Goods and the Last Drop: Memory For End Satiation Delays Repeat Consumption Frequency

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Five experiments reveal that end satiety level determines delay in repeat consumption and that this effect is driven by a memory bias to recall the end of the most recent consumption episode. These findings elucidate factors that influence repeat consumption and suggest ways to decrease the delay between consumption episodes.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A great deal of research has investigated ways to increase profit margin (e.g., Young and Nestle 2002), but relatively little attention has been given to factors that affect velocity (purchase cycles). Thus, the primary goal of this research - attempting to identify which features of a consumption experience determine when consumers will desire to repeat that experience, and why. Of the two primary psychological factors that determine food intake, wanting (habituation) and liking (satiety) (Berridge 1996; Berridge and Robinson 2003), we hypothesize that recollection for satiety rather than habituation experienced at the end of a consumption episode determines when consumers desire to and do repeat that experience.

Experiment 1. The objective was to examine whether manipulating end satiety would affect observed delay until participants consume that food again. Satiety level was manipulated by varying portion size. Participants assigned to the small (large) portion size condition ate 1 (4) truffle(s). They rated liking after eating each truffle. Participants were then compensated with a coupon that entitled them to a free bag of truffles. A coupon code matched participants’ condition to observed delay. Participants who ate a small portion retrieved their free bag sooner than did participants who ate a large portion, t(41) = -3.66, p = .001. A mediation analysis revealed a mediating role of final liking.

Experiment 2. We examined whether the influence of end satiety on delayed consumption would influence how long people would desire to delay future consumption. Participants in the small (large) portion size condition were given a plate with 5 (15) Nut Thins. After eating each Nut Thin, participants indicated how much they liked that flavor (satiation measure) and the extent to which they wanted to continue eating that flavor (habituation measure). Participants provided their e-mail so that a follow-up could be sent to them the next day. The next day, participants were told that completing the follow-up automatically entered them in a drawing to receive free boxes of Nut Thins. Participants were asked to indicate when they would like these boxes delivered if they won the lottery. Participants in the small portion size condition desired to receive their Nut Thins sooner than did participants in the large portion size condition, t(28) = 2.24, p = .03. A mediation analysis revealed a mediating role of decrease in liking but no mediating role of decrease in wanting.

Experiment 3. The objective was to gain insight into the underlying mechanism. Distracting participants while they are consuming disrupts the encoding of that meal into memory (Higgs and Woodward 2009). Thus, differences in remembered satiation that accompany various portion sizes can be prevented by using a cognitive load task. The method for experiment 3 was identical to experiment 2 except that participants were also placed under high or no cognitive load. Those assigned to the high cognitive load condition were asked to perform an arithmetic task while eating whereas those in the no load condition were not. There was a significant interaction between portion size and cognitive load, F(1,75) = 7.23, p < .01. Participants under no load in the small portion size condition reported a shorter desired delay than did those in the large portion size condition, t(128) = 2.65, p < .01. This finding was also observed for participants in the end recall condition, t(128) = 3.29, p < .01, but not for participants in the beginning recall condition, t(128) = .10, p = .90. Decrease in liking is responsible for differences in the control and end recall conditions, but not in the beginning recall conditions.

Experiment 4. This directly tested that the effect of larger portion sizes on desired delay is driven by consumers’ predisposition to recall the end rather than the initial moment of satiety during the initial consumption episode. The method was identical to that of experiment 2 with the exception of two guided recall conditions. In the end (beginning) recall condition, participants that completed the follow-up were directed to recall the last (first) cracker that they ate. There was a significant interaction between portion size and recall, F(2, 128) = 3.25, p = .04. In the control condition, participants in the small portion size condition reported a shorter desired delay than did those in the large portion size condition, t(128) = 2.65, p < .01. This finding was also observed for participants in the end recall condition, t(128) = 3.29, p < .01, but not for participants in the beginning recall condition, t(128) = .10, p = .90. Decrease in liking is responsible for differences in the control and end recall conditions, but not in the beginning recall conditions.

Together, these results suggest that satiety level at the end of a consumption episode influences the frequency with which a good is consumed. This effect is driven by a memory bias such that consumers spontaneously recall the end, and most satiated, point of their most recent consumption experience. The present research identifies an important factor that significantly influences the delay until consumers repeat consumption of goods in the domain of food, and suggests strategies than managers can implement to accelerate the repeated consumption of such goods.

REFERENCES


