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**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**COURSEWORK SUBMISSION FORM AND  
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**MSc Programme:** Social and Organisational Psychology

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## **SUMMATIVE ESSAY**

NatureBox: Promoting Healthy Snacking Behaviours

PS456: Consumer Psychology

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London School of Economics and Political Science  
Department of Social Psychology  
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## **I. CASE PRESENTATION**

NatureBox is an online box-of-the-month subscription service for nutritionist-approved snacks. Since its launch in the United States in early 2012, the company has broken aggressively into the \$64 billion snack food industry and seen a 20X growth. Founder and CEO Gautam Gupta attributes the company's fast success to understanding its customers and working efficiently to provide a unique customer experience. The company is driven by a social mission to provide America with healthier and novel snacking options in a direct way, thereby offering convenience and nutritional value. Subscribers receive a box of five full-sized snacks delivered to the door each month. Snack concepts and formulations are co-created by in-house and external teams and ingredients

are sourced from independent growers (Gould, 2013). Over a hundred snacks are currently available to choose from or discover in curated boxes, including fan favourites such as big island pineapple, blueberry greek yogurt pretzels, and pistachio power clusters.

NatureBox differentiates itself from the traditional snack food industry by capturing the power of the consumer through a direct-to-consumer (DTC) model. Big data analytics such as order patterns, dietary needs, and ratings are taken into account in iterative development and product creation decisions to quickly roll out products at a cheaper market price. The following outlines economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable features of the company at present:

### **Key Features**

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- Carefully sourced, designed, and nutritionist-approved snacks that *cater to increasingly ethical and health conscious consumers*
- Production volume is forecasted through the subscription model in order to minimize inventory and *prevent overstock and waste*
- Direct distribution and shipping to all 50 states provide *access* to healthier alternatives to mainstream supermarket snacks

- *Larger social mission* by teaming up with Feeding America to deliver one meal for those in need each time a customer receives a box of snacks with a goal of delivering 1 million meals this year

Last year, NatureBox received \$18 million for series B funding and announced international expansion beginning with Canada. CEO Gautam Gupta further stated that a long-term goal for the company is to extend to brick-and-mortar revenue streams from its current online only model. The rapid growth of the company in a highly saturated market space points to several current limitations and long-term challenges. At present, NatureBox targets a specific population of health conscious and online customers and lacks brand awareness in the offline space and with marginal groups. Furthermore, an increase in retail health-oriented snack companies and other DTC competitors such as UK-based Graze.com presents a challenge to retain a loyal customer base. Finally, to expand into a multi-channel business while maintaining a strong brand identity and value proposition is a key long-term challenge. The subsequent memorandum to the CEO of NatureBox addresses these concerns and provides short-, mid-, and long-term solutions that can be implemented in the future of the business.

## **II. MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Gautam Gupta, CEO of NatureBox  
**FROM:** Consumer Insights Strategist, LSE  
**DATE:** 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015  
**RE:** Recommendations for NatureBox moving forward

Dear Mr. Gupta,

First and foremost I would like to commend you on founding an innovative and fast growing business with one important social goal: to promote more

healthy and fun snacking behaviours. The social mission NatureBox has embarked upon is one that resonates with today's unsustainable consumption patterns and reflects a powerful value proposition on which you have built a strong brand identity. In the span of just three years, your company has successfully reconfigured the traditional subscription model into a direct-to-consumer platform that fosters healthy snacking habits by allowing consumers to make just one simple decision (to subscribe!) and in addition provides an innovative way to keep consumer mindshare. Indeed, your company has inspired many others to place an emphasis on social impact.

With that said, I truly appreciate the opportunity to work with you to continue to build a sustainable and impactful business moving forward. It is my hope that my interdisciplinary background and expertise will capture key insights to help extend the reach and impact of your business. As requested, I have assessed the goals of your company alongside its current limitations and future challenges. In doing so, I have taken into account the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, at the centre of which are the consumers. It is my understanding that in order to remain financially sustainable and socially influential, NatureBox in the long-term must move beyond its online subscription model and translate itself into a multi-channel brand. The current model provides a gateway to better understand consumers' needs and preferences, but extending the brand offline also requires a fundamental shift in the consumer-brand relationship.

