



Research Article

The sweet taste of gratitude: Feeling grateful increases choice and consumption of sweets

Ann E. Schlosser

Department of Marketing, Foster School of Business, University of Washington, PACCAR Hall, Box 353226, 4295 E. Stevens Way NE, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

Received 18 March 2013; received in revised form 20 December 2014; accepted 25 February 2015

Available online 4 March 2015

Abstract

Gratitude is a positive emotion experienced when a positive outcome is attributed to others. Though often regarded as a virtuous emotion, I argue that gratitude may have sweet side effects. Specifically, because gratitude involves acknowledging benefits received from the kind (or metaphorically sweet) actions of another, individuals may infer that they must be deserving of sweetness. As a result, they prefer foods with congruent – or sweet rather than nonsweet – tastes. If gratitude causes individuals to prefer sweets because they infer that they must be deserving of sweetness, then the effect should be strongest among those most likely to infer from a sweet act that they deserve sweetness, such as those who are psychologically connected to others (i.e., primed with interdependence or shared attributes). The results of six studies support these predictions. In particular, individuals selected more sweets and fewer non-sweet foods when primed to feel grateful than proud, a positive emotion experienced by attributing a positive outcome to the self. Furthermore, moderation and mediation support the cognition of deserving sweetness as the underlying mechanism.

© 2015 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Gratitude; Taste metaphors; Food consumption; Psychological connection; Emotion; Pride

“Sweet is the breath of vernal shower,
The bee’s collected treasures sweet,
Sweet music’s melting fall, but sweeter yet,
The still small voice of gratitude.” –Thomas Gray

Gratitude is a positive emotion attributed to the benevolence of another (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Larson, 2001; Weiner, 1985). Across Eastern and Western cultures and religions, gratitude is considered a “basic and desirable aspect of human personality and social life” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, p. 377). Yet, despite its importance across cultures and religions, its effects on consumption have not been explored. In psychology, recent research has shown gratitude to have multiple positive effects, such as fostering prosocial behaviors (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; McCullough et al., 2001), maintaining intimate bonds (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012), and

improving psychological and physical well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2001). In fact, the popular press proclaims that being “oriented around gratefulness is the panacea for insatiable yearnings and life’s ills” (Emmons & McCullough, 2003, p. 377). However, I propose one consequence: increasing preferences for and consumption of sweets. More specifically, I argue that by attributing a positive outcome to the kind (or metaphorically sweet) actions of another, those experiencing gratitude may infer that they must be deserving of sweetness, and thus select and consume more foods with congruent (sweet) tastes. Six studies support this surprising finding. Further, through moderation and mediation, the results support inferences of deserving sweetness as mediating the effects of gratitude on sweet food preferences.

Research investigating the role of gratitude in consumer psychology is nascent, with the majority focusing on how firm investments can elicit gratitude and thus influence consumer

E-mail address: aschloss@uw.edu.

behavior (Morales, 2005; Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechhoff, & Kardes, 2009; Wetzel, Hammerschmidt, & Zablah, 2014). As a social emotion, gratitude is cause for many holidays and social gatherings (e.g., Thanksgiving, Mother's and Father's Days, Veteran's Day, etc.), and yet its influence on product choice and consumption in general is relatively unknown, and its incidental effects on food choice and consumption in particular have not been studied. Studying the effect of gratitude on food choice and consumption is important for several reasons: (1) many occasions centered around gratitude (e.g., Thanksgiving) involve food, (2) positive emotions in general have been linked to food choices (for a review see [Bublitz, Peracchio, & Block, 2010](#)), and (3) helpful perceptions have been linked to certain types of foods ([Meier, Moeller, Riemer-Peltz, & Robinson, 2012](#)).

