendance, attending dance performances, or other activities). The interviews were conducted from May to July 2003.

Six matrices were obtained, three with results grouping titles by authors who were known to subjects (K-condition), and three with the results of the tasks performed with titles by authors who were unknown to subjects (U-condition).

The data lend themselves to be analyzed using Multidimensional Scaling (MDS). This technique produces a representation of the grouping of individual titles. The greater the distance between two titles, the greater the perceived difference between them. The representation will match the data more or less imperfectly; measures of stress (Stress I and Stress 2), ranging from zero to one, indicate the lack of fit. According to a rule of thumb (Backhaus et al. 1996: 456), values of 0.05 and 0.1 for Stress 1 and Stress 2, respectively are good; values of 0.1. and 0.2 are sufficient.
It is expected that MDS of our data will yield stress values that are considerably higher. This is largely due to the large number of titles that were grouped. This makes it unlikely that increasing the number of dimensions will reduce the stress values. Furthermore, it will be difficult to interpret a stimulus space containing about 20 titles.

In order to gain insight into the similarities and differences subjects perceived between titles, cluster analyses will be performed with the coordinates of the (two dimensional) MDS solutions as input. Using different methods of cluster analysis informs us about the stability of the solutions that are obtained. Ward's method, minimizing variance within clusters and maximizing variance between clusters will be the base-line.

Our focus will be on initial pairs of titles. These pairs represent titles that the majority of subjects put into the same group. When titles are paired with each other, this indicates that their is stronger similarity perceived between them than when these titles are put into a cluster containing three or more titles. Such larger clusters will be disregarded here.

As was said, the relations established by titles in the successive grouping tasks will be analyzed by performing network analysis. We shall use the Pajek program (De Nooy et al. 2004).

As suggested, information about an author's notoriety and about the positive or negative appraisal most consumers have of a given title play a decisive role in differentiating among titles. How can this information be related to the initial pairs produced by cluster analysis?

Of each title contained in an initial pair we know how many subjects used it in the grouping tasks. When 20 subjects or more used a title in all tasks in the K-condition, this indicates that its author had much notoriety. Conversely, when 20 subjects or more used a title in all tasks in the U-condition, this signals that its author had minimal notoriety.

In the second task, titles were put into two groups according to whether or not subjects wanted to own them. The outcome of this task provides information about the degree to which subjects appraised each of the titles positively or negatively. When there is a difference of at least 20% between the number of subjects that sorted a title into one of the two groups, we take this to indicate that there is a marked difference in the (positive or negative) appraisal of this title in the K- or in the U-condition.

We shall conduct analyses of variance to assess whether the information used by our subjects was not only affected by the conditions in which the grouping tasks were executed, but also by their experience with books.

Results

Description of the Sample

Demographic characteristics (sex, age, level of education, and occupation) of our subjects are given in Appendix 2.

Since buying books is an important aspect of the behavior of our subjects, the Table in Appendix 2 also includes data drawn from the report *Profile 2001 of Dutch buyers of trade books* (Jager and Van Leeuwen 2002). Respondents were individuals who stated that they had bought at least one trade book in the two weeks preceding the telephone survey. This group comprises 18.1 of the Dutch population (Jager and Van Leeuwen 2002: 3).

Appendix 2 also lists data obtained in the national survey of time expenditure conducted every five years by the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau. The data stem from the 2000 survey (N=1,813), and are representative of the Dutch population. We omitted respondents (n=596) who read less than our subjects.

In comparison to the two other investigations, ours shows a substantial overrepresentation of individuals aged from 25 to 49 years; the majority of our subjects had a high level of education and were full-time employed (as students or in a profession). There was also a large proportion of females.

Our subjects were avid readers. On average, they bought 27.2 (s.d. 49.2) and borrowed 24.9 (s.d. 34.3) books per year. They also bought large numbers of books by authors who were unknown to them: 17 subjects stated that such titles encompassed 0 to 20% of their purchases; 11 stated that this proportion ranged from 20 to 40%, and 13 said that this proportion exceeded 40%.

Reading books was the favorite pastime of 31 subjects; the next largest group (15 subjects) had watching movies as their favorite cultural activity.

Execution of the Tasks

Titles had to be grouped according to perceived similarity, according to whether subjects did or did not want to own them, and according to the publishing house from which as title stemmed. As noted, the photo scans of titles' front covers did not bear the name of the publisher.

