Questioning the End Effect: Endings Do Not Inherently Have a Disproportionate Impact on Evaluations of Experiences

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This research re-examines the end effect, which suggests that people’s retrospective evaluations are disproportionately influenced by the end of the experience. We demonstrate that episodes do not disproportionately affect evaluations simply because they occur at the end. Instead, end effects exist only when additional conditions are met.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1019124/volumes/v43/NA-43

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**Evaluations of Hedonic Experiences**

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**Paper #1: Questioning the End Effect: Endings Do Not Inherently Have a Disproportionate Impact on Evaluations of Experiences**
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**Paper #2: Experience Heterogeneity Moderates the Peak Effect in Retrospective Evaluations**
Robert Latimer, University of Toronto, Canada

**Paper #3: Modes of Enjoyment for Multifaceted Experiences**
Michael C. Covey, University of Minnesota, USA
Joseph P. Redden, University of Minnesota, USA

**Paper #4: Feeling Like an Expert: Subjective Expertise and Consumption Enjoyment**
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**SESSION OVERVIEW**

Human lives are a collection of experiences and an extraordinary amount of money is spent acquiring hedonic experiences. In 2013 alone, Americans spent twenty billion dollars on bars and nightclubs, $140 billion on hotels, bed and breakfasts, and hostels, $15 billion at amusement parks, and well over $400 billion eating at restaurants (IBISWorld 2013). Given the prevalence of experiences, understanding how consumers’ form evaluations of experiences is increasingly important. The goal of this session is to re-examine factors currently understood to influence the evaluations of experiences and to uncover new factors that influence such evaluations. Examining both established and novel factors, the papers included in this session offer important new insights to better understand how consumers form evaluations of experiences.

The first two papers re-examine one of the most well-established findings in the current literature: the peak-end effect, which suggests that people over-weight the peak (i.e., most intense) and end (i.e., final moments) of an experience when forming evaluations. These re-examinations provide greater clarity on if and when such moments are indeed over-weighted. First, Tully and Meyvis systematically re-examine existing evidence for the end effect. This paper did not set out to identify moderators or boundary conditions, but rather to re-examine the existence of a basic end effect. The findings in this paper indicate that endings are not inherently over-weighted in retrospective evaluations. Their results demonstrate that prior demonstrations attributed to an end effect are in fact the result of other processes associated with the end under specific conditions. In the second paper, Robert Latimer demonstrates when peaks are over-weighted in evaluations providing a boundary condition as well as offering a mechanism to better understand previous findings. He demonstrates that the heterogeneity of an experience influences whether people use global or local processing which in turn impacts whether the experience is stored as a prototype representation affecting the extent to which a peak is weighted in evaluations.

The other two papers reveal new factors that systematically impact evaluations of experiences. Complementing the findings of the second study, the third paper also demonstrates that processing style affects evaluations. However, instead of examining the peak of a unitary experience, this research examines multifaceted experiences (experiences that consist of multiple components simultaneously). Their results suggest that, compared to using a destructionist mode where components are appreciated independently, the constructionist mode, where components are evaluated holistically (e.g., globally), increases overall evaluations above the rating of either of the individual components. The last paper, by Campbell and Ariely, pieces together existing findings on expertise and consumption enjoyment to identify subjective expertise (i.e., feeling like an expert in the “experience” area) as an important influence that differentially impacts consumption and process enjoyment of experiences. Their findings suggest that subjective expertise increases process enjoyment and consumption enjoyment of high quality experiences. However, for low quality experiences, subjective expertise increases process enjoyment, but not consumption enjoyment.

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**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

This research adds to the existing understanding of how the structure of an experience affects its overall evaluation, by reexamining one of the most basic findings in this area: the end effect. The end effect suggests that people over-weight the final moments when evaluating an experience (e.g., Fredrickson and Kahneman 1993). Although demonstrations of the end effect abound, prior research also has identified several boundary conditions under which the effect fails to obtain (e.g., Miron-Shatz 2009). Rather than examining boundary conditions, the current work revisits the basic effect to test if the end of an experience is in fact inherently over-weighted. While we certainly acknowledge that endings can have a disproportionate impact on retrospective evaluations at times, our findings suggest that people do not readily over-weight the end of an experience in evaluations.

