

Title:

Strength and determinants of the First Position Effect (1PoE)

Authors & affiliations:

*Brömlage, M.; Volkmer, H.-P.; Scharf, A. & Strack, M.
isi Marketing Research & Consulting, Sensory Analysis; Germany, Rosdorf
mail@isi-goettingen.de*

Abstract

The first position effect (1PoE) is well known as an order effect in sequential-monadic CLT: overall liking (OL) of the first sample per session often is higher than on else positions. However, the 1PoE's strength and it's determinants are yet in debate. Some scholars believe the 1PoE to be rooted in weak expectations, i.e., an unclear frame of reference. Others admit the effect's direction: "The first is the best" (Carney & Banaji, 2012), but the OL is "inflated" (Lee & Meulenett, 2010). A meta-analysis should derive an effect size of the 1PoE's strength in CLT. Explanations from the social psychology perspective expect 1PoE to result from test anxiety reduction. Hence, experience should reduce the 1PoE: the 1PoE should decline over multiple sessions and decrease for experienced respondents. The physiology perspective expects 1PoE to result from leaving the sensorial resting state and rapid palate desensitization. Hence, no reductions by experience, a 1PoE also in trained panels (descriptive analysis), and higher likings for the first sample per category in multi-category sessions (e.g., juices, snacks) are expected.

Meta-analysis of 80 own CLT projects resulted in a small but robust positive 1PoE of $d_w = .250$ (SE .020). Over multiple sessions the 1PoE did not decline, $r = .019$ (SE .032; 21 multisession CLT). Respondents participating for their first time did not show stronger 1PoE (paired-t = -0.49, 39 CLT with both groups in the project's first session). Hence, experience does not reduce the 1PoE.

Together with a smaller but significant 1PoE for overall intensity in descriptive analysis ($d_w = .107$, SE .043; 20 DA without an anchor sample) and evidence for liking enhancements after product category switch the results support the physiological explanation.

In conclusion, the 1PoE could not be ignored. Its not decreasing with experience. (1) Rotated or randomized presentation order compensates 1PoE only for the purpose of mean reporting. (2) Separate benchmarks for monadic and semi-monadic procedures are appropriate. (3) The monadic procedure suffers from lower sample differentiation (SAM, 2012). (4) Segmentations based on likings are critical: In order to avoid artificial allocations either the first sample has to be excluded (i.e., a warming up sample per session), or the 1PoE has to be modelled and subtracted from the data (Hottenstein, Taylor & Carr, 2008; Lee & Meullenet, 2010).

Key words: first position effect, meta-analysis, consumer experience, physiology, sensory

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