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Functional or emotional? How Dutch and Portuguese conceptualise beer, wine and non-alcoholic beer consumption



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ABSTRACT

Non-alcoholic beer (NAB) may be a healthier alternative to wine and beer consumption, however has little appeal to consumers. Conceptualisations, i.e. functional and emotional associations that consumers have with foods/beverages, were explored to understand how NAB consumption is perceived, and compared to beer and wine conceptualisations in the Netherlands and Portugal. A qualitative study was performed using a focus group approach with moderate consumers of both countries ($n = 56$). Content analysis followed by correspondence analysis were used to explore conceptualisations. This study showed similar conceptualisations of the beverages in both countries. NAB has a limited conceptual content, which is mostly functional as a substitute. Beer and wine are rich in both functional and emotional content. Wine is associated with positive low arousal emotional responses, such as *calm* and *loving*. Beer is associated with positive high arousal emotional responses, such as *adventurous* and *energetic*. NAB evokes neutral and negative emotional responses, such as *rational*, *conscious*, and *disappointed*. The difference in conceptualisations of NAB versus beer/wine might be why NAB is not adopted more widely as a substitute as it does not deliver a comparable emotional response to consumers. NAB should be treated as a beverage in its own right and it might be wise to avoid direct conceptual comparisons with beer. Should the image of NAB be communicated and understood with positive and high arousal associations, such as *energetic* and *convivial*, in communication and advertisements, a higher level of congruency between expectation and experience could be achieved.

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1. Introduction

Beer and wine are among the oldest and the most consumed alcoholic beverages worldwide and are part of the daily diet of millions of people (WHO, 2014). Non-alcoholic beer (NAB) on the other hand, is a relatively new beverage that is consumed far less than beer or wine (BoE, 2014). Despite the similar nutritional and sensory profile of beer and NAB, the latter has little appeal to consumers, whereas it may be a healthier alternative, without the alcohol (Sohrabvandi, Mousavi, Razavi, Mortazavian, &

Rezaei, 2010). NAB could be an attractive non-alcoholic replacement for beer and wine. However, the patterns of consumption suggest a lower preference for NAB. Therefore, it is important to understand, the image that NAB presents to consumers and the reasons underlying its limited consumption, within the context of a wider choice of beverages.

The definition of product conceptualisation and its importance, in the framework of this study, is presented in this introduction. Furthermore, a literature review regarding functional and emotional conceptualisations of beer, wine and NAB as well as cultural issues of beer and wine consumption in Portugal and in the Netherlands are described.

1.1. Conceptualisations

Thomson, Crocker, and Marketo (2010) proposed that eating and drinking experiences are influenced by two processes that

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occur in the mind of consumers: the identification of a product via sensory perception (e.g. it is a beer), and the establishment of associations that consumers assign when thinking about a specific food or beverage. The combination of these associations determines the conceptualisations a consumer has of the product. This means that a person's response to a food or beverage does not only depend on the product itself (intrinsic and extrinsic properties), but also on the associated conceptualisations, in terms of functional (e.g. healthy for me) and/or emotional connotations (e.g. makes me happy) (Gutjar et al., 2015; Ng, Chaya, & Hort, 2013; Thomson & Crocker, 2014). Being aware of NAB conceptualisations will lead to a better understanding of how and to what extent the functional promise and the emotional response, are perceived by consumers, i.e. if what is expected is consistent with what is experienced, and thus may be used to optimise the sensory profile in order to fulfil the expectation of the consumers (Thomson et al., 2010).

1.1.1. Functional conceptualisations

Functional conceptualisations are defined as functional consequences of what the product might do to us and thus are associations and factors that motivate consumption (Thomson, 2010).

Beer is a thirst quencher associated with informal and relaxing occasions, being a symbol of demarcation between work and non-work hours, in both eating and non-eating social contexts (Pettigrew & Charters, 2006). Sensory attributes, such as perceived quality, aroma and carbonation, as well as description, context/moment, culture, character and affect are important factors influencing beer preferences and used in the consumer's mental representation of beers (Aquilani, Laureti, Poconi, & Secondi, 2015; Sester, Dacremont, Deroy, & Valentin, 2013). Functional associations with wine consumption are: sensory characteristics, to pair with food, specific contexts, status or group identity, as a social facilitator, as a gift, and for ritualistic purposes (Barrena & Sanchez, 2009; Charters & Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Charters, 2006; Ritchie, 2007). For NAB, functional associations are: avoiding to get drunk, having to drive, as a healthier alternative beverage and enjoying the flavour (Jongh, Peters, & van Teeffelen, 2014; Thompson & Thompson, 1996). According to Porretta and Donadini (2008) packaging attributes, such as glass format provided with a twist off cap, were nearly five times more important as flavour, in which body and malty were the most relevant attributes. In terms of alcohol content, light beer is positioned between NAB and regular beer. Light beer is perceived as less tasty than regular beer, but even so, the taste seems the main motivation for light beer consumption, followed by health statements and weight management (Chrysochou, 2014).

