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Are All Teasers Created Equal? the Effectiveness of Sampling Experiences on Desire For the Target Product.

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Marketers commonly provide consumers with free samples to induce them to purchase the target products. We find the effectiveness of this practice depends on two critical factors: whether the samples are placed outside or inside the target products and whether consumers have a prior expectation to consume the target products.

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Are All Teasers Created Equal?

The Effectiveness of Sampling Experiences on Desire for the Target Product

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Providing sampling experiences (i.e., “teasers”) is a common marketing practice. For example, Amazon.com invites consumers to “click to look inside” for sample pages; Godiva offers registered chocolate aficionados free chocolate samples. In this research, we study the factors that influence the effectiveness of sampling experiences on inducing consumers’ desire for the target product.

Existing literature has documented the reasons why sampling experiences can increase (Cabanac 1979) or decrease (Steinberg and Yalch 1978; Lammers 1991) desire for the target product. We propose a novel factor that influences the effectiveness of sampling experience, independent of the previous findings. We refer this factor as the *perceived overlap* between the sampling experience (i.e., the experience of consuming the product samples) and the product experience (i.e., the experience of consuming the target product). We reason that, because the sampling experience and the product experience share commonality, consumers could perceive the sampling experience as a part of the product experience (i.e., perceiving overlap). We hypothesize that consumers will desire the target product less when the perceived overlap is higher, because a higher perceived overlap signals to consumers that their desire for the target product has been fulfilled to a greater extent by the sampling experience, and that they do not need to consume the product “again”. Our reasoning is in line with research showing that people disengage from focal activities after engaging in a few related actions and feeling that they have (partially) completed the focal activities (Dhar and Simonson, 1999; Fishbach, Dhar, and Zhang 2006; Laran and Janiszewski 2009).

Then, what influences the perceived overlap? We propose two factors in this research. The first factor is on the environment: the *location of the sample relative to the target product*. We propose that, because object relations in the mental world is a direct reflection of those in the physical world (Shepard and Metzler 1971), consumers would perceive higher overlap when the samples are displayed inside (i.e., physically overlap with) the target product than outside.

The second factor is on the consumer: *consumption expectation*. Because accessible goals lead people to perceive environmental cues as relevant to the goals (Balci and Dunning 2006; Wilcox et al. 2009), we argue that people with a consumption expectation (i.e., consumption goal) would be more likely to interpret sampling experience as relevant to the product experience, and thus perceive higher overlap, than those without a consumption expectation.

Taken together, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Product samples displayed inside (vs. outside) the target product would lead to a higher perceived overlap between the sampling experience and the product experience, which further leads to a lower desire for the target product.

H2: Consumers with an expectation (vs. without expectation) to consume the target product would perceive a higher perceived overlap between the sampling experience and the product experience, which further leads to a lower desire for the target product.

Studies 1-3 tested H1. Study 1 adopted a 2 (sampling experience: with vs. without) \times 2 (location: inside vs. outside) between-participants design, using a painting album as the target product and two sample paintings to provide a direct sampling experience. In the with-sampling-experience (vs. without-sampling-experience) condition, participants viewed two sample paintings (vs. non-painting pag-

es). In the inside (vs. outside) condition, the pages were shown in an opened album (vs. shown as separate pages next to a closed album). We measured desire to view the whole album and found that, in the with-sampling-experience condition, those in the inside (vs. outside) condition exhibited lower desire; whereas in the without-sampling-experience condition, desire did not differ between the inside and outside conditions. Results in the two with-sampling-experiences conditions supported H1, and results in the two without-sampling-experience conditions (control conditions) ruled out the possibility that the proposed effect may be driven by the inherent positivity of the outside condition.

Study 2 used a causal chain design to test the mechanism in H1. Study 2a used a 2 (location: inside vs. outside) between-participants design to test the first link, from Sample Location to Perceived Overlap. Participants viewed sample paintings (displayed inside vs. outside the target album) and indicated the perceived overlap on a Venn-diagram measure, which used one large circle to represent “Viewing the whole album” and a small circle to represent “Viewing the samples,” and varied the degree of overlap between these two circles from small (denoted as 1) to large (denoted as 7). As predicted, participants in the inside (vs. outside) condition indicated higher perceived overlap. Study 2b used a 2 (perceived overlap: high vs. low) between-participants design to test the second link, from Perceived Overlap to Desire for the Target Product. We imposed high (vs. low) perceived overlap via both verbal and pictorial information on participants, before they viewed sampling paintings. We then measured their desire to view the whole album and found that participants in the high-perceived-overlap (vs. low-perceived-overlap) condition exhibited lower desire.

Study 3 replicated study 1 using a different product (M&M’s chocolate) and videos on eating M&M’s to provide an indirect sampling experience.

Studies 4 to 6 tested H2. Study 4 adopted a 2 (sampling experience: with vs. without) \times 2 (consumer expectation: with vs. without) between-participants design. In the with-expectation (vs. without-expectation) condition participants learned (vs. did not learn) that they would view an album in its entirety. In the with-sampling-experience (vs. without-sampling-experience) condition, participants then viewed (vs. did not view) sample paintings. We measured desire to view the whole album and found that, in the with-sampling-experience condition, with-expectation (vs. without-expectation) participants exhibited lower desire; whereas the reverse was true in the without-sampling-experience condition. Results in the two with-sampling-experience conditions confirmed H2, and results from the two without-sampling-experience conditions ruled out the possibility that the proposed effect may be driven by the inherent positivity of the without-expectation condition. Study 5 found supportive evidence for the causal chain in H2, using similar methods as study 2. Study 6 replicated study 4 using a different product (Ghirardelli chocolate) and videos on eating Ghirardelli to provide indirect sampling experience.

In sum, these empirical studies supported our proposed framework. Theoretical and practical implications will be discussed.

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