In study 1, participants listened to one of two sound clips of a vacuum cleaner noise. The clips were identical, but reversed in sequence, such that the ending was either softer (better-end) or louder (worse-end) than average. Participants in the better-end condition rated the end of the clip as significantly better than participants in the worse-end condition ($F(1, 294)=273.67, p<.001$). Despite this effective manipulation, there was no significant difference in their overall irritation ratings ($F<1$). In this study, the sample size was sufficiently large to detect a small effect (Cohen’s d=.2) with a 93% probability. The remaining studies reconcile our inability to find an end effect here with previous demonstrations of the effect.

We first turned to previous demonstrations that retrospective evaluations of an aversive experience improve when a better end is added to it. We tested whether this effect was due to an improvement in the average of the experience rather than an over-weighting of the end. In study 2, participants were assigned to listen to one of three noise profiles: better-middle, better-end, and added-end. The better-middle and better-end sound clips were equally long but differed in whether a less aversive (i.e., better) segment was positioned in the middle or the end. The added-end clip consisted of the better-middle clip, adding an additional, less aversive segment to the end. Thus, the better-middle and added-end clips differed in both average intensity and the intensity of the end (as in previous demonstrations), whereas the better-middle and better-end clips had the same average intensity and only differed in the intensity of the end. Replicating previous demonstrations, participants in the added-end condition reported less
irritation with the noise than participants in the better-end and better-middle conditions ($F(1, 220) = 4.43$, $p = .036$). However, there was no significant difference in irritation between the better-middle and better-end ($F < 1$), indicating that the intensity of the end didn’t matter when average irritation was held constant.

Study 3 conceptually replicated study 2 using positive stimuli by creating compositions of music. Since the overall experience was positive, we added a less enjoyable component to the compilation for some participants, and varied the positioning of this component. Participants in the control condition enjoyed the music compilation more than did participants who had a less enjoyable part added, either to the end or to the middle ($F(1, 880) = 4.37$, $p = .037$). There was no significant difference between the last two conditions ($F < 1$). Thus, while adding a less enjoyable component lowered evaluations, the positioning of this component did not matter. In sum, studies 2 and 3 indicate that adding a better (or worse) end changes evaluations by changing the average, rather than by changing the final moments.

We next turn to prior research that has observed end effects within-subjects. We examined whether providing multiple experiences that vary only in structure compels people to incorporate opinions of the structure into evaluations. In study 4, participants listened to two aversive sounds that were identical, but reversed in sequence, such that one ended well and one ended poorly. The order of the sounds was counterbalanced. The within-subject analysis replicates previous demonstrations of the end effect: participants rated their better-end experience as less irritating than their worse-end experience, $F(1, 199) = 73.45$, $p < .001$. However, the between-subjects analysis showed no difference in ratings of the better-end and worse-end sounds at time 1 ($F < 1$). It was only at time 2 that participants who listened to the better-end reported less irritation than those who heard the worse-end sound ($F(1, 198) = 53.44$, $p < .001$).

Study 5 replicated study 4 using positive stimuli. The within-subject analysis replicated the end effect as demonstrated in prior research ($F(1, 488) = 15.52$, $p < .001$). However, between-subjects analysis indicated that, at time 1, there was no difference in enjoyment between participants who received the worse-end experience and those who received the worse-middle experience ($F < 1$). Only at time 2 did participants who received the worse-end experience rate their experience as less enjoyable than those who received the worse-middle experience ($F(1, 487) = 5.10$, $p = .024$). In other words, the end effect did not appear until participants were exposed to both experiences.

Finally, in study 6, participants listened to two aversive sounds that varied in structure, with one sound ending relatively better and one ending relatively worse. However, half of the participants heard two sounds of the same type (e.g., a vacuum) while the other half heard two different types (e.g., a vacuum then a drill). Thus, the same-sounds condition differed only in the intensity of the end as in previous within-subjects demonstrations of the end effect whereas the mixed-sounds condition varied in both intensity of the end and sound type. As predicted, there was a 3-way interaction ($F(1, 298) = 4.163$, $p = .043$). Again, there was no end effect at time 1. Further, in line with our predictions, the end effect was only significant at time 2 for people in the same-sounds condition—for whom the structure was the only aspect available to differentiate ratings of the first and second sound. For those in the different-sounds condition—who had another aspect to consider—there was still no end effect at time 2. Thus, the end effect may only occur when people evaluate multiple experiences that only differ in structure which encourages a reliance on the intuitive preference for improving sequences.

