

BENJAMIN MAHIEU, PH.D. STUDENT AND AWARD WINNER: FREE COMMENT



Benjamin Mahieu, a Ph.D. student at the CSGA, has just been awarded the 2021 thesis prize by the French Society of Sensory Analysis (SFAS). This seemed a good opportunity to make a free comment on his thesis work...

Talking about our meals and describing what we eat is pretty much a national sport here in France. But it is also an important source of information for all those interested in consumer expectations and preferences.

In the framework of his thesis supervised by Pascal Schlich and Michel Visalli, Benjamin aimed to take another look at the "free comment", a method that allows consumers to freely describe a product using their own vocabulary. This type of free comment is easy to implement but often only an extra question of a long questionnaire and analysis of the answers remains at a rudimentary level.

Benjamin developed a semi-automatic procedure to extract consumer responses in the form of a contingency table (presence/absence of terms for each product × consumer pairing) and then analysed how effective free comment was when compared with the so-called "CATA" (Check-All-That-Apply) method. Unlike free comment, the CATA method asks consumers to tick the terms that apply to a product in a list of predefined sensory descriptors.

Benjamin compared such results from free comment to those obtained using the CATA method to describe red wines and chocolates. The results showed that free comment provided a better level of differentiation between products with a richer, more detailed and precise description than those obtained using the CATA method.

By providing researchers with powerful analytical tools and verifying the validity of results, Benjamin has opened up a very promising research avenue for study of the words consumers use to describe their perception.

Contact

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For more information

Mahieu B, Visalli M, Thomas A, Schlich P (2020). Free-comment outperformed check-all-that-apply in the sensory characterisation of wines with consumers at home. *Food Quality and Preference*, 84.

Mahieu B, Visalli M, Thomas A, Schlich P (2021). An investigation of the stability of Free-Comment and Check-All-That-Apply in two consumer studies on red wines and milk chocolates. *Food Quality and Preference*, 90.

Keywords

Sensory analysis; description; food; drink; statistics