IV. The Power of Emotions in Sensory Perception of Food

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Measurement of emotions is a complex process and many theories concerning the subject are registered since the 3rd century B.C. The most famous philosophers discovered during this period are Plato and Aristotle. Sophisticated theories in the works of philosophers such as René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza and David Hume were written during the 17th century A.C. James-Lange in 1884 argued in his article 'What is an Emotion?' that emotional experience is largely due to the experience of bodily changes. He claims that "we feel sad because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and neither we cry, strike, nor tremble because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be." The theories found over the centuries are not mutually exclusive and many researchers incorporated multiple perspectives in their work.

But, what is emotion anyway? In short words, emotion is an intense mental state that arises autonomically in the nervous system rather than through conscious effort. Emotion must not be considered as a synonymous of mood, feeling or temperament. Mood is longer lasting, often objectless and has low intensity background. Feelings are conscious experiences and temperament is part of the personality and it is stable over time and situations.

Emotions can be either positive or negative. A strong emotion, positive or negative, helps to memorize the event more deeply and, in return, the emotional experience will be as well recalled more easily and accurately than an emotionally neutral event.

The five human senses are connected to our memory and provoke directly our emotions. The sense of smell and the memory are closely linked. Odors are the most powerful stimuli when we talk about evoking emotional memory. Even after many years an odor of our childhood evokes vivid and intense memories!

As Martin Lindstrom, quoted in In-store Marketing, June 2006, "If you take brands in general, the case today is that 83% of communications come through the eye...This is ironic because 75% of all emotions are generated by smell."

"The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it [...]. as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me [...]. immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it for my parents." (M. Proust (1871-1922), Remembrance of Things Past)
Memory is part of the decision making process and the stronger and more positive it is, the more likely will occur the buying decision.

Decision-making is a cognitive process where the result is a choice between alternatives, that’s why it is fundamental to know how consumers make their buying decisions. Understand the role of emotions to provide your consumers with the product that best fits their emotional needs.

We have to consider also the human individual differences. Factors such as cultural, environmental, gender and age impact directly on the perception of emotion. Consumers remain close to their national and regional culinary preferences, as well as women tend to over-eat in response to negative emotions.

Emotional attributes are being associated with brands, but few studies are published in with regards to understand the emotional aspects associated to product itself. Silvia C. King and Herbert L. Meiselman have published in 2009 a paper in Food Quality and Preference which contains a development of a questionnaire with descriptive terms of emotions related to various product categories. This method to measure emotions called EsSense Profile™ represents one of the biggest advances in consumer research of foods and beverages.

The company Symrise in Brazil is running pilot tests with different categories using this method. The most important consideration for applying the methodology is the translation of 39 emotions found in the mentioned study and the relevance of those terms for the local consumers. This requires preliminary consumer tests and strong participation of psychologists or sociologists for emotions interpretation.