BRANDS, TASTES, JUDGMENT

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Abstract

Selective bias is the tendency to interpret information in ways that are consistent with our preconceived notions. If, for example, consumers have different opinions about branded and non-branded versions of certain products, it can also be caused by the fact that they perceive the product differently due to their beliefs about the brand in any way (e.g. previous experience, brand name).

With the involvement of several food industry products, I tested the relationship between the brand and perceived taste in two independent groups. During a blind test, I researched whether the favored branded product is really tastier, and I used the brand test to check the effect of brand awareness on taste.

Keywords: *private label, blind test, brand test*

Introduction

The two essential types of brand are the manufacturer's brand and the commercial brand. The manufacturer's brand is developed by the manufacturers, bears the name of their choice, brand management is their responsibility, and they are distributed by several commercial units (Szántó – Hinora, 2010).

However, commercial brands are only available in their own store network, the commercial company is also responsible for the production and market introduction of the brand (Agárdi, 2010). Commercial brands are not given to the product by the manufacturers, but by the distributors. In this case, the commercial chains produce certain products or, less often, produce them themselves and introduce them to the market under their own name. It was first introduced in Hungary by Tesco and Profi, and since then its importance in the food industry has been steadily increasing. (Tooth, 2001)

Kristóf (2014) explains that there are several names for the commercial brand, such as retail, department store, private label, or own brand (the latter is the name most used by retailers). For many manufacturers, the dealer is both a partner and a competitor.

The literature has identified different generations of commercial brands according to the role private brands play in the given product category. (Bauer - Kolos, 2017) In the beginning, the most important feature of own brands was a significant price advantage, which was combined with low quality. They were primarily introduced in categories that satisfy basic needs. A slight improvement in quality can already be observed with the second-generation own brands, and the price advantage is smaller compared to manufacturer brands. In the case of third-generation commercial brands, the emphasis is already on the price-value ratio, they approach the market-leading manufacturer brands in terms of positioning, and there is no longer any significant difference in product quality. Finally, the fourth generation brands target the premium brands of the category. These commercial brands are products aimed at specific segments with serious innovation content. Research (Balló, 2014 and Földi, 2014) also proves that it is no longer only low-income customers who buy commercial brand products, they are no longer a less attractive, low-quality alternative for customers.

Based on Nielsen's survey covering more than sixty countries, the market share of private label products in the daily consumer goods (FMCG) market - based on value - averaged 16.7 percent worldwide in 2016, but at the same time, there were significant differences between individual regions. The market share of this product segment is the highest in Europe (31.4 percent) (Dudás et.al., 2019). The spread and popularity of commercial brand products among domestic consumers are also clearly visible. They have become an integral part of our everyday shopping, they can be found in most households. (Földi – Polya, 2017)

In 2017, while the growth rate of manufacturer brands was 5%, that of commercial brands was almost 9%. In the food market, consumers are more willing to look for the chains' own brands (Tisza, 2019). On ORIGO (2020) we can read that in 2019 the ratio of turnover of the manufacturer and commercial brands in Hungary was 72%:28%, a year later Trademagazin writes that in 2020 commercial brands accounted for 12.8% were also able to increase in value to a greater extent, which is why their market share continued to strengthen (without author, 2021).

According to Lehota (1994:25), consumer behavior is the totality of the consumer's actions aimed at acquiring, using, evaluating and treating products and services after use.

One of the characteristics of consumer behavior is selectivity. Due to selectivity, we primarily perceive those that we are interested in out of countless stimuli (Bauer et.al., 2016). However, in addition to selective attention, selective bias can also "have a say" in the customer's decision.

Selective bias can be realized in such a way that certain product properties are judged based on the image (the brand) (Lehota, 2001). As a result, selectivity can lead to the fact that the consumer's judgments may be contrary to the real properties of the product (Lőricz –Sulyok, 2017). So, it may happen that consumers may judge a product with a better-known, more famous brand name to be of higher quality, and may even imagine it to be tastier. Brand awareness has a stronger influence in our country than in other cultures. This is confirmed by a survey of nine European countries by Markovina et al (2015). Sipos et. al. (2007) for example proved the primary role of the brand in the preferences of mineral water consumers.

