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The Effects of Physically Opening Packaging on Consumers' Perceived Familiarity toward Product

Abstract. Food sampling is the most prevalent tactic to enhance consumers' purchase decisions in Kazakhstani traditional market. However, little attention has been paid to how to execute the food sampling effectively. Therefore, current research explored how the physical behavior of opening packaging in a food sampling context can facilitate perceived familiarity toward the offered product. Drawing on the theory of embodied cognition, the mind encodes abstract concepts as bodily movements. Furthermore, due to their direct and concrete characteristics, movements of the body and the consequent sensorimotor experiences are used by individuals' minds to comprehend abstract concepts. Therefore, we hypothesize that physically opening product packaging provides at least temporary psychological closeness, which makes people feel a familiarity with the offered item. To address the hypothesis, one hundred forty-five undergraduate students participated in the experimental study with a 2 (physical opening act vs. control) between-subjects design. The results of ANOVA show that participants who tried to open the cover of the chocolate perceived stronger familiarity toward the sample due to reduced psychological distance. The findings provide an insightful understanding and practical implications for marketers in Kazakhstan that they can strive to induce favorable perceptions such as familiarity with the product in the sampling context.

Keywords: embodied cognition, the physical opening act, perceived familiarity, product trial, consumer behavior

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Introduction

Imagine that you visit a Kazakhstani local market like "Green Bazaar", and the salesperson gives you some snacks to try. You have probably had the experience of trying a food before deciding to buy it at the bazaar because this is a kind of traditional service method in Kazakhstan. More importantly, these kinds of activities may help the store facilitate consumers' purchasing decisions by reducing the perceived risk/uncertainty of products through the trial. This can be an effective way to increase purchase intent [1], [2]. In this context, we need to consider the various possibilities of the food sampling situation. For example, one possibility is that the product is displayed in its package, so consumers must open the cover when they want to try the product. Another possibility is that this same product is presented without the package, so consumers do not need to engage in additional physical activity for the food trial. Would this difference in presentation or requirement of the consumers' physical act lead the consumer to perceive the offered product placed on the tray differently? Would a physical activity such as physical opening behavior affect the judgment of an offered product the consumer ultimately buys? If so, how would this happen?

Previous research on embodied cognition theory suggests that such bodily movements may influence people's perception and judgment through evoking specific concepts [3], [4]. Consistent with this research stream, the current research proposes the answer to these questions: a physical opening activity is associated with an open mind, which makes the perceived object more familiar. More specifically, the current research posits that opening movements lead to the perception of familiarity by facilitating the psychological state of an open mind or lower reactance. We postulate the accompanying association between the perception of familiarity with the stimulus and the opening act so that people automatically borrow the familiarity concept when engaging in

physical opening behavior.

Given the symbolic association between physical movement and psychological closeness, we considered a reciprocal possibility based on the previous literature explaining the bidirectional relationship between physical elements (physical cleanliness or clean smell) and psychological concept (motivated virtuous behavior or morality) (i.e., [5], [6]). Naturally, open-mind/familiarity and a physical opening act may also be reciprocally connected. We investigated whether the movement of physically opening a package could transcend the domain of psychological closeness and promote greater perceived familiarity toward the sample product. In other words, we examined whether a concrete experiential concept (i.e., the act of opening) can express an abstract concept (i.e., openness to a sample)

The primary purpose of this study is to find out if the participants from two different food sampling contexts (with physical opening activity vs. without physical opening activity) respond differently to the provided product when they try a kind of unknown new product. We establish a certain physical action as a critical element for evaluating the new product. Concretely, we point out the physical opening activity as a crucial component and discover consumers' favorable responses when they do additional physical opening actions for a product trial. While previous research has examined the role of physical activity in consumers' responses (i.e., [7], [8], [9], [10], [11]), little is known about impact of physical opening behavior, in which the consumer exposes the new product test or food sample. Consequently, the current study contributes to extending the understanding of how consumers' physical acts form their perception toward products.

In this study, we address an emerging topic in the food sampling situation, which prevails in the local traditional markets in Kazakhstan. Consequently, our findings will provide meaningful and practical implications in the Kazakhstan marketplace. In other words, this understanding has implications for how retailers and salespersons manipulate how to present sample products on a tray or in containers in the market setting.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Embodied Cognition

The literature on embodied cognition emphasizes that bodily movement, such as the act of opening, offers important informative input to cognitive interpretation and comprehension ([7], [8], [9], [10], [11]). Specifically, inducing bodily sensations evokes abstract concepts normally associated with the specific bodily sensations, which in turn can guide evaluative judgments.

