



Emotion responses under evoked consumption contexts: A focus on the consumers' frequency of product consumption and the stability of responses



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ABSTRACT

Previous research has demonstrated that the context in which a certain food is consumed (even if imagined) can affect consumers' associative emotional responses to that product. In three separate studies we extended this line of research by: (1) replicating these previous findings with consumers from another country and another product category; (2) investigating the impact of participants' product consumption frequency on their associative emotional responses; and (3) examining whether the emotional associations involved in eating certain products in evoked contexts are stable through time. The results of this work support previous findings demonstrating the impact of the consumption context (and its perceived appropriateness) on consumers' reported emotional associations with a food product, and that this result is generalizable across nationalities. We also confirm that the associative emotion profiles of more emotion-laden product categories (in comparison with more neutral ones; e.g. chocolate vs. fruit) are more variable between contexts. In addition, the emotional associative profiles obtained from two groups of participants that were either high or low frequent consumers of the food stimuli did not differ to any significant extent. Finally, the emotion responses provided under evoked consumption contexts seemed to be consistent (stable) across time. Taken together, this study strengthens the rationale for evoking consumption contexts during emotion-related tasks, demonstrating that this methodology provides repeatable results and insights that go beyond the product and the consumer.

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1. Introduction

The context of eating/drinking occasions has a greater impact on our food choice and enjoyment than we are aware of (Köster, 2003). This has been empirically demonstrated in several studies (e.g., de Graaf et al., 2005; Edwards, Meiselman, Edwards, & Leshner, 2003; King, Meiselman, Hottenstein, Work, & Cronk, 2007; King, Weber, Meiselman, & Lv, 2004) that have either taken place in a physical setting, where consumers would go in a real-life situation, or in a space available to simulate these real-life situations. However, while measures taken beyond the boundaries of a laboratory are highly encouraged (Meiselman, 2013), they can be burdensome and costly. Hence some researchers have opted to evoke specific consumption contexts (partly personalised by the consumer) in laboratory settings by means of providing a descriptive text (e.g. Hein, Hamid, Jaeger, & Delahunty, 2010, 2012; Jaeger & Rose,

2008) or a picture (Hersleth, Monteleone, Segtnan, & Næs, 2012). Moreover, consumption context is inextricably linked to how we feel (Desmet & Schifferstein, 2008; Richins, 1997). It sets up our mood and mindset and may give rise to an array of emotions and feelings (either positive, negative, or neutral) that very likely will modulate our perception of the food (not to mention choice), and our liking and enjoyment of the consumption experience (Hartwell, Edwards, & Brown, 2013). However, in spite of the great interest that has emerged in the last years on the impact that foods and beverages can exert on our emotions/feelings (e.g. Schifferstein & Desmet, 2010) and how this relates to food acceptance/liking, until very recently the influence of evoking a consumption context during an emotion task on the participants' emotion responses has not been explored in any depth.

In previous research (Piqueras-Fiszman & Jaeger, 2014) we began to fill in this gap by exploring how evoked consumption contexts affect responses obtained from an emotion questionnaire. In that study, two food stimuli (apple and chocolate brownie, shown as images) and three different written consumption

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contexts were used to vary the level of product-context appropriateness. The contexts were: (i) breakfast on a weekend morning; (ii) afternoon break snack on a weekday; and (iii) after a special dinner at home in good company. Given that the situational/contextual dependence of consumer responses to food products (to date limited to preference or acceptance measures, e.g. Cardello & Schutz, 1996; Schutz, 1988, 1994) implicitly entails an appraisal of product-context appropriateness, participants' appropriateness judgement of the foods imagined to be consumed in each of the evoked contexts were also obtained. We were able to show that the emotion-related terms associated with products can greatly differ when imagined to be consumed in one context or the other. It was also found that the use of positive emotion terms was more frequent in those consumption contexts that were considered more appropriate, whereas negative emotion terms were more frequently selected when the context was perceived as less appropriate for the product. Taken together, these findings demonstrated how the context in which a food is consumed (even if imagined) can affect consumers' emotion responses towards it and that the effect the context and the product have on the elicited emotion responses is reciprocal. Finally, this research also found that in general more emotional eaters selected more emotion terms (positive and negative).

