

Title:

Giving products “identity” – Importance of a “Sensory DNA” for successful brands

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Abstract:

In sensory research, descriptive perception data and affective consumer liking scores are gathered and then mathematically-statistically linked to gain information for the optimization of sensory product properties (key driver analysis).

In most cases, consumer liking is measured in so called “blind tests”, hence hiding the extrinsic, especially the brand-related information. “Problem” with such “blind tests” is the focus only on the “category element” of the respective products, meaning that consumers implicitly make a decision whether or not the blind tested samples are good or bad representatives of the category under research.

Not considered in blind tests and the later selection of key drivers is the “brand element” of a product. It might therefore be risky following optimization recommendations how to modify certain sensory properties when the link to the brand is missing.

The current research aims to investigate the existence of certain sensory characteristics that are “typical” for specific brands and therefore enable immediate identification. This can also be seen as a set of “identity-giving” attributes that kind of constitute the “Sensory DNA” of products of a certain brand.

A first step involved an objective sensory profiling to gather the perception dimension of different cola brands. The results indicate that there are many significant sensory differences among the samples. A second step involved the consumer dimension and aimed to reveal whether the unique sensory profiles of the cola samples lead to a differentiated brand assignment. This was done in a blinded test and included – next to measuring overall liking – a CATA survey. In this CATA questionnaire, the respondents had to assign appropriate characteristics and their assumed cola brand to each sample under time pressure.

These results confirm the previous findings of the descriptive analysis, but provide also additional information: The number of correct associations of one blind tested cola sample to the right brand name was significantly higher than the guessing probability. Using CATA the consumers even identified differentiating sensory characteristics, according to which were worked out by the panel.

Consequently this research proves the existence of typical sensory characteristics of a brand and hence requires taking this into account in all decisions of product optimization and product differentiation.