



The impact of the means of context evocation on consumers' emotion associations towards eating occasions



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ABSTRACT

The joint investigation of the product, the consumer, and the consumption context is necessary for furthering the understanding of eating occasions (snacks and main meals), including their construction and enjoyment. The study of people's experience of eating occasions is less advanced than the understanding of acceptability, preference, and choice of individual food/beverage items and/or their combination in meals. The current research contributes to narrowing this gap by focusing on emotions as a dimension of eating experiences and enjoyment. Under evoked consumption contexts (breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, dinner), the emotion associations for several products (potato crisps, chocolate brownie, and kiwi-fruit) were obtained from consumers ($n = 399$) using a questionnaire method. Emotion associations were explored in relation to: (1) the way in which the food stimulus was evaluated by participants (tasting food vs. seeing a food image); (2) the serving presentation of the food stimulus (image of food shown in isolation vs. image of food served on a plate with cutlery); and (3) the means in which the consumption context was evoked (written vs. written and pictorial). Consumers' product emotion associations when tasting a food stimulus vs. seeing an image of the same food were highly similar. There was some evidence that more specific means of presenting the food stimuli (with tableware vs. without tableware) and consumption contexts (written and pictorially vs. written only) influenced perceived appropriateness of the product in the focal consumption context. This resulted, for example, in a higher frequency of use of negative emotion terms in the less appropriate consumption contexts. Overall, through the use of evoked consumption contexts this research has contributed new understanding of product-specific emotional associations during eating occasions from a methodological approach. In addition to the aforementioned results a more general finding was the apparent reliance by participants on past product experiences when completing the emotion questionnaire.

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Introduction

Evaluative judgements made prior to, and during, eating occasions¹ extend beyond liking and preference for certain food/beverage items relative to others. The consumption context contributes to one's mood and mindset and gives rise to an array of emotions and feelings (positive, negative, or neutral) that influence food choices and modulate the enjoyment of the consumption experience (Desmet & Schifferstein, 2008; Hartwell, Edwards, & Brown, 2013; Richins, 1997) and one's satisfaction (Phillips, 2000). Hence, to better understand people's experiences of eating occasions, the emotional dimension has to be accounted for.

In previous research (Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014a,b) we contributed to closing of this knowledge gap by exploring how evoked consumption contexts influence emotional responding (using a questionnaire; checklist format). In online studies, we varied products (apple and chocolate brownie; shown pictorially) and consumption contexts (breakfast on a weekend morning, afternoon break snack on a weekday, and after a dinner at home in good company; presented in written format). We found that the emotion-related terms associated with products can greatly differ when foods are imagined to be consumed in one context or another. Mirroring results obtained with acceptance ratings (Cardello & Schutz, 1996), we also found that positive emotions were more frequently selected in those consumption contexts that were considered more appropriate. Correspondingly, negative emotion terms were more frequent when the context was perceived as less appropriate for the product. Taken together, our previous studies demonstrated how the context in which a food is consumed (even if imagined)

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¹ In the remainder of this paper the term eating occasions is used instead of meals, hereby acknowledging the difference between snack and main meal occasions.

can influence consumers' emotion responses towards it, and that the effect that the consumption context and the product have on emotion responses is reciprocal. In addition, emotion responses elicited under evoked consumption context appeared to be consistent (stable) across time, which suggests that evoking a consumption context facilitates the memory of emotion associations with that eating occasion.

Despite our previous research representing a needed advance in emotion research by providing knowledge about the product, the consumption context, and their relationship with food-related emotion associations, several methodological questions remain unaddressed. In the present work we focused on research questions (RQ) pertaining to the means of elicitation of emotion responses under evoked consumption contexts. Specifically, we explored the effect of the following experimental variations: (RQ1) the way in which the food stimulus is evaluated by participants (tasting food vs. seeing a food image); (RQ2) the serving presentation of the food stimulus (image of food shown in isolation vs. image of food served on a plate with tableware); and (RQ3) the means in which the consumption context is evoked (written only vs. written & pictorial).

Regarding RQ1, emotion responses from consumers obtained by means of showing them food images vs. asking them to eat real food were compared to determine whether or not people report the same emotions when thinking about a food than when actually consuming it. There is evidence that they do report similar emotional and hedonic responses in the two treatments (Cardello et al., 2012; Guthrie, Rapoport, & Wardle, 2000), and that consumers can imagine the sensory and hedonic aspects of consuming the product quite vividly (Phillips, 2000), but this has not been tested under evoked consumption contexts.