While the abovementioned study represented a needed advance in food-related emotion research demonstrating a context effect on emotion associations, important questions remain unaddressed. First, would the results be replicable with another consumer population and product category? Second, King and Meiselman (2010) showed that as the frequency of product use increased, emotion intensity ratings also increased (except for the negatively charged emotion terms, which intensity increased inversely with the frequency of use). Would this same pattern of results be observed between high- and low-frequency consumers of the products when these are presented under evoked contexts? Third, Cardello et al. (2012) demonstrated that emotion ratings obtained in repeated tests (without evoked contexts) were highly correlated, and therefore deemed stable. In our framework, would the results be stable within participants (that is, would they report the same emotional responses to food stimuli under the same contexts in replicated tests at different points in time)? And, do their ratings of product-context appropriateness vary across time? Thus, the aim of this work was to extend the research on contextual dependence of product-elicited emotional associations by: (1) replicating Piqueras-Fiszman and Jaeger (2014) with another consumer population group and product category; (2) investigating the impact of the participants' frequency with which they usually consume the products used as stimuli on the responses; and (3)

examining whether the emotional associations towards eating certain products in evoked contexts and their appraisal of the appropriateness are stable through time. To address each of these specific objectives, three studies were conducted with different consumers (i.e. the subjects taking part in one study did not participate in the others) who, additionally, did not participate in our previous research. Table 1 summarises the stimuli and procedure used in the three different studies.

While several methods to measure emotional responses (both implicit and explicit) to consumer goods exist, self-reported questionnaires remain a simple and popular approach among practitioners in sensory and consumer research. Since the choice of the specific questionnaire itself (or its construction) was not considered crucial for the purpose of this research (which involves comparing different experimental conditions), a checklist version of the EsSense Profile® wordlist (King & Meiselman, 2010) was used. This particular questionnaire was chosen since the responses obtained from it have already been questioned from a consumer-centric perspective (Jaeger, Cardello, & Schutz, 2013) and it has been subjected to methodological research (e.g., King, Meiselman, & Carr, 2013). Nonetheless, we believe that the present approach can be applied to other emotion-related questionnaires/techniques (e.g., EmoSemio; Spinelli, Masi, Dinnella, Zoboli, & Monteleone, in press). The checklist format was considered to be not too demanding/tiresome considering that each participant might have to complete an emotion questionnaire several times. In this manuscript we do not assume that the responses obtained with explicit protocols, such as emotion-scoring surveys, give valid reflections of inner thoughts or purely experienced emotions, feelings, moods, or mindsets (Jaeger, Cardello & Schutz, 2013), and hence refer to the emotion-related data as associations (or responses).

2. Study 1: the effect of consumption contexts on emotion responses: a replication study (objective 1)

2.1. Materials and methods

2.1.1. Participants

A total of 115 participants were recruited from the general Auckland population (New Zealand). Of these, 52.2% were females (34 were 18–30 years old, 40 were 31–45 years old, and 41 were 46–60 years old). They were invited to the Institute of Plant and Food Research – PFR (Auckland) and, after being told the protocol of the study, they gave their informed voluntary consent to participate. No additional information was given about the purpose of the study, and after completing the study they were remunerated for participation.

Table 1

Summary of the three studies contributing empirical data to this research, with details of data collected and participant characteristics.

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Objective of the studies	Replicate previous findings (effect of evoking contexts) with another population	Compare consumer groups in terms of frequency of consumption (high/low)	Examine the stability of emotion responses across time (test–retest)
Gender% (M:F)	48:52	45:55/41:59	37:63
Sample size (<i>n</i>)	115	302 (157/145)	188
Test location	Laboratory	Online	Laboratory
Warm-up product (image)	Red-skinned apple	Green-fleshed kiwi	Red-skinned apple
Main product category (images)	Chocolate brownie	Yellow-fleshed kiwi	(a) Chocolate brownie (b) Potato crisps
Contexts (written)	No context Weekend breakfast Afternoon snack Home dinner with friends	Weekday breakfast Packed lunch outdoors Home dinner with friends	(a) Special dinner (b) Afternoon snack
Product-context appropriateness measures	Yes	Yes	Yes
Retest measures	No	No	Yes

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