HOW ADVERTISING INFLUENCES CONSUMPTION IMPULSES

The Role of Visualization, Anticipated Emotions, Taste Anticipation, and Hedonic Rationalization

David J. Moore and Seung Pil Lee

ABSTRACT: This paper examines some of the key factors that determine how hedonic advertising appeals influence consumption impulses. Study 1 demonstrates that when advertising appeals vividly describe the pleasures of consumption rather than the utilitarian functions of the product, message recipients are able to visualize the emotions they are likely to experience during the consumption process. These anticipated emotions, once activated, may be so overwhelming that a tug-of-war between impulse and self-restraint occurs, prompting message recipients to generate excuses to justify yielding to their consumption impulses. Study 2 replicates this process and goes further by showing how hedonic appeals influence taste anticipation and consumption impulses. Ideas for future research and implications for advertising researchers and practitioners are also discussed.

One ad execution strategy food advertisers may use to stimulate consumption impulses is describing the pleasures of consumption so vividly that message recipients may actually visualize the emotions they are likely to experience, and even anticipate the very taste of the product (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008; MacInnis and Price 1987; O’Doherty et al. 2002). In this paper, our objective is to demonstrate that a hedonic advertising execution format highlighting the pleasures of food consumption rather than the utilitarian benefits of the product may play an effective role in improving the consumer’s ability to visualize the imagery of the consumption experience (Babin, Darden, and Griffin 1994; Batra and Ahtola 1990; Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Homer 2006; Kosup, Creyer, and Burton 2003; MacInnis and Price 1987; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). This visualization process, in turn, should lead to stronger anticipation of the emotions to be experienced when the food is consumed (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008). These anticipated emotions, once activated, may be so overwhelming that a tug-of-war between impulse and restraint may be initiated (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009), which may prompt the message recipient to generate excuses to justify yielding to the eating temptation (De Witt Herberts, Evers, and De Rijder 2011; Kober et al. 2010; Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012). All these responses are ultimately expected to influence consumption impulses. The question is: What is an impulse?

MacInnis and Patrick (2006) describe an impulse as “a sudden, forceful urge” to yield to a given stimulus that is associated with pleasure. Hofmann, Friese, and Strack (2009) identified three characteristics of impulses: First, an impulse is specific, in the sense that it is manifested when a more general drive state (e.g., hunger) confronts a more specific appetitive stimulus in the environment, such as the smell of warm delicious cookies. Second, an impulse may stimulate short-term gratifications, but the incentive to satisfy those appetitive desires may quickly diminish, as time and spatial distance from the stimulus increase. Third, in response to an emotionally compelling stimulus, an impulse often carries with it a forceful urge to act on one’s desires, such as reaching forward for the opportunity to grab or to sample the product (Hofmann 2009; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002).

This paper contributes to the literature by demonstrating how four factors play important roles in determining how hedonic advertising appeals influence consumption impulses: imagery visualization (MacInnis and Price 1987), anticipated emotions (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008; Mellers, Schwartz, and Ritov 1999), taste anticipation (O’Doherty et al. 2002), and hedonic rationalization (Moore and Bovell 2008; Kober et al. 2010). In essence, we show that effective hedonic advertising appeals must first ensure that message recipients can visualize the imagery of the consumption experience, and this imagery visualization process in turn serves as a catalyst that ignites anticipated emotions (Study 1), taste anticipation (Study 2), and hedonic rationalizations (see Figure 1). Imagery

David J. Moore (Ph.D., Indiana University) is an associate professor of marketing, Department of Sport Management, University of Michigan.

Seung Pil Lee (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is a post-doctoral research fellow, Department of Sport Management, University of Michigan.

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visualization is conceptualized as the capacity to mentally "picture" or imagine the sensory dimensions of the consumption experience of a product or service (Escalas 2004a; MacInnis and Price 1987; Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000).

First, this paper demonstrates how hedonic advertising appeals influence the generation of anticipated emotions through the mediation of imagery visualization. Because anticipated emotions are based on the certainty of the future occurrence of an imagined experience (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008), the exploration of this concept should be profitable to both researchers and practitioners in the advertising industry. Second, Study 2 goes even further by showing how the ability of hedonic message appeals to activate a more visceral representation of the pleasure of eating (taste anticipation) (Elder and Krishna 2010; O’Doherty et al. 2002) is highly dependent on the imagery visualization process. Affective neuroscientists have demonstrated that the anticipation of a pleasant taste reward can be as powerful as the taste experience itself (O’Doherty et al. 2002). It is therefore quite possible that exposure to an advertising appeal that vividly describes sensory attributes of the product (e.g., thick creamy mozzarella cheese sizzling over the pizza topping), may activate the imagery visualization process in such a powerful way that it becomes a significant mediator of the influence of the advertising appeal on taste anticipation itself. However, very little research has been done to explore the conditions under which advertising appeals may influence taste anticipation among message recipients (Elder and Krishna 2010; Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006).

Third, this paper proposes that the imagery visualization process stimulates not only affective responses such as anticipated emotions and taste anticipation, but also cognitive deliberations about the message proposition itself (Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2007). For example, as a result of enhanced visualization stimulated by exposure to the hedonic advertising appeal, the message recipient may automatically generate excuses (hedonic rationalizations) to justify the decision to yield to consumption impulses (Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012; Kober et al. 2010; Moore and Bovell 2008; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Alternatively, it may be the anticipated emotions or taste anticipation that triggers the hedonic rationalizations. Our investigation therefore focuses on how hedonic advertising stimulates consumption impulses through the dynamism of imagery visualization (MacInnis and Price 1987) (see Figures 1 and 2).

