

Fig.1: Image cloud of both cola products in blind test



Fig.2: Image cloud of both cola products with knowledge of brand names



# A brand tasting

Picture gallery tool measures consumers' taste experiences

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How do brands taste? And how can you describe a certain taste? **Andreas Jütting** and **Michael Koch** present a tool that allows respondents to express their inner visions and associations evoked during their consumption of goods.

To position brands, the food industry goes great lengths to create brandscapes that should also be associated with savouring the respective product. Standardised verbal expressions like "acidity", "harmony", or "body" are often used when trying to measure this taste experience objectively. However, for most consumers these taste nuances are way too complex, and they usually have trouble putting their sensations into words. Moreover, this standardised terminology lacks emotionally charged terms like "sense of

well-being”, “sociability”, or “luxury” that consumers could use to describe their taste experience.

Produkt + Markt uses the validated picture gallery “VAL|LERY” to accommodate this challenge when measuring taste experiences. This way respondents are able to express their inner visions and associations evoked by their taste experience, without stumbling over verbal barriers.

### **Practical Example: Softdrinks**

In collaboration with Professor Ulrich Enneking and students of the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück, Produkt + Markt has conducted a study on measuring the taste experience for two Coca-Cola products. The study’s objective was to examine

- if properties used for brand positioning would turn up again in the taste experience,
- and if knowing the brandname would influence the taste experience for the products.

The test products were a well-established cola softdrink by an international producer, and a new cola softdrink by a nationally established beverage producer, who is rather known for other flavours than cola. Overall, both products are positioned in similar dimensions. The only difference is that the new product distinguishes itself as “organic” and some kind of “otherness”. In comparison, the established product strongly positions itself through the unique and exciting moments associated with its consumption.

In order to examine whether these positioning dimensions are also echoed in the taste of the cola beverages, a group of respondents completed a blind tasting of both products. In order to describe their taste experience, the survey participants were then asked to assign pictures from the VAL|LERY set to the respective brand. A second group of respondents completed the same task. However, this group did know the brand names of both products. Both groups of respondents were structurally identical. Any differences between the two groups can therefore be ascribed to the impact of the brand.

### **Visualisation of the Taste Experience**

Fig. 1 shows the image clouds for both cola beverages after the blind tasting. The larger a picture is printed, the more often it was selected by the participants to express the taste experience.

Even at the first glance, major differences between the two products become apparent: While Brand A was matched with pictures associated with “sociability” and “sense of well-being”, Brand B was matched with pictures associated with “artificiality/chemistry”, “innovation”, and “environmental awareness”. This already allows us to conclude the following:

- Brand A and B each trigger a very different taste experience.
- Brand A generally confirms its targeted positioning; the decades of branding are paying off. In contrast – strictly from the taste experience – the positioning of Brand B is moving in a very different direction than originally intended.

When comparing the image clouds in fig. 1 with those of the second group of respondents (fig. 2), even if the brand names are known, the results for Brand A are hardly different from those of the blind taste test. However, there are significant differences for Brand B. The artificiality makes room for rather environmental/nature-oriented pictures:

- The second group of respondents clearly reflects Brand B’s organic brand image.
- Thus the brand name has a crucial influence on the brandscapes associated with Brand B.

## **Quantification of the Taste Experience**

In addition to qualitative analysis of the imagery, the picture gallery tool also quantifies the results: Each picture has a certain allocation probability with regard to specific property dimensions. When connecting this allocation probability with the number of times a picture was selected during the brand tests described above, one receives a numeric value expressing the strength of the coherence between brand and property dimension.

Image profile of both cola beverages based on the selected pictures

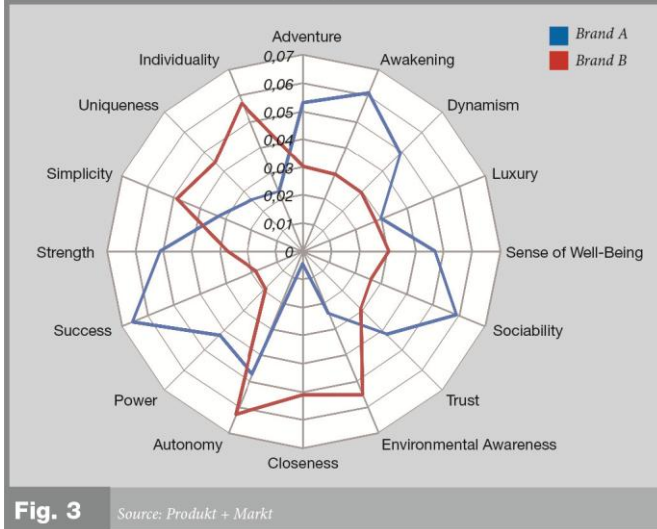


Fig. 3 Source: Produkt + Markt

Fig.3 shows the results of the application of this the probability model for all essential positioning dimensions of both cola products depicted in an image profile.

While the well-established Brand A scores high in sociability, adventure, dynamism as well as success and strength, Brand B is rather associated with autonomy, uniqueness, and individuality, in addition to environmental awareness. Hence, the “otherness” intended by the maker, is associated with Brand B. In contrast, exciting moments associated with

adventure, awakening, or dynamism are perceived less strongly.

The visualisation of the inner visions by means of image clouds and the quantification make it possible to identify the unconscious driving forces of both cola brands, and can therefore be put to operative use by the brand and product management.

## The Authors



**Andreas Jütting** has been working for Produkt + Markt since 2006. His concentrations are Advanced Statistics as well as tool and software development in Produkt + Markt’s Product Development department.



**Dr. Michael Koch** has been with Produkt + Markt since 2007. He is responsible for tool and software development in Produkt + Markt’s Product Development department.