

This article is... Consumer reactions to unfinished teasers for digital content

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Abstract

To preview digital content and arouse consumers' interest, online providers often use short teasers designed in an unfinished form, such that the teaser begins a new sentence but does not finish it. These teasers aim to create curiosity and trigger consumption of the advertised content. However, we reveal that consumers' reactions to unfinished teasers are not always positive. The results from a qualitative pilot study and five experimental studies show that consumers react negatively to unfinished teasers for paid content, as demonstrated by reduced purchases. This effect reverses for free content, in that unfinished teasers lead to more consumption. We explain this reversal by showing that the barrier associated with paid content (i.e., the payment requirement) activates consumers' persuasion knowledge and suppresses any positive curiosity-induced effects, which does not occur when content is available for free. These findings offer novel insights into the complexity of consumers' reactions to prevalent advertising techniques designed to promote content consumption in digital marketplaces.

KEYWORDS

curiosity, digital content, persuasion knowledge, previews, teasers

1 | INTRODUCTION

Teasers are limited excerpts of digital content (e.g., introductory sentences, sound snippets, audio-visuals) that companies use to persuade consumers to purchase and consume content. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* frequently displays the initial sentences of an online article for free, *Amazon* allows consumers to read a few pages of an e-book, and *Apple's iTunes* permits potential buyers to stream a few seconds of audio-visual content. Using teasers aims to induce curiosity and increase revenues from digital content (Li et al., 2019), either directly through access fees (Schulz et al., 2019) or indirectly through increased traffic and ad revenue (Halbheer et al., 2014).

However, despite the importance of digital content and a variation in current practices regarding the use of teasers (see Figure 1 for examples), empirical evidence on consumers' reactions to different kinds of teasers for paid content is limited. While some content providers use finished teaser endings (e.g., a limited preview of digital content that finishes with a complete sentence, as in the examples of *The New York Times* and *The Hollywood Reporter* in Figure 1), others use unfinished teaser endings that stop the preview midsentence (e.g., *Reuters* and *Medium*). Moreover, the same content is sometimes teased using both finished and unfinished teaser endings on different pages or platforms (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*). Similarly, there are discussions in related industries, such as advertising and music, if—and when—teaser ads are effective (e.g., Lipshutz, 2021; Wohl & Diaz, 2021).

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Finished teaser endings

Unfinished teaser endings

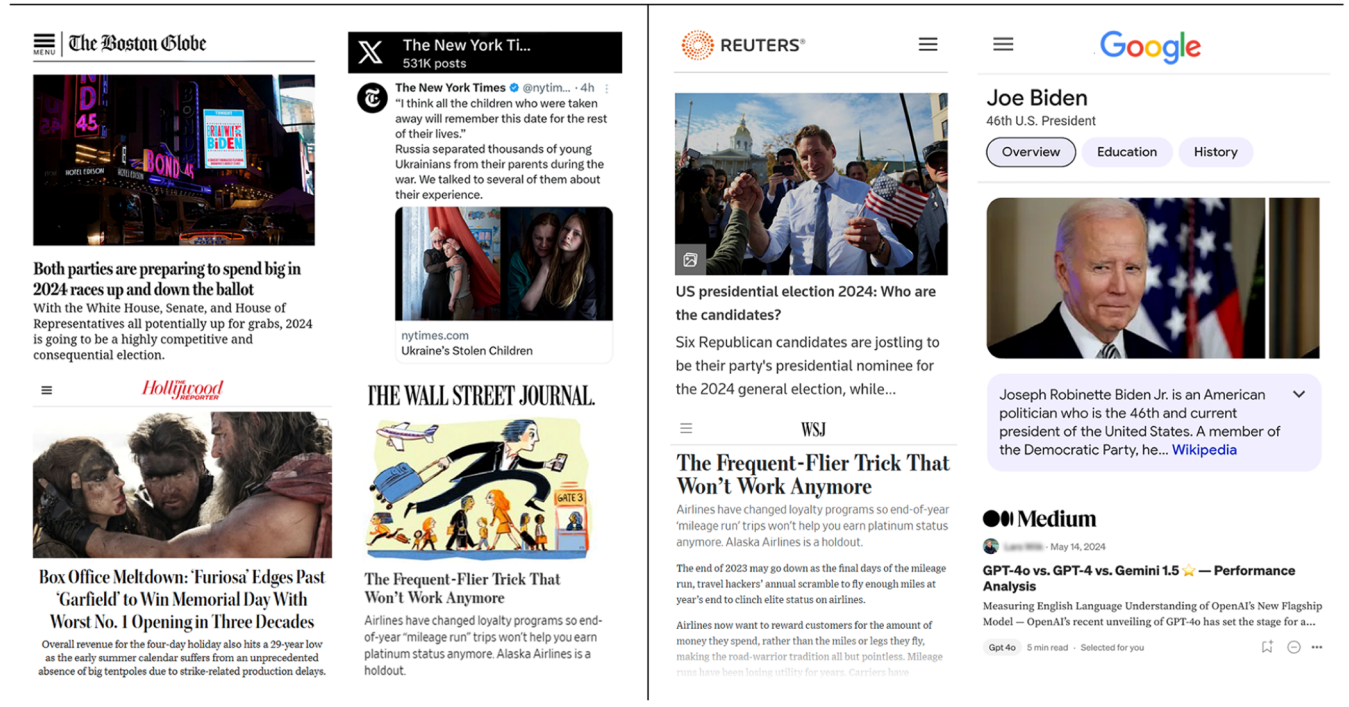


FIGURE 1 Real-world examples of finished and unfinished teasers.

The variation in the use of finished and unfinished teasers in practice suggests that the design of teaser endings is a nontrivial task.

From an academic perspective, some initial insights suggest how to design video clips to promote audio-visual content on digital channels (Liu et al., 2018) or how to create digital samples to sell books online (Li et al., 2019). While these studies shed light on the role of content quality and quantity, the effects of different teaser endings for digital content, that is, the effects of finished versus unfinished teasers, remain unclear.

According to information gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994), withholding information from consumers (e.g., an unfinished teaser ending) should create curiosity, which consumers subsequently strive to resolve by consuming the teased content (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). This notion is supported by the “teasing effect” (Ruan et al., 2018), which postulates that a teaser first increases curiosity and then leads to improved experiences after all information has been provided. Similarly, Sevilla and Meyer (2020) show that partly concealing product visualizations in advertisements increases consumers’ curiosity and preferences for the product. Thus, one may expect positive outcomes from unfinished teasers promoting digital content.

At the same time, paid content presents consumers with an access barrier that prevents them from resolving their curiosity without making a payment, which generally produces varying consumer reactions (Vohs, 2015). Because consumers have to pay to gain access to the teased content, using an unfinished teaser may activate consumers’ persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999); that is, they may perceive it as a deliberate attempt to manipulate them. Thus,

using unfinished teasers for paid content may result in a new form of conflict, indicating the need for a distinct empirical examination.