The rest of this paper covers the relevant literature and the development of associated hypotheses. Study 1 features a multiple mediation model with one independent variable (product description), one dependent variable (consumption impulse), and three mediators (mental visualization, anticipated emotions, and cognitive deliberations). Study 2 replicates Study 1, but focuses on taste anticipation instead of anticipated emotions. The paper ends with a discussion of the findings, the implications for advertising researchers and practitioners, and new ideas for future research.

**LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES**

**Hedonic Versus Utilitarian Product Descriptions**

Advertisements featuring the hedonic dimensions of a product or service should typically stimulate the affective rather than the cognitive processing system (Hofmann et al. 2009; Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2007; Metcalfe and Mischel 1999; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Descriptions of the hedonic features of a product often include the joys of consumption, and the sensory experiences associated with pleasure, fantasy, and fun (Batra and Ahtola 1990; Dhar and Wertensbroch 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). In contrast, the same advertising appeal may be targeted at a different audience segment, where the goal is to highlight utilitarian features such as the nutritional values associated with the product ingredients (Kosup, Creyer, and Burton 2003). Because this strategy assumes that consumption is cognitively motivated and goal oriented toward the functional benefits to be derived by the consumer (Batra and Ahtola 1990; Dhar and Wertensbroch 2000), the utilitarian appeal will stimulate weaker levels of anticipated emotion and pleasure (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008).

Differences in the processing of affective versus cognitive orientations in the external stimuli processed by the human mind have been the subject of considerable research driven by dual processing models (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009; Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2007; Metcalfe and Mischel 1999; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). One interesting model distinguishes between a “hot” emotional system that is fast, impulsive, and action oriented, leading to immediate gratification, versus a “cool cognitive system” that is slow, self-controlled, and reflexive (Metcalfe and Mischel 1999). Adapting critical elements of this model, Loewenstein and O’Donoghue (2007) proposed that an emotional or hedonically charged stimulus is capable of activating both the affective processing system driven by visceral drive states, as well as the deliberative processing system that encourages slower and deeper evaluations of the information available to the decision maker (Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). A pleasure-focused (hedonic) stimulus emphasizing the sensory experiences associated with pleasure, fantasy, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982) may be more imagery provoking than a utilitarian advertising appeal (Anand-Keller and Block 1997; MacInnis and Price 1987; McGill and Anand 1989; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). It is to be assumed, therefore, that a hedonic product description will enhance the

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**Second, Study 2 goes even further by showing how the ability of hedonic message appeals to activate a more visceral representation of the pleasure of eating (taste anticipation) (Elder and Krishna 2010; O’Doherty et al. 2002) is highly dependent on the imagery visualization process.**

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message recipient’s ability to form mental images of future consumption situations, and this in turn may influence consumption impulses (Anand-Keller and Block 1997; MacInnis and Price 1987; Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000). However, an interesting question in this paper is whether the ability to form mental images of future consumption can mediate the influence of advertising appeals on consumption impulses (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002).

**Imagery Visualization**

Burns, Biswas, and Babin define imagery elaboration as “the activation of stored information in the production of mental images beyond what was provided by the stimulus” (1993, p. 35). When imagery visualization operates at a higher level of cognitive elaboration, hedonic symbolic consumption responses may be evoked as sensory experiences—a process that encourages rehearsals or even fantasizing about plausible future
Anticipated Emotions

Addressing the role of future-oriented emotions in goal-directed behavior, Baumgartner, Pieters, and Baggozzi (2008) differentiated anticipatory emotions from anticipated emotions based on the certainty/uncertainty of the occurrence of a future event. For example, anticipatory emotions are experienced when people currently feel specific emotions (e.g., hope or fear) due to the uncertainty that a future event with desirable or undesirable consequences may occur (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008; Lee and Qiu 2009). In contrast, anticipated emotions are based on the premise that there is no uncertainty about the future occurrence of the imagined experience (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Baggozzi 2008). These anticipated emotions are presumed to be driven by the perceiver’s ability to mentally visualize the occurrence of the event (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008; Mellers, Schwartz, and Ritov 1999). A hedonic advertising appeal, for example, may inspire message recipients to visualize very vividly the actual emotions they will experience in the future because of the certainty that a specific desirable future event will definitely occur (e.g., anticipated joy, fun, or excitement). Anticipated emotions are therefore structured like prefactual thinking about one’s imagined positive or negative consequences of future events—a type of affective forecast (e.g., what type of emotion would I experience if X occurred?)

Although Baumgartner, Pieters, and Baggozzi (2008) tested the influence of anticipated emotions on behavioral intentions, the assumption that the process of engaging in mental visualization actually stimulates anticipated emotions has not been formally tested. High elaboration imagery facilitates anticipatory gratification and vicarious satisfaction even before actual consumption of a delightful product takes place, thus enhancing the ability to clearly visualize the consumption experience (Babin and Burns 1997; Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000). This suggests that imagery visualization will play a direct role in stimulating anticipated emotions as well as consumption impulses (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). It is also expected that an advertising appeal that is designed to highlight the hedonic rather than the utilitarian attributes of a given product will facilitate the stimulation of the actual emotions that the message recipient imagines he or she will experience in the future (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008). However, a very crucial issue in this investigation is the proposition that the imagery visualization that is triggered by a hedonic advertising appeal may have such a powerful impact on anticipated emotions that it significantly weakens the direct effect of the advertising appeal on anticipated emotions. Once activated, these anticipated emotions are very likely to stimulate a sudden compelling urge to gratify the appetitive impulse by reaching forward for the opportunity to sample the product or stop at the nearest store to make a purchase (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Anticipated emotions are therefore expected to play a crucial role in determining the influence of product descriptions on consumption impulses.