Our idea that execution of the latter task involved the use of the names of publishing houses proved to be incorrect. This information was unknown to subjects. No less than 28 subjects (46.7%) were unable to mention the name of one single Dutch publishing house; only seven (11.7%) of them produced the names of more than three Dutch publishers. It is not surprising that 58 subjects stated that they had no preference for titles from a particular publishing house.

The mean numbers of groups formed in the first task were 4.3 and 4.9 in the K- and in the U-condition, respectively. In the third task, the mean numbers of groups formed were 4.3 and 4.4 in the K- and the U-condition, respectively. The mean numbers of titles used in making groups were 16.1 and 18.9 in the first task, and 15.1 and 18.9 in the third task in, respectively, the K- and the U-condition.

Statistical Results

We expected to find little correspondence between the substantial degree of notoriety acquired by an author and the extent to which titles by this author were positively appraised by our subjects. On the other hand, we supposed that there would be a strong association between an author's lack of notoriety and the extent to which our subjects would give an negative appraisal of titles by such authors (cf.H_1, H_2).

We assessed whether there was a marked difference between the K- and the U-condition in the extent to which, in the execution of the second grouping task, titles were put into the group of titles subject wanted to own and in the group of titles subjects did not want to own. A T-test showed that there was no significant difference in the K-condition between the mean number of titles put into

each of the two groups. However, titles by authors who were unknown to subjects were put significantly more often in to the group of titles subjects did not want to own. The mean number of titles judged favorably was 8.4; that of titles rejected was 11.6 (df = 58; p = .027).

As was expected, MDS yielded high values of stress. For each task in the two conditions, Stress 1 was always above 0.40; Stress 2 consistently exceeded 1.08. Cluster analyses were performed, using Ward's method, with the coordinates of the two-dimensional MDS solutions as input.

Table 1 is based on the results of the cluster analysis. It specifies the characteristics of all individual titles that were used to form pairs.

Table 1: Numbers of Titles that Were Paired in the Three Grouping Tasks

	task1	task2	task3	task1	task2	task3
FREQ	7	6	6	4	4	5
DIFPRF	8	10	13	7	11	11
DOUBLE	1	3	2	9	7	9
TOTAL#	26	30	28	28	28	32

The left panel gives the results of the tasks performed with titles by authors who were known to consumers; the right panel lists the results of the tasks performed with titles by authors who were unknown to subjects.

FREQ denotes titles used by at least 20 subjects in the grouping tasks; DIFPRF denotes titles for which at least 20% of all subjects differed in their positive or negative appraisal, DOUBLE refers to titles that were not only used by at least 20 subjects in the groupings tasks, but also showed a difference of at least 20% of the subjects as to their appraisal, and TOTAL# indicates the total number of titles used in forming initial pairs.

It is seen that, in the U-condition, the number of titles labeled by DOUBLE is substantially higher than in the K-condition. The difference in the numbers used of titles labeled by FREQ and DIFPRF seems to be less marked (cf. H_3 and H_4).

Cluster analyses which used other methods (average linkage, single linkage, centroid and median clustering) did not yield initial pairs whose composition differed substantially from those obtained by Ward's mehtod.

Figures 1 and 2 give the networks of titles paired with each other in the successive grouping tasks.