In relation to RQ2, extant literature on the effect of contextual variables on product perception (e.g., Ariely, 2008; Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2012; Schifferstein, 2010) suggests that a product presented in isolation will not be perceived in the same way as one presented with tableware (Spence, Harrar, & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2012). These results have been explained in terms of expectation effects (i.e., consumers expect a certain presentation of the food depending on the consumption context they are in). These effects in turn exert an impact on the appropriateness of that food in that consumption context, and consequently the consumers' appraisal of the food itself (see also Cardello, Schutz, Snow, & Leshner, 2000). Another possible explanation for observed differences when presenting food in isolation vs. with tableware could be that certain products are rarely eaten without tableware/utensils. Therefore, not providing this information might affect how consumers experience the product or imagine its consumption. For example, we previously found (Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014b) that when showing an image of a kiwifruit in isolation and asking participants to imagine consuming it in a dinner context, participants mentioned in open-ended questions (following the emotion task) that they had thought about using it sliced as a decoration on pavlova (a popular dessert in NZ for special occasions) or as a salad ingredient. Tentatively, had the kiwifruit been shown on a plate with tableware, participants may have more readily imagined eating the fruit on its own (as a simple dessert), which is also common practice, but not as part of a special dinner occasion. Therefore, in this research we explored different ways of presenting a food product (food in isolation vs. food with tableware) and anticipated that providing participants with additional consumption-related cues would impact emotional responding and lead to differences in terms of perceived product-context appropriateness.

The third research question (RQ3) pertained to the means of evoking a consumption situation. Fundamentally, imagery processes are evoked as sensory experiences in working memory

(MacInnis & Price, 1987). Thus, imagery involves concrete sensory representations of ideas, feelings, and memories, and it permits a direct recovery of past experiences (Bone & Ellen, 1992; Yuille & Catchpole, 1977). It can be described along several sensory related dimensions. For example, vividness refers to the clarity of images and moderates the relationship between imagery and emotional and physiological arousal (MacInnis, 1987), and controllability reflects the extent to which images can be held in mind and/or altered in specific ways at will (McGill & Punam, 1989). In the sensory and consumer field, some researchers have evoked specific consumption contexts in laboratory settings by means of providing a descriptive text (e.g., Hein, Hamid, Jaeger, & Delahunty, 2010; Hein, Hamid, Jaeger, & Delahunty, 2012; Jaeger & Rose, 2008) or a picture (Hersleth, Monteleone, Segtnan, & Næs, 2012), in part because these alternatives represent cost- and time- convenient options. In this study, a comparison was performed on emotion associations in response to a written only vs. a written and pictorial evocation of eating occasions. Providing a pictorial representation of the focal consumption context in addition to written information eliminates ambiguity because the picture conveys a specific situation. In contrast, instructions to imagine through verbal information increases cognitive elaboration, which results in the imagery being less concrete across subjects (though not necessarily less vivid). While eliminating heterogeneity among consumers with regard to what, for instance, 'lunch eaten outdoors' entails, the specificity that accompanies a picture could also have the effect of limiting participants ability to imagine a situation of 'lunch eaten outdoors' that they may actually engage in, which could be not accurately represented by that shown in the picture. In such an event, emotion responses could differ in the two experimental treatments and be more negative if the picture conveys a specific situation that is unfamiliar to the respondent or perceived as inappropriate, or more positive if it actually resembles a past (appropriate) consumption occasion. Conversely, it is possible that people rely more heavily on past experiences of eating occasions when completing an emotion questionnaire without letting the pictorial evocation control their imagery. In that situation, the emotion responses elicited in the two experimental treatments in RQ3 could be very similar.

Finally, this work further explored the impact of product-context appropriateness on emotional responding. This was motivated by the finding that perceived appropriateness (lower vs. higher) may have an impact on emotion responses (Cardello & Schutz, 1996; Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014a,b; Schutz, 1988; Schutz, 1994; Schutz & Jaeger, 2010). In addition, we also consider it possible that the means of presenting the stimuli and/or evoking the contexts could affect the appropriateness ratings, since it may modulate how the respondent imagines the consumption situation. Consequently, we obtained ratings of perceived appropriateness and used this information to shed light on the findings from RQ1-RQ3.

General materials and methods

To achieve the objectives of the research, two studies were conducted in which the experimental treatments linked to RQ1-RQ3 were investigated in between-subjects designs to avoid repetition or learning effects. To keep a methodological consistency with our previous research, and to make the task as easy as possible to the respondents, a checklist version of the 39-item emotion words included in the EsSense Profile® (King & Meiselman, 2010) was used. At the outset we make clear our position regarding the elicited emotion data, which we do not assume to give valid reflections of inner thoughts or purely experienced emotions, feelings, moods, or mind sets (Jaeger, Cardello, & Schutz, 2013). Rather, we consider the emotion responses obtained in this research to also encapsulate associations. We also acknowledge that in research focusing

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