With the long-term goal in mind, I have identified two key obstacles to turning NatureBox into a household snack food brand. Firstly, customer acquisition requires moving beyond targeted online in-groups (e.g., health-oriented consumers) to offline in-groups and marginal out-groups (e.g., unhealthy snackers), which presents specific physical, psychological, and social barriers. The second obstacle pertains to standing out from a highly saturated and continuously expanding market category of healthy snack food companies online and offline, thereby accentuating the need for customer retention. I have framed the obstacles as short- and mid-term goals below as a way of opening up possibilities for action rather than reaction (See, Table 1).

***Table 1. Steps to reaching the long-term goal.***

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I have additionally utilized my knowledge to design a set of recommendations (See, Table 2) rooted in relevant research from sociology and social psychology to help you take your business and its social mission to the next level. The recommendations supplement each goal with practical solutions



anchored on the consumer experience as a whole. They are designed to enable systems change and take the perspective of consumers as psychological actors within an installation of physical and social structures (Lahlou, 2009).

**Goal 1: Widening the customer-base.**

- (1) Include trial packs in boxes for current customers to share with others.
- (2) Form offline ordering and pick-up hubs in neighbourhood corner stores.

These recommendations focus on lowering physical, psychological, and social barriers to access for offline customers and out-groups. Trial packs shared with others increase brand exposure and gives potential customers a chance to sample the snacks without a large commitment barrier. Sharing with others contributes to building social relationships and enhancing the consumption experience leading to increased buy-in. The formation of ordering and pick-up hubs in local corner stores lowers physical barriers to access for offline customers and puts lower cost delivery systems in place to conveniently pick up snacks on the way home. The presence of a neighbourhood hub moreover acts as a form of environmental intervention for out-group members (i.e., unhealthy snackers) by raising brand awareness and inducing healthy snacking norms.

**Goal 2: Standing out from competitors online and offline.**

**(3)** Create interactive online communities dedicated to healthy snacking based on neighbourhood and flavour profile.

**(4)** Set-up mobile experience kitchens and online snack design contests.

These recommendations are associated with creating a high-involvement customer experiences in order to strengthen the customer-brand relationship and commitment. In order to become a company that offers a source of social value beyond the product, NatureBox should offer opportunities for forming brand communities and memorable experiences. Creating interactive online brand communities based on neighbourhood will enable real-life interaction with local snackers while communities based on flavour profile will enable the formation of unique sub-groups within the larger snacker community. Mobile expeditions around the United States that involve interactive snack kitchens which teach customers to build their own snacks is both educational and enhances customer involvement in the company as well as healthy snacking. Moreover, it is an opportunity to gather flavour profiles of offline and out-group consumers all over the country. Online snack design contests furthermore allow customers to participate in designing new snacks and to feel personally recognised, thereby increasing the likelihood to commit to the brand.

**Goal 3: Becoming a multi-channel brand.**

(5) Partner with public institutions such as schools, public transport companies, movie theatres, and sports stadiums.

Lastly, offline and positive representations of the brand can be spread by partnerships with established institutions (i.e., public snacking spaces) that have a need to improve their snacking options. Catering to a diverse population of students, on-the-go travelers, professionals, and families, while changing the way people snack in public settings can initiate a change in private snacking behaviours and thus changes people's attitudes and motivation to snack healthily. This can be seen as a public awareness campaign and a starting point for venturing into retail stores.

