

Too cute to resist: Do whimsical products make consumers overspend?

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Babies are cute. Kittens are cute. But for some people, products that emphasize baby features like chubby cheeks and large eyes cause them to be more careful and restrained. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, products that are cute in a playful and whimsical way can bring out more indulgent behavior.

"We were not convinced that all cute [products](#) would lead to the restrained behavior that stems from baby-cuteness. Our research examined whether there are indeed different types of cuteness, and if these differences could lead to more or less indulgent behavior," write authors Gergana Y. Nenkov (Boston College) and Maura L. Scott (Florida State University).

To test their theory, the authors studied the behavior of adults when given whimsical products. In one study, each participant was given either a playful [ice cream](#) scoop or a plain one and then asked to serve themselves as much ice cream as they wanted. Participants serving themselves with the playfully shaped utensil scooped and ate more ice cream than those using the plain scoop.

In a second study, participants were shown either a plain or an alligator-shaped stapler. Participants that viewed the alligator-shaped stapler were more likely to think of having fun and indicated they would use the stapler for more indulgent purposes such as fun or art projects. Conversely, participants that viewed the plain stapler indicated they would use their stapler for less indulgent, work-related projects.

These study results offer insight into consumer spending for brands that offer products like indulgent dinner entrees, lighthearted movies, and children's clothing.

"Even though we examined the effects of playful products on indulgence in the domains of eating, shopping, and product usage, we expect that exposure to whimsical products could have similar effects on helping people focus on having fun and rewarding themselves in other important life domains like savings, debt repayment, or time management," the authors conclude.

More information: Gergana Y. Nenkov and Maura L. Scott. "'So Cute I Could Eat It Up': Priming Effects of Cute Products on Indulgent Consumption." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2014.

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