

Less is More (Natural):
The Impact of the Number of Ingredients on Consumers’ Perceptions and Preferences

Michelle Kim (UCSD), Rachel Gershon (UCSD), Sydney Scott (Washington University)
Zoom meeting ID: 347 626 0795

Abstract

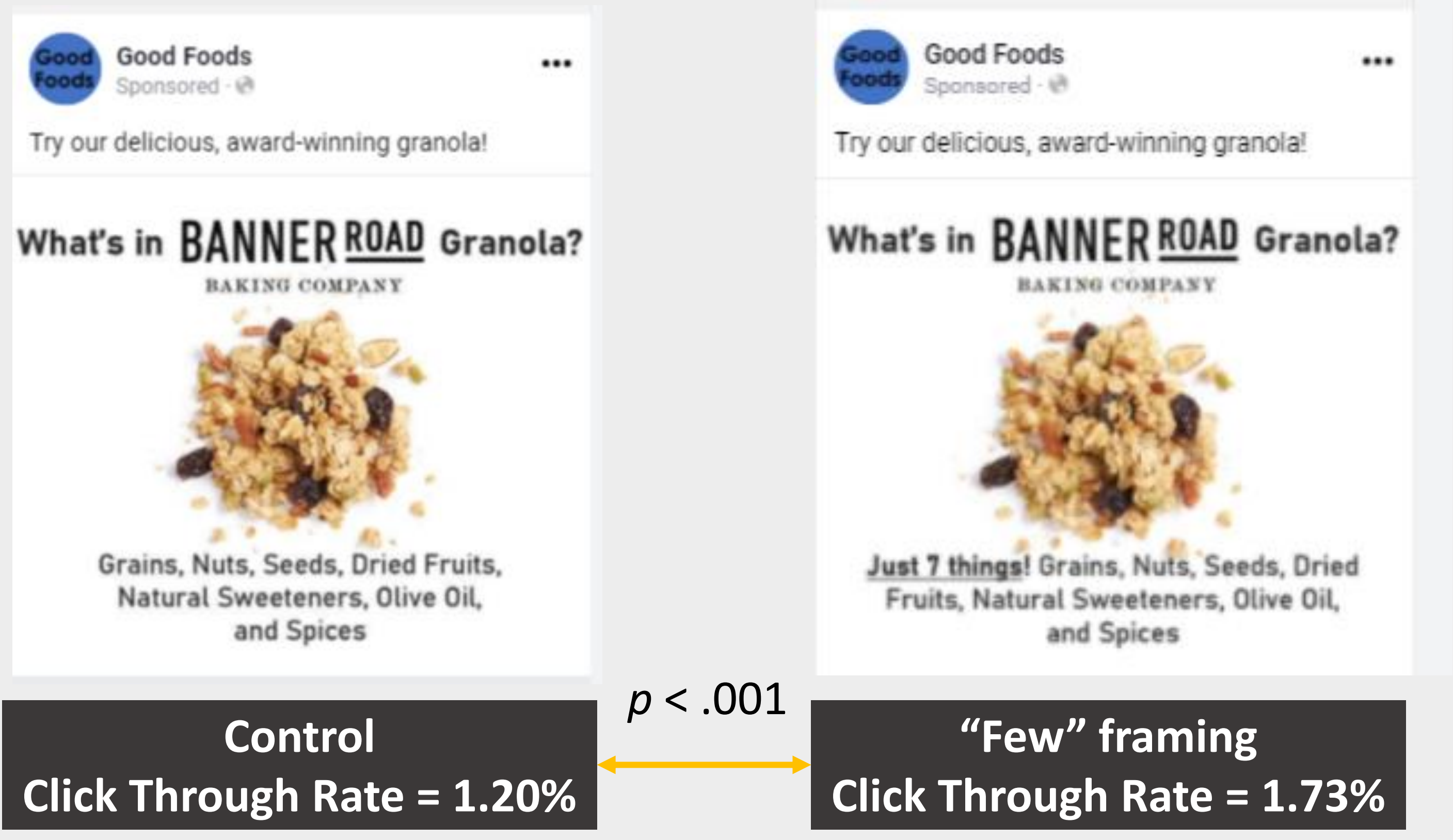
- Framing a product with the same number of ingredients as having fewer ingredients increases consumers’ interest (Studies 1A, 1B, and 7).
- This occurs because consumers view products with fewer ingredients as more natural. The belief that a product with fewer (vs. more) ingredients is more natural persists even when all ingredients in both products are explicitly natural or organic (Studies 2 – 7)
- Consumers who have higher (vs. lower) concern for naturalness are more likely to choose a product with fewer ingredients. (Study 8)

Motivation

- **Theoretical Motivation:** Naturalness research has focused on the types of ingredients (e.g., GMO, artificial flavorings) and processes (e.g., blending). Are they exhaustive in explaining naturalness?
- **Practical Motivation:** Recently, brands are launching products with an emphasis on how many ingredients they used in the product. Haagen-Dazs Five is a good example. Is this framing strategy effective?