Figure 1: Network of Titles by Authors who Are Known to Subjects

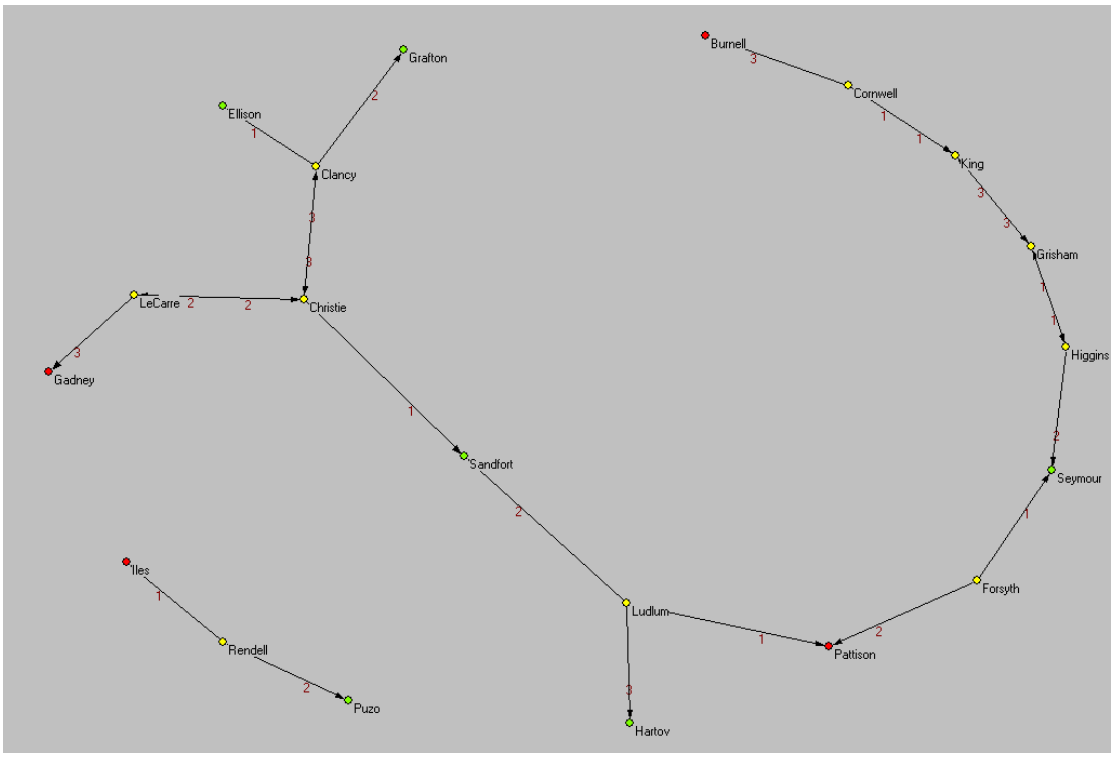
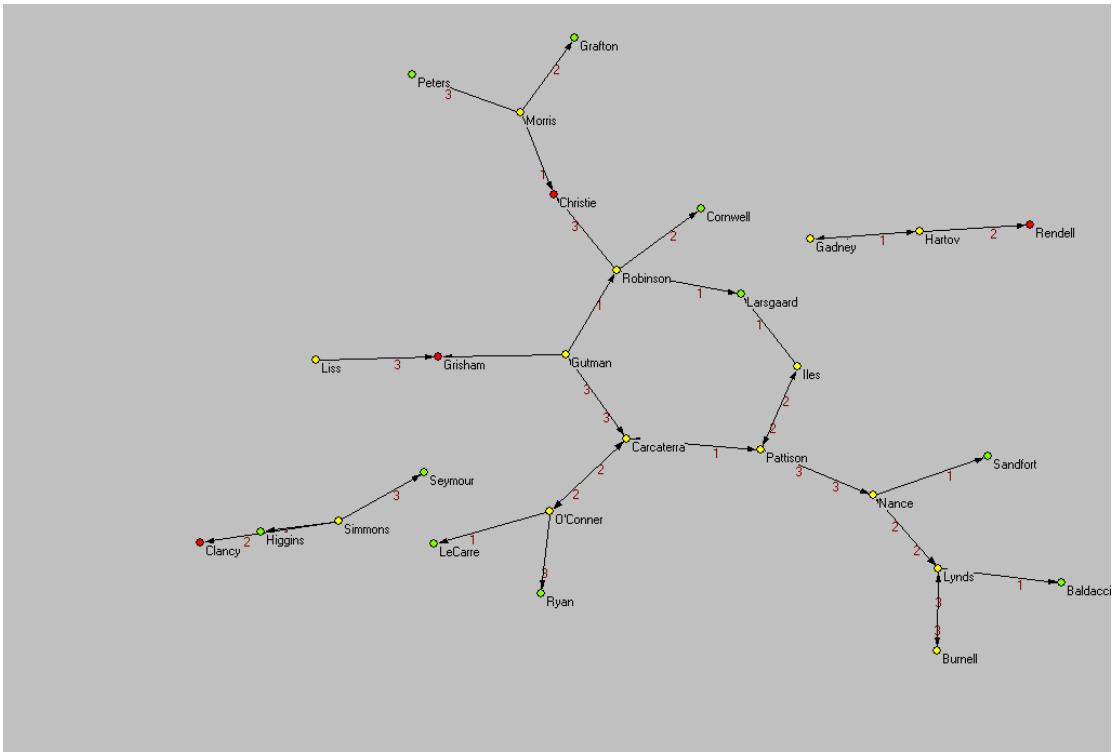


Figure 2: Network of Titles by Authors who are Unknown to Subjects



The network featuring titles by authors who were known to subjects contains 20 vertices, linked by 23 arcs. The other network contains 28 vertices and 34 arcs.

