

Context Setting for Improved Understanding for Design Thinking and Product Research

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Introduction

Qualitative Research

From the discipline of Cultural Anthropology, we have learned the value of studying individuals in their own environment. An extension of this has been the use of Ethnography for in-home observation. Both of these are examples of putting individuals in the context of their own lives in order to obtain unbiased observations

For qualitative product research we have found that context setting prior to a product discussion may be used as an alternative to ethnography to aid in a number of research endeavors.

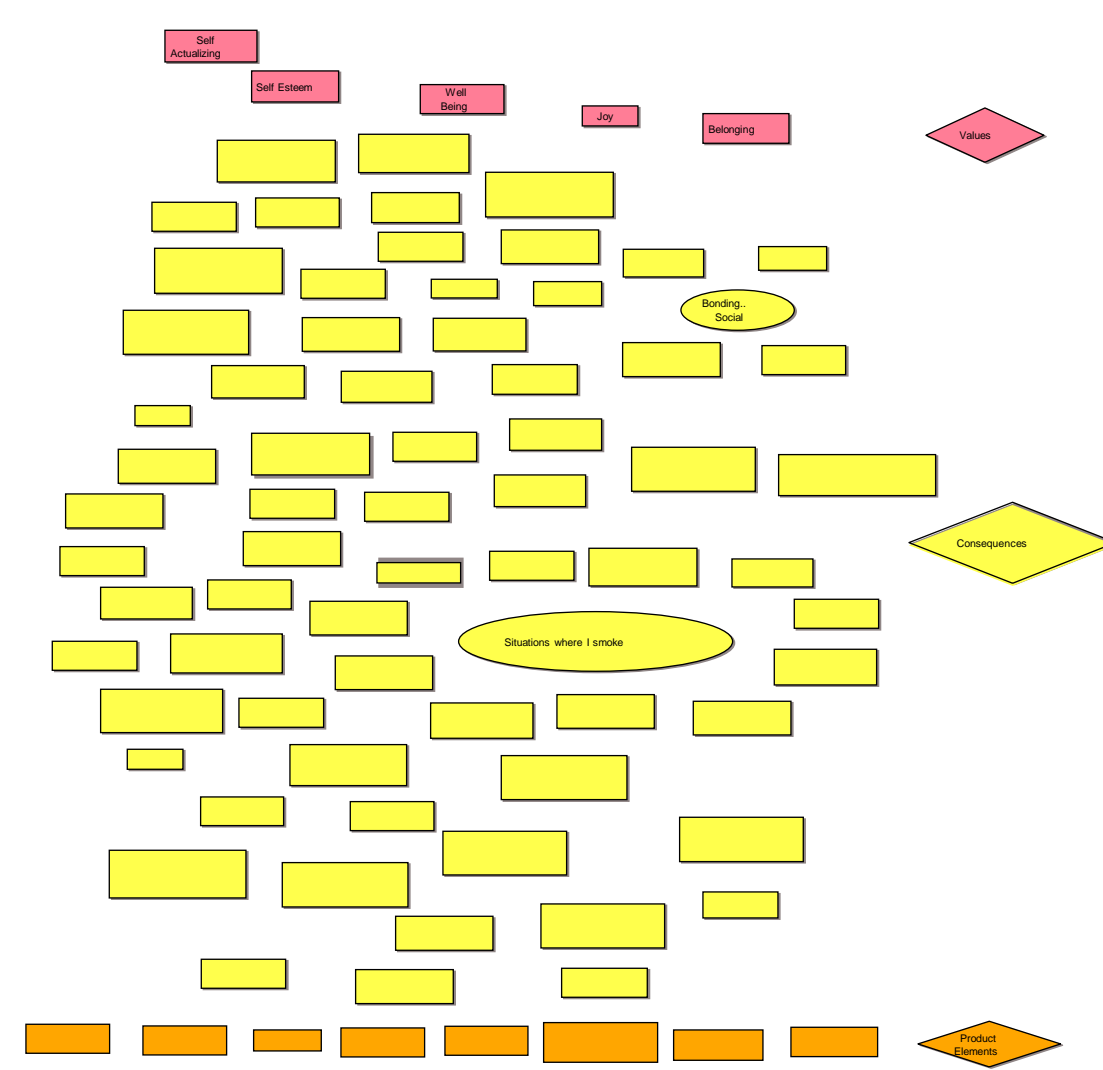
This includes understanding the role that products play in our lives, the emotional connections that products enable, as well as the product attributes that will deliver that emotional connection. Through varying the context, we can develop an understanding of the attributes (extrinsic and intrinsic) that prevent product acceptance or allow the building of an emotional connection.