According to Kotler–Keller (2012), the power of consumer persuasion regarding brands is excellently demonstrated when, during a blind test, one group of consumers tastes the product without knowing its brand, while another group does the same with knowledge of the brand, and there will be differences in the opinions of the two groups. Forgács et. al. (2013) and Allison – Uhl (1964) confirmed with beers the influencing power of the brand. Orgovány (2012) and Paraszt–Papp (2019) showed with energy drinks, that the well-known brand is assumed by the respondents to be the best.

I tested the information presented in the processed literature with the help of two small group samples.

In connection with this, I set out to examine the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis H1: Because of the influence of brand name, testers will assume that the manufacturer's brand is more palatable, but as a result of the quality improvement observed in commercial brands, there will be some people who find private label products more palatable (blind test).
- Hypothesis H2: Due to selective bias, more people will prefer the manufacturer brand in the open test than in the blind test. (blind test ↔ open test)

I examined whether a correlation could be demonstrated between brand- and product consumption and the results of the taste experience.

Material and method

I conducted the research among undergraduate students (rural development agricultural engineers and agricultural engineer) at the Szarvas Training Center of the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences. 2021/2022. in academic year, the number of active undergraduate students was 54.

I carried out the research with my own financial resources, so due to limited financial resources I decided to involve a total of 30 people. The sampling frame was compiled with the help of the Study Department of the Training Place, during which the list of active students in ABC order was made available to us in an Excel workbook.

To select the participants, I assigned a number to each undergraduate student, and then randomly selected 30 of them. After another coding, I also randomly selected 15 people from the drawn people, with whom I did the blind test, and the remaining 15 people did the open test.

The results of the research can be considered representative of the undergraduate students of the Training Place.

The product categories included in the study were the following (Figure 1): mineral water, cola, biscuits, and curd bars/stick. For each category, I included a well-known manufacturer's brand and a commercial brand in the analysis. In the case of the commercial brand, I chose the products of the 100% Hungarian-owned store chain Coop. (Participants do not consume Coop products.)

- In the case of mineral water, the compared brands were the non-carbonated waters of Natur Aqua and Coop Aquarius.
- I contrasted the classic Coca Cola with the Coop cola-flavored soft drink.
- Győri Édes and Coop honey-flavored versions competed in the biscuit category.
- The Pöttyös curd bar compared its "taste" with the Coop dessert bar, in both cases in the unflavored, dark chocolate version.

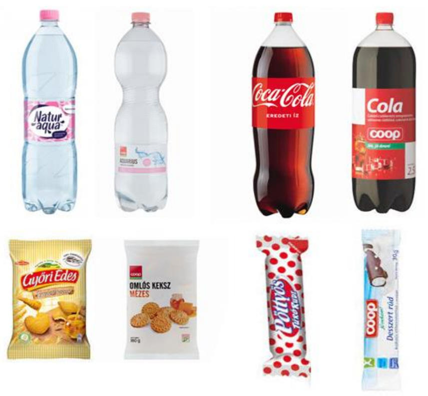

Figure 1. Tested products

Source: own editing, 2022

Price ratio information for the products tested (in Coop stores, May 2022):

- NaturAqua price per liter is 30% higher than Coop Aquarius.
- The price per liter of Coca Cola is 60% higher than Coop Cola.
- Coop biscuits are 17% cheaper than Győri Édes biscuitst (180 g)
- Pöttyös curd bars are 50% more expensive than Coop dessert bars (30 g)

I used brand/product tests to investigate consumer attitudes toward brands. Testing can provide answers to how a brand influences consumers' perceptions of product attributes (Rekettye-Hetesi, 2017).

Blind testing is the research framework where all brand identifiers are removed from the product during the product test and offered to the target group. (Veres et. al., 2017) I identified each brand by coding. Consistently, the manufacturer brand was coded as 1 and the commercial brand as 2. During the blind test, the liquids were served in coded white plastic cups. Solid items were also placed on numbered white plastic plates. In the first step, I made a note of who assumes which brand is more delicious and whether they were consumers of that particular brand. I considered a consumer to be someone who buys the product at least once quarterly. During the tasting, the students only evaluated the product overall, without focusing on individual product characteristics.

During the open brand test, the brand of the food consumed was clearly identified by the students. During the open tasting, they were also asked to decide which brand tasted better to them.

The two tests were carried out separately, on two different days agreed in advance, in the month of May 2022, in the trainisite-building.

The test results were recorded and the analysis was done in Excel.