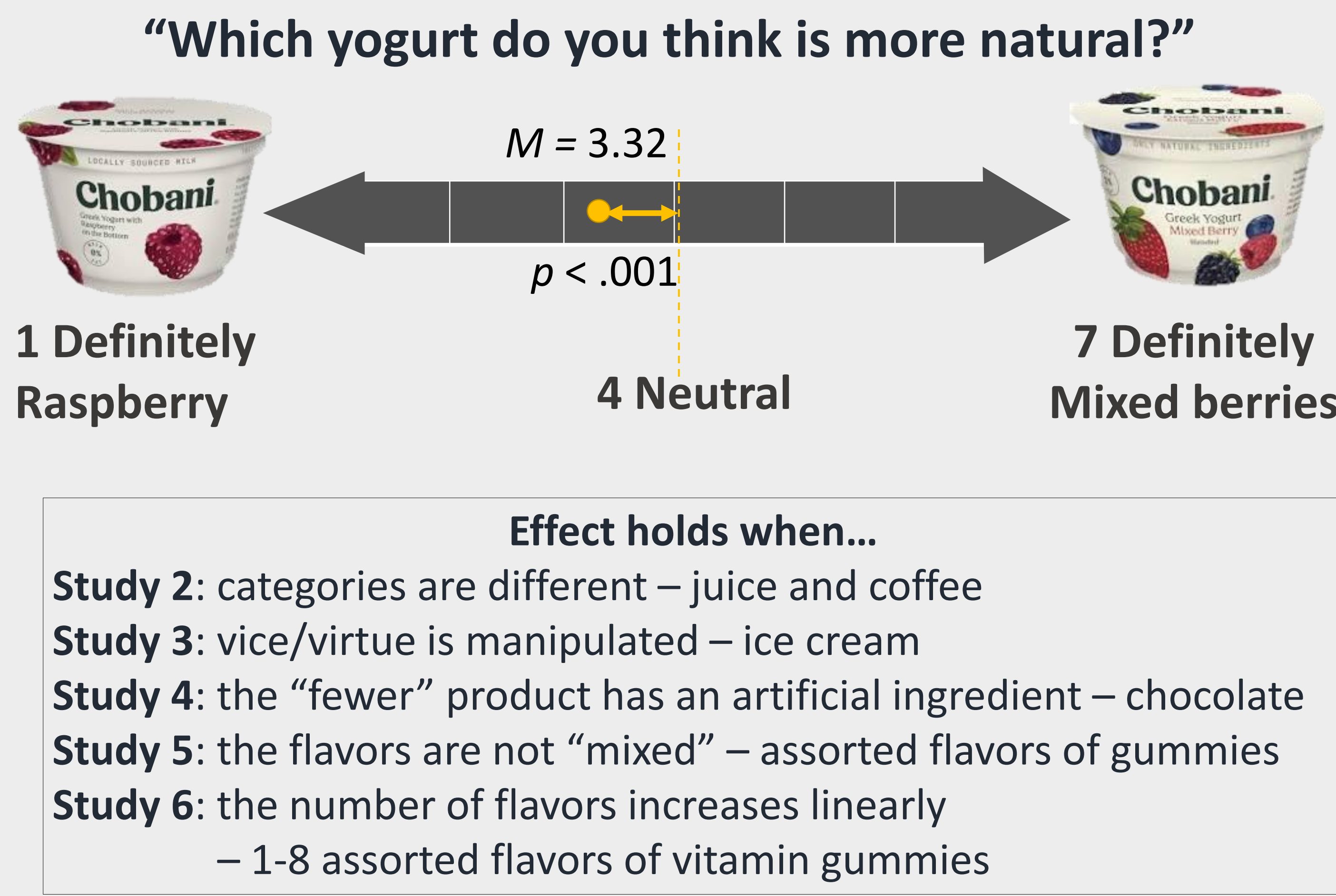
STUDY 1A – Do consumers prefer a product highlighting the number of ingredients?