Context setting can be accomplished through exercises such as story telling – sometimes with the aid of tools such as collages.

From these stories we can build Value Diagrams that link product attributes to higher order values. We can see the paths that allow emotional connections – but if we aren't careful, we will miss the opportunities to build new product. For example, setting up only one context – we miss things and only hear one side of the story. It's important to vary the context.

Case Study I – we asked individuals to tell us a story about their tobacco experience – what we ended up with was the positive connections between tobacco and values such as joy and well being.

Positive Stories about tobacco use

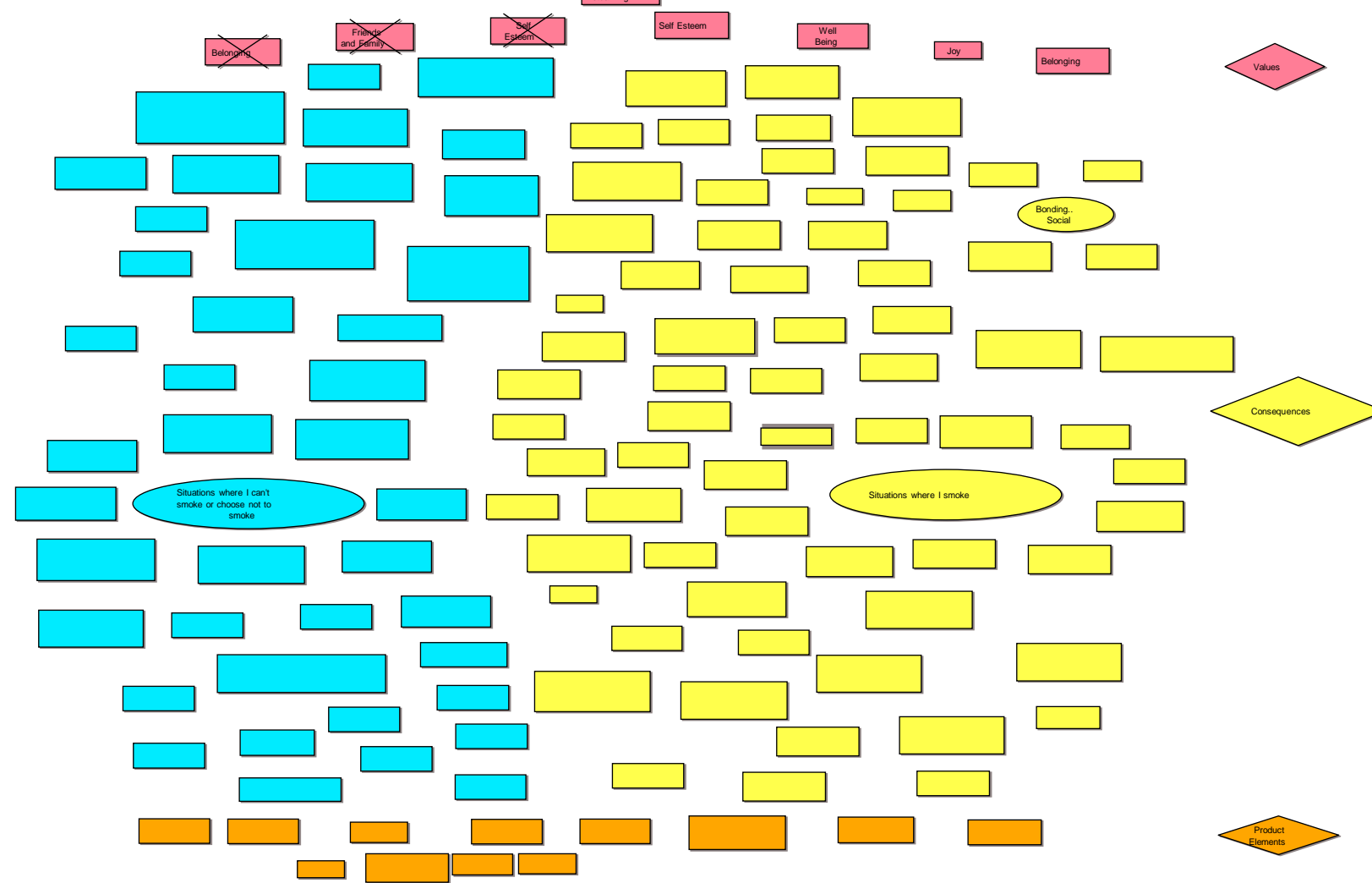


What we didn't hear was the negatives associated with tobacco use. We needed to change the beginning context to hear that – tell us a story about a time when your tobacco use was not a positive experience.

