Effects of Consumer Co-Production on Perceived Authenticity of Consumption Experience and Input Product

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This paper addresses the effects of consumer co-production (cooking) on perception of authenticity of product experience (taste of food) and input product (a Tikka Masala dinner toolkit). Two experiments were carried out that differed in terms of whether the co-production manipulation was based on scenario descriptions or real production activities. Only in the second study, where a random half of participants actually prepared the food, we observed significant effects on perceptions of authenticity for both product experience (taste) and input product. High domain involvement (involvement with cooking) was found to be boundary condition for these effects.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In two studies we examine the effects of prosumption (Toffler 1980; Xie, Bagozzi, and Troye 2008) on the perceived authenticity of a food product (taste and input product). Prosumption (production + consumption) is “value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences” (Xie et al. 2008, p. 110). We suggest that subjective feelings of authenticity are stimulated when consumers actively participate in the value-creation process (prepare food) and that this sense of authenticity transfers to the outcome (the taste of food) and the input product (a dinner toolkit). It is further suggested that stronger perceptions of authenticity are obtained when consumers are highly involved with the prosumption domain (cooking). Specifically, we tested the following hypotheses:

H1: Consumer prosumption has a positive effect on outcome authenticity, i.e. self-produced outcomes will be perceived as more authentic than ready-made solutions of comparable quality
H2: Consumer prosumption has a positive effect on perceived authenticity of the input product
H3: The positive effects of consumer prosumption on perceived authenticity of outcomes (H1) and input product (H2) will be more pronounced for consumers who are highly involved in the prosumption domain compared to those who are less involved.

Study 1: Effects of Real Prosumption

Participants and Design

A professional research agency recruited subjects randomly from a Scandinavian city (n=98; 52.4 percent females, mean age: 33). All participants were users of the focal product category (Asian food). The study used a 2 (Low prosumption/High prosumption) x 2 (Low involvement/High involvement) between-subjects design. The product was a Tikka Masala dinner toolkit.

Stimuli, procedure and measures. The experiment took place in a laboratory kitchen with 8 pairs of ovens. In the Low Prosumption condition (n=47), the food was ready-made and subjects only heated and stirred the food. In the High-Prosumption condition (n=51), subjects were asked to fry meat and prepare the meal as prescribed on the product package (the package contained coco milk and dehydrated sauce and rice).

Before tasting the food, subjects filled in a small booklet of measures on perceived prosumption level (manipulation check) and demographic questions in an adjacent room. While subjects filled in this questionnaire, their casseroles were secretly swapped with food prepared by our chef. Subjects were let to believe that they were going to taste the food they had prepared themselves. Next, subjects were instructed to taste the food.

After the taste session, subjects responded to a questionnaire with measures of outcome and input authenticity and prosumption domain involvement. Outcome- and input authenticity were measured on two seven-point semantic differential scales (not at all authentic–very authentic; not really Indian–really Indian). Product domain involvement was measured by three items on seven-point scales.

Results of study 1

Manipulation checks. The manipulation of prosumption was successful (F(1,182)=5.679, M_{high prosumption}=3.492 vs M_{low prosumption}=2.881, p<.05).

Test of hypotheses. In line with H1, we find that subjects who prepared the dish themselves, rate the taste as more authentic than subjects who tasted ready-made food (M_{HighPros}=4.66 vs M_{LowPros}=4.37, F(1, 81)=3.93, p =.051). A similar, but even stronger effect is observed for authenticity of the input product (the Tikka Masala toolkit), lending support to H2 (M_{HighPros}=4.76 vs M_{LowPros}=4.14, F(1, 81)=4.86, p =.00). Also, the Prosumption level x Domain involvement interaction is significant for both taste authenticity (F(1, 81)=11.83, p =.00) and product authenticity (F(1, 81)=4.43, p =.04). The patterns of means and the results of contrast analyses are consistent with H3 for both variables.

Study 2

Participation involves three aspects that may partly determine perceived authenticity of the outcome. First, the prosumer gains insight into how the dish is made. Second, it allows an association between the self and the outcome. Third, what is self-made is also hand-made. In study two we used a scenario manipulation to assess whether “self-made” had an effect over and beyond the effect of the outcome being “hand made”.

Participants and Design

Subjects were 240 bachelor students in an introductory marketing course. Two subjects did not use Asian food and were removed from the analyses. In line with previous research (Bendapudi and Leone 2003), prosumption was manipulated by means of scenarios. All scenarios focused on the same product as in study 1 and described a situation in which friends were expected to visit in 90 minutes. Three scenarios described three different prosumption conditions: 1) food purchased from a firm specializing in delivery of fast food (low prosumption), 2) food prepared by a friend (handmade, low prosumption), or 3) food prepared by the subject (high prosumption). After reading a scenario, subjects tasted the food (prepared in the same way as in study 1) and responded to a questionnaire with the same measures as in study 1.

Results Study 2 and conclusion

Manipulation checks. The prosumption manipulation was successful (F(2,236)=7.631, p =.05; M_{self-made}=2.753; M_{made by friend}=2.259, M_{purchased}=2.162, p <.05 for both contrasts).

Test of hypotheses. The main effect of prosumption on outcome authenticity (taste authenticity) was not significant (F=1.980, p=.139). Thus, H1 was not supported (M_{self-made}=3.97; M_{made by friend}=3.65, M_{purchased}=3.80). ANOVAs for the effects of prosumption on input product authenticity (H2) and the interaction between prosumption and domain involvement on outcome- and input authenticity (H3) revealed no significant findings (all p-values>.30).

To our knowledge, this research presents the first experimental evidence of positive effects of consumer co-production on authenticity perceptions. A methodological contribution is also offered to research on consumer prosumption. The scenario manipulation in study 2 was too weak to produce any of the effects observed in study 1. This finding suggests that real participation is needed in future experiments on the effects of prosumption.
REFERENCES