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COFFEE CONCEPTS: AN APPROACH FROM FREE WORD ASSOCIATION METHOD TO VIETNAMESE CONSUMERS

● NGUYEN BA THANH - HO THUY DUNG - DUONG THI THUY DUONG

ABSTRACT:

This paper aimed to understand clearly about some kinds of coffee concepts to Vietnamese consumers. Two hundreds of consumers were recruited from around coffee pubs and shop in Ho Chi Minh city from 18 to 65 years old with their different coffee drinkings years. Participants participated in this study were asked about three concepts of coffee: coffee, original coffee and fake coffee. Free word association method was used to collect consumers concepts. Each participant was guided to be familiar with this methods by other concepts before conducting to ask about three coffee concepts.

The results showed that most Vietnamese consumers liked to used filtered coffee (66.5%). Most of them didnt know about coffee they drank (74%). The quality and flavor of coffee were focused on by consumers. While, sensory properties were a key factor. Correspondence Analysis (CA) was used to classify consumers according to 3 kinds of coffee concepts. Black color, aroma, and bitterness are terms related to coffee and original coffee, while "additive, unknown" coffee related to fake coffee.

This study is significant to have a better understanding of Vietnamese coffee consumers and may be suggested a way to improve Vietnamese coffee drinkers' to have a right ways to choose coffee products safety.

Keywords: Vietnam, coffee, consumer, word association, food choice.

1. Introduction

Vietnam is the second largest producer in the world after Brazil. The quality of the beans, however, has typically limited their marketability. Robusta coffee accounts for 97 per cent of Vietnam's total output, with 1.29 million tonnes exported in 2012, a value of USD 1.4 billion. However, the ground coffee and roasted coffee bean only occupied 5% of the total volume. For Vietnamese consumers, ice coffee (ca phe da) and condensed milk coffee (ca phe sua da) are the two ways to drink.

The coffea plant is a genius of the Rubiaceae family. Classification of coffee plants is

complicated, as there are many species, varieties and strains. The two species from which most commercial coffee comes are the coffea arabica and the coffea canephora species, usually called robusta [1]. Vietnam coffee production is about 93% robusta and 7% arabica. One of the rare coffee research in Vietnam conducted in 2003 by Nguyen Hoang Dung [2] to determine the coffee profile and customer preference of the Vietnamese and European coffees. In this study, Vietnamese consumers prefer Vietnam coffees than European ones. According to Nguyen Hoang Dzung et al., Vietnamese consumers prefer smoky, butter flavor to others and drink robusta coffee. Another

research of sensory properties of Buon Ma Thuot coffee was conducted to show the typical sensory properties of those regions [3]. In Vietnam, coffee is grown in three main regions: Central Highlands (DakLak, Lam Dong, Gia Lai and Kom Tum), South Vietnam (Dong Nai) and the North Vietnam (Son La, Quang Tri).

From 2013, Vietnamese consumers began toward original coffee, at least in Ho Chi Minh City regions. A hundreds of coffee shops and pubs as well as the coffee chain system were grown rapidly. The concept “fake/chemical coffee” was mentioned more on social media, televisions, newspapers and the messaged called people reject those kinds of coffee and the concept “pure/original coffee” was the most popular for coffee consumers. Fake/chemical coffees are the products that 'coffee' makers use chemicals, soy beans, corn..., no real coffee, while real coffees are ground coffee from only roasted coffees [4]. At that time, healthy foods or food safety was paid attention to by consumers. In this case, original coffees could be better than fake coffee.. that the reasons whyconsumers also use fake coffees in vendor pubs. Beyond the price of coffee cup, from the view of consumers perception and preference explained that consumers liked the appetite perception of the foods they used. Therefore, we conducted a research to understanding consumers concepts about those kinds of coffee as well as the factors affected to consumers coffee choices to answer the questions that Why consumers do use fake coffee?

In this study, free word association was used to reveal consumers concepts related to consumers thinking. Free Word Association is convenient and useful method, that used in psychology and sociology. The fundamental of method bases on the assumption to supply a stimuli to reply and request consumers talk their thoughts and those connections between their first thought.

The idea of method is to record useful information to find out products images or attributes linked to the products. [5]. Traditionally, the first linkages or believes to a certain products of consumers is considered to tie products and consumers. For food products, the linkages of consumers to foods are such as attributes, benefits

and values. This method was used to understand consumers concepts to functional foods [6] and rice [7], food concept [8]... Therefore, this method is useful in food product development to explore consumers perception and define the consumers images, symbols... of products before launching products to new markets.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

In this study, two hundreds of coffee consumers were recruited from coffee shops and pubs in Ho Chi Minh City in 2015. Participants were between 18 to 65 years old and coffee consumption at least one time/week. They are come from many careers and ready to attend this study. Convenience sampling is often used in exploratory research where the researcher is interested in getting an inexpensive approximation to a specific topic through involving participants who meet specific recruitment criteria with relevance for the subject under investigation.