_Hypothesis 2a: The effect of hedonic product descriptions on anticipated emotions will be mediated by imagery visualization._
Hypothesis 2b: The effect of hedonic product descriptions on consumption impulses will be mediated by anticipated emotions.

Taste Anticipation

High elaboration imagery should facilitate preconsumption anticipatory gratification, thus enhancing the ability to clearly visualize the taste experience during a future consumption event (Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000). However, the anticipation of the taste experience has received limited attention in advertising and consumer behavior research, despite the rich extant literature on taste perception (Elder and Krishna 2010; Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006), taste preference (Hoegg and Alba 2007), and consumption enjoyment (Nowlis, Mandel, and McCabe 2004). This paper speculates that through the process of imagery visualization, exposure to a hedonic advertising appeal may awaken an acute sensitivity for the imagination of the most vivid and cherished characteristics of the taste experience (Elder and Krishna 2010). In fact, taste anticipation is a more specific representation of the anticipated consumption experience (O’Doherty et al. 2002; Rolls 2005), and is based on the notion that people will be attracted to the option with the greatest subjective expected pleasure (Mellers, Schwarz, and Ritov 1999). For example, an advertisement for cookies may prompt the message recipient to anticipate that the product would be “soft” and “moist,” with warm melted gooey chocolate chips, while popcorn may evoke vivid imagery of how it feels in the hand, the smell of butter, and the salty crunch in the mouth (Elder and Krishna 2010). Taste anticipation may be enhanced by input from multisensory sources such as the smell or the sight of a highly desired food (Elder and Krishna 2010). Neuroscientists have recently reported that the powerful synergy of these multisensory sources is most notably represented in the secondary taste cortex (Rolls 2005). Consistent with these findings, O’Doherty et al. (2002), using event-related fMRI, reported that the anticipation of a pleasant taste activated key regions of the secondary taste cortex as well as the posterior dorsal amygdala. This implies that taste anticipation itself may possibly be playing a powerful role in stimulating consumption impulses to satisfy the appetitive urges (Berridge 2004; O’Doherty et al. 2002; Pecina and Berridge 2005; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). The role of advertising in stimulating taste anticipation has not been directly addressed in the marketing literature, although Elder and Krishna (2010) specifically noted the need for including taste experience in multisensory advertising appeals. Moreover, since the anticipation of food reward may be encoded in terms of the most vivid and cherished characteristics of the taste experience (Elder and Krishna 2010), we expect that hedonic product descriptions will have a positive impact on taste anticipation (O’Doherty et al. 2002). However, the product description → taste anticipation may not be direct, but may be mediated by the imagery visualization process, which often acts as a catalyst in enhancing the ability to clearly imagine the consumption experience (Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000).

Hypothesis 3a: The effect of hedonic product descriptions on taste anticipation will be mediated by imagery visualization.

Hypothesis 3b: The effect of hedonic product descriptions on consumption impulses will be mediated by taste anticipation.

Preconsumption Cognitive Deliberations

A message recipient who has been exposed to a hedonic advertising appeal that activates clear mental images of anticipated emotions and taste imaginations of an affect-rich food (e.g., chocolate cake) may engage in cognitive deliberations about the benefits of engaging in this guilty pleasure (Moore and Bovell 2008; Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012; Kober et al. 2010). The affective system may transmit the message that the appetite is craving delicious pastry, but the role of the deliberative system is to activate an array of cognitive deliberations concerning the wisdom of yielding to the food temptation (Kober et al. 2010). In the context of this investigation, cognitive deliberations are self-reflective thoughts that may serve as either a restraining or a motivating influence on consumption impulses (Hofmann et al. 2009; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Affective reactions such as anticipated emotions are spontaneous reactions to an external stimulus, but since cognitive deliberations are normally more contemplative and self-reflective, they typically play a more secondary role, and therefore hedonic product descriptions may have a weaker impact on cognitive deliberations than on anticipated emotions (Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2007). Cognitive deliberations are the result of slower strategic processing of thoughts concerning self-control and self-regulation—a type of tug-of-war between impulse and self-control (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009). During this process, the individual deliberates the consequences of his or her contemplated action (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009) and typically generates excuses or rationalizations for succumbing to the prevailing temptation (Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012; Kober et al. 2010; Moore and Bovell 2008). In this investigation, we focus on hedonic rationalizations—self-arguments and excuses to justify the indulgence and give the brain “permission” to gratify the appetite (Kober et al. 2010). Hedonic rationalizations tend to focus on the short-term benefits of self-gratification when the consumer is confronted with an appetitive or hedonically charged stimulus such as an advertising appeal that vividly describes the sensory delights of consuming one’s favorite snack food. To cope with the mental tug-of-war between self-regulation and self-gratification (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack...
2009; Tice, Bratslavsky, and Baumeister 2001), the consumer may attempt to justify the decision to yield to the consumption impulses (e.g., it will taste good). Figure 1 indicates two indirect paths to predict how hedonic rationalizations influence the impact of product descriptions on consumption impulses. Let us trace the first path: Product description → Visualization → Anticipated Emotion → Hedonic Rationalization → Consumption Impulse. Here, the hedonic advertising appeal activates the visualization process, and this stimulates anticipated emotions. Presumably, this anticipation of the pleasurable emotions to be experienced leads to the generation of hedonic rationalizations, which in turn intensifies consumption impulses. The second path omits the role of anticipated emotions (Product → Description → Visualization → Hedonic → Rationalization → Consumption Impulse). Here, we predict that the imagery visualization process will play a significant role in determining the extent to which the hedonic product descriptions influence hedonic rationalizations. We also predict that hedonic rationalizations will mediate the impact of product description on consumption impulses.