### Experience Heterogeneity Moderates the Peak Effect in Retrospective Evaluations

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

We explore how the heterogeneity of an experience changes the influence of the most intense moment of an experience (peak) on retrospective evaluations of the experience as a whole. Prior research has shown the peak is a powerful predictor of overall evaluations (Fredrickson, 2000). This phenomenon—described by the peak-end rule—is an example of judgment by prototype (Kahneman, 2003) or gestalt (Ariely & Carmon, 2000). Instead of representing the entirety of an experience in memory, people instead store an abstraction of the experience drawn from a few key moments. In this paper we manipulate the heterogeneity of experiences in order to change reliance on a prototype representation.

Two streams of research suggest that heterogeneity of an experience may moderate the peak effect. Replications of the peak-end rule across different types of experiences reveal that the peak effect is less robust for long, complex experiences such as vacations (Kemp, Burt, & Furneaux, 2008) or the events of a week (Ben-Zeev, Young, & Madsen, 2009) or day (Miron-Shatz, 2009). This pattern is consistent with the literature on categorization. Prototype models tend to perform best for simple stimuli such as patterns of dots (e.g., Smith & Minda, 2002). Exemplar models, in which every stimulus is stored in memory, better predict categorization for complex, feature-rich stimuli such as imaginary creatures (Yamauchi & Markman, 2000). If heterogeneity increases the complexity and feature-richness of an experience, people should shift from using a prototype representation to an exemplar representation. This shift may reduce the peak’s impact on retrospective evaluations.

Study 1 (N=930) was designed as both a pretest and an opportunity to test the effect of heterogeneity on the predictive power of peaks and ends. Participants viewed and rated their liking of 20 paintings and each painting’s similarity to the other paintings in the set. Participants viewed either 20 paintings of the same style (homogenous condition, 9 style replicates) or 20 paintings drawn randomly from all 9 styles (heterogenous condition). Finally, participants indicated their overall enjoyment of the set.

Following Kahneman and colleagues (e.g., Shreiber & Kahneman, 2002; Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993), we tested the the peak-end rule by examining the correlations between online and retrospective evaluations. Both peak and end liking ratings were more closely correlated to overall enjoyment in the homogenous condition ($z_{peak} = 3.8$, $p < .0001$; $z_{end} = 4.11$, $p < .0001$; Steiger, 1980).

Study 2A (N=386) demonstrates that the addition of a highly enjoyable peak (vs. moderately enjoyable peak) produces greater retrospective enjoyment for participants viewing a more homogenous set of art. Participants viewed 10 paintings for 20 seconds each. As in Study 1 heterogeneity was manipulated by presenting participants with paintings of the same style (homogenous) or 2 paintings from each of five styles (heterogenous). Both conditions had five replicates that were collapsed together during the analysis. In all conditions, eight of the paintings were selected to be moderately liked based ratings in Study 1 (Mbackground = 45.3). For half of the participants we added two highly liked paintings (Mhipeak = 74.2) and for the remaining participants we added two moderately liked paintings (Mhipeak = 59.8). Participants in the homogenous condition indicated a greater increase in retrospective enjoyment due to the higher peak (Mhipeak = 68.2, Mlopeak = 54.6) than participants in the heterogeneous condition (Mhipeak = 64.0, Mlopeak = 59.3) ($F(1, 382) = 5.21$, $p < .05$).

In Study 2A, participants in the high peak condition also experienced a set with a higher mean liking rating. Study 2B corrected
this by changing the 8 moderately liked paintings across conditions to keep the mean consistent despite the changing intensity of the peak ($M_{hipeak} = 51.1$). The same high and low peaks were used as in Study 2A and the remainder of the procedure was identical. Replicating Study 2A, participants in the homogenous condition indicated a greater increase in retrospective enjoyment due to the higher peak ($M_{hipeak} = 74.8, M_{lopeak} = 63.4$) than participants in the heterogeneous condition ($M_{hipeak} = 65.6, M_{lopeak} = 67.4$) ($F(1, 609) = 6.80, p < .01$).

