

Véronique Pesant
CART 360
Professor Elio & Sabine
December 6th, 2019

Taste Your Emotions

The research conducted by these three students aimed to demonstrate the relationship between taste and emotional experience for use in HCI (Human centered computing - Interaction devices) through experimentation with 3D food printing. Even though I support the theory that taste is sometimes a good tool to express certain experiences, I believe the evidence used in this research is too weak to prove anything. Indeed, the findings are based on a narrow range of data, based on language conformities, predetermined scales of evaluation that do not allow to fully express emotions and an ethnically uniform pool of participants which, therefore, cannot possibly provide a deep enough analysis of the relationship between taste and emotions.

Based on two blocks of fairly simple experiments, the authors conclude a correlation between sweet taste and positive emotions and between bitter taste and negative emotions. However, they did not take into consideration many factors that could affect these results. Primarily, the number of people interviewed for their research and their ethnicity, even though they mention being aware of the ethnicity uniformity and argue that it doesn't affect their results. Indeed, using only 16 participants for their principal experiments doesn't seem like a representative group of people. Considering that these people were found through the mailing list and social media of Dovetail Ltd, company for which one of the authors work, and that 15 out of 16 were white europeans. When conducting a study, "given that the sample may represent only a portion of the target population, the researcher needs to examine carefully whether the selected sample frame fits the study objectives or hypotheses, and especially if there are strategies to overcome the sample frame limitations"¹, which was not the applied in this case.

Secondly, research in the field of psychology has shown that the human brain is easily biased. Suggestive questioning or forced choice question, forcing "people to choose between two choices (in our case bitter or sweet and the in between) when the answer could be neither of the choices or needs more explanation"², can lead to errors in the

¹An Bras Dermatol, "Sampling: how to select participants in my research study?," PMC, accessed on december 4th 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4938277/>.

²"Forced choice question," NPL Notes, accessed on december 4th 2019, <http://nplnotes.com/presuppositions-suggestive-questions/>.

answering process. This theory has been proven in other fields like criminology, in which a witness testimony could be altered by the manner that said witness was interviewed. I believe that to some extent, this applies to this work concerning emotions and taste. Indeed, the authors provide a small range of possible responses to the stimuli they are presented with, hence, making the results of the experience lean towards their desire. The participants would have possibly answered quite differently if presented with a larger range of tastes or simply asked, without predetermined options, what they experienced “tasted” like to them. Taste is something really individual, but I believe this was not taken enough into consideration while concluding their research.

Which brings me to the last argument in concern to individuality and language. Languages differ greatly in different parts of the world. By focusing solely on the bitter/sweet feeling and using solely the English language, the authors exclude a great portion of possibilities. Many languages have words to express emotions or concepts that the English language doesn't have. The people speaking such languages possibly do not relate at all with our expressions such as “a bitter ending”. On top of that, there is the fact that these expressions are based on common agreement to their meaning. For example, it might seem a bit exaggerated, but contrary to what is stated in the text I would never use “honey” as a reference to a positive emotion simply because I personally do not appreciate honey. Just like some people seemed to express a positive feeling in relation to a taste similar to the one of beer, which is definitely not a sweet taste, but indeed closer to a bitter one. Like John A. Lucy mentions in his essay on the influence of language diversity on thoughts “There are two distinct relationships: each language embodies a particular *interpretation* of reality and these languages' interpretations can *influence* thought about that reality”³. Although it may seem like technicalities about translations, it should probably be taken into consideration.

To conclude, even though the research explores interesting paths leading to possible conclusion in concern to the relationship between taste and emotions, they are currently excluding too many factors to make their work reliable. A greater, diverse pool of participants, deeper analysis of the psychology behind the manner in which to compile the results and considerations for other linguistic interpretations would all be a good starting point to bring more credibility into their work. And unlike they were trying to do by neutralizing other factors such as textures and temperatures, maybe bringing the

³Lucy, "Introduction," 299.

wholesomeness of flavors into the equation would open the doors to even more accurate communication of emotions in relation to taste for the HCI field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dermatol, An Bras. 'Sampling: how to select participants in my research study?', *PMC*, May, 2016,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4938277/>.

'Forced choice question' NPL Notes, accessed on December 4 2019,

<http://nlpnotes.com/presuppositions-suggestive-questions/>.

LUCY, John A.. "Introduction" In *Through the Window of language: Assessing the Influence of Language Diversity on Thought*, 299.