**Hypothesis 4a:** The influence of product descriptions on hedonic rationalizations will be mediated by imagery visualization.

**Hypothesis 4b:** The influence of product descriptions on consumption impulses will be mediated by hedonic rationalizations.

### STUDY 1

**Method**

**Design and Procedure**

Participants were 198 undergraduates (85 males) who were told that we were investigating lifestyles and eating preferences of students. The design was based on a multiple mediation model featuring one predictor variable (product description: hedonic versus utilitarian), one dependent measure (consumption impulse), and three putative mediators (imagery visualization, anticipated emotions, and hedonic rationalizations).

Using a narrative message style (Escalas 2004b), participants were exposed to either the hedonic or the utilitarian version of an advertising appeal for Cinnabon™ rolls. The introduction to both versions was similar, each cast in the same scenario; “You and a friend are shopping at the mall . . . .” However, the utilitarian version featured only the nutritional values of the product, while the hedonic version was similar in length but emphasized the pleasures of consuming the product.

**Measurement**

Imagery visualization (α = .95) was measured with three, nine-point semantic differential scales: (1) “not easy”/“easy to visualize myself consuming the roll”; (2) “not easy”/“easy to picture myself consuming the roll”; (3) “not easy”/“easy to imagine myself consuming the roll” (Anand-Keller and Block 1997; McGill and Anand 1989; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). Anticipated emotions (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008) were measured with four, one to nine-point semantic differential scale items using the following adjectives: “not exciting”/“exciting,” “not fun”/“lots of fun,” “not enjoyable”/“enjoyable,” “not thrilling”/“thrilling” (α = .94), in response to the following question: “Having read the product description, I imagine that eating a Cinnabon™ roll will be ____.” Hedonic rationalization was measured with a one to nine-point “strongly disagree”/“strongly agree” scale in response to the following prompt: Please tell us the extent to which you disagree or agree that the following thoughts came to your mind when you read the advertisement for the Cinnabon™ roll: “This is so delicious, I’ll just enjoy it” and “I’ll make up for it when I work out” (Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012).

To measure consumption impulses (α = .89), participants responded to a one- to nine-point “strongly disagree”/“strongly agree” scale to indicate the extent to which they were willing to: (1) “sample a Cinnabon® roll if you had the chance right now”; (2) “take a quick Cinnabon® roll snack if you had the chance right now”; and (3) “stop by a Cinnabon® store if you were out shopping now” (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009; Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002).

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks**

First, it was important to determine whether the hedonic product description stimulated more pleasure-focused responses than the utilitarian description. Results showed that participants who were exposed to the hedonic version found that the product description: (1) stimulated higher levels of sensory pleasure associated with taste, $M_{Hed} = 7.34$ versus $M_{Util} = 6.62$, $F(1, 197) = 6.49, p < .01$; and (2) activated less nutrition-related thoughts than the utilitarian ad ($M_{Hed} = 4.96$ versus $M_{Util} = 5.97$), $F(1, 197) = 6.62, p < .02$.

Second, it was also important to determine whether potentially confounding variables such as prior brand knowledge could have influenced the impact of the hedonic versus utilitarian product description manipulations. No significant differences were observed when respondents were asked whether Cinnabon® brand has a strong reputation for delicious rolls, $M_{Hed} = 6.13$ versus $M_{Util} = 6.35$, $F(1, 197) = .37, p = .55$, and whether they immediately think of delicious rolls when they encounter the Cinnabon® brand, $M_{Hed} = 4.98$ versus $M_{Util} = 4.95$, $F(1, 197) = .008, p = .93$. Third, to ascertain whether differences in favorability toward the message could have provided an alternative explanation to the findings, the
data showed no significant differences in the hedonic versus utilitarian manipulations when the message was rated in terms of being pleasant, $M_{Hed} = 6.97$ versus $M_{Util} = 6.52$, $F(1, 197) = 2.17, p = .14$, and sensible, $M_{Hed} = 4.33$ versus $M_{Util} = 3.96$, $F(1, 197) = 1.74, p = .19$. Finally, when asked if they were hungry during the experiment, respondents in the hedonic versus utilitarian conditions showed no significant differences, $M_{Hed} = 5.84$ versus $M_{Util} = 5.24$, $F(1, 197) = 1.9, p = .17$, thus reducing the possibility that respondents’ level of hunger may have confounded their responses to the product description treatment.

### Rationale for the Multiple Mediation Model Using Bootstrap Sampling

Shrout and Bolger (2002) suggested that bootstrapping methods should be used in multiple mediation designs to address the problem of normality in sampling distribution. Bootstrapping involves a process of sampling with replacement directly from the total sample for a specified number of times (2000 times in the present study), yielding specific estimates of the indirect effects of the predictor variable on the dependent variable. Lower and upper bounds with 95% confidence intervals are also provided (Preacher and Hayes 2008).