In Studies 1 and 2, heterogeneity was achieved by mixing art from disparate styles. However, the styles themselves also vary in how similar one painting is to the next. Using the similarity ratings from Study 1, we selected the styles for which paintings were most similar to one another (Pollock Drip) and most different from one another (Watercolor Portraits). For just these styles, participants in Study 3 ($N = 562$) were presented with sets containing either high or low peaks, as in Study 2B. Participants with the more similar set indicated a greater increase in retrospective enjoyment due to the higher peak ($M_{hipeak} = 74.8, M_{lopeak} = 63.4$) than participants with the less similar set ($M_{hipeak} = 65.6, M_{lopeak} = 67.4$) ($F(1, 558) = 8.32, p < .01$).

In Study 4 ($N=784$), we manipulated the perceived homogeneity of a set with processing style. Participants viewed a series of 8 Navon figures–large letters made up of many smaller letters–(Navon, 1977) and were prompted to respond with either the large letter (global processing) or the smaller letter (local processing). Local processing may reduce the perceived similarity between stimuli, in turn reducing reliance on prototypes and decreasing the magnitude of the peak effect. In all other aspects Study 4 replicates the homogenous condition of Study 2B. Participants in the global processing condition indicated a greater increase in retrospective enjoyment due to the higher peak ($M_{hipeak} = 78.8, M_{lopeak} = 69.8$) than participants with the less similar set ($M_{hipeak} = 68.3, M_{lopeak} = 64.5$) ($F(1, 558) = 8.32, p < .01$).

Over four studies we demonstrate that high peaks have a larger influence on retrospective evaluations of experiences when those experiences are more homogenous or are processed more globally. Our results both provide evidence for the mechanism underlying the peak effect– prototype representations of experiences–and suggest boundaries–heterogeneous experiences. Although we happily concede that other mechanisms may also produce peak effects (e.g., distinctive, memorable peaks represented as exemplars, Montgomery & Unava, 2009).

**Modes of Enjoyment for Multifaceted Experiences**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Consumer experiences are typically multifaceted. For example, an overall experience (e.g., a night at the cinema) is comprised by constituent parts that are enjoyed simultaneously (watching a movie while eating popcorn). If the movie is more enjoyable than the popcorn, how much do people enjoy the overall cinematic experience? On the one hand, overall enjoyment could be greater than the utility that either the movie or the popcorn alone could provide. On the other hand, overall enjoyment may lie somewhere between the utility derived from a highly-liked movie and from middling popcorn.

Through four studies, we demonstrate that either of these results are possible depending on the mode of enjoyment consumers use while having a multifaceted experience. First, consumers can use a Constructive Mode, wherein the individual components are fused and are seen as one inseparable Gestalt whole. As a result, using a Constructive Mode means that overall enjoyment is greater than the enjoyment gained from having either of the components alone. Second, consumers can use a Deconstructive Mode, which leads to the perception that the individual components are seen as separable, distinct entities. Consequently, a Deconstructive Mode leads to a preference for having the better-liked component by itself, because overall enjoyment is dragged down by the presence of a less-liked component.

Imagine eating cheese that has great taste but mediocre texture. Although early attitude models viewed a product’s attributes as separable drivers of liking, this does not necessarily follow for hedonic psychology. It is difficult to cognitively separate taste and texture and arrive at a rational evaluation of the cheese. Taste and texture are interwoven, resulting in a composite hedonic response. In this way, we predict that people often use a default Constructive Mode when evaluating experiences. We further predict that this Constructive Mode leads people to enjoy an overall experience more than either of its components alone. These predictions are supported by research in cognitive psychology, which suggests that people are equipped with the ability to perceive an object as either a unified whole or as the smaller parts that comprise it (Palmer 1977). Although the use of these processing strategies can change depending on how stimuli are presented (Kimchi 1992), people are often better equipped to use the former strategy (Navon 1977; Kahneuman, 2003), favoring the forest over the trees. In contrast, we predict that people will use a Deconstructive Mode when experiences are broken apart and attention is drawn to the individual components. This will lead people to enjoy a better-liked component more than the overall experience, which is being “dragged down” by the lesser-liked component. We conducted four studies to test these ideas.