The density of the first network is 0.06, which is lower than that of the second one (0.04). The average degrees are 1.15 (s.d. 1.19) and 1.21 (s.d. 1.34) for the first and the second network, respectively.

Cramer's V of 0.8 indicated a very strong association between the two dimensions used in grouping titles by authors who were unknown to subjects. In the other network, there was a very low degree of association (of 0.04) between the two dimensions (cf. H_5, H_6).

To assess whether the experience subjects had acquired with books affected their use of information in the grouping tasks, analyses of variance were performed.

The most salient indicator of information shared by subjects is their capacity to identify titles that in Table 1 were denoted by *double.* Identifying such titles requires the ability to weight them jointly on two dimensions.

Analyses were performed with as the dependent variable the number of such titles used in each of the grouping tasks. Three dichotomous independent variables measured subjects' experience with books: READING splits subjects into two groups according to whether or not they stated that reading books was their favorite pastime; UNKNOWN divided subjects into two groups according to whether the proportion of books they bought by authors who were unknown to them was below or over 20%;

PURCHASE was constructed by taking the mean number of books bought per year as the cut-off value. The variable CONDITION indicated whether the grouping tasks were performed in the K- or in the U-condition.

In the models that were estimated, BOUGHT never attained significance. Therefore, we report only the results of the estimation of models with the remaining two independent variables. No three-way interactions were significant. Thy are omitted in what follows.

All models had significant main effects, to which each of the independent variables made a significant contribution (cf. H_7).

In the model for the first grouping task, the main effect is significant ($F = 11.69$; $df = 3$; $p = 0.000$), which also holds for the contributions of UNKNOWN ($F = 10.33$; $df = 1$; $p=0.002$), READING ($F = 10.13$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.002$), and CONDITION (($F = 17.73$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.000$).

In the analysis of information used in the second task, there is again a significant main effect ($F = 57.23$; $df = 3$; $p = 0.000$). The contributions of two independent variables are significant, i.e., that of READING ($F = 7.15$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.000$) and that of CONDITION ($F = 158.15$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.000$). UNKNOWN just fails to attain significance ($F = 3.35$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.073$).

The same observations hold for the third grouping task. There is a significant main effect ($F = 35.27$; $df = 3$; $p = 0.000$). All three independent variables have significant effects: UNKNOWN ($F = 12.27$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.001$), READING ($F = 8.17$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.006$), CONDITION ($F = 1.51$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.000$).

Discussion

Support has been found for all our hypotheses. In comparing fiction titles, consumers weight them on two dimensions, that of authors' notoriety, and that of appraisal. This information is used differently according to whether titles are compared that stem from authors who are known or unknown to consumers. In the first condition, separate weighting takes place on the two dimensions; in the second condition, there is a joint use of the two dimensions.

In principle, titles by well-known author stand a good chance of being purchased. However, the diversity of consumer appraisal introduces considerable volatility. The separate use of the two dimensions makes it possible that similarity will be perceived between a title by a well-known author and a title that stems from a less well-known author and that, moreover, is negatively appraised.

As to avenues for further research, it is urgent to increase our insight into the dimensions on which consumers weigh fiction titles. Since distinctiveness and idiosyncrasy are attributed to available books, the number of dimensions that may appear to be relevant will be considerable.

A good strategy is to focus on dimensions that reflect knowledge shared by consumers.

If, as suggested, consumers are able to make sophisticated guesses about which authors and which titles are positively appraised by other buyers, in particular by members of reference groups, then this may lead to submitting titles that stand a better chance of being less heterogeneously

appreciated that those in our random sample. Such titles may produce information that enhances our insight into the conditions under which titles are positively appraised.

Consumers have past records of purchases. These records could also be used to get a clearer view of the conditions under which titles are positively or negatively appraised. Information about these records would enable us to devise networks in which titles are linked to each other by relationships that have higher density and degree than those analyzed in the present study.

Note

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Appendix 1

List of titles that were submitted to subjects. All titles were in print in Dutch translation at the time of the investigation.

The names of authors who were expected to be very well-known to subjects are in bold. The original English title and the year of first publication are given in square brackets.