We tested a comprehensive multiple mediation model rather than a series of separate mediation models for the following reasons: First, a comprehensive multiple mediation model makes it possible to determine the extent to which specific variables (visualization, anticipated emotions, and hedonic rationalizations) mediate the effect of the predictor variable (product description) on the dependent variable (consumption impulses), assuming the presence of other mediators in the model (Preacher and Hayes 2008). Second, the comprehensive multiple mediation model significantly reduces the likelihood of parameter bias due to the omission of variables in the model. In contrast, the testing of separate mediation models...
Model Fit, Direct and Indirect Effects

Overall, the proposed model fit the data fairly well using Hayes (2012) macros and code for SPSS and AMOS 18: \( \chi^2(d�) = 79.47/47 = 1.69, p < .002; \) CFI (comparative fit index) = .98; IFI (incremental fit index) = .98; NFI (normed fit index) = .95; and RMSEA (root mean square residual) = .06. Table 1 shows: (1) the regression weights indicating the standardized direct effects; and (3) the standardized indirect effect coefficients representing the manner in which each of the three putative variables mediated the influence of product description on consumption impulses (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Standardized Direct Effects

The direct path from Product Description → Visualization was significant (\( \gamma = .20, SE [\text{standard error}] = .33, CR [\text{critical ratio}] = 2.80, p < .007 \)), indicating that hedonic product descriptions are capable of inspiring an acute ability to engage in mental visualization. This power to visualize, in turn, played a significant role in stimulating anticipated emotions (\( \gamma = .59, SE = .05, CR = 8.05, p < .001 \)), as well as hedonic rationalizations (\( \gamma = .33, SE = .10, CR = 3.92, p < .004 \)). Also, anticipated emotions directly influenced hedonic rationalizations (\( \gamma = .26, SE = .14, CR = 3.08, p < .004 \)), signifying the ability to motivate the message recipient to generate some type of “rationalization” to justify succumbing to his or her appetitive desires. The hedonic rationalization in turn provided the motivation to yield to the consumption impulse (\( \gamma = .46, SE = .06, CR = 7.50, p < .001 \)). Finally, Table 1 also shows that consumption impulses were positively influenced by anticipated emotions (\( \gamma = .21, SE = .12, CR = 2.88, p < .001 \)), and product descriptions had no direct effect on hedonic rationalization (\( \gamma = .05, SE = .35, CR = .80, p = .42 \)).

Indirect Effects and Hypothesis Testing

In support of H1, Table 1 shows a significant indirect influence of product description on consumption impulses through the mediation of imagery visualization (\( \gamma = .35, p < .001 \)). H2a (Product Description → Visualization → Anticipated Emotions) was also confirmed (\( \gamma = .47, p < .0001 \)), showing that visualization played a crucial role in determining the influence of product description on anticipated emotions. Note here that an indirect-only mediation seems evident because the Product Description → Anticipated Emotions path was rendered insignificant (\( \gamma = .05, p = .66 \)) through the strong mediating role of imagery visualization (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010).

Anticipated Emotions

In reference to H2b (Product Description → Anticipated Emotions → Consumption Impulse), although the data showed that product description had an indirect influence on consumption impulses through the intensity of the anticipated emotions experienced by the message recipient (\( \gamma = .13, p < .001 \)), this influence was somewhat dependent on the mediating role of the visualization process. The role of hedonic rationalizations in determining how product description influenced consumption impulses was powerful, yet followed a very indirect path (Product Description → Visualization → Anticipated Emotion → Hedonic Rationalization → Consumption Impulse), as can be seen in Figure 1. These considerations must be taken into account when we report that hedonic rationalization played a significant role in determining the extent to which product description influenced consumption impulses (\( \gamma = .42, p < .001 \)).

Discussion

Study 1 showed that all three variables (imagery visualization, anticipated emotions, and hedonic rationalizations) played a significant role in determining how hedonic product descriptions influenced consumption impulses. In particular, imagery visualization was powerful enough to directly stimulate anticipated emotions as well as hedonic rationalizations. At the same time, imagery visualization also played a crucial role in the way product description influenced anticipated emotions, hedonic rationalizations, and consumption impulses. Using a different product (pizza), Study 2 examines the notion that hedonic advertising appeals can also stimulate another type of anticipatory response, namely, taste anticipation (O’Doherty et al. 2002). The objective is to replicate the findings of Study 1 by demonstrating how imagery visualization, taste anticipation, and hedonic rationalizations can mediate the influence of hedonic advertising appeals on consumption impulses.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants, Procedure, and Design

One hundred and thirty undergraduates (88 males) were given course credit for participating in a study investigating lifestyles and eating preferences of university students. Similar
to Study 1, participants were exposed to either the hedonic or the utilitarian version of a narrative advertising appeal for pizza (Escalas 2004b). The introduction to both versions was similar, each cast in the same scenario; “You and a friend are shopping . . . ”. However, the utilitarian version featured only the nutritional values of the pizza, while the hedonic version was similar in length but emphasized the pleasures of consuming the product.

Measurement

The measurement for imagery visualization ($\alpha = .96$), consumption impulses ($\alpha = .92$), and hedonic rationalization were similar to measures used in Study 1. Taste anticipation ($\alpha = .83$) was measured with the following question: “Having read the product description, how do you imagine the taste will be? This was followed by three, one to nine-point semantic differential scales using the following adjectives: “not very moist”/“very moist”; “not very juicy”/“very juicy”; “not very palatable”/“very palatable” (Elder and Krishna 2010).