Consistent with this research stream, a myriad of experiments confirm that bodily sensations influence judgment ([12], [13]). For example, Krishna and Morrin [12] demonstrated that the haptic experience of a container (e.g., firmness vs. softness) can influence a person's judgment of the product's quality. The results show that participants show a more favorable evaluation such as the higher quality perception of water when they touch a firm container than the soft container. Similarly, Meyers-Levy, Zhu, and Jiang [13] develop their hypothesis that bodily sensation induced by flooring may differently impact consumers' evaluation of a product. Concretely, people who stand on a soft carpeted floor can experience bodily comfort and then assess what the product looks more comfortable, whereas people who stand on a hard tile floor may experience bodily discomfort, and then assess what the product looks more uncomfortable. Zhong and Liljenquist [6] explored whether washing one's hands may eliminate the upsetting consequences of one's own and others' immoral behavior because the abstract concept of morality is metaphorically embedded in the concrete and vivid experience of physical contamination. Therefore, physical cleansing after contamination helps alleviate the negative feeling of unethical behavior.

To sum up, in all of these examples, physical experience is considered a piece of information and then reflected in the judgment of the target. Of particular relevance in the previously

mentioned research streams, Lakoff and Johnson ([9], [14]) established the conceptual metaphor theory, which assumes that an abstract concept is metaphorically grounded in a concrete concept such as real sensory or bodily experience. In other words, humans imports abstract concepts into understanding by conceptually projecting concrete actions. The constructing structures of all concepts are basic schemas that arise from universal experiential perceptuomotor experiences [5], [15].

The Physical Act of Opening Is Associated with Open-Mind (Psychological Closeness)

Consistent with the embodied cognition perspective [9], our conjecture is that the physical act of opening a package may activate the psychological open-mind. Given that the presence or absence of a physical action (i.e., opening a package) may trigger the psychological response of an open or closed mind, respectively, perceived familiarity is expected to vary depending on whether they were made during engaging in a movement of the body to open the cap or not.

As the evidence for our proposed assumption, Lakoff and colleagues showed that people often use metaphors to talk about abstract concepts, and in the majority of these conventional metaphors, language from a concrete and vivid experienced domain is used to talk about more abstract concepts ([9], [16]). Based on these linguistic metaphors, bodily sensations can also elicit a specific concept. We, therefore, suggest that our proposed conjecture stems from everyday behaviors, for example, opening behavior such as spreading one's arms represents an open and generous mindset, whereas closing behavior such as crossing one's arms represents a close and critical mindset.

Similarly, in the growing body of literature on the link between body movements and valence, arm flexion is related to an approach motivation toward positive stimuli, whereas arm extension is related to an avoidance motivation to negative stimuli (e.g., [17], [18], [19], [20], [21]). For instance, Cacioppo, Priester, and Berntson [22] examined whether participants preferred neutral stimuli (Chinese ideographs) after they evaluated them during arm flexion compared to during arm extension. In another seminal study, Chen and Bargh [23] investigated whether participants showed quicker responses to positive stimuli when they pulled a lever toward themselves (naturally activating arm flexion) than when they pushed a lever away from themselves (naturally activating arm extension); their participants exhibited quicker responses to negative stimuli when they pushed rather than pulled the lever.

These findings indicate that bodily movement involving arm flexion automatically activates positive evaluation, while bodily movement involving arm extension automatically activates negative evaluation ([22], [23]). Given the apparent associations between body position and valence of evaluation, it is likely that these body movements, like mood, color, or facial expressions, may be considered as cues that the current situation is benign versus problematic and thereby influence one's perceptions. In the current study, we predicted that the body movement of physically opening a package would lead to a favorable perception of the objects, thereby facilitating perceived greater familiarity. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis: Bodily movements enabling consumers to open a package tend to be associated with perceived familiarity toward the stimulus.

Research Method and Results

This study tests the proposed hypothesis that the bodily movement performed to open a cover (i.e., physical opening action) is associated with psychological openness toward the offered product in the food sampling context. As people are more accustomed to considering a stimulus as more familiar when their minds are open to it, they may perceive greater familiarity toward the stimuli when engaging in an opening behavior. Hence, we contend that bodily movement such as

the act of opening is considered a cue that informs them of the familiarity of the offered objects. If so, this cued body information must also be used in familiarity judgments.

Participants

One hundred forty-five undergraduate students (57.9% female; MAge = 21.58 years, SD = 1.63) participated in a survey-based experiment for course extra credit. The survey required less than 5 minutes to complete.

Research Design and Procedures

The study was a 2 (Physical opening act vs. No physical opening act), single-factor, between-subjects study. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.