Then we heard a very different story – which pointed out the attributes that prevented the person from higher level values such as self image, self esteem, friends and family...

It is in this negative area that new product opportunities can be found – where the attributes of a product are not meeting the needs of the person.

Positive and Negative Stories about Tobacco Use

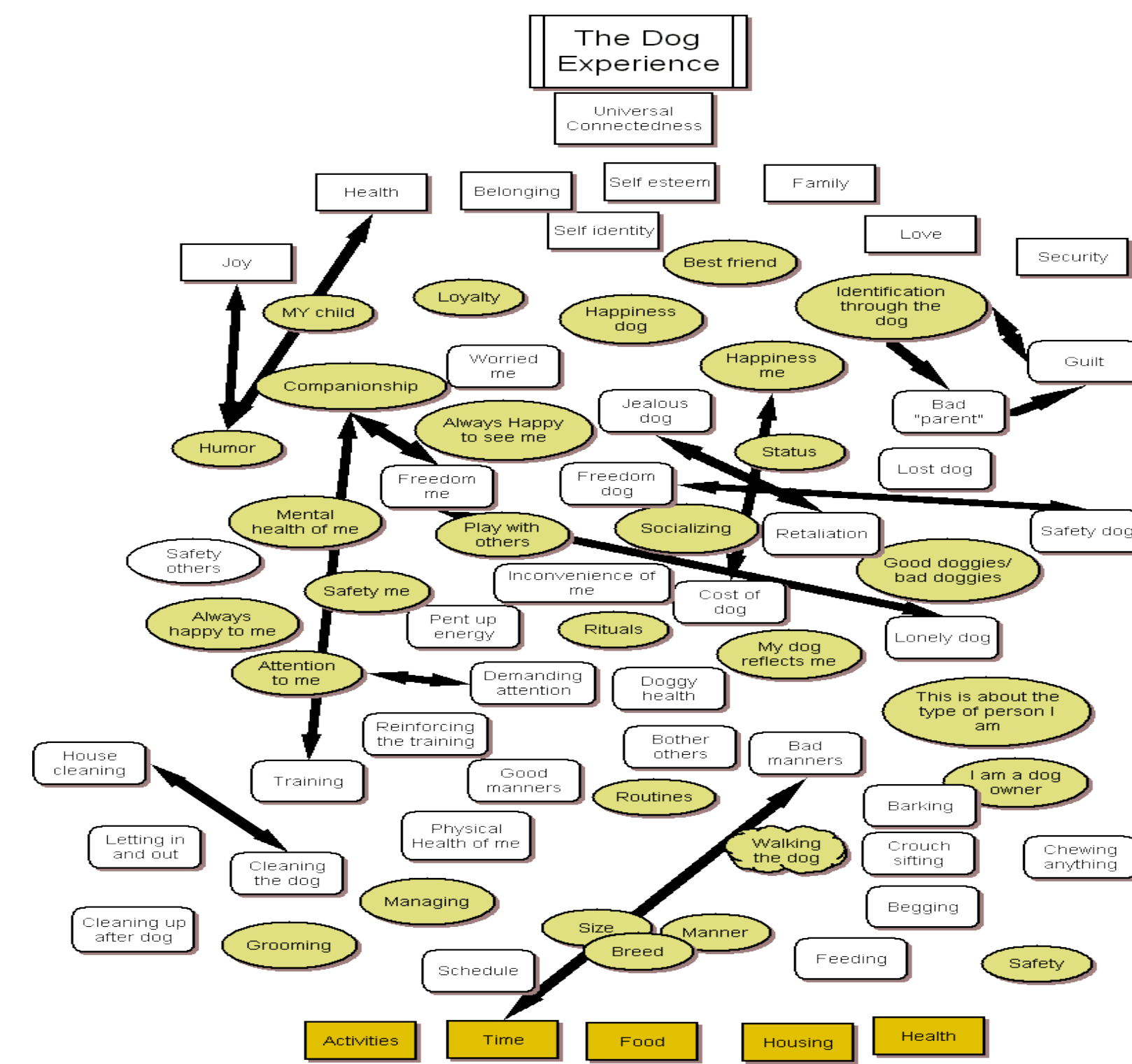


Case Study II - Pets



We had an opportunity to showcase the use of value diagrams in development of new product opportunities. To do this, we chose pet ownership as the example.

Through this "play" research we identified a large opportunity in pet "stuff", well before it became the boom it is today. For this research, we conducted some interviews with pet owners and built a value diagram, but what was important here is that the value diagram needed to contain not only the "owners" voice, but also the "pets" – so we needed 2 contexts.



