Results
Initially it would appear that people will plagiarize information more from categories that do not hold their interest.

Correct recall was higher for Traffic Accidents than for Standardized Tests.

While overt conscious plagiarism has been the focus of much academic research, few are aware that there are other forms of plagiarism.

Are differences in plagiarism due to differences in interest in the category of knowledge tapped by the problem?

Initially it would appear that people will plagiarize information more from categories that do not hold their interest.

Correct recall was higher for Traffic Accidents than for Standardized Tests.


Conclusions

• Participants will plagiarize different material at different rates.
  • Initially, it would appear that people will plagiarize information more from categories that do not hold their interest.
  • Such a finding, if it holds up over time, has enormous implications for academic honesty policies.
  • Another method of gathering this information may be to collect data on rates of plagiarism in particular courses by both majors and non-majors.

Caveat

• Are differences in plagiarism due to differences in interest in the category of knowledge tapped by the problem?
  • Our researchers noted that many participants demonstrated greater difficulty at initial generation when generating ideas for Standardized Tests.
  • It is possible that our difference in plagiarism is the result of difficulty at generation rather than (or in addition to) differences in interest level.
  • We are currently gathering normative data on the interest level, frequency of thoughts, and ease of generation for 40 different problems. These data will be used to select the extreme values in each of these three ratings categories.

References


Background

• Cryptomnesia (AKA Unconscious Plagiarism) occurs when an individual unknowingly uses information generated by others as their own original contributions.

• While overt conscious plagiarism has been the focus of much academic research, few are aware that there are other forms of plagiarism.

Goal and Prediction:

Are there particular categories of knowledge that are plagiarized more than others?

If a category is more important to the participant, the ideas generated by others will be elaborated on and absorbed more, resulting in higher rates of plagiarism compared with a less important category.

Importance may serve to make ideas more distinctive in memory, resulting in lower rates of plagiarism for important categories.

Procedure:

• In groups of 3-4, each participant generated (aloud) four ideas to each of two problems:
  1. Alternatives to standardized test scores as university admission criteria
  2. Ways to reduce traffic accidents

• All participants were asked to return to the laboratory exactly one week later and were not told the purpose of the second session.

• All participants were asked to recall their own ideas (on paper) from the first session and were told that they were not expected, nor required, to recall all of their ideas.

• Participants were sternly admonished to recall only their own ideas and not those generated by others.

• After the Recall-Own phase, all participants filled out a post-experimental questionnaire that assessed their subjective feelings about each of the two problems (i.e., Standardized Tests and Traffic Accidents).

Mean Ratings from Post-Experimental Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>This problem is important to me**</th>
<th>My answers will make a difference*</th>
<th>I do not care about this issue**</th>
<th>I think about this issue often**</th>
<th>I thought about this issue since last week**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Tests</td>
<td>3.29 (.12)</td>
<td>2.67 (.10)</td>
<td>2.14 (.10)</td>
<td>2.25 (.12)</td>
<td>2.77 (.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Accidents</td>
<td>4.21 (.10)</td>
<td>2.93 (.11)</td>
<td>1.52 (.09)</td>
<td>3.48 (.11)</td>
<td>3.81 (.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Parentheses represent standard errors.
Scale ranges from 1 (Completely Disagree) to 5 (Completely Agree)
* These values differ at p < .05
** These values differ at p < .001

• The problem of Standardized Tests was rated as:
  • Less important.
  • Answers were less likely to make a difference.
  • Participants cared less about it.
  • Thought less about it in general as well as over the previous week.

• Traffic Accidents are clearly more important to our participants than standardized tests.

• Plagiarism was higher for Standardized Tests than for Traffic Accidents.

• Correct recall was higher for Traffic Accidents than for Standardized Tests.

Grand Theft Plagiarism: Stealing More When You Are Interested