

## Effects of attentional selection on preference choices for consumer products

Nadiia Makarina<sup>1,2</sup>, Ronald Hübner<sup>1,2</sup>, Sebastian Dummel<sup>3</sup>, and Arnd Florack<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Konstanz, Germany <sup>2</sup>Graduate School of Decision Sciences, University of Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany

<sup>3</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Cologne, Germany <sup>4</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Vienna, Austria

E-Mail: Nadiia.Makarina@uni-konstanz.de

### Abstract

It is usually assumed that consumers base their choice between products on the expected benefit provided by the products. However, there is evidence that the mere selection of a product also increases the preference for this product. In a study by Janiszewski, Kuo, and Tavassoli (2013), participants had to select targets in a visual search task. As a result, in a subsequent preference choice task former targets were preferred to former non-targets. However, for detecting the relatively small increase in preference, they paired unknown products so that originally there was no difference in value. In the present study, we tried to generalize the mere selection effect to known products. Equal-value pairs for the preference choice task were constructed based on preference ratings obtained in an independent preliminary study. In two experiments with this method, we replicated the mere selection effect. Moreover, we also provide evidence that selected products can increase in value.

### How do we choose a product?

- Products are valued for the benefits they provide and chosen accordingly (Brosch & Sander, 2013)
- We choose what we prefer, but also prefer what we chose: chosen items increase in value compared to the non-chosen ones (Coppin et al., 2014; Izuma et al., 2010)

**Choice biased by attention** (Wedel & Pieters, 2008; Krajbich et al., 2011; Banovic, 2014):

- items that are attended more are more likely to be chosen
- items fixated on last are chosen more often

**Attention is affected by value** (Dummel & Hübner, 2017):

- value of an item determines how strongly it attracts attention, which in turn influences the choice probability

### The influence of selective attention on choice

“Repeatedly allocating attention to a product (selective attention) and away from other products (inattention) subsequently influences choices between these products and competing products.” (p. 1258) (Janiszewski, Kuo, and Tavassoli, 2013)



**Mere selection effect** – increased preference for selected target items

### Visual Search Task

Locate the sweet item and click the respective mouse button!



Distractor  
Savory

Target  
Sweet

Locate the savory item and click the respective mouse button!



Target  
Savory

Distractor  
Sweet

### Methods and Material

Two experiments with three tasks:

**Search Task**

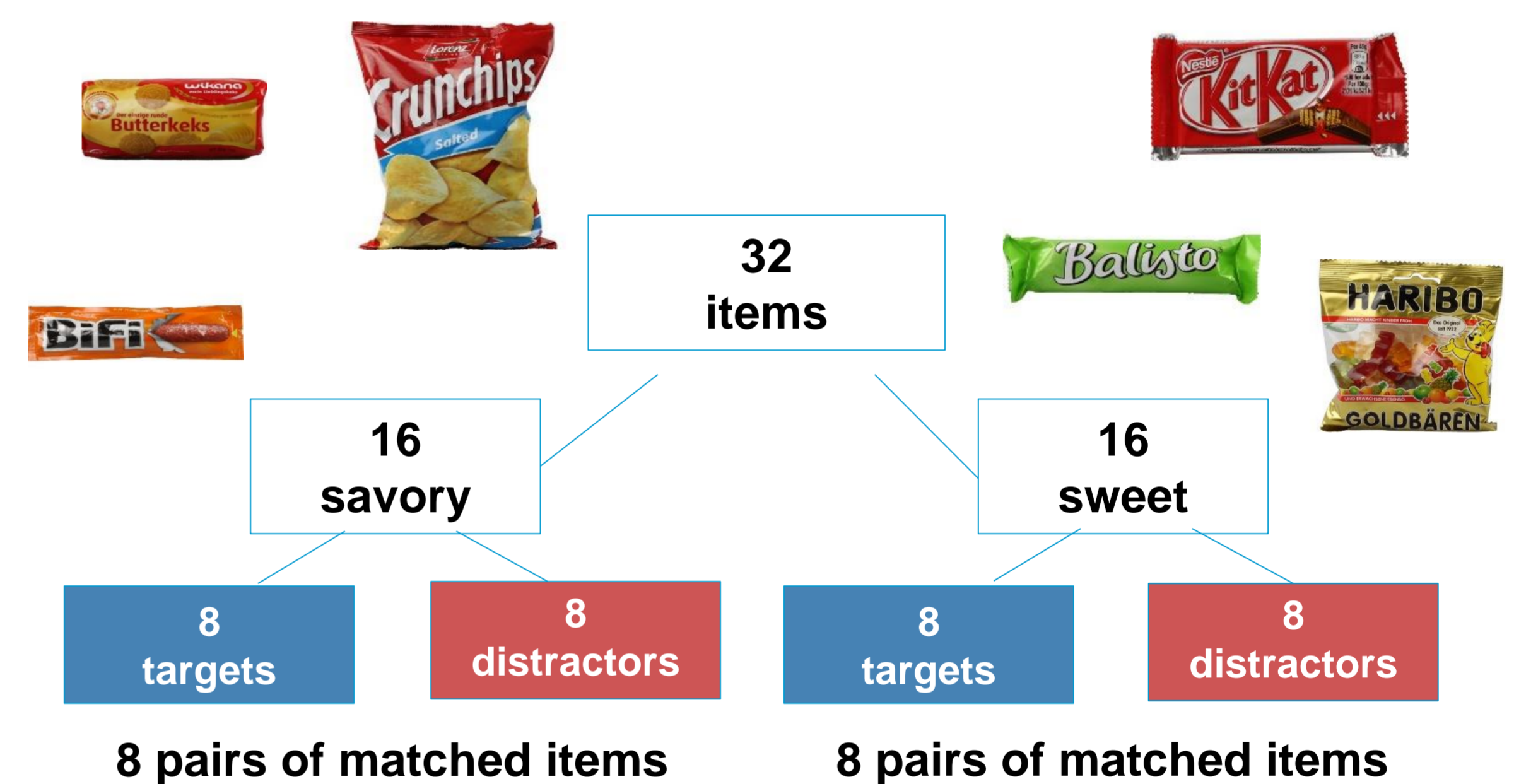
**Preference Task**

without (Exp. 1) and

with (Exp. 2) time pressure

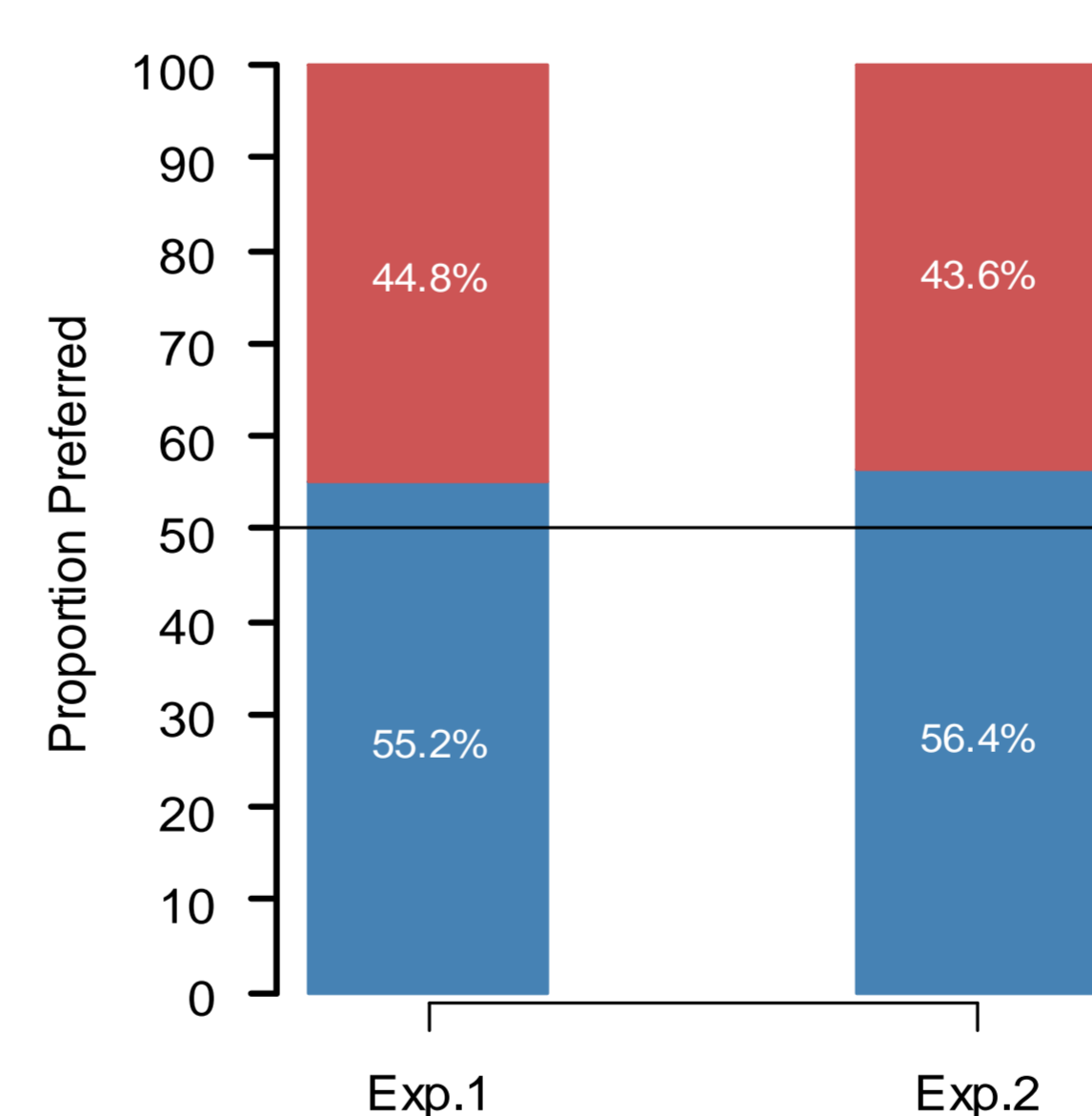
**Rating Task**

five-point Likert scale

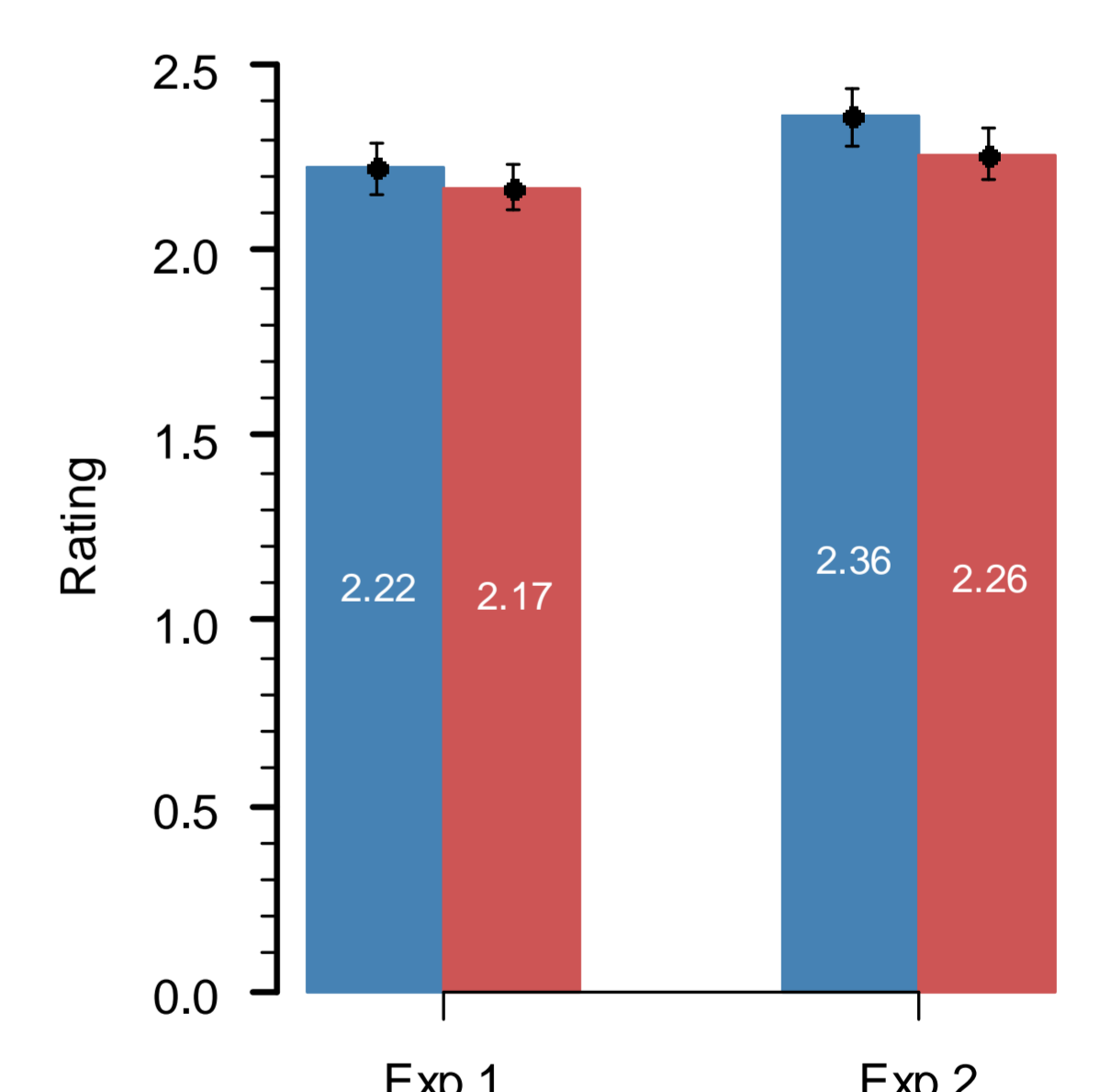


### Results

**Choice proportions  
in the preference-choice task**



**Liking ratings of the products**



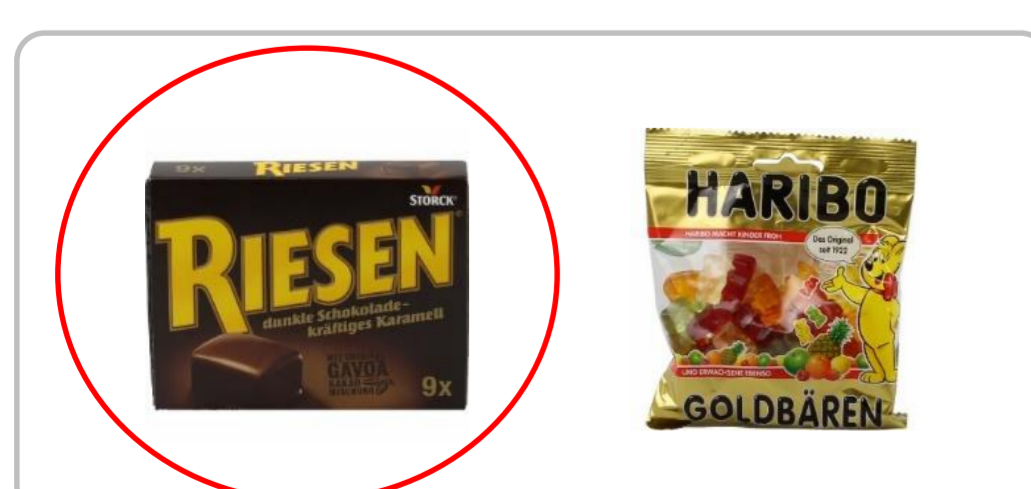
■ Target ■ Distractor

Experiment 1:  $N = 46$ , 37 ♀,  $M_{age} = 22$ ,  $SD_{age} = 3$

Experiment 2:  $N = 48$ , 38 ♀,  $M_{age} = 20$ ,  $SD_{age} = 3$

### Preference Choice Task

Between two items  
choose the one you prefer more!



Target  
Sweet

Distractor  
Sweet

### Conclusions

- **Generalization of the mere selection effect: the effect is found even for well-known products, for which participants already had prior preferences**
- **Relatively subtle preference unrelated manipulation affects existing preferences**
- **Attention and selection had an effect on values of the snacks (i.e., liking rating)**
- **Mere selection effect does not increase when choice is made under time pressure**