The Future of Sensory/Consumer Research
Evolving to a better science...

Dr. Herb Meiselman
Herb Meiselman Training & Consulting
The future: evolving to a better science

• Where are we now? – Emotion, questionnaires, internet
• Where are we going? – More representative samples
• What I hope will change – Less scaling
  Less product-specific research
  Less country-specific research
• Many issues apply to both sensory AND consumer science
• Long career in government research at Natick
• Journal editor and reviewer
• Review panels in government, industry, and academia
• Food and non-food
• Targeting the Consumer courses with Hal MacFie
• Every Pangborn & Eurosense

My Perspective: 49 years in the field
Future sensory & consumer research

- Must-haves
- Need-to-haves
- Nice-to-haves
1. Health/Wellness: a great opportunity for sensory

- We will embrace Wellness as we have embraced Qualitative
- Wellness is defined by the consumer, not the manufacturer
- Our job is to determine how to measure and use it as a variable
- Consumers will not accept a trade-off of functional foods with less flavor/taste...Sensory can be important!

When: Now and will increase!
2. Move beyond the laboratory

- Better balance of control vs. real life
- Academia can learn from industry
- HUT, perhaps with internet reporting
- Data collection via internet tech
- Simulated/imagined environments

When: 5-10 years
3. Trained panels vs. consumer panels

- The line will continue to blur and tasks will be assigned to efficiently solve the problem
- The line between sensory and consumer science will blur also
- Trained panel members are people...they are consumers!
- If seen as machines, they’re not part of this field
- If viewed as trained consumers, they are part of sensory and consumer science

When: Now-5 years
4. People, Consumers, Subjects

- We will develop better standards of “Representative Consumers”
- We will become more skeptical of convenience samples
- Are students representative people?...No!
- Is that an issue for both sensory and consumer science?...Yes!
4. People, Consumers, Subjects

• Industry uses product users vs. convenience samples
• We will describe and segment consumers on their psychology
• Psychographics will be used as regularly as demographics
• Actual (vs. reported) behavior will be used as both dependent and independent variables
5. Number of people – is more better?

- Minimum numbers in consumer/sensory research will increase.
- Increased segmentation will drive larger numbers – you cannot segment small samples...
- When do we need segmented vs. unsegmented studies?
- We need to stop generalizing from small convenience samples to large populations.

When: Now-5 years
6. Scaling

- Scaling, and measurement, have had a traditional place in sensory research.
- In the future we will (finally) accept that all scales produce the same ranking of products.
- We will stop arguing that there are good scales and bad scales.
- Good and bad for what purpose?
- We will use scales that are most efficient and consumer friendly.
- We will specify scales to achieve specific results.

When: Soon, I hope...
7. Measuring beyond liking

- We will make greater use of broader measurements such as satisfaction, in addition to liking.
- We will increase measurement of behavior vs. measurement of liking and questionnaires.
- There will be less use of blind products and more use of brands.

When: Now-5 years
8. Ritual and Habit

- We will recognize much of consumer behavior is not about choice, but rather about ritual and habit.
- Habit is controlled by environment, making its study important.
- Many products are used together or in sequence for rituals.
- While we currently study products in isolation, we will begin to study them together since they are used together.

When: 10 years
9. Internet Questionnaires

• Some laboratory and CLT work will be replaced by internet questionnaires
• Are we ready for sensory research without products present? We need to be...we are the experts in consumer research
• When do you need to have an actual product present; when is an internet questionnaire OK?
• There is a literature on the differences between responding to a name and to a product
• New internet technology will help here.

When: Now and will increase rapidly
10. Transitions of child to adult to elderly

- We will begin to see life as a series of stages and transitions, rather than as simple stages (young, middle-age, elderly)
- We will need to study each stage and the transitions
- We will focus on the young and the old, and less on the middle
- We will develop new methods for the very young & very elderly

When: Now-5 years
11. Cross-cultural: global products/global issues

- We will view problems and products globally.
- We will need to feed a world with 10 billion people in cities.
- I predict that in 30 years we will all eat a diet of global foods, designed and processed to look and taste fresh.
- The current trends in local, regional, authentic, traditional food will need to be brought into the processed food industry.

When: Now and will increase over 5-10 years
• Sensory and consumer science will support this globalization of food and other non-food products.
• We will develop evaluation methods which work globally.
• We will develop consumer language which spans cultures and countries.
• We will identify consumer issues which are global? Neophobia?
• We will continue to organize sensory and consumer research globally (Pangborn, Eurosense, European Sensory Network, Society of Sensory Professionals, Sensiber, Sensometrics,...)
Summary: Future Trends

Now

• More Health/Wellness

Soon

• Scaling

3 Yrs

• Internet Questionnaires
  • Cross-Cultural / Global Issues

5 Yrs

• Number of People
  • Life Transitions
  • Measuring Beyond Liking

10 Yrs

• Trained v. Consumer Panels
  • Move Beyond The Lab
  • Representative Subjects

Nice

• Ritual and Habit

Need

• Importance

Must
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