***Table 2. Outline of Recommendations***

Recommendation	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
<b>Goal 1: Widen customer-base</b> <b>Increase access and enable customer engagement.</b>		
Sharing trial packs with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increases brand awareness</li> <li>Enhances customer experience</li> </ul>	Short-term
Corner store ordering and pick-up hubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lowers physical barrier to access</li> <li>Enables community engagement with brand</li> </ul>	Short-term
<b>Goal 2: Stand out from competitors online and offline</b> <b>Retain customers by strengthening the brand relationship through experience.</b>		
Interactive online snacker communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fosters brand communities</li> <li>Empowers customer self-expression</li> </ul>	Short-term
Mobile experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthens brand relationships</li> </ul>	Mid-term

kitchens and snack design contests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boosts involvement in healthy snacking</li> </ul>	
<b>Goal 3: Become a multi-channel brand</b> <b>Form mutually beneficial relationships with established institutions.</b>		
Partner with schools, public transport, movie theatres, and sports stadiums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increases public brand exposure</li> <li>▪ Change in public snacking spaces enables change in private snacking spaces</li> </ul>	Long-term

In brief, I am confident that NatureBox has both the capabilities and resources to implement the above recommendations. In doing so, it is my hope that NatureBox will be able to continue to sustainably grow into a business that furthers its social mission from promoting healthy snacking to fundamentally changing unhealthy snacking behaviours. Please do not hesitate to contact me to further discuss the recommendations outlined above and answer any potential questions that might arise.

Warm regards,

XXX

Consumer Insights Strategist

### III. THEORETICAL REVIEW

This section of the essay aims to justify each of the recommendations outlined above using relevant social scientific literature within the scope of consumer research. First, a broad description of *Installation Theory* is provided as an underlying framework to position the reader. Following this, each recommendation is supported with a detailed explanation using sociological and social psychological theories and empirical findings.

### **Installation Theory**

As a whole, the recommendations are designed through the lens of *Installation Theory*, a theoretical framework for implementing change in real-world systems (Lahlou, 2008, 2009). Installations constitute “assembling patterns in space to modify the way we experience [a] situation” (Lahlou, 2008, p. 9). As rationally bounded primates living in a complex world (Simon, 1990), human activity is only possible and efficient because it is distributed across three interdependent layers – physical, psychological, and social. The physical layer composes of objects and offers material affordances, which constrain the possible behaviours of an actor (Gibson, 1967). At the psychological layer, mental representations evolve through practice and feeds back into interpretations of situations to continuously negotiate an inner state. Importantly, whereas alternative frameworks of human activity are founded upon a dichotomy between person and world, *Installation Theory* takes into account that a person

always acts upon the world in reference to a generalized other (Moscovici, 1984). Therefore, the third social layer encompasses societal institutions and referent others that set real and normative rules of behaving to abide to. Taken together, the following review considers the interplay of these three layers and their accompanying social psychological processes.

**(1) Include trial packs in boxes for current customers to share with others.**

Human consumption behaviour reflects underlying evolutionary motives to make friends, attain status, avoid physical harm, and acquire mates (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013). From this perspective material consumption is an instrument of gaining symbolic capital (i.e., status), belonging to social groups (i.e., friends), cooperating (i.e. avoid harm) and competing (i.e., mate acquisition) with others. In order to meet these deeply rooted needs, NatureBox needs to expand beyond commercial exchanges to provide what is immensely valuable to humans – social interaction and social information.

By including sharing packs in customers' boxes, it facilitates customers to share with friends, family, or relevant others by providing specific physical affordances to foster social relationships. According to Belk (2007), sharing occurs through "the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use" (Belk, 2007, p. 126), and relies on a desire for intimacy and pleasure.

Through sharing, interpersonal boundaries are dissolved and one's extended self comes to include other people (i.e., sharing in) (Belk, 2010). Sharing diverges from the individualist-strategist approach, which reduces the typified individual to a *homo economicus* that is self-interested and cares only for maximizing utility (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005). Instead, it suggests a rationally bounded *homo sociologicus* that takes into account altruistic and irrational social behaviours and decision-making, which underlies an understanding of unconditional generosity (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005). Nevertheless, sharing displays are also a way of signaling non-visible qualities such as preferences and group memberships to others to establish a symbolic capital position or status (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005).

