

Measuring Acceptability of a New Product Through Consumers' Prolonged Exposure: The Case of Low-Alcohol Wine

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Summary

To what extent is a consumer ready to accept a product that has undergone a change of one of its intrinsic attributes? How is this change perceived at blind level (that is, in the absence of the information about the change) and when the information is given to the consumer?

Focusing on the case of a red wine with a content of alcohol reduced to 9 %, we organise an experiment in the home of 40 regular red wine consumers in Montpellier (France) which allows for both a measure of the volumes actually consumed by the respondents during the experiment, and a measure of preference before and after exposure to the wines.

The hypotheses were (1) The preference for a wine should be better after 2 weeks exposure to this wine than before the exposure, and (2) A lower level of alcohol in the wine should result in higher levels of consumption.

During a first stage where blind samples of wine were used, 24 consumers split in two groups have received alternatively two wines for a 2 weeks period: the “low-alcohol” wine (9 %), and a “standard” wine (12.5 %). The order of the wines was different between the two groups.

During the second stage, also organized with two 2 weeks periods, 40 consumers split in two groups were given the same wine (12 % alcohol content) during the two periods. However, the wine was labelled respectively 10.5 % and 13.5 % alcohol content, and the information was switched after 2 weeks in each group. The hypotheses being that a low level of alcohol is generally associated with a lower level of quality.

Comparative preference tests before and after the blind exposure reveal that the “low-alcohol” wine (9 %) is equally preferred to the “standard” wine (12.5 %). However, it was not clear whether exposure to one of the wines would improve the level of preference for this wine.

On the other hand, the quantities consumed between the two wines during the 2 weeks periods in blind condition are not statistically different, who demonstrate quite stable levels of intakes during the period.

During the full information stage, it is interesting to note that, in spite of the poorer quality expectation of the information “10.5 % alcohol content” compared to the information “13.5 % alcohol content”, the quantities consumed were again quite the same. This would suggest that, in a context of actual daily consumption, a low level of alcohol in the wine may not be a barrier.

From a research point of view, this result suggests that measuring acceptance in a laboratory and in real consumption situations may produce quite different results.

However, the size of the sample group of consumers makes it difficult to extract significant results from the data. But it provides valuable indications for further research using at home exposure to new products.

Key words: exposure, new product, wine consumer, experimental design.