This research investigates consumer reactions to unfinished (vs. finished) teasers for free and paid digital content as well as the underlying psychological mechanisms. Insights into the beneficial or detrimental effects of teasing techniques when users face (no) access barriers are timely and important, considering ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of paywalls for increasing publisher revenue (e.g., Fischer, 2022; Senz, 2019). Based on the theoretical foundation of the persuasion knowledge model, as a contrast to information gap theory, we propose that unfinished teasers can be detrimental for *paid* (but not for *free*) digital content because of consumers’ negative reactions to such persuasive attempts. We propose these effects based on two opposing psychological mechanisms, namely an increase of curiosity due to the interrupted nature of unfinished teasers and the activation of persuasion knowledge, which is triggered when unfinished teasers are paired with an access barrier. Following a qualitative pilot study, we investigate the potential negative outcomes of unfinished teasers for paid content across five experimental studies. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that unfinished teasers activate consumers’ persuasion knowledge and lead to lower purchase rates than finished teasers for paid content. However, consumers’ persuasion knowledge is not activated when the teased content is available for free. Without a payment requirement, the effect switches, as the unfinished teaser ending heightens consumers’ curiosity without creating perceptions of being manipulated.

Our findings contribute to theory and managerial practice in three main ways. First, we provide evidence illustrating under which

circumstances using unfinished teasers for selling digital content is detrimental. More specifically, employing a combination of different methodological paradigms and outcome measures, including qualitative insights (Pilot study), incentive-aligned purchase decisions (Study 1), and facial expressions (Study 2), we show that consumers react negatively to unfinished teasers when they are combined with an access barrier. This finding expands research on the positive outcomes of teasers (e.g., Ruan et al., 2018; Sevilla & Meyer, 2020).

Second, we show that the nature of consumers' reactions depends on the underlying business model of the content provider. The relationship between teaser type and consumption is contingent on the type of access to the content, as consumers' negative reactions to unfinished teasers switch to positive reactions when they can access the content for free (Study 3a and Study 3b). This moderation resolves the seeming contradiction in existing research findings.

Third, we offer a theoretical contribution by integrating two distinct theories to explain the underlying processes. Specifically, we find that the presence of a payment barrier activates persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999) instead of enhancing curiosity due to information gaps (Loewenstein, 1994), which explains consumers' differential reactions to unfinished teaser endings (Study 4).

Moreover, these findings offer content creators and platform managers a more nuanced understanding of consumers' reactions to teasers for digital content. For practitioners striving to monetize digital content with payment-based access restrictions, unfinished teasers likely decrease revenues. By contrast, companies that use teasers to advertise free content can expect unfinished teasers to increase content consumption. The identified psychological mechanisms help understand why the effectiveness of teaser endings differs, allowing practitioners to apply our findings to specific contexts.

2 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Teasers as an advertising strategy for digital content

A teaser is designed to attract consumers' attention, inform them, and generate interest in the product by creating an information gap (Aaker et al., 1992; Fazio et al., 1992; Menon & Soman, 2002). Instead of reading the complete content, consumers preview the content by consuming a predefined excerpt. Some teasers end with concluded sentences (finished teasers); others stop midsentence, by adding the beginning of a sentence that remains unfinished or using a fading-out technique, for example (unfinished teasers). Both finished and unfinished teasers allow consumers to experience only a limited part of the content. However, even when providing the same amount of information, unfinished teasers may convey a stronger sense of incompleteness due to ending midsentence.

Academic insights into teasers are nascent (see Table 1). Some notable exceptions investigate previews as a sampling technique for narrative products. For example, Meiseberg (2016) finds that Amazon's provision of free sample book pages significantly increases

sales. Similarly, Li et al. (2019) affirm the positive effect of book previews by considering the case of sampling free online PDFs to advertise physical books. Teasers might be particularly effective for digital content because they typically appear on the same platform or with a direct link to the promoted content, allowing consumers to follow through and consume the advertised product.

Ruan et al. (2018) focus on the "teasing effect," in general, without distinguishing different types of teasers, and analyze both the curiosity sparked by missing information and its resolution upon consuming the teased content. Specifically, they show that teasing stimulates curiosity and increases customers' probability of choosing a specific option if the induced curiosity is resolved. However, their findings pertain to a situation where curiosity is resolved without any preconditions or payment. Thus, there is no distinction between directly resolving curiosity (i.e., free content) and needing to overcome a barrier (i.e., paid content). Moreover, their investigation does not focus on different teaser endings.

2.2 | Finished and unfinished teasers

We posit a distinction between finished teasers (e.g., "New *Psychology & Marketing* study shows unfinished teasers can backfire") and unfinished teasers (e.g., "New *Psychology & Marketing* study shows unfinished teasers...") based on insights from information gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994) and prior findings on the psychological and behavioral consequences of unfinished and interrupted tasks. Per definition, teasers provide incomplete information since they do not reveal the teased content. The resulting information gap is intended to create curiosity and induce a desire to close the gap. Compared to a finished teaser, however, an unfinished teaser creates a greater salience of the information gap due to the interrupted experience. Interruptions disrupt cognitive focus on a given task (Coraggio, 1990); stopping consumers' reading or viewing of a teaser midsentence should create a comparable feeling of noncompletion.

Although not explicitly focused on teasers, existing research has more generally examined reactions to momentary interruptions, which allow individuals to complete the experience after the distraction ends (e.g., Amaral, 2021; Niculescu et al., 2014). In this stream of research, studies show that such temporary task interruptions can trigger strong reactions, including better decision-making for simple tasks but worse decisions for complex tasks (Speier et al., 1999), better (advertising) recall (Brechman et al., 2016), increased curiosity, and greater persuasion when the arguments presented are strong (Kupor & Tormala, 2015). Another research stream examines permanent interruptions that do not allow individuals to complete the interrupted task at all. Studies in this area have focused primarily on positive outcomes, such as increased recall in a memory task (Baddeley, 1963), greater attention to advertising stimuli (Hammadi & Qureishi, 2013), enhanced evaluations of consumption experiences (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008; Nelson et al., 2009), and higher willingness to pay (Kardes et al., 2007).

TABLE 1 Overview of studies on teasing effects.

