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Save The Best for Last? The Role of Opportunity Costs in The Enjoyment of Variety-Based Consumption Sequences

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Abstract

Consumers often face decisions about how to sequence their consumption of variety-based options, such as tasting flights, playlists, or sampler packs. While “saving the best for last” is a common intuition, we argue and demonstrate that this strategy can reduce moment-to-moment enjoyment by heightening the salience of opportunity costs. Across two experiments, we show that consuming favorites first (best-first) enhances ongoing enjoyment compared to saving them for last (best-last). Study 1, using jellybeans, found higher moment-to-moment enjoyment in best-first sequences, with no difference in remembered enjoyment after the sequence. Study 2, using movie trailers, replicated this effect in a new context and explicitly tested the process mechanism. Results revealed that best-last sequences increased opportunity cost consideration, which in turn lowered ongoing enjoyment; mediation analyses confirmed this indirect effect. Interestingly, remembered enjoyment favored best-last sequences, consistent with peak-end theory. These findings extend research on variety seeking by shifting focus from how consumers construct variety sets to how they consume them, highlighting opportunity cost consideration as a key driver of ongoing enjoyment. We also offer actionable insights for marketers, educators, and policymakers: arranging consumption sequences so that favorites appear first can improve real-time enjoyment, encourage acceptance of less-preferred options, and optimize consumer experiences across categories.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Enjoyment; Opportunity Cost; Sequencing; Variety Seeking