2.2. Experiment designs and interview procedure

Consumers were interviewed individually. Interviewers (one or two in each region) explained the procedure for carrying out the test to the participant and provided him/her with some examples (green, family...) in order to relax the individual and to train him/her. Once the interviewer assumed that the participant had properly understood the dynamics of the experiment the word association test started. To focus on coffee context, participants were first asked to concentrate on food-related issues and matters when providing their answer. The word association test consisted of verbally presenting the word coffee/original coffee/fake coffee” (the stimulus) to the participants and wait for the first verbal response that came to his/her mind.

Consumers were asked to elicit up to three different words and a maximum of 30 seconds were allowed for giving each valid association. Finally, participants were asked some information about their demographics (gender, age) and habits (frequency, longtime to drink...) about coffee consumption The total duration of the test including the introductory and training phase ranged between 10 and 15 min.

2.3. Data analysis

Data collected are coded categorized by the meaning of words that arranged into sub-groups. Correspondence Analysis (CA) was used to analyze the relation between those concepts according to time to use and consumers experience [9].

3. Results

3.1. Consumer demographics

In this study, two hundreds of coffee consumers were asked to collect data. They came from coffee shops and pubs in Ho Chi Minh City. Among consumers, 28.5% consumers have four-to-six-year experience drink coffee; 21.5% consumers drink coffee from 1 to 3 years and 7-15 years; 19% of them used coffee over 15 years and the rest (9.5%) using coffee under one years.

3.1.1 Place, frequency and time to drink coffee

People are often go to the garden cafe to enjoy coffee (28%). Meanwhile, the percentage of consumers drinking coffee at a vender coffee shop is 17%, at home with 21% and 24% drink everywhere. In addition, this study also showed that Vietnamese consumers Vietnam often use ground coffee for filter-coffee (66.5%) and drink instant coffee (19.5%) and only 5% of consumers use coffee machine such as espresso, capuccino...

Coffee frequencies of consumers is one time per day (39.5%), 20% consumers drink coffee 2-3 times per day and 3.5% of them do more than 4 times per day. According to this study, Vietnam consumers have the habit of using coffee in the morning (56%), while 23% of them have used coffee in the evening; the percentage of consumers using at noon is 7%, 5% in the afternoon and others is 4%.

3.1.2. Reasons to drink coffee and influenced factors

When asked about why drinking coffee 23% of consumers stated for relaxation. There are, in part explained by the winter garden restaurant consumer choices. The reason seeing friends accounted for 16%, 22% for all the reasons above. There are many reasons for consumers to choose a cup of coffee. The majority of consumers are more interested in the quality and taste of coffee product than other factors,

quality and taste, respectively 46% and 39%. People are seem less interested in packaging.

This can be explained because the interview took place in cafes or other direct conversation, the majority of consumers to shop only with the coffee drink was concocted available. Therefore, quality ingredients and flavors are focused, in particular sensory properties affecting consumer tastes feel products. "Delicious" is the most interested term when consumers use the coffee. Besides, branding is also a factor affecting the consumer through product packaging.

3.1.3. Experienced consumers and coffee ways of drink

The result showed that 74% of consumers did not know about the coffee they drink and 26% of them do not care about real coffee or fake coffee. There are 39% of consumers in this study said that they drank real coffee and 35% of them did fake coffee. Ready-to-drink coffee and ground coffee are acquainted with consumers. Most of consumers drink filter coffee (66.5%), next to instant coffee (19.50%), coffee machine maker (5.5%), filter and instant coffee (3.5%) and many ways to drink coffee, others (5%). According to fig 2., people using coffee less one year tend to ready-to-drink coffee (58%), while others are less 50%. Consumers drinking coffee around 3 years toward roasted coffee beans (42%); for 4-6year consumer group drinks more ground coffee than others (60%), and consumers drinking coffee more than 7 years refer to ground coffee. Chisquare test showed significant difference between time of using and coffee ways to drink (χ^2 squared = 39.1881, $df = 12$, $p < 0.001$), (Fig 2).

In addition to, this study result showed that most of consumers dont know the coffee varieties they drink (74%). Only 15% of consumers know robusta coffee, 9% of them knowing arabica and 2% of them are clear about robusta and arabica coffee they drink. Consumers often drink coffee in the morning than the others.

3.1.4. Difference of concepts

The most frequent words ($n \geq 10$ for all the participants) elicited using three words coffee, original coffee and fake coffee stimuli were 173.