In addition to the number and distribution of votes for each brand, I used cross-tabulation analysis to examine the relationship between consumption and brand choice. The cross-tabulation analysis is suitable to examine the association between two nominal variables, the association relationship. The two indicators I chose were the Yule coefficient and the khi-square indicator. For alternative criteria, the Yule indicator can be used. In the present case: does he or she consume the brand of the manufacturer under study or not, and does he or she judge the brand of the manufacturer to be more refined or not in the blind test? In the case of more than two criteria, I used the khi-square indicator. The basic idea behind the calculation is that if we find differences between the expected (assuming an independent relationship) frequencies and the actual frequencies, we can assume the existence of a stochastic relationship (Ács, 2014). In the present study: consumes the brand of the manufacturer being tested, consumes another brand, does not consume this product category.

In presenting the results I also use the concept of my own brand, a private label instead of a commercial brand.

Results

Without exception, participants assumed that NaturAqua tasted better and would buy it, based on the appearance of the mineral water. They justified their decision on the basis of packaging, brand name and previous experience. The vast majority of respondents (80%, 12 people) drink mineral water, but only a third (4 people) are familiar with NaturAqua (Figure 2).

	Drink mineral water	Drink Natur Aqua mineral water	Which one would you choose?	Why?	Blind test
1	yes	no	NaturAqua	shape of glass	2
2	yes	yes	NaturAqua	experience	1
3	yes	no	NaturAqua	brand name	2
4	yes	no	NaturAqua	brand name	2
5	yes	yes	NaturAqua	experience	1
6	yes	yes	NaturAqua	experience	1
7	no	no	NaturAqua	packing	2
8	yes	no	NaturAqua	brand name	2
9	yes	no	NaturAqua	packing	2
10	yes	yes	NaturAqua	packing	1
11	yes	no	NaturAqua	packing	1
12	yes	yes	NaturAqua	experience	2
13	no	no	NaturAqua	brand name	2
14	no	no	NaturAqua	packing	1
15	yes	no	NaturAqua	packing	1

Figure 2. Mineral water blind test original data table

Source: own editing, 2022

Results of a blind test of mineral water: 53% (8 people) of the testers found Coop's own-brand product tastier. Five of them regularly drink mineral water, but not NaturAqua water, and two of them do not drink bottled water at all. One person, despite drinking NaturAqua mineral water, found the rival brand tastier in the test (Figure 3).

			NaturAqua	Coop	All
Khi squared test:	0,19	Drink NaturAqua	4	1	5
Experience khi-squared value	3,37	Drink mineral water	2	5	7
Critical value (95%)	5,99	Don't drink mineral water	1	2	3
		All	7	8	15

Figure 3. Mineral water blind test results - 1

Source: own editing, 2022

Seven people preferred the manufacturer brand, of which more than half (4 people) are NaturAqua consumers, two people drink mineral water but not the NaturAqua brand and one person does not drink mineral water at all. The khi-squared test shows (0,19>0,05) that there is no stochastic relationship between brand choice and whether someone drinks NaturAqua or drinks another brand or doesn't drink mineral water. The experience khi-squared value is less than the critical value at a 95% confidence level (Figure 3).

	Blind test		
	NaturAqua	Coop	All
Drink NaturAqua	4	1	5
Don't drink NaturAqua	3	7	10
All	7	8	15
Y =	0,8065		

Figure 4. Mineral water blind test results - 2

Source: own editing, 2022

70% of people who do not drink bottled water at all or do not drink NaturAquat found the commercial brand more pleasant. Regular NaturAqua consumers, with one exception, preferred the manufacturer brand in the blind test. Hence, a strong correlation between the consumption of the NaturAqua brand and the choice made in the blind test can be established. This is confirmed by the value of the Yule indicator (0.8) (Figure 4).

40% of the respondents do not consume cola. Everyone would choose Coca Cola if offered it, they also consider it to taste better, basically because of the well-known brand name and the more appealing packaging. In the blind test, everyone thought Coca Cola tasted better. (The table is not shown because of the unanimous choice.)

In the biscuit test, participants assumed that the Győr Édes biscuit tasted better at first glance. Their decision was mainly based on the brand name and previous experience. The majority of the respondents (60%, 9 people) consume biscuit products, almost all of them (7 people) eat Győri Édes (Figure 5).

