

Wanting a bite of everything: Hungry people crave more variety

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You're whale watching in Alaska, longing for a margarita and a spot on a beach. You think to yourself, "How did I get here" I hate the cold. Never finished Moby Dick. And I get seasick!" A fascinating new study from the *Journal of Consumer Research* finds that when we long for something intensely – like a much-needed vacation – a wider array of options will sound appealing, potentially leading to some out-of-character choices. Similarly, when we are especially hungry and presented with an range of menu choices, we are more likely to deviate from our favorite meal.

"This article investigated whether desire-induced perception changes can reduce loyalty to favorite[s]," explain Caroline Goukens, Siegfried Dewitte, Mario Pandelaere, and Luk Warlop (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium). "In general, these findings point to the power of desires to affect choice making."

For example, in the pilot study, the researchers had participants who were hungry and participants who were satiated quickly decide whether they liked or disliked twenty-eight different snacks by pressing either a red or green button. Hungry participants were asked not to eat within four hours of the experiment. Satiated participants were presented with a large piece of cake upon arrival and told they had to finish the entire thing. On average, the participants who were hungry liked two more snacks than the participants who had cake.

In another study, the researchers then tested whether diminishing desire

would have an inverse effect, as they wanted to see whether it was the perceived value of the product category that drove the desire for variety. They “accidentally” exposed one group of participants to smelly two-day old sandwiches, messily left near one experimenter table. All participants were then asked to choose what they would like to eat every day for the next workweek from a menu of sandwiches as part of an ostensible sandwich shop contest. Among hungry participants who were sensitive to disgustingness (tested separately), the researchers found that exposure to unappealing, odorous sandwiches eliminated the desire for more variety.

“Our hypothesis joins two different ideas. The first is the idea that an active desire increases the perceived value of the desired object class,” the researchers explain. “The second is the idea that this increase in perceived value can influence variety-seeking tendencies. Our results support the notion that an active desire increases the value of any item that may satisfy the desire: Due to a particular desire, a larger number of items may be considered satisfactory than in the absence of that particular desire.”

Source: University of Chicago

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