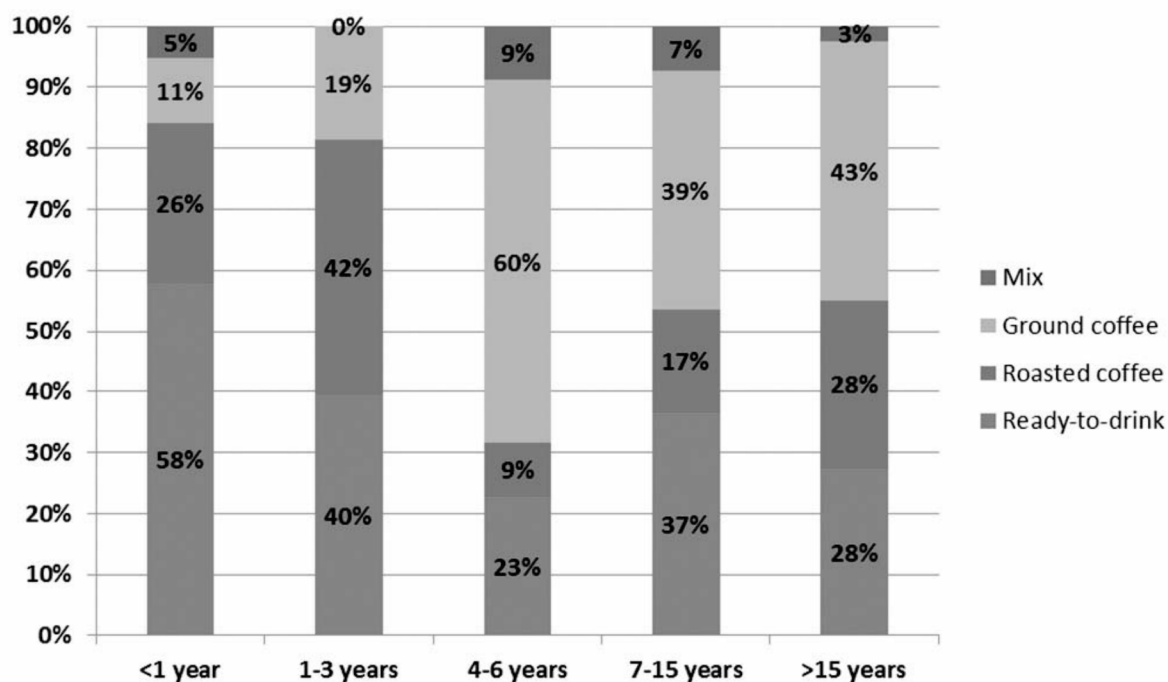


Fig 2. Experience using coffee and coffee varieties

For the coffee concepts, bitterness (132), aroma (105) and black(77) are the most frequent words. Next to delicious (29), awake (26), brandname (26), sweetness (18); and brown color is appear 13 times of total elicited words; For the original coffee concepts, aroma (96), bitterness (76), and delicious (58) are the most frequent words. Next to strongness (40), oral viscosity (27), black (26), brown (25), awake (26), brandname (26), sweetness (18). Besides, purity (21), clean (17), nature (17) are the stronger terms than coffee concepts. The price (10) also is mentioned in this stimuli. Finally, fake coffee concepts, dont know item is the highest frequent concept (190); aroma (18), and delicious (10) are mentioned. Other terms related to chemical (10), butter (10), additive (11), corn (18)... tie to fake coffee concepts.

From the results of this study, fake coffee is no relation to consumers using coffee more than 7 years. For consumers using coffee less one year, there are a difference concepts with the others. In fact, most of consumers do not know very much about the coffee they drink. They enjoy coffee by

aroma they smell (aroma) and taste (bitterness). In practice, coffee has many flavor and sensory properties are complex. Vietnam consumers often drink Robusta coffee with medium-to-dark roasting make coffee cups more stronger. This result also adapted to previous research [2,3].

The term relating to coffee in recent years are paid attention to both consumers and state governor. The results in this study help manufacturers understand consumersneeds clearly and explorethe images, attributes of consumers to “original coffee”, “coffee” and “fake coffee” as well as the main factors affected to consumers understanding about coffee.

4. Conclusions

Sensory properties of coffee (aroma, bitterness) play a significant role in the choice of coffee. The similarity in three concept are: sensory properties (bitterness, black color, aroma, strongness) and hedonic (delicious). Coffee concepts refer to the psychological benefits and the brand, quality and cleanness are related to original and fake coffee concepts are concerned to food additives, additive,

poor quality. Experience factors (time of use) is not the key factors that make differences in consumers' concepts... Most of consumers take care about the quality and taste than other factors.

The study results showed that misunderstanding information about coffee led to differences in the perception of consumers, reflecting consumers' concepts. This is the fundamental for state policy makers to set up the right information channel for

consumers to understand exactly what about coffee. In this study, the experiment was conducted on consumers in the cafe. However, context and emotional factors also play an important role when using food. This suggestion will extend in future research.

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