Results

Manipulation Checks

First, participants who were exposed to the hedonic version found that the product description: (1) stimulated more sensory pleasure associated with taste, $M_{Hed} = 6.38$ versus $M_{Util} = 4.00$, $F(1, 127) = 38.79$, $p < .0001$; and (2) activated less nutrition-related thoughts than the utilitarian ad, $M_{Hed} = 4.56$ versus $M_{Util} = 6.03$, $F(1, 127) = 13.46$, $p < .0001$. Second, we tested whether the differences in responses to the hedonic versus utilitarian descriptions may have been due to interpretations beyond the hypothesized responses, thus introducing the possibility of an alternative explanation of the findings. Accordingly, we found no significant differences when participants rated the hedonic versus utilitarian product descriptions in terms of being “a good value for the money,” $M_{Hed} = 4.63$ versus $M_{Util} = 4.63$, $F(1, 127) = .04$, $p = .99$, and “good for my health,” $M_{Hed} = 3.56$ versus $M_{Util} = 3.61$, $F(1, 127) = .036$, $p = .86$. Finally, when asked whether they were hungry during the experiment, respondents in the hedonic versus utilitarian conditions showed no significant differences, $M_{Hed} = 5.74$ versus $M_{Util} = 4.61$, $F(1, 127) = 1.01$, $p = .31$, thus reducing the possibility that respondents’ level of hunger may have confounded their responses to the product description treatment.

Model Testing and Direct Effects

Table 2 shows a satisfactory fit of the model using Hayes (2012) macros and code for SPSS and AMOS 18: $\chi^2 (S-B) = 74.27/47 = 1.58$, $p < .007$; CFI = .98; IFI = .98; NFI = .94; RMSEA = .07. Using standardized regression weights, Table 2 (see also Figure 2) shows the following direct effects: First, the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Visualization path was significant ($\gamma = .25$, $SE = .37$, $CR = 2.87$, $p < .003$), thus replicating the finding in Study 1 that hedonic product descriptions are capable of enhancing imagery visualization. Second, imagery visualization directly influenced consumption impulses ($\gamma = .36$, $SE = .08$, $CR = 4.25$, $p < .003$). Third, visualization stimulated: (1) taste anticipation ($\gamma = .36$, $SE = .07$, $CR = 3.70$, $p < .001$), and (2) hedonic rationalization ($\gamma = .45$, $SE = .10$, $CR = 5.44$, $p < .001$). Fourth, taste anticipation directly influenced hedonic rationalization ($\gamma = .26$, $SE = .14$, $CR = 2.94$, $p < .003$), indicating that when taste anticipation is highly aroused, message recipients are likely to generate convenient rationalizations to justify yielding to the temptation. Fifth, these rationalizations in turn directly enhanced consumption impulses ($\gamma = .45$, $SE = .07$, $CR = 5.23$, $p < .001$). Finally, neither the Taste $\rightarrow$ Consumption Impulse link ($\gamma = .04$, $SE = .10$, $CR = 0.52$, $p = .14$) nor the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Hedonic Rationalization link ($\gamma = .05$, $SE = .37$, $CR = .61$, $p = .54$) were significant.

Indirect Effects and the Mediation Process

First, consistent with Study 1, the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Visualization $\rightarrow$ Consumption Impulse path shows a significant indirect influence of product description on consumption impulses through the mediation of imagery visualization ($\gamma = .26$, $p < .001$). Second, imagery visualization mediated the effects of product description on taste anticipation (Product Description $\rightarrow$ Visualization $\rightarrow$ Taste $\rightarrow$, $\gamma = .32$, $p < .001$), as well as hedonic rationalizations (Product Description $\rightarrow$ Visualization $\rightarrow$ Hedonic Rationalization, $\gamma = .092$, $p < .01$). In both of these cases, note once more the evidence of indirect-only mediation by imagery visualization (Zhao, Lynch, and Chen 2010). For example, although the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Visualization link ($\gamma = .25$, $p < .001$) and the Visualization $\rightarrow$ Taste link ($\gamma = .36$, $p < .001$) were significant, the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Taste anticipation link was marginally significant ($\gamma = .17$, $p = .06$). Similarly, we see that the Visualization $\rightarrow$ Hedonic Rationalization link was significant ($\gamma = .36$, $p < .001$), but the Product Description $\rightarrow$ Hedonic Rationalization link was not significant ($\gamma = .17$, $p = .24$), signifying the role of visualization as a mediator of product description on hedonic rationalization.

Third, as in Study 1, the effect of product description on consumption impulses was indirectly mediated by hedonic rationalization through visualization (Product Description $\rightarrow$ Hedonic Rationalization $\rightarrow$ Consumption Impulse, $\gamma = .42$, $p < .001$). This implies that advertisements that encourage the message recipient to generate hedonic rationalizations for yielding to the temptation at hand may also enhance consump-
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ization impulses. Fourth, taste anticipation played a significant role in determining the extent to which product description influenced consumption impulses (Product Description \(\rightarrow\) Taste \(\rightarrow\) Consumption Impulse, \(\gamma = .12, p < .01\)). However, from Figure 2, it should be noted that this path was very indirect (Product Description \(\rightarrow\) Visualization \(\rightarrow\) Taste \(\rightarrow\) Hedonic Rationalization \(\rightarrow\) Consumption Impulse). Along this path, visualization played a crucial role by mediating the influence of product descriptions on taste anticipation (\(\gamma = .32, p < .001\)). Also, taste anticipation did not directly influence consumption impulses (\(\gamma = .04, p = .61\)), but followed a direct path to hedonic rationalization (\(\gamma = .26, p < .001\)), which in turn affected consumption impulses (\(\gamma = .45, p < .001\)). Hence, the role of taste anticipation as a mediator of the influence of product descriptions on consumption impulses takes into consideration the total indirect effects in the Product Description \(\rightarrow\) Visualization \(\rightarrow\) Taste \(\rightarrow\) Hedonic Rationalization \(\rightarrow\) Consumption Impulse path seen in Figure 2.