The implementation of sharing packs can act as an instrument of social influence upon the out-group. Cialdini (2009) outlines social modeling and liking as key features of social influence. Social modeling in this case can be understood as the inclination to consume what is seen to represent the other's preferences. Shared trial packs induces liking, which in turn makes persuasion less difficult (Cialdini, 2009). The sharing packs could additionally include a promotion code to access a larger free trial box. Since there is a social incentive for short-term product adoption, out-groups that agree to sampling NatureBox are more likely to subscribe according to empirical findings on the foot-in-the-

door technique whereby agreeing to a small request increases likelihood to comply with a larger request (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

## **(2) Form offline ordering and pick-up hubs in neighbourhood corner stores.**

*Theory of planned behaviour* emphasizes context-specific factors that predict and explain human behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Intention to perform behaviour including attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control capture motivational factors and increases the likelihood of action only when the behaviour is under the actor's volitional control. Perceived behavioural control impacts both intentions and actions and can vary across situations and actions. Attitude towards the behaviour refers to appraisal, subjective norm refers to social pressure, and perceived behavioral control refers to perceived ease or difficulty in performing this behaviour and is assumed to reflect past experiences (Ajzen, 1991). In the present case, corner store hubs increase access to offline customers by lowering perceived difficulty to perform the intended act of ordering. Corner store hubs in addition can act as a physical intervention to expose unhealthy snackers to alternative options and change their motivational intention to order by enabling positive attitude formation towards healthy snacking and fostering positive neighbourhood norms.



**(3) Create interactive online communities dedicated to healthy snacking based on neighbourhood and flavour profile.**

As proposed by *Installation Theory*, social representations arise from practice and education and is negotiated through the physical environment and referent others (Lahlou, 2008). For this reason, building a positive representation of the brand and healthy snacking by facilitating interaction among customers through online platforms will lead to formations of relationships with each other and the brand. Brand relationships are conceptualised as similar to interpersonal relationships and reflect themes of reciprocity, meaning provision, multiplicity, and temporality (Fournier, 1998). Focusing on the purposive nature of relationships, brands inject meaning into a person' s life and "can change self-concept through expansion into new domains or reinforce self-concept through mechanisms of self-worth and self-esteem" (Fournier, 1998, p. 345). Fournier (1998) further suggests that it is "within this level of ordinary experience that the meanings most central to life are contained" (Fournier, 1998, 366).

Consumption in this way can be seen as a form of identity seeking behaviour (Belk, 1988). And as such, *Social Identity Theory* postulates that people' s self-concepts rely on social group memberships people hold (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). *Self-Categorisation Theory* further suggests that social identity

depends on the salience of specific contexts and particular social comparisons between in-groups and out-groups (Turner, Oakes, & Haslam, 1994). Building an interactive online brand community increases contextual salience of the social identity of being a healthy snacker while maintaining a sense of distinctiveness from out-group members. People tend to conform to valued in-group members as it fulfills motives of belonging and the preservation of a positive self-concept (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Therefore, by making the social identity salient, value propositions of the brand can be extended to the consumer's own values. Indeed, empirical data supports that brand communities are characterised by "a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (Muniz & O' Guinn, 2001, p.412).

Using the dramaturgical model of social life, Goffman likens social interaction to a stage play where people perform roles (Goffman, 1959). Likewise, online interactions are opportunities for autonomous and expressive self-presentation in alignment with explicit brand community norms (i.e., healthy snacking) as a way of proving in-group membership. Involving oneself in the healthy snacker community can be used as a means to signal one's preferences and social position, but also to project an individualized image of a desired lifestyle (Catalin & Andreea, 2014). One empirical study confirms that gathering in virtual brand communities enables customer empowerment through peer

interaction as well as personal self-exhibition through the marks and rituals linked to the brand, thus making their experience more self-relevant (Cova & Pace, 2006).

