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The impact of evoked consumption contexts and appropriateness on emotion responses

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ABSTRACT

Sensory and consumer scientists are seeing the need to explore broader measures, such as product-driven emotions, to be able to fully understand and satisfy consumers' demands. However, to date, the consumer methodologies used in food-related emotion research have neglected a crucial element linked to emotions: the consumption context. This is a concern, because consumers' emotional responses to food are elicited by many other sources apart from the sensory properties of the food itself. The present research aimed to fill in this gap of knowledge by exploring how evoked consumption contexts affect responses obtained from an emotion questionnaire. Two food stimuli (apple and chocolate brownie) and three different consumption contexts (a 'weekend breakfast', an 'afternoon snack', and 'after a special dinner') were used to vary the level of product-context appropriateness. A within-subject design was used in which 157 participants first completed an emotion questionnaire (36 terms, checklist format) in response to each of the evoked consumption contexts (presented in written format). A week later, the same participants completed the same emotion questionnaire while imagining themselves eating an apple or chocolate brownie (shown as images) without any given context (control condition), and then under the three different contexts (random monadic sequential order). When the chocolate brownie was the food stimulus, 20 of 36 emotion responses were significantly different from context to context (including the no-context condition). Conversely, only 9 significant differences were established when apple was the food stimulus. It was also found that frequency of use of positive emotion terms was higher 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 highlight how the context in which a food is consumed (even if imagined) can affect consumers' emotion responses towards it. More broadly, they demonstrate the reciprocal effect that the context and the product have on the elicited emotion responses, which are not situationally invariant. This research also explored how psychological traits related to emotional eating affected the emotion responses and found that in general higher emotional eaters selected a higher number of emotion terms (positive and negative). This study represents a needed advance in food-related emotion research, and upon replication of the results with other product-context combinations, could offer an easy-to-implement methodology that should more closely match the emotion responses that consumers would elicit in real-life situations while eating and drinking.

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1. Introduction

In the last 5 years, great interest has been focused on the impact that foods and beverages can exert on our emotions/feelings (e.g., Manzocco, Rumignani, & Lagazio, 2013; Schifferstein & Desmet, 2010; Schifferstein, Fenko, Desmet, Labbe, & Martin, 2013) and how this relates to food acceptance/liking. In sensory and con-

sumer research, questionnaire methods are being developed to obtain measures of emotions/feelings elicited by (or associated to) food (e.g., Cardello et al., 2012; King & Meiselman, 2010; King, Meiselman, & Carr, 2010; King, Meiselman, & Carr, 2013; Moskowit, Silcher, Beckley, Minkus-McKenna, & Mascuch, 2005; Thomson, Crocker, & Marketo, 2010). Regarding the methodological research pertaining to emotion questionnaires, King et al. (2013) have demonstrated the impact of several parameters of the EsSense Profile[®] questionnaire format (i.e., type of questionnaire, order of emotions listed, and position of emotions with respect to an overall acceptability question) on hedonic and emotion responses;

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the difference in response when testing a product by different means; the impact of number of samples; and the impact of time of day when the emotion test is conducted. Other researchers have looked at individual differences (Jaeger & Hedderley, 2013), what it feels like completing one of these emotion-related surveys (Jaeger, Cardello, & Schutz, 2013), or whether the emotion responses provided are reliable (stable) for repeated presentations (Cardello et al., 2012).

However, to date, the influence of evoking a consumption context during an emotion task on the participants' emotion responses has not been explored. The contextual characteristics of eating/drinking occasions have a greater impact on our enjoyment of the food than we are aware of (Köster, 2003; e.g., Bell, Meiselman, Pierson, & Reeve, 1994; de Graaf et al., 2005; Edwards, Meiselman, Edwards, & Leshner, 2003; Hersleth, Monteleone, Segtnan, & Næs, 2012; King, Meiselman, Hottenstein, Work, & Cronk, 2007; Petit & Sieffermann, 2007; Stroebele & De Castro, 2004). Moreover, consumption context is inextricably linked to how we feel (Richins, 1997). It sets up our mood and mindset and may give rise to an array of emotions (either positive, negative, or neutral) that very likely will modulate our perception of the food, and our liking and enjoyment of the food and consumption experience. Desmet and Schifferstein (2008) introduced the concept of 'source of food emotion' to emphasize that food emotions can be elicited by five types of sources: (1) sensory properties of the food itself, (2) experienced consequences, (3) associated consequences, (4) personal or social meanings, and (5) behavior of others involved. It is worth noting that four of these sources could be categorized as pertaining to the context. Trying to discern sources from consequences may be challenging, but perhaps not really necessary, since this combination of factors plays an important (and intrinsic) role in emotion elicitation. Therefore, this reciprocal 'halo' effect should be taken into account in emotion-related consumer research.