### Discussion

Altogether, the results in Study 2 are consistent with the findings in Study 1, in the sense that visualization served as a key factor in enhancing the impact of product description on taste anticipation, hedonic rationalizations, and consumption impulses. Whereas Study 1 demonstrated the mediating role of anticipated emotions, Study 2 used a different but related food product (pizza) to demonstrate that taste anticipation itself can also mediate the influence of hedonic advertising appeals on consumption impulses. However, the mediating role of taste anticipation took an interesting and indirect route. First, as displayed in Figure 2, product description influenced taste anticipation through the mediation of visualization. Second, taste anticipation had a direct influence on hedonic rationalization, and this in turn affected consumption impulse. Thus, the influence of taste anticipation on consumption impulse was not direct, but was mediated by hedonic rationalization.

### TABLE 2

Study 2: Standardized Regression Weights, Indirect Effects Showing Mediation, Bootstrap 95% Confidence Interval, Lower and Upper Bounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression weights</th>
<th>Estimates</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>Bootstrap 95% CI Lower</th>
<th>Bootstrap 95% CI Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Visualization</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>2.87***</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>4.25***</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization (\rightarrow) Taste anticipation</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.70***</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualization (\rightarrow) Hedonic rationalization</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>5.44***</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste anticipation (\rightarrow) Hedonic rationalization</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>2.94**</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste anticipation (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.523</td>
<td>-.072</td>
<td>.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonic rationalization (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>5.23***</td>
<td>.400</td>
<td>.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Taste anticipation</td>
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<td>.28</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Hedonic rationalization</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-.106</td>
<td>.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Visualization (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.26***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Visualization (\rightarrow) Taste anticipation</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Visualization (\rightarrow) Hedonic rationalization</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.411</td>
<td>.817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Hedonic rationalization (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.42***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product description (\rightarrow) Taste anticipation (\rightarrow) Consumption impulses</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio; CI = confidence interval.

Model fit: \(\chi^2(S-B\chi^2)/df = 74.27/47 = 1.58, p < .007\); CFI (comparative fit index) = .97; IFI (incremental fit index) = .98; NFI (normed fit index) = .94; RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) = .07. Bootstrap resampling = 2000 (Hayes 2012).

*** \(p < .001\).

** \(p < .01\).
Presumably, because message recipients were able to vividly imagine or anticipate the gustatory pleasures of indulging in the advertised pizza, desire was so overwhelming that they resorted to some type of hedonic rationalization to justify yielding to their consumption impulses. The implications of these findings are discussed in the next section.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

**Summary of Findings**

This investigation examined how four specific factors (imagery visualization, anticipated emotions, taste anticipation, and hedonic rationalizations) play a crucial role in determining how hedonic advertising appeals influence consumption impulses. The results of two studies indicate the following: First, hedonic product descriptions in advertising messages are capable of activating a process of imagery visualization that enhances the ability to clearly imagine or picture the consumption experience (MacInnis and Price 1987; Petrova and Ciabdlini 2005; Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000). Second, this visualization process was directly instrumental in stimulating two types of anticipatory responses: anticipated emotions (Study 1), and taste anticipation (Study 2). These responses, in turn, played a significant role in determining how hedonic advertising appeals influence consumption impulses. Third, the results also showed that both anticipated emotions and taste anticipation played a direct role in triggering the rationalizations respondents used in their decisions to yield to their consumption impulses. Finally, the hedonic rationalization process itself mediated the influence of the message appeal on consumption impulses.

**Implications for Theory Development**

This paper offers several contributions to the literature in advertising and consumer behavior. First, the ability to engage in imagery visualization stimulated two crucial responses: anticipated emotions (Baumgartner, Pieters, and Bagozzi 2008) and taste anticipation. Because each of these responses proved to be powerful mediators of the influence of hedonic advertising appeals on consumption impulses, advertising researchers and practitioners can gain illuminating insights in designing messages that can specifically stimulate the urge to consume. For example, if advertisers design hedonic appeals that vividly describe the anticipated pleasures of consumption, these messages should enhance the ability to clearly visualize the anticipated emotions to be experienced during consumption, and this in turn will stimulate consumption impulses—a sudden forceful urge targeted to a specific need (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009). It should be noted that MacInnis and Price (1987) speculated that imagery elaboration might serve as a sensory substitute, particularly when the benefits of product consumption are associated with pleasurable experiences. However, this proposition has never been tested. In this context, this paper has contributed to the literature on mental imagery visualization (Escalas 2004a; MacInnis and Price 1987; Phillips 1996; Phillips, Olson, and Baumgartner 1995; Shiv and Huber 2000) by demonstrating that the visualization process can serve as a dynamic catalyst that ignites the imagination in a manner that enhances not only anticipated emotions, but also taste anticipation (Elder and Krishna 2010).

