



## Revisit and satiation patterns: Are your restaurant customers satiated?



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### ABSTRACT

This study was designed based on the notion that when people visit a restaurant repeatedly their overall enjoyment of the dining experience may decrease due to the nature of satiation. Thus, this study set out to understand the effect of repeated experiences on consumers' affective responses. Specifically, this study examined whether or not repeated visits contribute to diners' satiation and, if so, to identify patterns of satiation. To fulfill these objectives, this study randomly distributed questionnaires to customers of upscale and casual dining restaurants in the U.S. The results of this study suggested that consumers' satiation levels increase according to the frequency of visits over both two- and six-week periods. However, satiation patterns differ over the two periods. Upscale restaurant customers feel satiated more quickly than casual dining restaurant customers when they revisit the same restaurant more often. Further, customers with more self-control feel less satiated after repeated dining experiences than customers with less self-control. However, customers with different optimal stimulation levels did not show a difference in satiation patterns after repeated dining experiences. Detailed findings and implications are provided in the main body of this study.

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### 1. Introduction

Imagine a person dines at a restaurant with superb service quality and high quality food, as well as great physical surroundings. It is highly possible that he or she would be satisfied with the dining experience if no severe service failures occur. In turn, high satisfaction would stimulate revisit intentions and the consumer might visit this restaurant again. This scenario demonstrates the well-known relationship among perceived quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml, 1988; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Oliver, 1999; Cronin et al., 2000; Namkung and Jang, 2007). Within this relationship, satisfaction has long been considered one of the most important variables in numerous service management studies because it is considered a direct antecedent of behavioral intentions and customer loyalty (Bolton and Lemon, 1999; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Cooil et al., 2007; Oliver, 2009).

However, recent literature suggests the possibility that satisfaction may not substantially account for consumer behaviors or behavioral intentions (Voss et al., 2010). For instance, even though overall quality is good and customers are satisfied, they might still

switch to another product or service due to satiation. Often, people are known to consume products until they no longer enjoy them (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977). In short, satiation is defined as a decline in overall enjoyment due to repeated exposure to a stimulus (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977; Redden, 2008; Galak et al., 2013). The stimuli can be any experience or form of consumption, such as food (Rolls et al., 1984), sex (O'Donohue and Geer, 1985), music (Kahn et al., 1997), or television programs (Nelson and Meyvis, 2008).

People are often exposed to or dine at the same restaurants repeatedly. Generally, their satisfaction with the dining experience leads to revisit intentions or actual revisiting, as suggested by previous studies (Bai et al., 2008; Liu and Jang, 2009; Heung and Gu, 2012). However, following the above-mentioned concept of satiation, repeated consumption can also make consumers tired of a particular restaurant. Satiation stimulates behavioral intentions, such as switching behaviors (Herrnstein and Prelec, 1991) or erratic switching among alternatives (Berné et al., 2001, 2005). Yet until recently, restaurant studies have paid little attention to identifying the antecedents of revisit (or repurchase) intentions, and satisfaction was the main focus. Though the importance of satiation has been stressed in other research areas, such as consumer research (Redden, 2008; Galak et al., 2009, 2013), social psychology (Staats et al., 1972; Poor et al., 2012), and economics (Iannaccone, 1986), satiation has not drawn much attention in restaurant studies.

Thus, this study was designed to fill this research niche and better understand diners' satiation and its patterns due to repeated dining experiences. Specifically, this study aimed to fulfill the

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following research objectives; (1) to examine whether satiation exists in a restaurant experience, (2) to identify patterns of satiation according to the consumption period if satiation exists, (3) to find the optimal frequency of revisits that minimizes satiation, and (4) to investigate differences in satiation patterns by restaurant type and customers' personality traits.

By identifying patterns of satiation this study provides important theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by providing evidence that consumer behavior itself can influence affective responses in a service setting. Further, this study suggests potential moderators for the relationship between revisit frequency and satiation, such as length of consumption period, type of restaurant, and consumers' personality traits. From an applied perspective, this study indicates the possibility that the consideration of repeated experiences could reduce enjoyment, which in turn stimulates switching behaviors. Moreover, by finding the frequency of visits that could minimize satiation levels this study provides important managerial implications to restaurateurs regarding how to manage their customers' revisit frequency and establish marketing strategies.

## 2. Related literature and hypotheses

### 2.1. Satiation

It is inevitable that people will eventually tire of almost anything if they experience it repeatedly (Coombs and Avrunin, 1977). Various concepts, such as habituation or satiation, have been applied to explain this phenomenon. More specifically, habituation refers to the psychological process whereby people respond less to the same stimulus when they are exposed to it repeatedly (McSweeney and Swindell, 1999; McSweeney and Murphy, 2000). For instance, people may no longer notice loud construction outside their home after a few minutes. Yet, the noise will become obvious again if a visitor points it out or the noise abruptly changes. Comparably, satiation refers to a decrease in overall enjoyment after repeated exposure to the same stimulus (Galak et al., 2013; Redden, 2008). Even though these two constructs explain responses after repeated experience, habituation focuses more on the strength of the response while satiation focuses on the decrease in enjoyment.