Reference	Research question	Content teaser	Method	Process	Positive outcome(s)	Negative outcome(s)	Relevant key findings
Meiseberg (2016)	How do different content platform communication practices (incl. free trials) influence book sales?	Reading excerpts	Analysis of sales rank data (N = 30,008 book titles)	-	Sales	-	Offering the first pages of a book for free is positively associated with sales. Such a free trial benefits niche product sales more than popular product sales.
Liu et al. (2018)	How should content aggregators design short video clips to promote movies, sitcoms, or video games effectively?	Short video clips	Three experimental studies, online (N = 122), in the lab (N = 169), and in the field (N = 40,000)	Elicitation of emotional experience	Happiness, intention to watch the movie, box office performance	-	The design of short movie clips on digital channels can influence consumers' emotions, intention to watch, and box office sales. Optimal clips consist of 3.6 scenes.
Ruan et al. (2018)	Can first creating and then resolving an uncertainty in information delivery (i.e., teasing) be hedonically beneficial?	Trivia facts	Seven experimental studies online (total N = 1983)	Curiosity	Hedonic experience, choice, attitude, willingness to try	-	Withholding information via teasers and then resolving the uncertainty can increase hedonic experience. This effect occurs because withholding and releasing information first creates and then satisfies consumers' curiosity. However, when given a choice, readers prefer to receive all information at once.
Li et al. (2019)	How do a free sample's quality and other design parameters affect the profit a product or service generates?	Free book samples	Field experiment (N = 540 book titles)	-	Revenue	-	Free samples of digital products and services (e.g., books, news, movies) can be an effective marketing strategy. For low-quality content, providing a free high-quality sample can decrease sales. Conversely, for high-quality content, providing any sample is preferable to none.
Sevilla and Meyer (2020)	When and how do visual concealment tactics benefit or hurt esthetic product evaluations?	Concealed images of products and human faces	Six experimental studies, online (N = 725), in the lab (N = 665), and on Facebook (N = 12,804)	Curiosity to see the complete item and inferences about its disclosed appearance	Curiosity, evaluation, preference	-	Withholding information in the form of visual concealments in advertisements creates curiosity to see the complete item. This, in turn, triggers positive feelings attached to a product, increasing preference and choice likelihood. However, these effects only manifest if consumers initially hold a positive stance toward the product.
This study	How do consumers react to finished and unfinished content teasers conditional on the presence of a payoff?	Various content teasers with finished vs. unfinished endings	Qualitative pilot study and five experimental studies (total N = 1101)	Persuasion knowledge and curiosity	Curiosity increases content consumption	Paywalls suppress curiosity-induced (positive) effects	Consumers react negatively to unfinished teasers for paid content. This effect reverses for free content, leading to more consumption. The reason is that paywalls activate consumers' persuasion knowledge and suppress any positive curiosity-induced effects, which does not occur when content is available for free.

However, anecdotal evidence also shows negative reactions to such incompleteness and interruptions. As Zeigarnik (1938) observed, an abrupt interruption, without the possibility of finishing the task, can provoke negative reactions, such that participants defend against an interruption (e.g., refusing to turn in their unfinished drawing tasks). This observation aligns with findings in marketing, where interruptions lead to lower willingness to pay (Acquisti & Spiekermann, 2011) or to donate (Amaral, 2021), less satisfaction with decision processes (Xia & Sudharshan, 2002), and worse consumption experiences (Nelson et al., 2009).

Yet, despite these indicators of potentially detrimental consequences of information gaps, prior research has not linked the risk of negative consequences to unfinished teasers. We address this gap by examining consumer reactions to different teaser endings for paid and free digital content.

3 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Teasers are designed to make consumers curious by deliberately withholding pieces of information. According to information gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994), information omission can create curiosity and drive behavior. Based on this theoretical foundation, we develop hypotheses about a positive teasing effect, which tends to emerge in contexts in which consumers can resolve the missing information without any access restriction (i.e., free content; Ruan et al., 2018). At the same time, however, the deliberate creation of an information gap represents a commonly used persuasion tactic. Consumers, the targets of this persuasion attempt, might show reflexive reactions that entail inferences about marketers' motives and tactics, as well as negative reactions such as avoidance (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022; Kirmani & Campbell, 2009). These reactions are described in the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999), a theory that has been widely used to explain consumer reactions to persuasive messages (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). We draw on this foundation to theorize the contrasting negative consumer reactions to unfinished teaser endings for paid content. Figure 2 illustrates our conceptual model.

Information gap theory argues that curiosity is triggered when consumers' desired knowledge (i.e., their informational reference

point) exceeds their current knowledge (Loewenstein, 1994). The resulting gap motivates consumers to acquire information to close the gap. Teasing free (vs. paid) content does not involve a barrier that prevents consumers from satisfying their desire for completed consumption. In line with this notion, research reveals positive outcomes of general teasers for freely accessible content. Ruan et al. (2018, p. 556) note that teasers about an unknown product evoke curiosity and build the "potential for a positive experience" and that resolving this curiosity "realizes that potential." Sevilla and Meyer (2020) find that showing consumers only a portion of an esthetically appealing product leads to heightened curiosity and, in turn, increased preferences for the product. The notion that curiosity prompts an intrinsic motivation to obtain further information (e.g., Loewenstein, 1994; Olson et al., 1984) and increases purchase likelihood (Hill et al., 2016; Laran & Tsiros, 2013; Thomas & Vinales, 2017; Zhang et al., 2022) is in line with a general human desire to complete ongoing activities rather than leaving them unfinished (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). However, the findings outlined above pertain to contexts where consumers can close the information gap without any barrier. Thus, in line with prior research, for *free* content, we expect unfinished teasers to increase the likelihood of consumption due to greater curiosity.

For *paid* content, however, consumers face a barrier that prevents them from closing the information gap. This may cause consumers to refrain from purchasing the advertised content because they question the provider's motives. Such a reaction is described by the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999). When consumers infer manipulative motives, they activate their persuasion knowledge and use it to adjust their perception of the agent and cope with persuasion attempts (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

The persuasion knowledge model is instrumental in explaining consumer reactions to a broad set of digital advertising strategies, such as online influencers (Han & Balabanis, 2024), click-baiting (Mukherjee et al., 2022), and sponsored social media posts (e.g., Boerman et al., 2017). Building on these findings, we propose that persuasion knowledge is relevant to make inferences in the new case of unfinished teasers, as consumers are faced with strategically omitted information. More specifically, we expect consumers to draw more inferences about a content provider's manipulative intent (compared to a finished teaser), especially if an unfinished teaser is paired with a payment demand. Under these conditions, we expect consumers to activate their persuasion knowledge. Consumers' sense of being manipulated by the provider should trigger negative reactions, manifested in a reduced willingness to conform by completing a purchase, despite any heightened curiosity elicited by an unfinished teaser. Although we expect persuasion knowledge to be activated by an unfinished teaser for free content as well, this effect should be less pronounced, as consumers can access the teased content without any access barrier, thus allowing them to complete the interrupted task.

Overall, we argue that these two competing paths, via curiosity and persuasion knowledge, underlie the differential effects of unfinished teasers for paid versus free digital content. If consumers can satisfy their desire to complete the unfinished task by freely

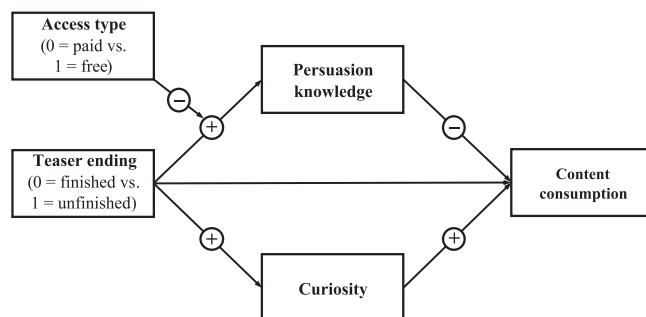


FIGURE 2 Conceptual model.

accessing the content, the unfinished teaser ending should increase consumption via increased curiosity. In contrast, if consumers cannot complete the unfinished task because of an access fee, we anticipate a detrimental effect on purchase behavior due to a greater activation of persuasion knowledge. Because consumers are prone to “attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information” (Vaish et al., 2008, p. 383), we expect the negative impact of persuasion knowledge to outweigh the positive effect of curiosity.

Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H1 For paid (free) content, the effect of unfinished teasers on consumption, compared to finished teasers, is negative (positive).

H2 For paid content, unfinished teasers negatively influence content consumption compared to finished teasers due to activated persuasion knowledge.

H3 For free content, unfinished teasers positively influence content consumption compared to finished teasers due to increased curiosity.

4 | OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

We investigate consumers' reactions to unfinished and finished teasers for paid and free content across one qualitative pilot study and five experimental studies. The pilot study explores how consumers react to unfinished teasers and supports the fundamental assumption that such teasers can indeed evoke both positive and negative responses. Study 1 provides evidence from an incentive-aligned choice paradigm that unfinished teasers have a consequential impact on consumer behavior. Study 2 illustrates the negative effect of unfinished teasers on consumers' emotional responses via their facial expressions. Studies 3a and 3b focus on the interactive effect of teaser ending and access type while ruling out the role of content type (H1). Finally, the preregistered Study 4 provides evidence for the full model by investigating the role of persuasion knowledge and curiosity as mediators of the interactive effect (H2 and H3). To enhance confidence in the generalizability of the hypothesized effects, we test them across varying contexts involving different consumption motives (utilitarian and hedonic settings) and presentation formats (text-based and audiovisual teasers). Table 2 summarizes the purpose and key characteristics of each study.

5 | PILOT STUDY: EXPLORING CONSUMER REACTIONS TO UNFINISHED TEASERS

First, we conducted a qualitative study to explore consumer reactions to unfinished teasers and the underlying psychological processes. 45 students (60% female; $M_{age} = 21.6$ years) at a Western European

university completed an online study in return for lab hours and were randomly assigned to one of two groups. In the first group (free-content group; $n = 24$), participants saw an unfinished teaser for an article about learning and exam preparation strategies (“Memorizing done right”) on a fictitious news website and were asked to describe their feelings and perceptions in detail. Participants in the second group (paid-content group; $n = 21$) first saw the same unfinished teaser, followed by a payment barrier asking them to pay €0.49 to continue reading. In an open-ended question, all participants were asked to describe their feelings about and perceptions of this situation (see Supporting Information S1: Web Appendix W1 for the stimuli). Across both groups, participants provided detailed responses ($M_{words} = 73.84$; median = 65; no significant between-group difference in terms of the number of written words, $F(1, 43) = 1.16$, $p = 0.29$).

We analyzed the comments in two steps. First, we used the Evaluative Lexicon 2.0 software to compare comments from the two groups regarding average valence. This quantitative linguistic tool uses natural language to measure the emotionality, valence, and extremity of individuals' evaluative reactions and attitudes in a text (Rocklage et al., 2018). Further documentation is available at www.evaluativelexicon.com. We first translated the original statements to English to enable the application of the tool. Then, we obtained scores that reflect respondents' reactions based on the emotionality of their comments, ranging from 0 (very negative) to 9 (very positive). Comments made by participants who could directly access the content ($M_{valence} = 4.85$) were significantly less negative than those from participants who encountered a payment barrier ($M_{valence} = 3.19$, $F(1, 43) = 10.97$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, when comparing the net results (i.e., the difference between the total number of positive and negative words), the difference is positive for the free-access group ($M_{net} = 0.21$) and negative for the paid-access group ($M_{net} = -0.90$, $F(1, 43) = 5.55$, $p = 0.02$).

In the second step, a research assistant unaware of the study's objective content-analyzed all responses to identify participants' different perceptions and psychological processes. This categorization revealed that curiosity was most frequently mentioned in both groups, though notably less in the paid-content group (66.0% vs. 79.0% in the free-content group). Participants in the free-content group also indicated anticipation more frequently (free content: 58.3%; paid content: 47.6%). The psychological construct suspicion was mentioned at similar levels across groups (free content: 58.3%; paid content: 52.4%). Major discrepancies between the two groups emerged around three negative perceptions, all of which were frequently mentioned in the paid-content group but mostly absent in the free-content group: the feeling of being manipulated (free content: 0%; paid content: 47.6%), disappointment (free content: 8.3%; paid content: 38.1%), and anger (free content: 16.7%; paid content: 42.9%).

Overall, the pilot study indicates that unfinished previews can elicit both positive (e.g., curiosity) and negative (e.g., manipulation) psychological reactions. However, the latter appear to dominate when an unfinished preview is combined with a payment barrier. The feeling of curiosity, present across both groups, is in line with

TABLE 2 Overview of empirical studies.

Study	Purpose	Design	Scenario/context	Key findings
Pilot study	Gain exploratory insights into consumer reactions to unfinished teasers	Qualitative study (N = 45)	Text-based teaser of a news article about learning and exam preparation strategies	Unfinished teasers can elicit both positive (e.g., curiosity) and negative (e.g., manipulation) psychological reactions. Negative reactions appear to dominate when a teaser is combined with a payment barrier.
Study 1	Test of the effect of unfinished teasers on actual purchases	Between-subjects consequential choice experiment (N = 143)	Text-based teaser of a news article about the job market outlook in participants' field of study	Unfinished (vs. finished) teasers decrease actual purchases of paid content.
Study 2	Test of the effect of unfinished teasers on facial expressions	Within-subject and between-subjects lab experiment (N = 56)	Text-based teaser of a news article about the job market outlook in participants' field of study	Unfinished (vs. finished) teasers for paid content lead to more negative facial expressions.
Study 3a	Test of the interactive effect of teaser ending and access type	2 × 2 between-subjects experiment, online survey (N = 279)	Text-based teaser of a news article about a spring break celebration (hedonic content)	Unfinished (vs. finished) teasers decrease purchase intentions for paid content but increase consumption intentions for freely accessible (hedonic) content.
Study 3b	Replication of the test of the interactive effect of teaser ending and access type	2 × 2 between-subjects experiment, online survey (N = 179)	Teaser video with audio, titled "How to make money with Bitcoin" (utilitarian content)	The negative effect of unfinished teasers for paid content and the positive effect for free content can be confirmed across different teaser formats (video and text) and content types (hedonic and utilitarian content).
Study 4	Test of the mediating effects of persuasion knowledge and curiosity	2 × 2 between-subjects experiment, online survey (N = 400) (preregistered)	Text-based teaser of a news article about summer travels	The mediating roles of persuasion knowledge for paid content and curiosity for free content can be confirmed in an additional preregistered study among general consumers.

information gap theory (Loewenstein, 1994) and research on teasers (Ruan et al., 2018) as well as task interruptions (Kupor & Tormala, 2015). At the same time, the negative perceptions of participants encountering paid content (e.g., manipulation, disappointment, anger) can be linked to the theoretical foundation of the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999), as respondents' inferences about the content provider's manipulative intent appear to elicit negative reactions. Overall, these insights lend support to our notion of combining the two theoretical angles of information gap theory and the persuasion model for hypothesizing about and investigating consumer reactions to unfinished teasers for paid content.

