

COMPARISON OF CONSUMERS AND DESCRIPTIVE SENSORY PANELISTS FOR DESCRIBING THE "EATING EXPERIENCE" OF PRODUCTS



Ulrike Hilmer and Edgar Chambers IV

The Sensory Analysis Center, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, USA

Introduction

Consumers' experiences are increasingly important to companies because they have to understand both product characteristics and experiences consumers have with the products.

No research on "eating experience" was found.

Traditional sensory testing

Descriptive sensory analysis:

Identification and quantification of specific sensory attributes using trained panelists

Consumer acceptance tests:

Assessing the personal response by consumers

Qualitative research methods:

Focus groups, in-depth interviews

Gathering Information about attitudes and behaviors

Problem analysis ("Opus-Method")

Role of expectations

Food is more likely to be rejected when texture does not meet expectations (Szczesniak and Kahn, 1971)

Expectations of an appropriate temperature influences the evaluation of foods (Zellner et al. 1988)

Product information can minimize mismatches between consumer expectations and experiences and increase \ acceptance (Cardello et al. 1985)

Concept of "eating experience"

"Reading between the lines"

Information AND expectations affect the first impression

What are the critical characteristics that must be met?

Understanding "eating experience" could be a useful tool to supplement other tools when creating new "products"

May be used to discover problems and annoyances

Gives a broader impression and attempts to capture the "holistic" experience

Objective

To develop and evaluate a technique combining aspects of traditional descriptive analysis and qualitative consumer research methods to provide information about products that might not be obtained from traditional research methods.

Materials/Methods

Samples:

Potato Chips: 2 commercially available plain samples (one fried, one baked). Both products were familiar to the descriptive Panel (extensive testing) and the consumer panelists (frequent consumption).

Chocolate Ice Cream: 2 commercially available brands (one standard; one super premium). Both products were less familiar to both panels (no previous testing and infrequent or no use)

Panelists:

Trained Descriptive Panel: 6 highly trained panelists

Consumer Panel: 6 naïve consumers matched to the trained panel by gender, age, and consumption frequency

Testing Procedure Timeline:

Practice

Testing potato chips

Testing chocolate ice cream

Example Study Instructions

Eat with all your senses!

What is your first impression?

What are your expectations of the product?

How does the product make you feel?

Were your expectations met?

Are you disappointed or satisfied? Why?

What would you use the product for?

Would you actually buy this product?

Results/Discussion

Example Data: Consumer Panel for Baked Chips

First impression was that the chips looked light and uniform in color

➲ *"These chips look sick. They don't look like they have much flavor"*

This made consumers think the chips were baked

The color gave the expectation that the chips did not have much aroma

➲ *"These look like they are baked and they won't have much smell."*

Handling and first bite: as expected, the chips felt dry and not greasy

➲ *"Because it is not greasy, I would think of a very mild taste."*

Fine powdery feel → salty taste

➲ *"Because of what I think is salt, I would think that they would be salty."*

The chips did not crumble

➲ *"They keep their shape. When they break or crunch, they do it cleanly – they are not so messy"*

Additional data for later bites, swallowing, after effects, reasons for stopping, etc.

Comparable Information for Both Panels

Thin chips, blisters → fragile → messy

Brown edges → potato slices → potato taste

Greasiness → oily taste → need for napkin

Uniform texture, shape, color → no potato taste

Baked chips → no aroma, less salt

Powdery feel → salty taste

Different Information from Panels

Consumers: Freshness and Liking

Descriptive Panel: Specific Sensory Properties, more detail on eating and the process

Characteristics of Data from the Two Panels

Descriptive Panel: Used technical jargon and extensive vocabulary, Was careful in word choice, Gave explanatory remarks

Consumer Panel: Used everyday language, made vague unexplainable comments, Confused terms like taste and flavor, Was spontaneous and imaginative

Summary/Applications

The information provided by this method is descriptive and helps to understand relationships among attributes, expectations, the process of eating products, and reasons for stropping eating. Both panels were able to do the task and provided useful information.

The trained descriptive panel did much better using detail, specific actionable terminology, and was easier to focus on the task.

The consumer panel used more consumer relevant terminology, was more spontaneous in their descriptions, but needed more practice and guidance than the trained panel.

The information would be useful for understanding the eating process, for better understanding how one attribute affects the expectation for other attributes, and may have some value in understanding why people stop eating a product. It may provide marketing with information that can make advertising more relevant to the eating experience.