1.1.2. Emotional conceptualisations

Emotional conceptualisations are associations with an emotional connotation that reflect what the product is communicating to consumers (Thomson et al., 2010). Emotional conceptualisations might lead to an emotion, but might differ from feelings or emotions. Feelings are the different ways people feel, and they could be emotions, moods and attitudes (Meiselman, 2015). Emotions are a specific response to an object or event, and are rapid, intense and last only a short whilst (Meiselman, 2015). For the emotional product characterisation, feelings (including emotions) are studied during product use or immediately after, whereas feelings prior to consumption do not characterise how one feels with the product, but rather they are used to understand what feelings the product leads (Meiselman, 2015). In the scope of this study the expressions "emotional association or emotional response" will be used, being aware that this may or may not be an emotion, according to the definition of Meiselman (2015), but that classification is beyond the aim of this study.

To feel relaxed is probably the most popular emotional association with beer and wine consumption (Charters & Pettigrew, 2008; Yang, Allenby, & Fennel, 2002). Chaya et al. (2015) revealed that the emotional response to beer differs depending on certain sensory properties. For instance, a hoppy beer was shown to increase ratings of negative emotional responses (disappointment, disillusionment) and decrease ratings of positive emotional responses (fun, desire).

Barrena and Sanchez (2009) suggested that emotional factors are more important than functional factors in the purchase decision-making process for wine. For pleasure, enjoyment, to feel relaxed and mood enhancement are the most relevant emotional associations identified to wine consumption (Barrena & Sanchez, 2009; Charters & Pettigrew, 2008). More recently, Ferrarini et al. (2010) summarised the emotional response of wine consumption, presenting a lexicon of 16 emotional terms, 12 of which are pleasant, and 4 are unpleasant.

These studies mentioned were performed with Spanish and Italian consumers. As emotions/emotional responses are culturally dependent (van Zyl & Meiselman, 2015) it is of interest to investigate what are the emotional associations that other cultures have in relation to beer and wine, in an exploratory way.

1.2. Cultural issues

Following this, culture might affect the general conceptualisations of a food or a beverage once its meanings, exposure and usage might be very different (Rozin, 2005). For instance, the Dutch can be considered closely linked with beer production and consumption from a cultural, social and economic perspective (Nederlandse Brouwers, 2015). The Portuguese on the other hand, are generally considered to have a comparable relation with wine. Portugal is traditionally a wine country, having history and heritage of wine making and wine has remained an important product of the national diet and food culture (Panzone & Simões, 2009). Wine production also has a considerable relevance in the Portuguese economy (Duarte, Madeira, & Barreira, 2010). For NAB, this is different as it has neither affective nor specific roots in both countries.

1.3. Aims of the research

Even though functional and emotional associations of beer and wine consumption can be found in the literature, as referred to in the previous sections, there is a lack of scientific work done regarding NAB consumption. Furthermore, most studies focus on beer and wine individually and not comparing them within the same group of consumers.

The main objective of this study was to explore the functional and emotional conceptualisations of NAB and to compare them to those of beer and wine, for moderate consumers from two different cultures: Dutch and Portuguese. Given the importance of context of consumption to differentiate beer and wine choice (Giacalone et al., 2015; Ritchie, 2007), it was decided to include the context of consumption in this study and link it to the functional and emotional associations of the beverages.

The second objective of this study was to compare how Dutch and Portuguese consumers conceptualise beer, wine and NAB consumption, based on their personal and cultural experiences. Given the close relation of the Dutch with beer and the Portuguese with wine, it is expected that cultural factors affect and differentiate the way these cultures conceptualise the beverages.

Results might be used in different perspectives. Describing the image of NAB will help in understanding what the obstacles to a wider usage of NAB are and why it is apparently not an attractive substitute to either regular beer or other popular alcoholic drinks

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