6 | STUDY 1: THE EFFECT OF TEASER ENDING ON CHOICE

We assessed the effect of teaser endings on actual purchases by conducting a between-subjects consequential choice experiment with one manipulated factor (teaser ending: finished vs. unfinished). Consequential choice studies offer good estimates of consumers' preferences because they provide a realistic setting for measuring actual decisions rather than intentions (Ding et al., 2005). Thus, we can test the behavioral consequences of unfinished teasers in an empirical context that requires participants to make a true sacrifice.

6.1 | Method and materials

We performed an a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) to assess the required sample size. For a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) and a power of 0.80 ($\alpha = 0.05$), a minimum sample of 126 participants was calculated. We recruited 143 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.05$ years, $SD = 2.37$; 55.2% female) who were informed that they were part of a study to understand consumers' reactions to news articles. Upon entering the computer lab, each participant received two vouchers, valued at €0.50 each, which they could use to purchase a news article or different material incentives (chocolate bar, lollipop, pencil). These vouchers gave participants an economic incentive to ensure that their behavioral response reflected their underlying preferences, mitigating concerns about experimentally induced task-specific preference statements (Mørkbak et al., 2014).

We randomly assigned participants to one of the two experimental conditions. In each condition, participants first read a text-based teaser of a news article that described the job market outlook in their field of study (i.e., business). The conditions differed only in the teaser ending type. In the finished teaser ending condition, the last sentence of the preview was concluded; whereas in the unfinished teaser ending condition, the beginning of an additional sentence was added: "In addition, it has been shown that ..." (see Supporting Information S1: Web Appendix W1 for an overview of the different stimuli across studies and Supporting Information S1:

Web Appendix W2 for an overview of the different measures across studies). After reading the teaser, participants had to click on a "continue" button, which produced a pop-up window informing them that they would have to pay €0.49 to read the full article. After reading the teaser, participants chose whether they wanted to purchase access to the full article by redeeming one of the two vouchers or use both vouchers for other incentives.

6.2 | Results and discussion

In the unfinished teaser condition, 18.3% of participants (i.e., 13 buyers vs. 58 nonbuyers) bought the full article, compared with 33.3% (i.e., 24 buyers vs. 48 nonbuyers) in the finished teaser condition ($\chi^2(1) = 4.21, p = 0.039$). A logistic regression with teaser ending as a regressor and age and gender as covariates revealed a negative effect of the unfinished teaser condition on purchases ($b = -0.91, SE = 0.41, z = 4.87, p = 0.027$). These results suggest that, compared with a finished teaser, an unfinished teaser leads to significantly fewer purchases of paid content. When consumers encounter a barrier that prevents them from completing the incomplete information provided by an unfinished teaser, such as an access fee, it leads to economically inferior results, compared to encountering a finished teaser.

7 | STUDY 2: THE EFFECT OF TEASER ENDING ON CONSUMERS' EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

7.1 | Method and materials

Study 2 illustrates the impact of teaser endings on consumers' emotional reactions by capturing participants' facial expressions. This study included one between-subjects factor (teaser ending: finished vs. unfinished) and measured within-subject changes in facial expressions over time. Recruitment of participants was based on a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). For a conservative assessment, we again assumed a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$) and a medium correlation among repeated measures ($r = 0.50$), resulting in an estimated sample of 34 participants for a statistical power of 0.80 ($\alpha = 0.05$). 56 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.41$ years, $SD = 3.75$; 53.6% female) were invited to a behavioral lab to complete a voluntary study. They were informed that their physiological responses to different tasks would be measured to understand consumers' reactions to news articles. Each participant sat in front of a computer equipped with a camera recording their face. We randomly assigned participants to one of the two experimental conditions ($n_{\text{finished}} = 27, n_{\text{unfinished}} = 29$), using the same stimuli as in Study 1. After reading the teaser, participants had to click on a "continue" button, which produced a pop-up window informing them they would have to pay €0.49 to read the full article.

We assessed participants' unconscious affective responses via facial expressions using iMotions Affectiva software (iMotions, 2015),

which relies on video images to measure facial expressions (see Stöckli et al., 2018 for a detailed description and assessment of the method). The software matches the detected facial expressions to emotional profiles developed by Ekman and Friesen (1978). The facial expression profiling classifies the valence of participants' facial expressions. The dependent variable is a measure of the time spent exhibiting positive (+100) or negative (-100) facial expressions in 10-ms frames. To analyze changes in participants' facial expressions as a function of the teaser ending, we took a 5-s baseline measure at the beginning of the manipulation, when participants were reading the start of the teaser article, which was identical across conditions. We compared this baseline measure with a 5-s time window that started when participants had finished reading the teaser endings (i.e., when participants clicked on the "continue" button). The next page displayed the payment information. Thus, this time window captures the moment participants were confronted with the teaser ending (finished vs. unfinished) and the payment barrier that prevented them from reading the rest of the article. After the experimental manipulation, we gathered demographic information.

7.2 | Results and discussion

We conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance with time as the within-subject factor ($Valence_1 = M$ of first 5 s of reading the teaser article; $Valence_2 = M$ of first 5 s after reading the teaser article and payment information), the two experimental conditions (finished vs. unfinished teaser ending) as the between-subjects factor, and age and gender as covariates. The results support our assumptions. We find no main effect of time ($F(1, 52) = 0.02, p = 0.893$) but a significant time \times teaser ending interaction effect ($F(1, 52) = 16.73, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.243$): participants exhibit more negative expressions after being exposed to an unfinished teaser ($Valence_1 = -11.47, SE = 2.01; Valence_2 = -24.95, SE = 3.74; t(28) = 4.70, p < 0.001$), but no such difference emerges in the finished teaser condition ($Valence_1 = -15.54, SE = 2.59; Valence_2 = -13.75, SE = 2.60; t(26) = -0.78, p = 0.442$, see Figure 3).

In addition, the analysis revealed no significant differences in facial expressions before the manipulation ($Valence_{1-unfinished} = -11.47, SE = 2.01; Valence_{1-finished} = -15.54, SE = 2.59; t(54) = 1.25, p = 0.216$), while negative facial expressions were stronger in the unfinished condition after the manipulation was shown ($Valence_{2-unfinished} = -24.95, SE = 3.74$) than in the finished teaser ending condition ($Valence_{2-finished} = -13.75, SE = 2.60; t(54) = 2.43, p = 0.019$).

To assess the robustness of our findings, we considered a different time window length (i.e., 10 s) and a second baseline measure (i.e., first 5 s after starting the survey). The results were consistent (see Supporting Information S1: Web Appendix W3). Study 2 thus further corroborates our assumption that consumers react negatively when confronted with an unfinished teaser ending for paid content.