As a construct, satiation is often misunderstood as the opposite of satisfaction because these two constructs share certain similarities. Satisfaction is conceptualized as a cognitive and affective reaction to an experience (Rust and Oliver, 1994). However, satisfaction is largely based on a cognitive evaluation – disconfirmation between expectation and performance (Oliver, 1980; Churchill and Surprenant, 1982). Comparably, satiation is a subjective psychological response, which can be viewed as an interaction between positive and negative affects after repeated exposure to the same stimulus (Redden, 2008; Redden and Galak, 2013). Thus, satiation can be considered different than satisfaction.

Oftentimes, satiation has been explained by the economic concept of marginal utility. By definition, utility refers to the value that an individual gains from consumption or the experience of goods of all kinds. This applies to anything from trivial goods, such as toaster ovens, to more complex experiences like dining at a restaurant or even friendship (Greene and Baron, 2001). Marginal utility refers to an increase (or decrease) in total utility as consumption increases within a given period. Marginal utility is known to diminish as the unit of consumption increases. This is known as the law of diminishing marginal utility, or Gossen's first law. It is suggested that additional consumption of the same product increases total utility until marginal utility reaches 'zero.' After this point additional consumption decreases total utility and causes marginal disutility, which causes pain. When marginal utility equals zero it is referred to as satiation.

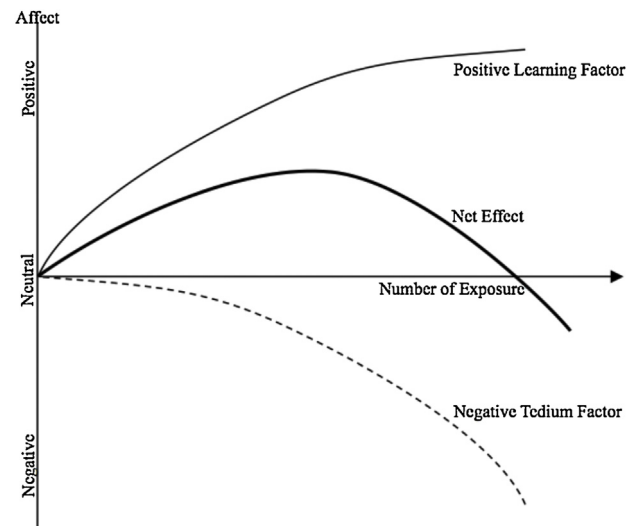


Fig. 1. Two-factor theory.

Source: [Rehans et al. \(1986\)](#).

Psychologically, satiation can be explained as a consumer's affective response after repeated exposure to the same stimulus. [Berlyne \(1970\)](#) proposed a two-factor theory, which posits that the affective consequences of exposure to a stimulus are a function of learning and satiation. As presented in [Fig. 1](#), [Berlyne \(1970\)](#) argued that negative and positive affect are derived from the frequency of exposure during a certain time period. When a person is first exposed to a stimulus, he or she starts learning about the stimulus. This learning process stimulates positive affect. However, once he or she gets too familiar with the stimulus it stimulates negative affect. These two categories of affect can co-exist according to the amount of exposure to the same stimulus. Accordingly, positive affect is strong during early stages of exposure to a stimulus, but negative affect grows stronger with repeated exposure. In other words, consumers experience negative affect strongly once they start to feel satiated. As explained above, both the two-factor theory and the law of diminishing marginal utility provide theoretical foundations for consumption satiation.

Empirically, satiation has been described as "sensory-specific satiety" ([McAlister, 1982](#); [Rolls, 1986](#)). For example, sensory-specific satiety refers to a drop in desire for a food after eating it, with little change in desire for foods not eaten ([Rolls et al., 1981](#)). Further, sensory-specific satiation is known to occur with specific attributes (i.e., entrées but not desserts) that people notice (i.e., flavors rather than calories). Consumers may feel satiation right after eating food or when they purchase specific products repeatedly ([Hetherington et al., 1989](#); [Inman and Zeelenberg, 2002](#)). Similarly, a study by [Galak et al. \(2009\)](#) found that consumers were easily satiated in terms of sensory-specific stimuli, such as music and food. This phenomenon has been noticed in various studies ([McAlister, 1982](#); [Szpunar et al., 2004](#); [Redden, 2008](#); [Galak et al., 2013](#); [Redden and Haws, 2013](#)). These studies implied that satiation occurs at a sensory level (i.e., flavor or scent) rather than at other attribute levels, such as brand.

From the perspective of sensory-specific satiation, satiation may not exist at the restaurant level. However, from the perspective of the two-factor theory satiation could exist at the restaurant level. For instance, when consumers visit a restaurant the first time they start to learn about the restaurant itself, such as the physical surroundings, servers, food, etc. Thus, the restaurant itself can be considered a combination of various sensory-specific stimuli. As the customer continues to dine at this restaurant he or she would feel positive affect from the learning experience during the early

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