Effects of slogans on acceptance of an unknown food neophobia: The role of food neophobia
A. Fenko, J.-M. Leufkens, J.J. van Hoof
University of Twente, Enschede, the Netherlands
a.fenko@utwente.nl

Introduction

Food neophobia, the avoidance of novel foods (Birch & Fischer, 1998), can be seen as a potential barrier for the introduction of new food products (Taivalsuo et al., 2001). This study investigates how slogans in a food product advertisement can facilitate product acceptance by two consumer groups, food neophobics and food neophilics. Food neophobia can be measured by the Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) with five positive and five negative items regarding foods and food-related situations (Pliner & Holден, 1992). With this scale consumers can be classified as either neophobic towards food, someone who avoids unknown foods, or as neophilic, someone who embraces novel foods (Veenek, 2010). By changing the attributes and to make them more prominent in the minds of consumers (Kohli et al., 2007), for instance, slogans were used to prime various attributes of soup (Bosch, 1993). Prior and Brodie (1998) provided further empirical evidence that slogans can be used as vehicles for priming certain key attributes to a product.

We suggest that slogans embedded in a product advertisement can be used to employ a certain loading of familiarity or newness associated with the presented novel food product. By changing the perception in a favorable way (as being more familiar for food neophilics and as more new for food neophobics) we expect to promote the acceptance of a novel food product. Food neophobics may react positively to a slogan that conveys familiarity rather than newness. Providing taste or “it tastes like…” information may result in a higher willingness to try novel foods in this group (Pelchot & Pliner, 1995). For neophilics, on the contrary, the perceived newness should be stressed. They perceive unusual foods in a positive light and embrace situations involving new foods (Veenek, 2010). Therefore, we expect food neophilics to react positively to a slogan that conveys newness rather than familiarity.

According to the MAYA (Most Advanced Yet Acceptable) principle (Hekkert, Snelders, & Van Wijningen, 2003), success of any innovation depends on a careful balance of typicality and novelty. In the current study we test whether this principle is also true for the domain of food neophobia by using a slogan that sends a mixed message conveying familiarity as well as newness. We expect a slogan combining familiarity and newness to appeal to both groups (neophilics and neophobics) simultaneously.

Method

Figure 1. Mean intention to try an unfamiliar product for different food groups

Overall acceptance of new products differs between food categories. To find the most appropriate food product for the main study, a pre-study was performed to assess the intention to try of a new product from different food categories. The results indicate that people were the most likely to try an unfamiliar fruit and the least likely to try an unfamiliar fish. The intention to try dairy products was close to the mean score across all the categories (see Figure 1). Based on these results, a dairy product was selected for the main study.

In another pre-study 16 different slogans that stressed either familiarity or newness of products were evaluated. The slogans with the highest score on newness (“The unknown taste sensation”) and familiarity (“A familiar taste”) were selected for the main study.

In the main study, an unknown dairy product from Iceland (Skyr) was used to examine the effectiveness of these different slogans that stressed 1) product newness, 2) product familiarity, and 3) both of these attributes simultaneously (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Slogan manipulations: Newness (left), familiarity (middle), and mixed slogan

Discussion

Our results show that neophilics and neophobics differ in their evaluation of an unfamiliar product. These findings are in line with other food neophobia studies (see Barea & Sanchez, 2011; Hoek et al., 2011; Veenek, 2010), which suggest that food neophobia represents an important barrier to new food acceptance. Marketers should take this difference into account when trying to introduce new food products.

Slogans that offer a more stressing newness of an unknown food product would increase the product acceptance by neophilics. This was supported by the data. A slogan that conveyed newness improved evaluation of a new dairy food product for neophobics on all measures. We also expected that stressing familiarity of an unknown food product would increase the product acceptance by neophobics. The data, however, did not confirm this hypothesis, although the mean scores mirrored the expected pattern for all four measures (see Figure 3). By combining newness and familiarity in one slogan we expected to increase the product acceptance by both neophobics and neophilics. However, the mixed slogan was unable to successfully affect the product evaluation by both groups. The mixed slogan only increased taste expectations for neophobics.

Different mechanisms could be responsible for the relative ineffectiveness of the mixed slogan, such as conflict avoidance (Festinger, 1957), incompatibility of the mesage (Riebe, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004) or sequence effect (Fischer & Frexer, 2009). Regardless of the reason why the mixed slogan was not perceived as improved, our results indicate that the neophilics and neophobics should be addressed individually rather than simultaneously with the mixed slogan. Consice slogans that convey only one message seem to work better than a paradoxical combination of statements combined in one slogan.

Slogans aimed at food neophilics need to stress the newness of a product. However, slogans alone seem to be insufficient for food neophobics. Previous studies suggest that offering a product with similar visual characteristics might increase product liking, because people have a positive bias to the familiar (Taivalsuo et al., 1994; Birch, 1999). Other techniques, like sampling or providing actual taste information, might also help to increase new product acceptance by a neophobic audience.

Further studies are needed into other advertisement characteristics (such as product names, package design and colour), as well as contextual factors (such as time and sequence effects), which might also influence evaluation and acceptance of new food products.

Results

The data analysis showed significant effects of food neophobia on Taste Expectation [F(2, 115) = 7.084, p = .008], Intention to Try [F(2, 115) = 13.222, p < .001], and Intention to Buy [F(2, 115) = 11.309, p < .001]. For attractiveness, the effect of neophobia was only marginally significant [F(2, 115) = 3.383, p = .067].

The main effect of slogan manipulation was not significant (p = .05). Interaction effects of slogan manipulations and food neophobia were significant for Taste Expectation [F(2, 115) = 3.756, p = .025] and Intention to Try [F(2, 115) = 3.128, p = .046] and marginally significant for attractiveness [F(2, 115) = 2.492, p = .071] and Intention to Buy [F(2, 115) = 2.675, p = .071]. Pairwise comparisons showed that food neophilics had an overall lower preference for the product than food neophobics (see Figure 3).

Slogan manipulations affected neophobics and neophilics differently. For neophobics, the slogan conveying newness significantly increased perceived product attractiveness, Taste Expectation, Intention to Try and Intention to Buy compared to familiar slogan. Significant differences between mixed and familiar slogan were found only for Taste Expectation. For neophilics, the slogan stressing familiarity of the product did not increase their acceptance of the product on any of the four measures. The mixed slogan also did not show any significant effect.

Figure 3. Mean Attractiveness, Taste Expectation, Intention to Try, and Intention to buy the product for food neophilics and neophobics

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Pangborn 2013