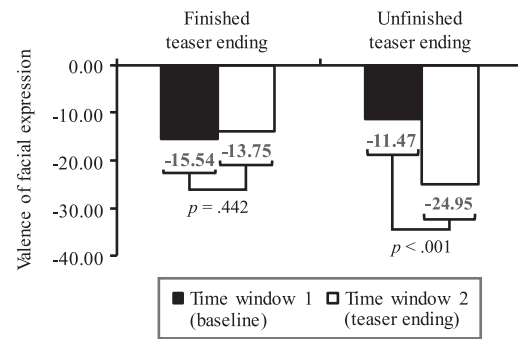


FIGURE 3 Within-subject differences in facial expressions by teaser ending. Time window 1 = 5 s at the beginning of the manipulation, time window 2 = 5 s at teaser ending and payment request. Higher negative numbers indicate more negative facial expressions.

8 | STUDY 3A: THE INTERACTIVE EFFECT OF TEASER ENDING AND ACCESS TYPE ON CONTENT CONSUMPTION

8.1 | Method and materials

In Study 3a, we compare the effects of the two teaser types for paid and free content using hedonic text-based content. Accordingly, the study uses a 2 (teaser ending: finished vs. unfinished) \times 2 (access type: paid vs. free) between-subjects design. Two hundred seventy-nine undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 22.03$ years, $SD = 3.62$; 43.7% female) completed the study for extra class credit.¹ The teaser ending stimuli consisted of a short text-based teaser of a news article (87 words) that included the information that 75% of the full article was missing. The article dealt with a spring break celebration focusing on students having fun. The unfinished teaser ending read, "It soon became obvious that..." as an additional incomplete sentence, not present in the finished teaser ending condition (see Supporting Information S1: Web Appendix W1). After viewing the stimulus material, participants indicated their intention to purchase (paid access condition) or read (free access condition) the full article. We measured intentions with a three-item scale, in which participants rated their probability of buying/reading the full newspaper article on a 7-point semantic differential scale (-3 to +3), with endpoints of "unlikely/likely," "improbable/probable," and "impossible/possible" (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). The questionnaire concluded by capturing participants' age and gender, which we entered as covariates.

8.2 | Results and discussion

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with teaser ending as the independent variable, access type as the moderator, and age and

¹We again conducted an a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). For an effect size of 0.25 and a power of 0.80 ($\alpha = 0.05$), a minimum sample size of 211 participants was calculated.

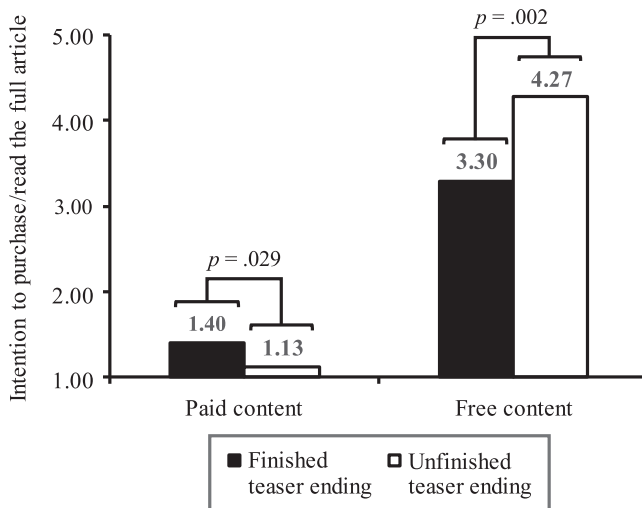


FIGURE 4 Intentions to purchase/read the article by teaser ending and access type.

gender as the covariates indicated a significant teaser ending \times access type interaction effect ($F(1, 273) = 14.21, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.049$) on purchase intentions. The results for the paid teaser ending conditions reveal a negative effect of the teaser ending on purchase intentions. Participants who saw an unfinished teaser ending for paid content expressed lower purchase intentions than those who saw a finished teaser ending ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 1.13, SD = 0.35; M_{\text{finished}} = 1.40, SD = 0.95; F(1, 131) = 4.85, p = 0.029$). In contrast, the free content condition reveals a positive effect of the teaser ending on intentions to read the entire article. The unfinished teaser for freely accessible content increased intentions to read the article ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 4.27, SD = 1.72; M_{\text{finished}} = 3.30, SD = 1.75; F(1, 140) = 10.48, p = 0.002$, see Figure 4).

Using hedonic content, Study 3a provides support for the hypothesized differential effects of teaser ending for the two access types (H1). For paid (free) content, an unfinished teaser is economically inferior (superior) to a finished teaser as it negatively (positively) affects purchase intentions.

9 | STUDY 3B: GENERALIZING ACROSS CONTENT FORMAT AND TYPE

9.1 | Method and materials

To generalize the findings from Study 3a beyond text-based and hedonic content, we replicate the study with an audio-visual teaser for utilitarian content. We recruited 179 students ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.8$ years, $SD = 5.00$; 49.2% female) who were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (teaser ending: finished vs. unfinished) \times 2 (access type: paid vs. free) between-subjects online experiment. Participants completed the study for extra class credit and were informed that the study was designed to understand consumers' reactions to videos. Participants watched a teaser video with audio titled "How to make money with Bitcoin" and learned that they either had to pay €0.49 to see the full

video or could access it for free. The difference in teaser endings was whether or not a new sentence began at the end of the video (unfinished statement, "Bitcoin is..."). To enhance ecological validity, the video was embedded in a mock-up website. Participants indicated their purchase/viewing intentions on the same scales as in Study 3a; we again captured demographic information at the end of the questionnaire.

9.2 | Results and discussion

An ANCOVA with teaser ending as the independent variable, access type as the moderator, and age and gender as covariates again revealed a significant teaser ending \times access type interaction effect ($F(1, 172) = 7.89, p = 0.006, \eta^2 = 0.044$) on purchase/viewing intentions. The analysis for purchase intentions for paid content revealed a negative effect of the teaser ending, with lower purchase intentions in the unfinished teaser condition than in the finished teaser condition ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 1.67, SD = 1.26; M_{\text{finished}} = 2.27, SD = 1.64; F(1, 87) = 3.72, p = 0.057$). In contrast with paid content, the effect of the teaser ending on viewing intentions is positive for free content, indicating greater consumption intention for unfinished teasers than for finished teasers ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 4.78, SD = 1.77; M_{\text{finished}} = 4.05, SD = 1.58; F(1, 83) = 3.99, p = 0.049$).

Providing further support for H1, we replicate the findings of Study 3a using video content related to a utilitarian topic. We again find that an unfinished (vs. finished) teaser reduces (increases) purchase/viewing intentions for paid (free) content, independent of content format or topic.

