

For Immediate Release: February 11, 2014
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Photo + Fragrance of Chocolate Cake = More Chocolate Cakes Sold

Fashion magazines come pre-loaded with scratch-and-sniff panels for perfume and aftershave, but what about advertisements for foods like chocolate chip cookies and fresh-baked bread? According to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#), when food advertisements combine a photo of food with an “imagined odor,” consumers both salivate more for the item and then consume it in larger quantities.

“We wondered whether both real and imagined food smells would enhance consumer desire for that product. Does the concept of smelling food make people salivate more and increase their desire to eat more than they normally would?” write authors Aradhna Krishna (University of Michigan), Maureen Morrin (Temple University), and Eda Sayin (Koç University).

In their research, the authors use a term they call “smellizing” to describe the concept of imagining what a particular food smells like when it is not actually there. Across four studies, the researchers placed cotton balls in participants’ mouths to collect and measure saliva saturation.

In one study, participants viewed the advertising tagline, “Feel like a chocolate cake?” Some participants were shown just the tagline and others were shown the tagline accompanied by a photo of a chocolate cake. The participants were then asked to either smell a sachet with the fragrance of chocolate cake, imagine the scent of chocolate cake, or neither.

As the researchers expected, smelling the cake increased salivation for all participants. They did, however, note an increase in salivation in participants who viewed the advertisement containing both the photo and the tagline when the cake smell was completely removed (compared to people who just viewed the tagline).

“Our results show that just asking people to imagine the odor of an appetizing food product will not increase salivation unless the consumer also sees a picture of the food product,” the authors conclude. “For brands asking people to imagine what an object smells like, they might consider appealing to common consumer experiences in visual imagery and use written cues if necessary.”

Aradhna Krishna, Maureen Morrin, and Eda Sayin. “Smellizing Cookies and Salivating: A Focus on Olfactory Imagery.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2014. For more information, contact Maureen Morrin (maureen.morrin@temple.edu) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.

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