

A matter of taste: Food ads work better if all senses are involved

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Do potato chips taste better if an advertisement describes their crunchy sound? Is popcorn more flavorful if its buttery aroma is also depicted in an ad? Researchers at the University of Michigan say yes.

Companies spend billions each year on [food advertising](#), but many ads may be ineffective if they only mention [taste](#) and no other senses, say Ryan Elder and Aradhna Krishna of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

In a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), Elder and Krishna show that multisensory advertising—ads that describe taste, smell, texture, sight and sound—can enhance the taste perceptions of consumers.

"Mentioning senses other than taste can increase positive sensory thoughts about the food and, consequently, taste," said Krishna, the Dwight F. Benton Professor of Marketing. "Because taste is generated from multiple senses, ads mentioning these senses will have a significant impact on taste over ads mentioning taste alone."

In a series of experiments involving chewing gum, potato chips and popcorn, the researchers found that ad slogans designed to appeal to multiple senses lead to higher taste perceptions than single-sense slogans—when consumers are able to "appropriate an ample amount of cognitive resources" to the multiple-sense ads. In other words, if consumers are distracted when viewing a multisensory ad, the ad's

effectiveness suffers.

Elder and Krishna believe their research has many practical implications for ad executives and managers since it can easily and readily be applied in directing ad copy for food products.

"Despite the conventional wisdom that taste is comprised of multiple sensory inputs, advertising within the food and beverage industry rarely addresses perceptions beyond taste," said Elder, a doctoral candidate at Ross. "Many executives believe taste is automatically comprised of multiple senses and thus mentioning the senses in advertisements should not affect taste. Further, many believe that taste, in general, is not affected by ads.

"However, our results suggest that advertising should include multiple-sensory attributes of the products as this has a significant impact on perceptions of the product. These findings are particularly relevant for the food industry, including packaged goods and restaurants, as they continue to spend billions of dollars in advertising the taste of [food](#), one of our most pleasurable and sensational experiences."

More information: The study, "The Effects of Advertising Copy on Sensory Thoughts and Perceived Taste," will be published in the February 2010 issue of the *Journal of Consumer Research*, and is [online now](#).

Provided by University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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