Anticipating Variety Reduces Satiation From a Current Experience

Barbara E. Kahn, University of Pennsylvania, USA
Jiao Zhang, University of Miami, USA
Julio Sevilla, University of Georgia, USA

This paper demonstrates that anticipating having a varied consumption experience in a given domain reduces satiation from a current related episode. We show that this effect is driven by the degree to which consumers savor the current experience and the amount of thoughts associated to the upcoming consumption episode.

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Julio Sevilla, University of Georgia, USA
Jiao Zhang, University of Miami, USA
Barbara E. Kahn, University of Pennsylvania, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

There are many factors that influence our enjoyment and satiation from a current experience. Among them we have, the initial utility we derive from it (Coombs and Avrunin 1977), the objective quantity that we have (Mook and Votaw 1992), the rate at which we consume it (Galak, Kruger and Loewenstein 2013; Nelson and Meyvis 2008; Nelson, Meyvis and Galak 2009), how much variety it contains (Rolls et al. 1984), or merely how we remember it (Rozin et al, 1998) or categorize it (Redden 2008). Finding ways to delay satiation is instrumental to our happiness (Raghunathan and Irwin 2001) because when this phenomenon takes place, consumers stop enjoying their favorite stimuli as much as they did before and need to consume better ones in order to just maintain a desired level of enjoyment (Brickman and Campbell 1971). Despite its importance for wellbeing, just a few ways in which satiation can be reduced have been documented in the literature (Frederick and Loewenstein 1999).

The current research looks at a new factor that can affect satiation from a current experience, such as anticipating consuming variety in a given domain. Frequently, in our everyday lives, we find ourselves in situations where our future consumption in a given category is likely set due to decisions we have made for ourselves, or simply because the circumstances have attached us to a particular set of conditions. For example, we choose to buy vacation packages, time shares, or season tickets for extended periods of time, lease vehicles to contracts for a set number of months or years, acquire annual country club or gym memberships, or simply buy our favorite flavor of yogurt in bulk at the local Costco. Alternatively, there are situations such as moving to a particular city for work, where we may find ourselves committed to a specific set of entertainment or dining options. What both of these cases have in common is that consumers know what their future consumption in a specific domain will be. Needless to say, we encounter this type of conditions on a regular basis, so it would be useful to learn more about what their effect is on the enjoyment of a related present experience. This research has the objective to help answer this question.

We look at cases where consumers face a current experience in a given domain and are able to anticipate what their prospective future consumption on that category is. We propose that in such cases people will satiate slower in the present if the prospective future episode contains variety. We also provide evidence that this effect is due to consumers’ increased savoring of the current experience - potentially caused by their anticipation of a different episode in the future - and to anticipatory thoughts related to the upcoming event (Loewenstein 1987).

We tested this effect in a series of studies in which subjects rated their enjoyment of different sets of jelly beans as they repeatedly consumed them. Study 1 tested the core prediction as participants satiated less from the consumption of jelly beans when they were made believe that they could have a more varied consumption opportunity in the future. The setup employed for this experiment served as a proxy for situations where consumers are attached to a particular set of consumption options due to external circumstances, such as the options available in the city in which they live. Study 2 replicated the effect in a design where instead externally establishing what the future consumption scenario is we determined it by asking participants about their individual preferences. This setup served as a proxy for situations in which participant’s future consumption is entirely determined by their own choices. Moreover, this experiment demonstrated the moderating role of time distance on this effect. It shows that the effect will be stronger in cases where the future consumption opportunity will take place in a few days as opposed to in several months. Lastly, study 3 provided evidence in favor of savoring of the present and thoughts about the future as the underlying mechanism, while showing that the effect is domain specific and does not extend to future, varied experiences in general.

In conclusion, these findings contribute to our understanding about the phenomenon of satiation in meaningful ways, as no research had looked at the effect that such important factor at the theoretical and practical level, such as anticipating future consumption, may have on satiation from a current experience. This paper is consistent with the conference objective of “making a difference”, as we, consumer behavior researchers, must strive on doing work on topics that are both, theoretically and practically relevant. If we use our skills towards this objective, we will be able to have a bigger impact on consumer welfare.

REFERENCES