**Taste Anticipation**

Despite the emerging literature on taste perception (Hoegg and Alba 2007; Nowlis, Mandel, and McCabe 2004; Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006), this is the first study to actually report that taste anticipation can be enhanced by hedonic advertising appeals and imagery visualization (MacInnis and Price 1987). Our research makes an interesting contribution to the advertising literature and to the emerging field of sensory marketing (Krishna 2012) by demonstrating that taste anticipation itself plays a critical role in determining the persuasive impact of hedonic advertising appeals on consumption impulses. These findings have both theoretical and managerial implications. For example, we speculate that when advertising appeals enhance one’s ability to visualize or even fantasize about some significant vivid detail of a desired product (e.g., a vivid gustatory characteristic such as the “juicy” or “moist” taste associated with one’s favorite pizza), this experience is likely to stimulate irresistible consumption impulses (Alba and Williams 2013). Affective neuroscientists provide an intriguing explanation for this process. According to Smith et al. (2010), pleasure itself is not automatically an intrinsic characteristic of a given stimulus (e.g., the sight, smell or imagination of food). So, for example, since the taste of sweetness on its own is basically just a sensation, the transformation of this sensation into an experience of pleasure is a process that occurs within the brain, “where neural systems actively paint pleasure onto the gustatory sensation to generate a ‘liking’ reaction, as a sort of pleasure gloss” (Pecina et al. 2006, p. 500). This pleasure transformation process is achieved through a range of hedonic hotspots within the brain where hedonic generators are so closely clustered together that they are able to amplify the impact of sensory pleasure (Smith et al. 2010; Pecina and Berridge 2005).

Noteworthy for advertisers is that these hedonic hotspots can possibly be activated by external advertising stimuli (e.g., audio or visual), as well as the synergistic effects of multiple sensory inputs (Elder and Krishna 2010). Future marketing research in collaboration with affective neuroscientists should be able to test the extent to which exposure to a hedonically charged product description (compared with a description
featuring the utilitarian attributes of the product) will activate a wider range of hedonic hotspots across the neural circuitry of the brain, thus amplifying taste anticipation and pleasure (Pecina and Berridge 2005; Smith et al. 2010). The ability to test consumer taste anticipation during the product testing stage should help advertisers and marketers to assess more accurately how consumers may respond to the introduction of a new product concept. For example, Pepsico, the maker of Quaker Oats, discovered that consumers in one specific culture readily accepted the idea of a drinkable oats cereal, presumably because that culture is accustomed to drinking liquid cereal. However, this product concept may have limited success among American consumers who may or may not anticipate consumption pleasure from drinking oats (Peterman 2011).

Hedonic Rationalizations

Our results also indicated that hedonic rationalizations mediated the influence of advertising appeals on consumption impulses. Furthermore, both taste anticipation and imagery visualization had a direct and significant impact on hedonic rationalizations. Study 2 showed that exposure to the hedonic advertising appeal stimulated the visualization process, which in turn intensified taste anticipation. Message recipients responded by generating convenient excuses to justify conceding to their consumption impulses. These findings are consistent with the propositions featured in dual processing models of information processing (Hofmann, Friese, and Strack 2009; Loewenstein and O’Donoghue 2007). We contribute to this literature by demonstrating that an advertising stimulus can activate the affective system (through anticipated emotions and taste anticipation), as well as the deliberative system (through hedonic rationalization). Furthermore, we have shown that the affective system directly influenced the deliberative system, and these systems in turn activated the behavioral system (consumption impulses). Since hedonic rationalization played a crucial role in the manner in which anticipated emotions and taste anticipation influenced consumption impulses, advertising researchers and practitioners should take a closer look at the way this form of cognitive deliberation enhances the persuasion process. For example, far more research is needed (using both qualitative and quantitative methods) to provide researchers more effective ways of understanding how consumers resort to convenient excuses as they struggle to resist or rationalize their desire to yield to food-related enticements (De Witt Herberts, Evers, and Riddler 2011; Kemp, Bui, and Chapa 2012; Kober et al. 2010; Moore and Bovell 2008). Meanwhile, as early as the 1970s, it seems that advertisers have been attempting to provide consumers with appropriate rationalizations to consume high calorie food products. As early as 1971, Needham, Harper, and Steers promoted McDonald’s hamburgers using the slogan “You deserve a break today.” Similarly, M&M provided consumers with the following “excuse”: “To make that tough job easier, you deserve M&M candies.” To make advertising even more effective, future research should determine whether there are differences in the type of hedonic rationalizations men and women may use in response to advertising appeals. Since women have expressed higher levels of interest in maintaining healthy lifestyles (Courtney 2000), it is quite possible that women may rely more on consequence-related thoughts than hedonic rationalizations when faced with advertisements for enticing food temptations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this paper attempted to investigate some of the factors that determine how hedonic/utilitarian advertising appeals influence consumption impulses, there are still questions about anticipated emotions and taste anticipation that should be clarified in future research with individual difference measurements. An appropriate example is the use of the Savoring Beliefs Inventory (SBI), which measures one’s capacity to savor positive outcomes pertaining to future events (Bryant 2003). The SBI assumes that before the occurrence of a positive future event, people engage in either positive or negative thoughts and feelings in the present. The potential benefit of the SBI is that it allows marketing researchers and practitioners to identify consumers with a positive outlook about the pleasures of savoring a future event or experience (Bryant 2003). For example, in the case of a future event for which tickets have been purchased in advance, if advertisers are able to design a series of messages to bolster the consumer’s interest in savoring and prolonging their positive feelings toward the event, it is conceivable that ticket cancellations or requests for refunds for the event may be significantly reduced.

Questions concerning the role of hedonic advertising appeals still remain unanswered in spite of the findings of this paper. For example, do anticipated emotions and taste anticipation undermine self-regulation, and consequently lead to increased food consumption in a marketplace where obesity is already a serious public health concern? Future research should use laboratory experiments where participants are exposed to an advertising appeal and then allowed to actually respond to behavioral measures such as the actual tasting of the product (Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006). Actual behavioral measures will certainly enhance the validity of the findings of this investigation. Given the emerging research indicating that taste anticipation may be even more powerful than the tasting experience itself (Gard et al. 2006; O’Doherty et al. 2002), we believe that it may not be too early to speculate that “anticipation is delicious”!
REFERENCES