It is also relevant to consider the effect of the context/situation in consumer research because in many occasions, the choice of a certain food product over another is driven mainly by a planned context of consumption, and consequently, we tend to enjoy it more in that situation than in another. It is evident that certain products fit better in specific situations of consumption. Take, for instance Köster's (2003) example of a chocolate-covered ice-cream on a stick, which is normally a highly appreciated product globally: while it may fit in a family dinner situation, or even in a friends-out situation, it could be quite unacceptable in a formal business lunch. Thus, the same product may fit one situation and not another, and while this difference in appropriateness has been proved to affect consumers' reported acceptance ratings toward the product (Schutz, 1994), it has not been explored yet with emotion data. Important questions have not been addressed yet, such as: To what extent are the emotions reported solely food-driven and to what extent do food-elicited emotions depend on consumption context? What is the contribution of the consumption context to the emotions rated? Can these two drivers of emotion elicitation be easily distinguished? What effect does the appropriateness of a given consumption situation have on emotion responses of foods? Here we attempt to address these questions.

Thus, the aim of this study was to investigate the impact of different consumption situations on consumers' emotion responses to two different generic food products with different emotional consequences (Thomson et al., 2010). The specific objectives were: (1) To compare the emotion responses evoked by foods in different conditions: under certain evoked consumption contexts and without context (control condition); (2) To investigate whether the emotion profiles of the foods imagined to be consumed under certain contexts follow the emotion profiles elicited by the contexts alone; (3) To explore whether the appropriateness and frequency of consumption of the foods in those contexts exert any impact

on the emotion profiles; and (4) To explore how psychological traits, namely those related to emotional eating behaviors, affect the emotion responses.

Note that, purely for simplification purposes, the expressions "emotion association" or "emotion response" will be used to refer to the affective phenomena/feeling-related concepts mentioned throughout this paper, being aware that they may not be strictly emotions. The emerging debate about what exactly are the responses elicited by emotion questionnaires (Jaeger et al., 2013) is necessary and requires attention, but it is not the focus of this work. Nevertheless, 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 or feelings, that is why we decided to refer to them as associations.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

A total of 157 participants (53.5% were females; 42% were 20–35 years old, 46% were 36–50 years old, and 12% were 50+ years old) were recruited at the Universitat Politècnica de Valencia (Valencia, Spain) from a managed panel by a research group at the Department of Food Technology, or from a range of short courses given at this university. After being told the protocol of the study, they gave their informed voluntary consent to participate. No previous information was given about the purpose of the study, and after completing the study they were remunerated for participation.

2.2. Emotion questionnaire

Though there are several methods to measure emotional responses (both implicit and explicit) to consumer goods, to date, self-reported questionnaires remain a simple and popular approach among practitioners in sensory and consumer research. In this study, the questionnaire used was based on the ESense Profile® wordlist developed by King and Meiselman (2010), translated to Spanish, and reduced, since some of the meaning of the translated terms would be contained in other terms of the list (*merry*) or would not be suitable (*tame* and *aggressive*), as found in pilot work, where these terms elicited confusion among participants. The final list containing 36 items (listed in alphabetical order) was checked by five Spanish people to ensure that they understood all the terms and found them potentially applicable for the purpose of the study (Richins, 1997). A checklist version of the questionnaire was chosen for this study since it has been demonstrated that it is an acceptable approach for measuring emotion-related responses (Meiselman, King, & Carr, 2013) and it was considered to be not too demanding/tiresome, considering the objectives of this study (i.e., each participant having to complete an emotion questionnaire several times). See the Appendix section for the translated wordlist.

2.3. Selection of contexts and products

An underpinning premise of this study was that the appropriateness of consuming a given product in one context or another affects the eating experience (Cardello & Schutz, 1996) as it may affect its emotions elicited too. The contexts and the products used throughout this study were selected with the purpose of creating product-context combinations that would vary in terms of appropriateness in consumers' minds. We studied two food products in three different consumption situations. The two products, apple

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