Study 1 tested our core prediction as stated above. 146 participants received a (pretested) lesser-liked music sample and a better-liked chocolate. We manipulated whether participants experienced these two components combined or separately. All participants indicated their enjoyment of the individual components. Combined-experiencers indicated their enjoyment of the overall chocolate-music experience; separate-experiencers predicted how enjoyable this combination would be. We found that combined-experiencers rated the overall experience as more enjoyable than the chocolate alone and the music alone. However, separate-experiencers predicted that the overall experience would be less enjoyable than chocolate, but more enjoyable than music. This is consistent with our theorizing: Combined-experiencers exhibited a Constructive Mode of enjoyment (because the components were interwoven), whereas separate-experiencers exhibited a Deconstructive Mode (because the components were fragmented).

Our second study sheds more light on the proposed process. 211 participants received (pretested) lesser-liked music and better-liked artwork. Whether the components were combined or separated was manipulated. Our DV was how much participants preferred to have the artwork with or without the music. Participants also answered, “How similar (different) were the art and the music?” which served as the proposed mediator. Results were consistent with the theory. Combined-experiencers (compared to separate-experiencers) had a stronger preference to have artwork with music, and this effect was fully mediated by the perception of similarity between the components. Essentially, having a multifaceted experience elicited a Constructive Mode of enjoyment (seeing components as interwoven), where overall enjoyment was greater than individual components alone. Breaking up an experience promoted a Deconstructive Mode (seeing components as independent), where a highly-liked component was perceived to be more enjoyable than an overall experience.

Study 3 provides more process evidence. 68 participants were given the same stimuli and DV from Study 2. Afterward, they filled
out the Attention to Detail subscale (Baron-Cohen et al. 2001), which determines the extent to which participants naturally deconstruct an experience into constituent parts. The scale was found to be correlated with our outcome variable. Participants who naturally use a Deconstructive Mode (Constructive Mode) were more likely to prefer having highly-liked artwork alone (artwork and music together).

Our final study elicits the core finding using a different manipulation. All participants enjoyed music and art simultaneously. During the experience, half of the participants were told to alternate their focus between components; the remaining participants were given no instructions. Finally, all participants were asked to indicate whether they preferred to have the music and the art together, the art by itself, or the music by itself. The results showed that participants who were given no instructions used the default Constructive Mode, overwhelmingly preferring to have the music and the art together. However, when participants were asked to break up the experience and alternate focus (eliciting a Deconstructive Mode), more participants preferred to have the better-liked component (artwork) by itself.

In sum, these four studies advance the idea that people have two fundamentally different ways of thinking about multifaceted experiences. They can either see an experience as components coming together (Constructive), or as components existing independently (Deconstructive). Although hedonic psychology has experienced a surge of interest in the last decade, there is no previous research that has explored what happens when consumers enjoy more than one thing at a time. Our research seeks to be the first to fill this void by proposing a unique intersection between cognitive and hedonic psychology.

Feeling Like an Expert: Subjective Expertise and Consumption Enjoyment

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Past findings show that beliefs and expectations are some of the most powerful forces that affect consumption enjoyment. Fortunately, these forces are within the feasible capability of marketers and consumption designers to influence. For instance, marketing materials that highlight a wine as expensive improve consumers’ enjoyment of the wine (Plassmann et al., 2008). Similarly, meats and sweets taste better to consumers when marketed with delicious and less healthy sounding labels (Wasnink and Van Ittersum, 2006). Across many studies, marketing researchers have found alteration of external beliefs and expectations about products’ qualities (e.g., how well-crafted a wine is) affect consumption enjoyment.

In this project, we explore a similar but new question; how do internal beliefs about one’s own consumer expertise (e.g. one’s belief in their personal ability to detect qualities of a well-crafted wine) affect evaluations of a consumption experience. Specifically we explore subjective expertise, defined as consumers’ beliefs about their ability and knowledge in a consumption domain (Alba and Hutchinson 2000; Hadar, Sood, and Fox, 2013).

