

# Why do appetizers matter more when you're dining out with friends?

June 18 2013

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First impressions of experiences have a greater impact when consumers share the experience with others, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"When consumers consume an experience alone, the end of the experience has a greater effect on their overall evaluations. On the other hand, when consumers consume an experience with others, the beginning has a greater influence on how they judge the entire experience," write authors Rajesh Bhargave (University of Texas, San Antonio) and Nicole Votolato Montgomery (University of Virginia).

Experiences (vacations, concerts, meals) often have multiple components that can be judged separately. For example, a consumer visiting a museum might like some [paintings](#) but dislike others, or a diner at a restaurant might love the appetizers and main course but hate [dessert](#). How consumers judge experiences may depend on whether they are shared with others or consumed alone.

In one study, consumers viewed a series of paintings while either seated alone or with companions. One group was shown a series of paintings beginning with the "least enjoyable" painting and ending with the "most enjoyable," while another group was shown the same paintings in the reverse order. Consumers who were seated alone preferred the series of paintings with the "most enjoyable" painting presented last, while those who viewed the paintings with companions preferred the series with the "most enjoyable" painting presented first.

The order of events in an experience can greatly influence overall enjoyment. Tour operators, museum curators, event planners, spa and resort managers, and others charged with creating [consumption](#) experiences should consider whether consumers tend to engage in the experience alone or with others.

"While consumers sometimes engage in experiences alone, they often share them with others and their overall evaluations are shaped by the social context in which they occur. Companies should consider the [social context](#) of a consumption experience, because consumers think differently and form different memories and evaluations when they feel bonded to others," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Rajesh Bhargave and Nicole Votolato Montgomery. "The Social Context of Temporal Sequences: Why First Impressions Shape Shared Experiences." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2013.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Why do appetizers matter more when you're dining out with friends? (2013, June 18) retrieved 3 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-06-appetizers-youre-dining-friends.html>

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