10 | STUDY 4: THE MEDIATING ROLES OF PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE AND CURIOSITY

10.1 | Method and materials

The purpose of Study 4 is to test the proposed mediating roles of persuasion knowledge and curiosity. Furthermore, to enhance the confidence in our empirical findings, we preregistered the study on AsPredicted.² Based on the partial η^2 of 0.044 ($f = 0.215$) observed in Study 3b for the interaction effect, we performed an a priori power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). For a power of 0.80 ($\alpha = 0.05$), a minimum sample of 284 participants was calculated. To allow for a robust estimation of the more complex mediation models, we recruited 400 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.72$ years, $SD = 9.45$, 53.3% females) from Prolific Academic who were randomly allocated to one condition in a 2 (teaser ending: finished vs. unfinished) \times 2 (access type: paid vs. free) between-subjects design. As a stimulus, we used a text-based teaser for a news article about vacation tips. Participants

²The preregistration is available at <https://aspredicted.org/b4jm8.pdf>.

had been screened to ensure sufficient levels of interest in the topic of the article (i.e., scale midpoint or higher). After the manipulation, we asked them to indicate their intention to purchase/read the previewed article, followed by an assessment of the levels of curiosity and persuasion knowledge they experienced. Participants stated their purchase/reading intentions, using the same set of scales from Studies 3a and 3b. Curiosity was measured using a two-item 7-point scale adapted from Kang et al. (2009): "At the current moment, how curious are you about the full article?" and "At the current moment, how eagerly do you want to know the rest of the article?" (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very much"). We assessed participants' persuasion knowledge based on Campbell and Kirmani (2000) ("While I read the teaser, I thought it was pretty obvious that the provider was trying to persuade me"; 7-point scale, 1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"). Finally, as covariates, we collected participants' age and gender, how often they read online news articles, and to what extent they expected the previewed article to be freely accessible or not.

10.2 | Results and discussion

To test our hypotheses, we performed a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) and a mediation analysis using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. In the MANCOVA, we used teaser ending as the independent variable and access type as the moderator on persuasion knowledge, curiosity, and purchase intention, along with the covariates (i.e., age, gender, frequency of online news consumption, and expectation of free/paid content) to account for potential heterogeneity in participants' preferences and expectations toward online news articles.

The results revealed a significant teaser ending \times access type interaction effect on purchase/reading intention ($F(1, 392) = 6.34$, $p = 0.012$, $\eta^2 = 0.016$) and persuasion knowledge ($F(1, 392) = 3.87$, $p = 0.050$, $\eta^2 = 0.010$). The analysis of the paid content conditions revealed no significant effect of the teaser ending on purchase intentions ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 1.46$, $SD = 0.99$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 1.38$, $SD = 0.94$; $F(1, 190) = 0.50$, $p = 0.498$) or on curiosity ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 2.58$, $SD = 1.42$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 2.79$, $SD = 1.47$; $F(1, 190) = 0.35$, $p = 0.553$), but a significant effect on persuasion knowledge ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 4.54$, $SD = 1.66$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 3.62$, $SD = 1.90$; $F(1, 190) = 9.03$, $p = 0.003$). In contrast, for free content, the effect of teaser ending on reading intentions is significant ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 4.69$, $SD = 1.82$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 4.01$, $SD = 1.89$; $F(1, 198) = 8.20$, $p = 0.005$), as is the effect on curiosity ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 3.88$, $SD = 1.71$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 3.49$, $SD = 1.51$; $F(1, 198) = 4.98$, $p = 0.027$). The effect on persuasion knowledge, however, is not significant ($M_{\text{unfinished}} = 4.41$, $SD = 1.63$ vs. $M_{\text{finished}} = 4.22$, $SD = 1.70$; $F(1, 198) = 0.90$, $p = 0.343$). We also tested a possible interaction between teaser ending and access type in relation to curiosity, indicating a marginally significant effect ($F(1, 392) = 3.29$, $p = 0.071$, $\eta^2 = 0.008$).

For the mediation analysis, we used PROCESS model 8 with 10,000 bootstrap samples and the same set of covariates. Overall,

the results provide support for both mediation paths. For paid content, we find a significant indirect effect of the unfinished teaser ending via persuasion knowledge of purchase intention ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% confidence interval [CI]: -0.141 , -0.007), while the indirect effect via curiosity is not significant ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI: -0.343 , 0.215). By contrast, for free content, we find a significant indirect effect of the unfinished teaser ending via curiosity on consumption ($b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI: 0.008 , 0.613), whereas the indirect effect via persuasion knowledge is not significant ($b = -0.011$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI: -0.058 , 0.025). Overall, these results provide support for the differential effect of teaser ending on purchase/reading intentions via persuasion knowledge and curiosity, conditional on access type (H2 and H3).

11 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Digital content providers rely on teasers to promote products, but little is known about their effectiveness in increasing users' likelihood of consuming teased content. Anecdotal evidence suggests a need for empirically grounded academic insights, especially regarding whether teasers should end in unfinished form or not.

Using a qualitative pilot study and a set of five experiments, combining insights across different methodological paradigms, samples, and outcome measures, we show that consumers' reactions to teaser endings depend on whether these are presented in a free or paid access situation, and that consumers' reactions affect their content consumption intentions and behavior. Importantly, we find that for paid content, consumers react more negatively to unfinished teasers than to finished teasers, leading to reduced purchases. We further determine that these negative effects switch to positive outcomes in the form of increased consumption if the advertising strategy is linked to free instead of paid content (H1).

We underpin these effects by providing evidence for the mediating roles of the curiosity-enhancing effect of incomplete information (Kupor & Tormala, 2015; Loewenstein, 1994) and the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999). Because unfinished teasers provide incomplete information, consumers react to these with greater curiosity than to finished teasers, which they subsequently strive to resolve. However, in the case of paid content, consumers' persuasion knowledge is activated to a greater degree when encountering an unfinished teaser, likely reducing their purchase likelihood (H2). In contrast, for free content, consumers can directly assess the digital product, allowing them to resolve their curiosity without feeling manipulated, thus increasing consumption (H3).

Therefore, our investigation unveils two key mechanisms that inform the effects of unfinished teasers: activation of persuasion knowledge and increased curiosity. For paid content, unfinished teasers lead to greater persuasion knowledge activation than finished teasers, thereby decreasing purchase intentions. For free content, a positive curiosity effect leads to greater inclinations to consume digital content after being confronted with an unfinished teaser.

Moreover, as consumers can immediately resolve their curiosity without any access barrier, we observe no detrimental effect via persuasion knowledge.

11.1 | Theoretical contributions

Our research makes three main contributions to facilitate our understanding of consumers' reactions to the promotion of online content and the mechanisms and consequences of incomplete information as an advertising strategy. First, we extend the literature on the "teasing effect" (Ruan et al., 2018; Sevilla & Meyer, 2020) by distinguishing between unfinished and finished teasers. This novel approach reveals that consumers' reactions depend on the teaser design. Both cases represent a teaser with limited information, providing equal amounts of information quality and quantity. Yet, the teaser ending makes a significant difference in terms of economically relevant behavior (Study 1) and consumers' emotional responses (Study 2).