From this we were able to develop various opportunities for new products. A few examples of what we found...

Time vs. Good Manners

Putting time and money into training a dog is difficult

Good manners of a dog are essential

Demanding Attention vs. Attention to Me

We want attention from our dogs and vice versa. However, we don't always want to be bothered. Our needs do not necessarily match our dog's needs

Freedom Me vs. Lonely Dog

In our busy lives, we need to be able to have flexible schedules. We can't always be there for our dogs. However, we know our dogs get lonely

Safety Dog vs. Freedom Dog

Dogs are wild animals. They want/need some amount of freedom. However, you worry about their safety

Safety Dog vs. Freedom Dog Example

GPS system that tracks dogs location and provides you a history of where they have been – allows you to know if they are wandering too far – and if they are, let's you know they have left a predetermined "safe" area

Also works for "health of dog" as it tracks their daily activity levels



Introduction

Quantitative Research

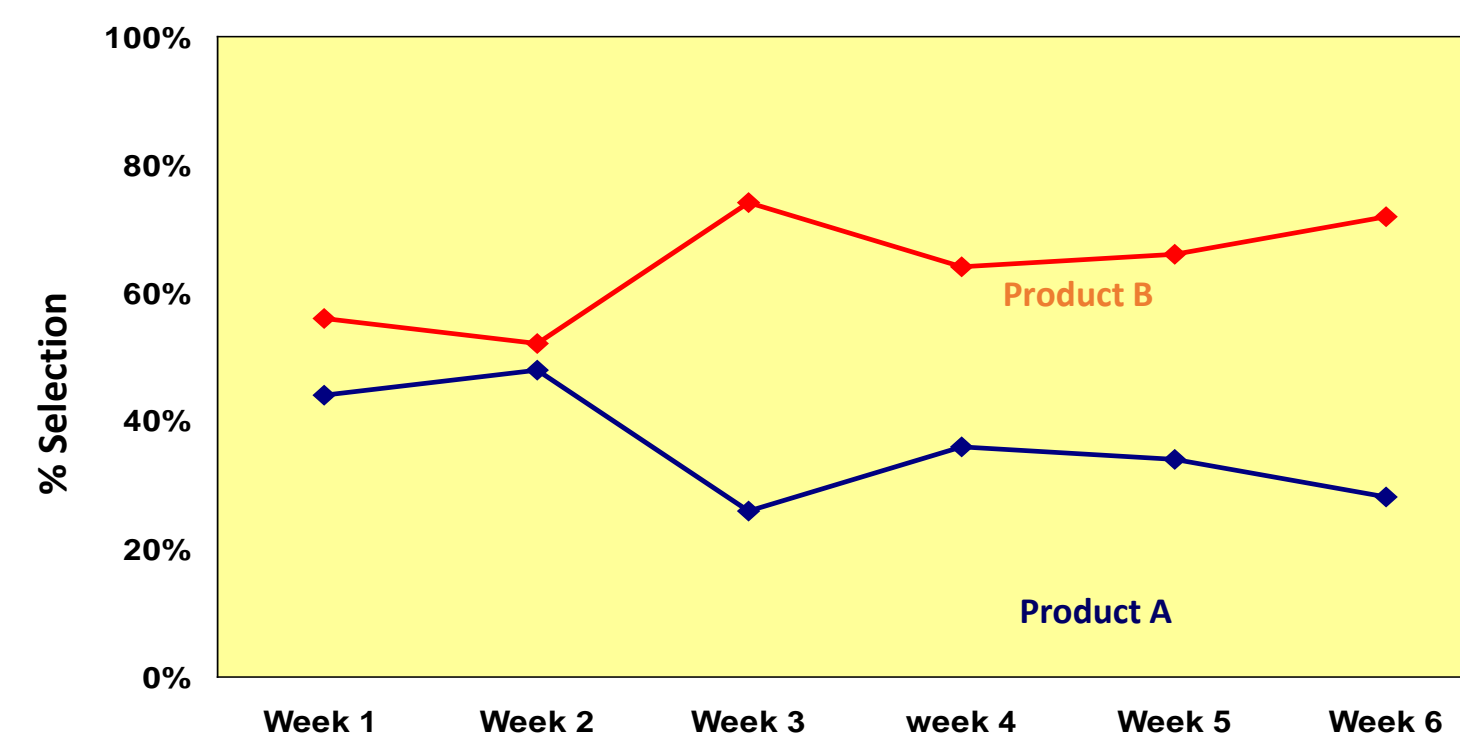
In quantitative product research, context setting can be used to more accurately assess product preferences and usage. Additionally, context can be used to determine the degree of product change that will be acceptable in everyday life, as opposed to what is deemed significantly different in a traditional sensory test.