Upon arrival, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions presenting a chocolate sample on the table in front of them. All participants received one piece of a chocolate sample on a tray at their table individually. Participants in each condition were in different rooms and could not see which presentation had been given to the other participants. They were instructed that this is a test of a new product before launching. Depending on the experimental condition, participants received the chocolate sample on the tray. Concretely, participants in the physical opening act condition were provided chocolate in a package with a cover, whereas participants in the no physical opening act condition were provided with a piece of chocolate in an open package without a cover. No additional information (brand, caloric content, etc.) about the chocolate was given because other information may influence participants' perception. In addition, the cover in the physical opening act condition was transparent so that participants could see the chocolate before the trial. Therefore, there was no difference in exposure duration across the conditions.

After looking at the offered product, familiarity toward the chocolate was measured with two items (familiar and well-known; Cronbach α = .75, M = 3.58, SD = 1.55) ranked on a 7-point scale with "Not at all" and "Very much" as end-points (adapted from [24]). In addition, participants indicated their perception about the packaging in terms of luxuriousness (two items: luxurious and fancy; Cronbach α = .86, M = 2.83, SD = 1.30) and cleanliness (two items: neat and clean; Cronbach α = .80, M = 4.48, SD = 1.49). Each was ranked on a 7-point scale with "Not at all" and "Very much" as end-points. Then, participants provided general demographic information (i.e., gender, age, etc.).

Results and Discussion

As expected, the offered chocolate was highly rated as being more familiar when participants opened the cover of the chocolate sample for the trial than when participants simply tried the sample without any physical action (MPhysical opening act = 3.85 vs. MNo Physical opening act = 3.33; F(1,145) = 4.045, p = .046) (See Table 1).

Table 1. ANOVA Results

	Type III		Mean		
Variable		df		F	Sig.
	Sum of square		Square		
Correction model	9.573a	1	9.573	4.045	0.046
Intercept	1865.973	1	1865.973	788.437	0.000
Physical Act	9.573	1	9.573	4.045	0.046
Error	338.434	143	2.367		
Total	2209.250	145			

Corrected total	348.007	144			

[a]R Squared = .028 (Adjusted R Squared = .021)

In addition, the control variables regarding package perception were not significant, so we can conclude that the potential influence of the package on participants' perception was successfully controlled (Luxuriousness: MPhysical opening act = 2.65 vs. MNo Physical opening act = 3.02; F(1,145) = 2.668, p = .105, and Cleanliness: MPhysical opening act = 4.46 vs. MNo Physical opening act = 4.50; F(1,145) = .014, p = .905). Neither the perception of luxuriousness nor the perception of cleanliness regarding the package would on its own be able to explain the proposed effect on perceived familiarity. These findings indicate that the physical act of opening does, in fact, influence the perception of the familiarity of the provided product. This is meaningful information, as it provides interesting evidence for the idea that the physical opening action is considered an informative cue in familiarity judgments.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Theoretical Contributions

The results of this study support our theorizing that bodily movements prompted by opening behavior can produce greater familiarity in people's product perception. When individuals were instructed to view and evaluate the product with the package, they opened the product before evaluation and then gave a higher familiarity rating to the target product. Presumably, this occurred because the physical act of opening evoked the mental representation of an open mind toward the product. Hence, individuals incorporated concepts elicited by their bodily sensations into their perception of product familiarity. Conversely, individuals who were instructed to view and evaluate the product without the package did not have any relevant or useful cue to enhance their perception because they did not need to engage in additional physical activity. Therefore, their familiarity rating was lower than in the other condition. In sum, the current findings show that engaging in physical opening behavior leads to a stronger familiarity perception of an offered product in the sampling context compared to the control condition.

This finding provides novel evidence that the physical act of opening among bodily sensations can stimulate the perception of psychological closeness such as familiarity. The current findings add to the extant literature on embodied cognition (i.e., [25], [26], [27]) by proposing a new physical activity as an informative cue for individuals' perception. Nevertheless, the observed effects rest on a single dimension of product assessments (familiarity), so these findings should be considered with caution and without generalizing.

Practical Contributions

The current research provides key practical implications and insights. That is, how to present new products or sampling products in the retailing setting should be more thoughtfully researched. The physical act of opening a package is not meaningful, relevant information to perceive the familiarity of offered products but may enhance consumers' subjective perception of the psychological distance between themselves and the product and thus increase familiarity judgment. In light of previous research on the relationship between familiarity and purchase intention, we can conclude that purchase intention and product attitude, in general, would be greater when consumers evaluate for a familiar rather than an unfamiliar product (i.e., [28], [29], [30]). In particular, local markets in Kazakhstan can apply these findings to serve the customer because sampling such as tasting foods in the marketplace is a prevailing tactic to promote products. Consequently, the findings of this study can inform the design of food sampling to increase its effectiveness.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are some limitations to this study that can suggest future research directions. First, we manipulated the presentation with only one type of target product (i.e., chocolate) to observe the effect of bodily movements in the product sampling context. Although using a food sampling context may be valid to test the proposed effect and help maximize the control in the research setting, different sorts of products with various involvement levels should be considered in future research. Second, we explored the influence of the physical act of opening only a package cover. For generalizability, other physical movements related to opening behavior (e.g., removing a wrapping) need to be explored. Finally, we enrolled 145 participants, which may be considered as low representativeness. According to the central limit theorem, the sampling distribution of the mean can surely be assumed to be normal if the N is equal to 30 or more [31]. In the current research, there are two experimental conditions (Physical opening act vs. No physical opening act), so we needed at least 60 participants to assume a normal distribution for testing our hypothesis. Still, confirming our hypothesis by using the general population, researchers can strengthen the generalizability and validity.