Second, we examine the teasing effect in a paid content context, revealing potential negative outcomes of this marketing practice. In line with the notion that consumers' thoughts, motivations, and behaviors change when they are reminded of money, more generally (Vohs, 2015), and payment, more specifically (Prelec & Loewenstein, 1998), we offer empirical evidence that reactions to unfinished teasers differ when confronting paid content versus free content (Studies 3a and 3b). Previous research considers temporary interruptions (Kupor & Tormala, 2015) that evoke curiosity by first limiting information and then subsequently revealing it (Sevilla & Meyer, 2020). However, in the context of digital content, providers may employ payment barriers to resolve the strategically triggered curiosity—an important difference that likely results in fewer purchases.

Third, we establish a relevant theoretical extension to the teasing effect (Ruan et al., 2018), by introducing the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1999) as an important theoretical angle to explain the negative outcomes of teasers for paid content (Study 4). Specifically, we examine the activation of persuasion knowledge in situations created by a payment barrier imposed by a content provider, thus suppressing the curiosity-enhancing effect. This insight advances our understanding of consumers' use of persuasion knowledge when encountering unfinished information in a commercial context. In this sense, we corroborate Kupor and Tormala's (2015) findings about interruptions in persuasion attempts. Related, we establish new insights into consumers' use of persuasion knowledge in digital formats when a provider prevents them from resolving the curiosity it has strategically created.

11.2 | Managerial implications

The evidence from our studies offers managers a more nuanced understanding of consumers' reactions to different teaser endings for

digital content. When content providers use teasers to attract customers, they should consider the teaser design carefully, because its effect appears to depend on whether access to the content is free or not. Specifically, an unfinished teaser would have a detrimental effect on revenues generated by paid digital content. Illustrating the relevance of this teaser design decision, our consequential choice study suggests an economically meaningful decrease in revenues, with article purchases dropping from 33.3% in the finished teaser ending condition to 18.3% in the unfinished teaser ending condition (i.e., 45% less). As this drop was observed in the lab and not in the field, we caution against overreliance on the size of the effect. The direction of the effect, however, is indisputable and in line with both theory and our cumulative experimental evidence. Given these results, we suggest that content providers aiming to increase purchases of paid digital content may achieve better results when they use finished teasers.

Conversely, for companies that offer free content, unfinished teasers are likely a better choice. This form of preview was more effective in increasing consumption of free content in our experiments, which can be applied to foster website traffic and, potentially, advertising revenues. For example, consumers may be more inclined to follow *Google's* short content teasers to external news websites when experiencing an unfinished teaser ending (compared to a finished teaser ending), as well as spend more time on review platforms such as *Tripadvisor* to read complete travel reviews for free.

Considering these contrary effects, our results further highlight why consumers respond differently to finished and unfinished teasers as a function of access type. To this end, it could be advantageous to consider the psychological mechanisms that explain the dual effects of unfinished teasers: activating persuasion knowledge and increasing curiosity. For paid content, the potential downside of using an unfinished teaser lies in the potential activation of persuasion knowledge, which may lead to decreased purchase intentions. If managers in charge of paid content decide to utilize unfinished teasers, we advise them to monitor consumers' reactions and design their consumer-facing communication in a way that reduces the perception of a manipulative attempt. For instance, an explanation strategy might alleviate consumers' concerns and mitigate potential negative effects (Bertini et al., 2022). Also, announcing early on that the underlying content is offered against a fee might increase transparency and decrease the skepticism of consumers.

In turn, for free content, the increased curiosity resulting from the unfinished teaser seems to positively affect consumers' likelihood of accessing content. One way that content providers could leverage this insight is to carefully test different ways of delivering the teaser. For example, research in cognitive psychology suggests that enhancing individuals' sense that accessing a specific piece of information will likely provide them with significant insight increases their curiosity (Goupil & Proust, 2023). Similarly, revealing a limited amount of the information contained in the teased content could further enhance curiosity, as it may cater to the human impulse toward more complete knowledge (Kidd & Hayden, 2015). Systematic A/B testing or dynamic optimization methodologies, such as multiarmed bandits

(e.g., Liberali & Ferencu, 2022), provide paradigms that allow content providers and media platforms to experiment and identify the most effective form of teasers for their specific audiences.

Both psychological mechanisms thereby help scholars and practitioners understand *why* the differential—and seemingly contradictory—effects of unfinished teasers occur. This understanding can then facilitate the application of the observed findings to new contexts and enables the identification of boundary conditions.

11.3 | Limitations and avenues for further research

Certain limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, this research focuses on teasers in the context of digital content. In such settings, consumers typically decide to purchase and consume the content instantaneously when reading or watching the teaser. In the context of offline content, consumers' exposure to a teaser (e.g., movie trailer) and their product adoption (e.g., purchasing tickets at the box office) tend to be temporally separated. As a result, the effectiveness of teasing techniques might differ between online and offline settings, as curiosity is a fleeting state, and persuasion knowledge might be activated in different ways (Hmurovic et al., 2022). Therefore, we invite scholars to identify boundary conditions that explain under what circumstances our findings also translate to nondigital settings, such as limited temporal separation between exposure and decision.

Second, this study is limited to teasers that preview a given piece of content, such as a news article, by providing a limited excerpt of its full version. However, some forms of teasers represent a unique remix of the previewed content and offer a more or less comprehensive synopsis of it. For example, movie trailers assemble movie scenes and recut them into a short novel narrative (Hixson, 2006). In such a setting, unfinished previews are less common because the consumption of the advertised product is not a direct extension or continuation of the teaser experience. We thus refrain from generalizing our findings to movie trailers.

Third, we encourage researchers to expand on other design features of effective teasers, such as information richness. Reportedly, consumers are often satisfied with reading only headlines rather than full articles (“The average news consumer in the United States is a headline-reader—at best,” Cillizza, 2014). Thus, finding ways to motivate consumers to dig deeper and read full articles is not only of economic interest but also of societal interest. On the one hand, teasers might be too rich in information, making people less interested in consuming the full content (e.g., “spoilers”; Johnson & Rosenbaum, 2015). On the other hand, teasers may be complete in terms of both syntax (finished ending) and narrative but leave out too many details. Therefore, learning more about the effects of different types of teasers is important.

Finally, this research used various measurement approaches to capture consumers' reactions to unfinished teasers, including facial expressions as a neurophysiological measure (Study 2). In

recent years, the neuroscientific toolkit available to marketing researchers and practitioners has expanded significantly (Venkatraman et al., 2015). These tools essentially measure changes in the body and brain, and complement conventional self-reported measures to enhance predictions of consumers' purchase decisions (Knutson et al., 2007) and willingness to pay (Boksem & Smidts, 2015). Employing other neuroscientific tools may yield additional, more granular insights into how consumers process teasers. For example, eye-tracking could reveal participants' degree of attention (e.g., number and duration of fixations on the stimulus) and arousal (e.g., pupil dilation) when processing teasers. Furthermore, facial electromyography represents an interesting alternative to the facial expressions recording used in our study. The former involves a precise and continuous tracking of participants' voluntary and involuntary facial movements, even those that are not visible to the human eye (Sung et al., 2019). Thus, facial electromyography could offer more nuanced insights into participants' momentary affective responses to different teasers (Verhulst et al., 2021).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data of the reported studies are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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