- In Study 1A and 1B, we partnered with real brands and ran Facebook A/B tests to see whether ads framed as having fewer ingredients increases consumers’ interest.
- We found a higher click rate when the ad highlights how many ingredients they used in the product.



STUDIES 2-6 – Demonstrating a heuristic of Fewer ingredients = More Natural

- Participants reported relative naturalness between two products on a bipolar scale. We tested against the mid point (4). All ingredients were counterbalanced.



STUDY 8 – The effect is moderated by consumers’ attitudes towards naturalness

- Participants reported their concern for naturalness (Siegrist et al. 2008) and made an incentive-compatible choice between two cookies (5 vs. 7 ingredients) from Etsy.



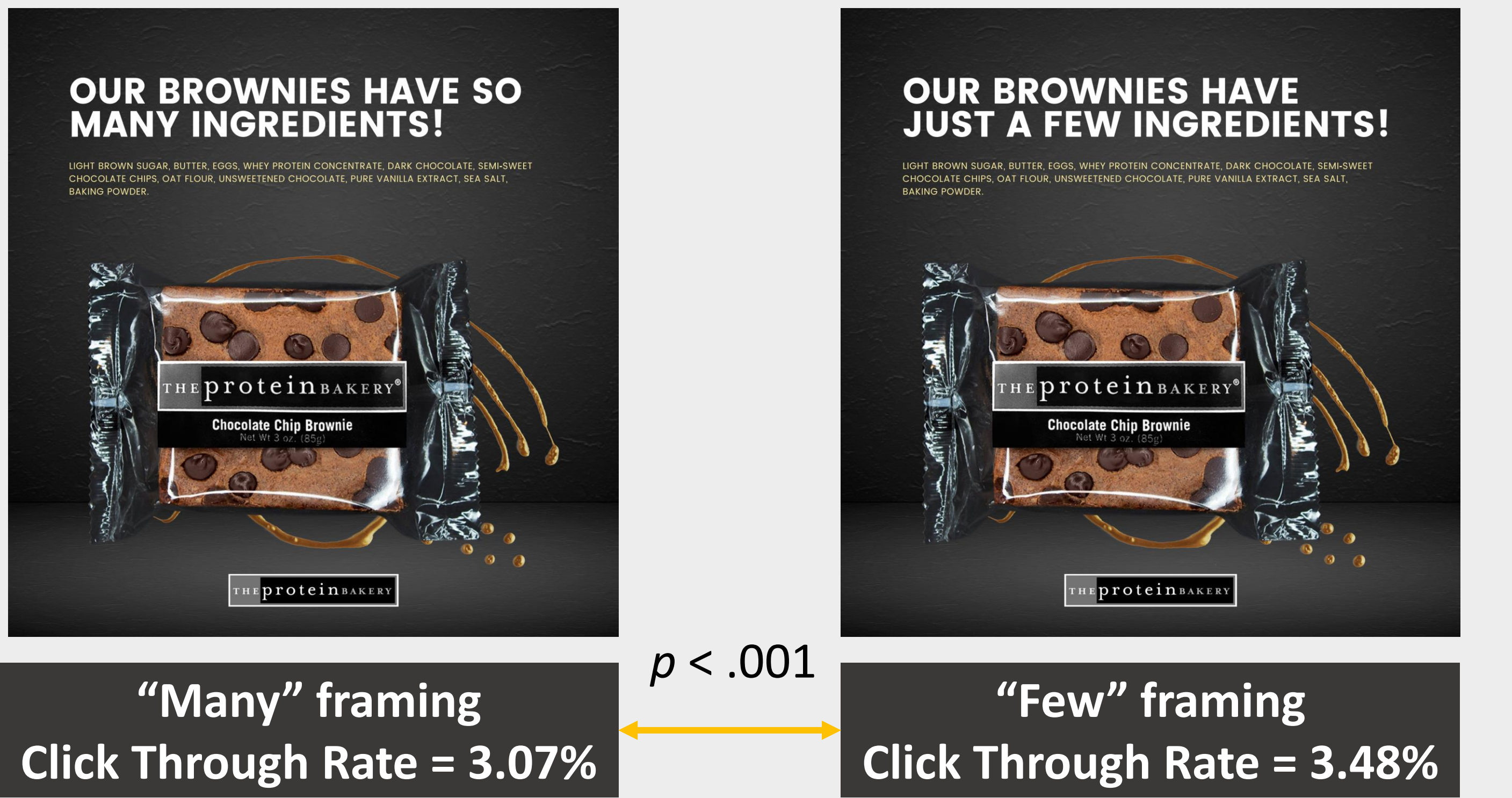
Ultimate Chocolate chip cookies
7 ingredients:
Flour, sugar, salt, eggs, butter, chocolate, vanilla