Overall, by examining gratitude and its effect on food preferences and consumption, this research contributes to the literature in at least three ways. First, in addition to shedding light on how gratitude affects food choice and consumption, this research is the first to show a negative consequence of gratitude: a preference for sweet foods. In addition to sugar consumption contributing to obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, recent research suggests that added sugar consumption increases one's risk of dying from cardiovascular disease, and that most adults in the United States consume more than the recommended daily amount of sugar ([Yang et al., 2014](#)). Second, whereas most research has examined the effect of emotion on healthy versus indulgent food preferences and consumption (e.g., [Andrade, 2005](#); [Garg, Wansink, & Inman, 2007](#); [Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001](#)), the current research combines the literatures on emotion and embodied metaphors to show that gratitude influences preferences and consumption of foods with a specific taste independent of indulgence. Finally, the current research provides evidence supporting a novel mechanism (attributions of deserving sweetness) as underlying the effect of gratitude on the selection and consumption of sweets. Although prior research has shown that preferring and consuming sweets leads to helpful perceptions and behaviors ([Meier et al., 2012](#)), I extend these findings by showing the reverse: feeling grateful for the helpful (i.e., metaphorically sweet) actions of others increases preferences for and consumption of sweets. Not all metaphors and their corresponding abstract concepts have bi-directional associations ([Ijzerman & Koole, 2011](#); [Landau, Keefer, & Meier, 2011](#)). Instead, evidence of a bi-directional association is necessary to conclude that a direct mental association between these concepts exists ([Jostmann, Lakens, & Schubert, 2009](#)). Such bi-directionality also challenges traditional thinking that "metaphors map structure directionally from a concrete concept to a relatively more abstract concept" ([Landau et al., 2011, p. 363](#)), and support instead an embodied metaphor explanation ([Ijzerman & Koole, 2011](#)), which a sweet metaphor is argued to be ([Meier et al., 2012](#)). Thus, I extend prior research on sweet metaphors by providing evidence suggestive of a bi-directional relationship and showing that attributions of deserving sweetness mediates the effects of gratitude on preference for sweets.

Conceptual development

Gratitude

Emotions are "discrete, time-limited, affective responses to environmental changes" that "coordinate thought, physiology, and behavior" ([McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008, p. 281](#)), and can influence choices incidentally – that is, even when they are normatively irrelevant for making such choices ([Cavanaugh, Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 2007](#); [Han, Lerner, & Keltner, 2007](#)). The focus here is on gratitude, which has been described as "one of the most neglected emotions and one of the most underestimated of the virtues" ([Solomon, 2004, p. v](#)). The fact that gratitude has been largely ignored for decades in psychology ([McCullough et al., 2001](#)) is surprising given that it is a commonly experienced emotion, has widespread appeal among the general public and is a desirable emotion across cultures and religions ([Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#)). Gratitude has received even less attention in consumer psychology, especially in terms of its incidental effects on product choice and consumption – a gap this research aims to address.

A critical element for the experience of gratitude is the recognition that someone else is responsible for a positive personal outcome ([Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#); [Weiner, 1985](#)). Consequently, gratitude has been called a "moral affect" because it is both a response to another's prosocial behavior and often a motivator of prosocial behavior ([McCullough et al., 2001](#)). Indeed, gratitude encourages those who experience it to recognize kindness from benefactors as well as to help others ([Emmons & McCullough, 2003](#); [McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002](#)), even if the beneficiaries of help are strangers ([Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006](#); [DeSteno, Bartlett, Baumann, Williams, & Dickens, 2010](#)). The finding that grateful individuals help strangers is counter to a reciprocity norm, or the expectation that one should repay the benefactor directly ([Pruitt, 1968](#); [Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970](#)), and thus is distinct from feelings of indebtedness, or feeling obliged to repay one's benefactor ([Greenberg, 1980](#); [McCullough et al., 2008](#)). Based on the metaphor literature, I argue that by recognizing the benefits received from the kind (i.e., metaphorically sweet) actions of another, individuals infer that they must be deserving of sweetness. As a result, grateful individuals prefer foods with tastes that are congruent with this attribution (i.e., sweets).

Sweet as a metaphor for kindness

Among the early theories on grounded cognition are those based on metaphors ([Barsalou, 2008](#); [Krishna & Schwarz, 2014](#)). Specifically, individuals draw upon their vast knowledge of bodily sensations and situations to describe abstract concepts ([Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999](#)). For example, physical warmth (coldness) – one of the most researched embodiments of interpersonal relationships ([Ijzerman & Koole, 2011](#)) – is often used to describe a friendly (unfriendly) person or situation ([Hong & Sun, 2012](#); [Ijzerman & Koole, 2011](#); [Wilkowski, Meier, Robinson, Carter, & Feltman, 2009](#); [Williams & Bargh, 2008](#); [Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008](#)). For

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/882016>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/882016>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)