We join a general trend that has spanned marketing (Mochon et al. 2012), psychology (Deci and Ryan 2010), and management literatures (Grant and Parker, 2009), that seeks to examine the effects of subjective expertise on various outcomes. We add to the existing bosi of literature by illustrating the nuanced effect subjective expertise has on evaluations of a consumption experience. Doing so allows researchers to better understand the importance of expertise as a construct and provides useful knowledge for managers since this is a type of expertise that can often be feasibly influenced by external factors.

In this investigation, we draw an important distinction between two different sources of enjoyment: item-enjoyment (the enjoyment of an item’s qualities such as liking an item’s flavor, appreciating its qualities) and process-enjoyment (the enjoyment of consumer processes such as thoughtfully evaluating an item’s flavor or other engagement processes). Such a distinction is related to many larger perspectives on procedural versus non-procedural elements (McFarlin and Sweeney, 1992), engagement versus satisfaction (Calder, Malthouse, and Schaeidel 2008; van Doorn et al. 2010), and recent work on enjoyment of consumer processes such as assembly (Dahl and Moreau 2007; Mochon et al. 2012, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004). However, empirical research in marketing has not widely examined when these two types of enjoyment diverge from one another and the specific and variable effects subjective expertise can have on them—for instance across items of high versus low quality.

We conducted eleven experiments using multiple online panels and a lab (individual cell ns > 30 in all experiments but one). In each experiment, we first manipulated participants’ subjective expertise of a single specific consumption domain using a classic test plus false feedback manipulation. Next, in general participants consumed content from that consumption domain, which depending on the experiment involved watching a film clip, reading literary excerpts, drinking tea, or perusing stylish branded advertisements. Next we measured enjoyment of these consumption experiences (and in two separate experiments the predicted enjoyment of a film and wine).

Next, the findings are reported with reference to the three dependents variables assessed, rather than by experiment. Every time each dependent variable was assessed across the experiments, we mention the findings. All reported differences and interactions had ps < .05, unless otherwise noted.

Item-Enjoyment. All eleven experiments measured and provided significant support that subjective expertise in a domain increases item-enjoyment of items in that domain (example measure: how much did you enjoy the qualities of item itself). Feedback that indicated high expertise lead to more consumption enjoyment compared to conditions with either low or no feedback. Further, one experiment tested and found that the effects of the subjective expertise manipulation are domain specific and do not affect enjoyment in other domains.

Three experiments demonstrate that the effect on item-enjoyment is dependent on quality. When domain items were noticeable low in quality either due to an explicit label or other traits about the item (e.g. a known low quality author), subjective expertise did not increase item enjoyment (a null effect). Meditational analyses found that participants increased feelings of general domain subjective expertise and specific perceived ability to distinguish unique qualities in of the certain specific stimuli items mediated the experimental effect of subjective expertise on item enjoyment.

Improvement Processes. Two experiments tested and found that subjective expertise leads people to be significantly more likely to engage in actions to improve consumption, such as taking the time to properly stir a hot tea to “improve the taste.”

Process Enjoyment. While watching a movie, a consumer may not enjoy the qualities of the movie but may enjoy aspects of the consumption process (e.g. critiquing the movie). We investigated this type of process enjoyment: the process of consuming/critiquing enjoyment. The measurement of this enjoyment involved: both asking people to post hoc reflect on their enjoyment of critiquing during a consumption experience for which no direction to critique had been given, and separately by directly asking participants to engage in a critiquing consumption process and measuring enjoyment of the process. Although subjective expertise only increased item enjoyment for high quality items, subjective expertise increased process enjoyment for both high and low quality items. Meditational analyses (me-
diator: generalized feelings of subjective expertise) supported this three-way interaction of manipulated subjective expertise by item quality by type of enjoyment (item or process).

Summary. The current research pieces together existing findings on expertise (Dahl and Moreau 2007; Deci and Ryan 2000; White 1959) and consumption enjoyment (Loewenstein 1999; Vohs et al. 2013) to distinguish subjective expertise as an important, distinct, and nuanced influence on evaluations of a consumption experience. The findings help researchers to make better predictions regarding how subjective expertise will affect different types of enjoyment, under what conditions these patterns will vary, and what behaviors subjective expertise might encourage.

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