	Eat biscuit	Eat Győri biscuit	Which one would you choose?	Why?		Blind test
1	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
2	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
3	yes	no	Győri Édes	brand name		2
4	yes	no	Győri Édes	publicity		2
5	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
6	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		2
7	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		1
8	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
9	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
10	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		1
11	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		2
12	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		2
13	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		1
14	no	no	Győri Édes	brand name		1
15	yes	yes	Győri Édes	experience		2

Figure 5. Biscuit blind test original data table

Source: own editing, 2022

The results of the biscuit blind test: 40% of the testers (6 people) found the Coop's private brand product tastier. Half of the respondents who chose private brand do not consume biscuit products, two of them do consume such products, but not Győri. And one person has tasted Győri biscuit (Figure 6).

				Győri Édes	Coop	All
Khi squared test:	0,07		Eat Győri biscuit	6	1	7
Experience khi-squared value	5,18		Eat biscuit	0	2	2
Critical value (95%)	5,99		Dont eat biscuit	3	3	6
			All	9	6	15

Figure 6. Biscuit blind test results - 1

Source: own editing, 2022

Nine respondents preferred the manufacturer's brand, two-thirds of whom are Győri biscuit consumers and one-third of whom do not eat biscuits at all. The khi-squared test shows that there is no stochastic relationship between brand choice and whether someone eat Győri Édes biscuit or eat another biscuits brand or doesn't eat biscuit. The critical value is more than experience khi-squared value at 95% confidence level (Figure 6).

	Blind test		
	Győri Édes	Coop	All
Eat Győri biscuit	6	1	7
Dont eat Győri biscuit	3	5	8
All	9	6	15
Y=	0,8182		

Figure 7. Biscuit blind test results - 2

Source: own editing, 2022

The majority of those who have not eaten biscuits at all or have not chosen the Győri Édes brand (five out of eight people) preferred the commercial brand. All but one of the Győri biscuit consumers chose the brand they had consumed (Figure 7). There is a strong relationship (Y=0.8) between brand experience and the results of the blind test.

Also in the case of the curd stick, everyone assumed beforehand that the brand Pöttyös would be tastier than the Coop product. Some would choose the Pöttyös product because they often encounter its advertising and the brand name itself, and some because they have experience with it. 40% of the respondents consume curd sticks, the majority of them the Pöttyös brand (Figure 8).

	Eat curd stick	Eat Pöttyös curd stick	Which one would you choose?	Why?		Blind test
1	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		2
2	yes	yes	Pöttyös	experience		1
3	yes	no	Pöttyös	publicity		1
4	no	no	Pöttyös	publicity		1
5	yes	yes	Pöttyös	experience		1
6	yes	yes	Pöttyös	experience		1
7	yes	yes	Pöttyös	experience		1
8	yes	yes	Pöttyös	experience		2
9	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		1
10	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		2
11	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		1
12	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		1
13	no	no	Pöttyös	publicity		1
14	no	no	Pöttyös	publicity		2
15	no	no	Pöttyös	brand name		1

Figure 8. Curd stick blind test original data table

Source: own editing, 2022

Stick blind test results: a quarter of the testers (4 people) opted for Coop, they were mainly (3 people) "non-consumers". Interestingly, one consumer with Pöttyös currently preferred the Coop brand. Of the 11 people who preferred the manufacturer brand, five were considered to be curd stick consumers, almost all of them consuming Pöttyös. And six do not consume this treat. The khi-squared test shows (0,71>0,05) that there is no stochastic relationship between brand choice and whether someone eat Pöttyös brand or eat another brand or doesn't eat curd stick (Figure 9).

				Pöttyös	Coop	All
Khi squared test:	0,71		Eat Pöttyös	4	1	5
Experience khi-squared value	0,68		Eat curd stick	1	0	1
Critical value (95%)	5,99		Dont eat curd stick	6	3	9
			All	11	4	15

Figure 9. Curd stick blind test results - 1

Source: own editing, 2022

There is no difference in choice between eating Pöttyös and not eating the brand. The majority of both groups (80% of Pöttyös consumers, 70% of non-consumers) preferred the manufacturer's brand also on the basis of taste (Figure 10).

	Blind test		
	Pöttyös	Coop	All
Eat Pöttyös	4	1	5
Dont eat Pöttyös	7	3	10
All	11	4	15
Y=	0,2632		

Figure 10. Curd stick blind test results - 2

Source: own editing, 2022

Among the participants of the open brand test, 13 people drink mineral water, four of them have experience with NaturAqua (Figure 11 - left). The latter rated this brand as the better brand in the test. A total of six of the open testers preferred Coop's own brand product. These are people who do not drink mineral water (2 persons) or drink but not Natur Aqua (4 persons). The manufacturer brand was chosen by only mineral water consumers.