Double Stuffed chocolate chip cookies
5 ingredients:
Flour, sugar, chocolate, eggs, butter

- A logit regression analysis showed that those who have higher (vs. lower) concern for naturalness were more likely to choose the five-ingredients (i.e., fewer) chocolate chip cookie.

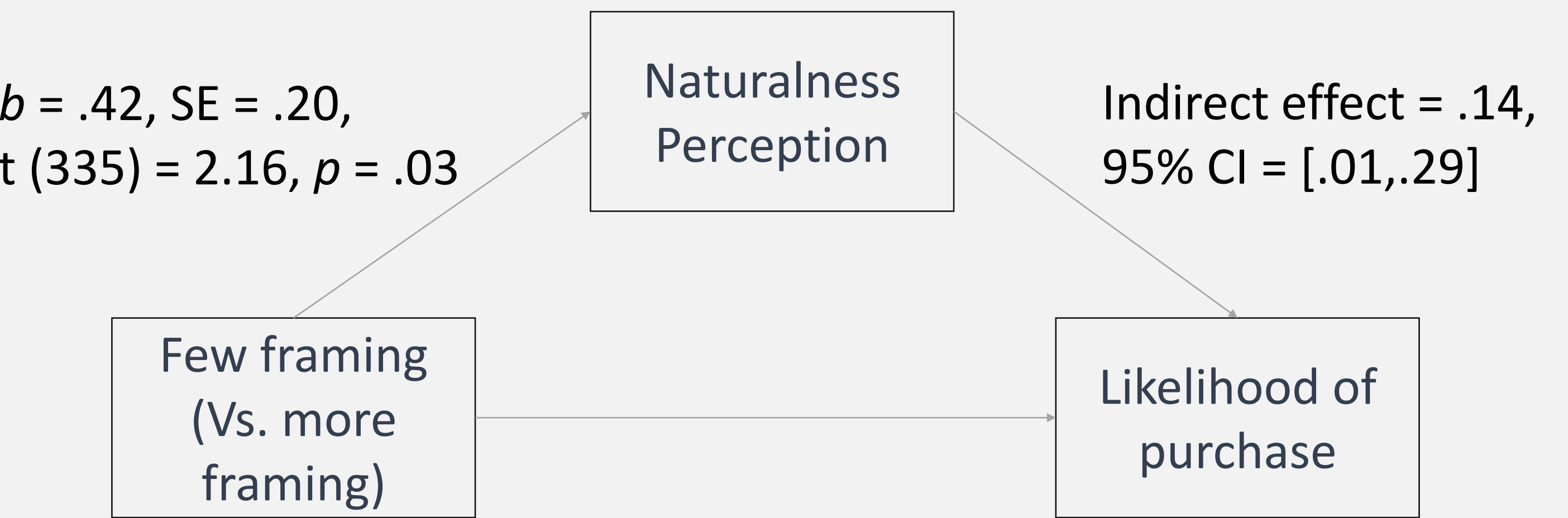
STUDY 1B – Do consumers prefer a product framed as having “few” (vs. “more”) ingredients?

- We found a higher click rate when the same product is framed as having “few” ingredients.



STUDY 7 – Naturalness perceptions mediate the effect of few framing

- We replicate this effect with purchase likelihood using the stimuli from Study 1B with the M-Turk sample and find the perceptions of naturalness mediate the effect.



Takeaways

- The number of ingredients is an important factor that consumers consider in their decision making.
- Specifically, few-ingredients framing is more effective than more-ingredients framing.
- A product with fewer ingredients is perceived as more natural than that with more ingredients.
- The effect of the number of ingredients on perceived naturalness is robust across different categories (e.g., yogurt, coffee origin, juice, ice cream, chocolate, vitamin gummies, chocolate chip cookies).
- The effect alters consumers’ decision making.