#### **(4) Set-up mobile experience kitchens and online snack design contests.**

Consumption is a process beyond the tangible product and involves meaningful subjective dimensions and social activities. Consumers as homo sociologicus do not rationally choose the healthier snacking option every time and instead looks for affective triggers such as pleasurable experiences to determine brand commitment. Mobile experience kitchens represent an opportunity to build offline presence and to use sensory marketing as a way triggering affective states of customers in order to increase willingness to adopt and commit (Kotler, 1973). Sensory marketing can “create subconscious triggers that define consumer perceptions of abstract notions of the product” (Krishna, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, the physical atmosphere provides a medium whereby NatureBox can express itself to potential customers (Kotler, 1973). Using visual, auditory, and particularly taste atmospherics, the mobile kitchen can manipulate customers’ perceived senses to affect their attitude, behaviour, memory, and cognition of the event and brand concept (Krishna, 2012). Mobile experience kitchens moreover create a physical space for social interaction and co-influence.

Boothby, Clark & Bargh (2014) found that having a simultaneous experience with another person even in the absence of explicit communication enhanced subjective evaluations of that experience. Two effects can explain this: a) a focus intensifying effect that increases the salience of the shared stimuli and b) a mentalising the other effect that leads to social imitation behavior (Boothby, Clark & Bargh, 2014).

Experience kitchens and snack design contests both allow customers the opportunity to feed into the discussion of how to make snacks healthier. Instead of autocratically imposing NatureBox' s social mission upon customers, customers can contribute their ideas using an educational guideline provided by the company. Through autonomy support and mastery, customers can internalise brand values and become intrinsically motivated to change unhealthy snacking behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, in a study on changing food habits, Lewin (1943) found that interventions involving people in discussions on how to change habits resulted in more positive motivational change compared to simply giving lectures on the topic (Lewin, 1943). This is in effect a form of co-production where customers are active participants in the design and production of snacks (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Giving customers a choice to participate minimizes the self-serving bias whereby people tend to claim more responsibility for oneself in cases of good outcomes and more blame to others in cases of bad

outcomes (Wolosin, Sherman, & Till, 1973). Participants therefore are likely to be more satisfied with the brand and themselves in light of a good outcome.

**(5) Partner with public institutions such as schools, public transport companies, movie theatres, and sports stadiums.**

Human action is situated within a complex society of institutions. Institutions arise from “reciprocal typification of habitualised actions by types of actors” and form structures that govern appropriate behaviour (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, p. 72). Embedded within institutions are social norms that accompany a stable pattern of rules and practices. One fundamental route to change involves changing social norms of behaving through institutions. To illustrate, schools drive social norms of snacking through environmental factors such as what is sold in vending machines and the cafeteria. Habitual behaviour is reinforced through peer interaction and can spill over to snacking behaviours in the private sphere. Partnerships with such institutions can act as interventions to breaking unhealthy snacking habits using what Verplanken and Wood (2006) refers to as an “upstream” intervention. Habits are automatically performed behaviours dependent on environmental factors. Therefore by disrupting familiar environmental cues (e.g., candy bars in school vending machines or buttery popcorn in movie theatres) in public spaces, new cues can be established (e.g.,

replacing unhealthy snacks with NatureBox snacks in vending machines in schools or giving movie goers the chance to choose a NatureBox snack when purchasing tickets online) (Verplanken & Wood, 2006). Combining physical affordances and authoritative institutions to influence psychological representations of snacking can result in positive normative pressures that lead to changing habits while increasing the physical brand exposure.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

The NatureBox business model is founded upon understanding and listening to its customers. In line with this, the recommendations and accompanying theoretical justifications are provided to further the goals of the company by increasing social impact for its customers. Taken together, the above recommendations aim to shift NatureBox from a production-consumption model to a psycho-socio-economic platform whereby valuable factors such as consumer identity construction, social relationships, and social capital are taken into account to move beyond selling healthy snacks toward promoting healthy lifestyles. Expected outcomes from the above recommendations contribute to three interdependent layers (physical, psychological, and social) of a viable installation for changing unhealthy snacking behaviours.

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