The letters following the Dutch title indicate the three Dutch publishing houses: 'B' = Bruna, 'DB' = De Boekerij, and 'LS' = Luitingh-Sijthoff.

1. Gerald Seymour: De onaantastbare (DB)
   [The untouchable, 2002]
2. Dan Simmons: Moedwil (LS)
   [Darwin's blade, 2000]
3. Lorenzo Carcaterra: Hell's Kitchen (LS)
   [Sleepers, 1996]
4. J.M. Morris: Duister web (B)
   [Fiddleback, 2002]
5. **John Le Carre**: Smiley's prooi (LS)
   [Smiley's people, 1980]l
6. Chris Larsgaard: De erfenisjager (B)
   [The heir hunter, 2000]
7. Gayle Lynds: Maskerade (LS)
   [Masquerade, 1996]
8. **Patricia Cornwell**: Honden eiland (LS)
   [Isle of dogs, 2001]
9. **Dean Koontz**: De overlevende (LS)
   [Sole survivor, 1997]
10. James Ellison: De panic room (B)
    [Panic room, 2002]
11. **Tom Clancy**: Ereschuld (B)
    [Debt of honor, 1994]
12. Gemma O'Conner: Oude schulden (DB)
    [Time to remember, 1998]
13. John Nance: Medusa's kind (LS)
    [Medusa's child, 1997]
14. **Alan Folsom**: De dag na morgen (DB)
    [The day after tomoroow, 1994]
15. **Frederic Forsyth**: Geheim dossier Odessa (B)
    [The Odessa file, 1972]
16. David Liss: De windhandel (LS)
    [A conspiracy of paper, 2000]
17. Steven Hartov: Gezant van de duivel (B)
    [The devil's sheperd, 2000]
18. **Stephen King**: Razernij (LS)
    [Rage, 1977]
19. **Mario Puzo**: Omerta (DB)
    [Omertà, 2000]

20. **John Grisham**: De rainmaker (B)
[The rainmaker, 1995]
21. Patrick Robinson: HMS Unseen vermist (B)
[HMS Unseen, 1999]
22. Greg Iles: 24 uur (LS)
[24 Hours, 2001]
23. **Robert Ludlum**: De Scarlatti erfenis (LS)
[The Scarlatti inheritance, 1971]
24. **David Baldacci**: Het recht van de macht (B)
[Absolute power, 1996]
25. **Jack Higgins**: De adelaar is geland (DB)
[The eagle has landed, 1975]
26. **Ruth Rendell**: Het stenen oordeel (B)
[A judgmnent in stone, 1977]
27. Amy Gutman: Onder verdachte omstandigheden (DB)
[Equivocal death, 2001]
28. **Sue Grafton**: E staat voor explosief (DB)
[E is for evidence, 1989]
29. Reg Gadney:De Griekse connectie (DB)
[Strange police, 2000]
30. Eliot Pattison: Dodenmantra (B)
[The skull mantra, 1999]
31. Mark Burnell: Dubbellevens (DB)
[Chameleon, 2001]
32. **Agatha Christie**: Moord op de Nijl (LS)
[Death on the Nile, 1937]
33. Chris Ryan: Doelwit (DB)
[The hit list, 2000]
34. **Ellis Peters**: Het stille woud (DB)
[The hermit of Eyton Forest, 1987]
35. **John Sandford**: Wurggreep (B)
[Easy prey, 2000]
36. **Jonathan Kellerman**: Duivels dans (DB)
[Devil's waltz, 1993]

Appendix 2

	This research	Profile 2001	TBO 2000
SEX			
Male	30	38.7	33.9
Female	70	61.3	66.1
AGE			
15-24	16.7	9.7	14.2
25-49	63.3	54.6	50.9
>50	20	35.7	34.9
EDUCATION			
University	61.7	44.4	37.3
Sec. educ.	13.3	31.6	33.6
Lower	25	23.1	28.9
OCCUPATION			
Profession	78.3	65.1	60.4*
Student	16.7	5.8	--
Other	5	29.1	41.4

Demographic characteristics (in percents) of our subjects ('This research'), of Dutch book buyers ('Profile 2001' De Jager and Van Leeuwen 2002), and of participants in the 2000 national time expediture survey ('TBO 2000').

**) In TBO 2000 students and profesionally employed individuals were put into one group comprising 60.4% of the total number of respondents.*