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Тұтынушылардың қаптаманы физикалық ашуда өнімге үйреншікті қарым-қатынасын қабылдау әсері

Аңдатпа. Тамақ өнімдерінің дәмін тату сынағы дәстүрлі қазақстандық нарықта шешім қабылдауға ықпал ететін кең таралған әдіс болып табылады. Оған қарамастан бұған дейін мұндай сынақты тиімді жүргізу жолдарына аз көңіл бөлінетін. Осылайша, аталмыш зерттеуде тамақ өнімдерінің дәмін тату кезінде қаптаманы нақты ашу барысындағы мінез-құлықтың ұсынылатын тауарды қабылдауды жеңілдететіндігі қарастырылады. Шынайы таным теориясына сүйене отырып адам санасы абстрактты ұғымды дене қозғалысы ретінде қабылдайды. Оған қоса, өзінің тура және нақты сипаттамаларына байланысты дене қозғалысы және одан кейінгі сенсомоторлық әсерленушілік адам санасымен абстрактылы тұжырымдаманы түсіну үшін қолданылады. Сондықтан тауар қаптамасын нақты ашу адамдар ұсынып отырған тауарды таныс деп қабылдауға итермелейтін психологиялық жақындықты (кем дегенде - уақытша) қамтамасыз етеді деген гипотезаны алға тартып отырмыз. Аталмыш гитопезаны тексеру мақсатында эксперименталды зерттеуге екі топқа бөліген – қаптаманы нақты ашқан және тауарды визуалды түрде бағалаған (екінші топ бақылау тобы болған) жүз қырық бес бакалавр студенті қатысты. Дисперсиялық анализ қорытындысы бойынша шоколад қаптамасын нақты ашқан зерттелушілер психологиялық дистанцияның азаюына байланысты тауармен жақынырақ таныстығын сезінді. Алынған қорытындылар бойынша өнімнің дәмін тату кезінде тауармен танысу сияқты жағымды қабылдауды күшейтуге ұмтылатын қазақстандық маркетологтарға пайдалы анықтама және практикалық ұсыныс болып табылады.

Түйін сөздер: шынайы таным, қаптаманы нақты ашу, ойда қабылданған таныстық, тауарды сынау, тұтынушылар мінез-құлқы.

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Влияние физического открытия упаковки потребителем на воспринимаемую ознакомленность с товаром

Аннотация. Проведение проб пищевых продуктов является наиболее распространенной тактикой, способствующей принятию решений о покупке на традиционном казахстанском рынке. Тем не менее, ранее уделялось мало внимания тому, как следует эффективно производить такие пробы. Таким образом, в данном исследовании изучено то, как поведение при физическом открывании упаковки в рамках проведения проб пищевых продуктов может облегчить восприятие по отношению к предлагаемому продукту. Опираясь на теорию воплощенного познания, разум кодирует абстрактные понятия как телесные движения. Кроме того, в силу своих прямых и конкретных характеристик, движения тела и последующие сенсомоторные переживания используются разумом людей для понимания абстрактных концепций. Поэтому мы выдвигаем гипотезу, что физическое открывание упаковки продукта обеспечивает психологическую близость (по крайней мере – временную), заставляющую людей воспринимать предлагаемый товар как уже знакомый. С целью проверки данной гипотезы в экспериментальном исследовании приняли участие сто сорок пять студентов бакалавриата, разделенных на две группы - физически открывавших упаковку и оценивавших товар визуально (вторая группа являлась контрольной). Результаты дисперсионного анализа показывают, что исследуемые, физически вскрывавшие упаковку шоколада, чувствовали более близкое ознакомление с товаром в силу уменьшения психологической дистанции. Полученные данные предоставляют углубленное понимание и практические рекомендации для маркетологов Казахстана, стремя-

щихся усилить благоприятное восприятие, такое как знакомство с продуктом во время пробы.

Ключевые слова: воплощенное познание, физическое открытие упаковки, воспринимаемая ознакомленность, проба продукта, поведение потребителей.

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