	NaturAqua	Coop	All
Drink NaturAqua water	4	0	4
Drink mineral water	5	4	9
Dont drink mineral water	0	2	2
All	9	6	15

	NaturAqua	Coop	All
Drink NaturAqua water	4	0	4
Dont drink NaturAqua water	5	6	11
All	9	6	15

Figure 11. Open test results for mineral water

Source: own editing, 2022

The results of the open test of cola products were the same as the blind test. Everyone rated the own-brand product as worse.

Half of the testers snacked on some kind of biscuit, six of them consumed Győri. They all felt that this brand was tastier (Figure 12 - left). Győri Édes Biscuits won the tastier title over Coop's product by a ratio of 10:5. The majority of the 5 people who chose their commercial brand were "non-consumers" (4 people) and one person consumes biscuits but not Győri Édes. Of those who prefer the Győri product, three do not consume biscuits, six consume Győri Édes and one consumes another brand. Those who have no experience with Győri biscuit (9 people) chose between the two brands in approximately half and half proportions (Figure 12 - right).

	Győri Édes	Coop	All
Eat Győri Édes biscuit	6	0	6
Eat biscuit	1	1	2
Dont eat biscuit	3	4	7
All	10	5	15

	Győri Édes	Coop	All
Eat Győri Édes biscuit	6	0	6
Dont eat Győri Édes biscuit	4	5	9
All	10	5	15

Figure 12. Open test results for biscuits

Source: own editing, 2022

In the curd stick category, the majority (80%) preferred the product with Pöttyös (Figure 13). Of those who choose Coop (3 people), two do not consume and one eats Pöttyös. People who eat curd bars (6 people), with one exception, found the manufacturer's brand tastier (Figure 13 - left). 80% of both Pöttyös consumers and non-consumers preferred the manufacturer's brand. (Figure 13 - right).

	Pöttyös	Coop	All
Eat Pöttyös curd stick	4	1	5
Eat curd stick	1	0	1
Dont eat curd stick	7	2	9
All	12	3	15

	Pöttyös	Coop	All
Eat Pöttyös curd stick	4	1	5
Dont eat Pöttyös curd stick	8	2	10
All	12	3	15

Figure 13. Results of the curd stick open test

Source: own editing, 2022

Comparing the results of the blind test and the open test, there were no major differences in the number of brand choices. Knowing the brand, two more people felt the manufacturer's brand was tastier at mineral water, and one more person each at biscuits and curd stick. For cola, in both cases, only the manufacturer's brand was preferred by the testers.

Manufacturer brand consumers:

In the mineral water tests, Natur Aqua-consumers preferred the manufacturer brand in the blind test with one exception and in the open test without exception.

For biscuits, there was only one Győri Édes consumer who preferred the commercial brand in the blind test and all consumers preferred the manufacturer's brand in the open test. In the tests for the curd stick, all but one of the Pöttyös consumers preferred the manufacturer's brand.

Implications

I do not wish to draw generalisations from the results of the study, but will only formulate them in relation to the target population

Prior to the blind test, all participants gave their vote of confidence to the brands of the manufacturers in terms of taste. They made their assumptions based on the brand name, advertising and their previous experience of the brand. Participants in the taste test rated the commercial brand as tastier on average 30% of the time for the four products. Based on this, I accept hypothesis H1.

The commercial brand scored the best for mineral water and biscuits, with on average almost half (47%) of the tasters describing the private brand as more palatable. These are the two product groups where the price difference between the private label and the manufacturer's brand is smaller (23% on average), so we can assume that they are now considered third generation commercial brands that the focus is on value for money. For only these two product categories, a relationship between brand consumption and taste test results can be demonstrated. Consumers of the manufacturer's brand found the manufacturer's brand more palatable, and people who did not consume the manufacturer's brand preferred the commercial brand. For cola and curd stick, there is a higher price difference between the two types of brand (55% on average), with an average preference for own brand of only 13%. These are probably previous commercial brand generations.

If we separately examine consumers of the manufacturer's brand, consumers of other brands, and non-consumers, we find no connection with the results of the taste test for any of the products.

When comparing the results of the blind and open brand tasting, we see that - minimally - more people rated the manufacturer brand as more palatable than the commercial brand in the open tasting. Hence, I accept hypothesis H2, with brand knowledge, more people perceive the manufacturer brand as more palatable than without brand knowledge.

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