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Giacalone, Davide; Bredie, Wender Laurentius Petrus; Frøst, Michael Bom

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Stimulus collative properties in food products and their importance for consumer liking:
A case study with novel beers
D. Giacalone*, W.L.P. Bredie, M.B. Frøst
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Introduction

There is a dilemma between liking for familiar stimuli and a wish to experiment with new ones. Berlyne’s theory on aesthetic preference¹, predicts that to maximize sensory appreciation, a (food) product should aim at optimizing the balance between familiarity and novelty.

Methods

Eight beers were tested by a consumer panel (N=135), for which relevant consumer characteristics – namely product knowledge, food neophobia and variety seeking tendency – were known. Consumers evaluated liking and three collative properties: novelty, familiarity and complexity.

Results

A multiple linear regression model was carried out to analyze effects of the three collative properties on liking (Adj. R² = .4, F(3, 1076) = 239.66, p < .001). All properties significantly positively predicted liking, with complexity (b = .47, t(1076) = 14.67, p < .001) and familiarity (b = .39, t(1076) = 15.06, p < .001) being the strongest regressors, followed by novelty (b = .27, t(1076) = 8.23, p < .001). Non-linear relationships were assessed by computing smoothing points using locally weighted polynomial regression. Berlyne’s predicted trajectory (inverse U-shaped) described most accurately the relationship between novelty and liking (Figure 1a), whereas the relationships between liking and the two other collative properties is linear and monotonic (Figure 1b+c).

ANOVA was performed using consumer traits as main effects. High variety seeking consumers gave significantly higher overall liking (p = .008). Consumers with higher product knowledge rated the beers significantly more familiar (p = .02), less novel (p = .03) and less complex (p < .001). No significant effects of degree of neophobia were observed.

Conclusion

Taken overall, our results confirm that liking is indeed a result from a combination of novelty, familiarity and complexity. Furthermore, we expand prior work on collative properties in a food context, by showing that several different consumer variables need to be taken into consideration for predicting consumer liking.

References:


Fig. 1 – Robust smoothed values of novelty (a), familiarity (b) and complexity (c) against liking.

Keywords: Product experience, Arousal theory, Novelty, Consumer psychographics