Home Use tests were devised to add some context to quantitative tests – by bringing the products into the home setting. Still, the way these products are assessed, still represents a structured test – usually with not only liking, but a battery of attributes (sometimes very long).

These tests often do not show much difference in liking between products and may require large sample sizes to find significant differences (~300 for a 0.3 mean difference).

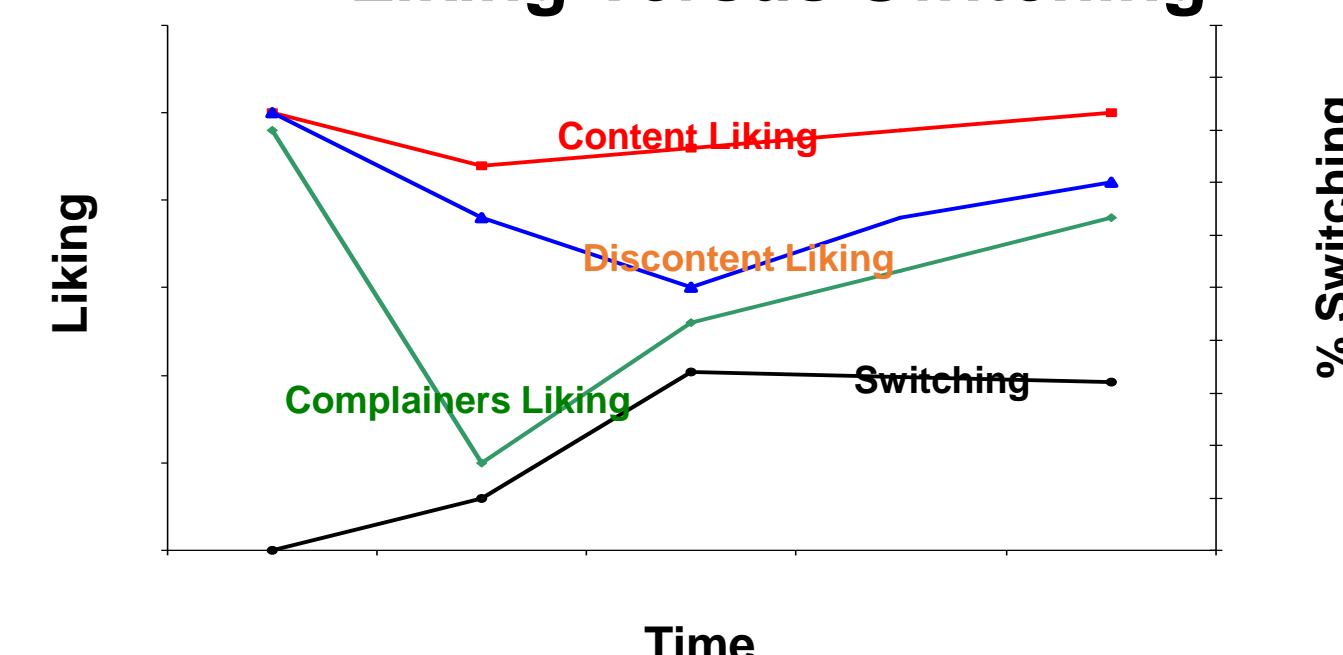
Also, the product that received the highest liking rating by a person, may well not be the product that they prefer in the long run

Less structured tests that assess preference of new products over the long term (extended preference tests) can be much more accurate at determining true preference as well as understand potential portfolio performance. To assess product changes, it can be very valuable to understand, not what difference is noticeable in a structured test, but what change is large enough to be noticed in a "real life" situation. Context setting which incorporates the modified food into the person's normal environment (be it a meal or on the shelf in a test market) can be used to understand the relationship between product change, complaints and sales.



An Approach to Integrate Long Term Behavioral Measures to Identify Opportunities for New Products
Ratapol Teratanavat, Ph.D.; Melissa Jeltema, Ph.D. Society of Sensory Professionals Conference, Cincinnati OH, 2008

Liking Versus Switching



Predicting sensory risk (marketplace performance) of new products and product changes – thoughts from 30 years of trying. M. Jeltema IFT 2016,

Conclusion

Context setting can be our best friend or our worst enemy. We need to be careful that our context does not lead to erroneous positive results
Ex. When we are doing concept work with product – and we set up a positive context with the concept – the product often found by participants to be "good" even when it isn't

Setting up only one context – we miss things and only hear one side of the story. It's important to vary the context

In both qualitative and quantitative research, we need to ask ourselves – Have we set up the right context? What biases are we introducing with our context