Beyond Liking: A Structured Approach to Quantifying Product Potential

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BACKGROUND

Liking and purchase intent metrics dominate product testing. While these measures summarize performance, they provide limited understanding of why a product succeeds or fails. Increasingly, researchers are asked to provide reliable metrics that can go beyond Overall Liking to predict product performance.

WHY NOT VALIDATE AGAINST SALES?

No single objective measure against which a product experience metric can be reliably validated - sales are influenced by pricing, distribution and marketing, i.e. more than just the product experience and this can't be isolated in sales data.

Ultimately, a product may be considered successful for a manufacturer despite relatively low sales if, for example, it is in the early launch phase, serves a niche audience, or achieves a specific competitive objective. Equally, the highest-selling product does not necessarily deliver the strongest product experience.

Therefore, the objective is to quantify the **product's potential** to fulfil its intended role for the brand, and to deliver a rewarding consumer experience.

OBJECTIVES

Understand product experience

Identify unique dimensions

Reduce redundant measures

Develop a single metric

METHOD

Questionnaire generation: An extensive product testing questionnaire was compiled via review of historic projects, expert workshops, and consumer input.

Product testing: Product evaluations conducted under blind test conditions, to minimize the influence of brand and other external factors.

7 categories: Mainstream food & drink categories.

86 products: Selected by sensory experts to ensure a spread of experiences.

1,245 consumers: Category users recruited in the UK and China to attend 2 x 60-minute central location sessions. All products from within a category assessed in a single visit as part of a complete and fully rotated design.

Matched online brand evaluation: A matched consumer sample evaluated the corresponding pack images. This enabled product and brand performance to be explored independently.

- Consumers assessed 3 brands from a single category in a 15-minute interview. (n=circa 150 assessments per brand)

ANALYSIS

To understand the structure of product experience and identify the most informative measures.

- Variance explained by individual measures
- Relationships and redundancy between measures
- Impact of different scoring approaches (Mean, Top 2 Box, Top Box)

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Many product testing questions tell us the same thing

Attribute appeal questions are redundant, particularly ones asked after a product has been consumed – correlating highly with each other and overall liking

Figure 1: Correlations for attribute appeal questions are high across the board, especially post tasting

		Pre-tasting		Post tasting			
		Appearance	Aroma	Overall Liking	Flavor	Texture/ mouthfeel	Aftertaste
Pre-tasting	Appearance	●		●	●	●	●
	Aroma		●	●	●	●	●
Post tasting	Overall Liking	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Flavor	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Texture/mouthfeel	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Aftertaste	●	●	●	●	●	●

● r>0.8 ● r>0.7 ● r>0.6

Finding 2: 3 questions were identified as measuring a different aspect of product experience to Overall Liking

The analysis identified 3 measures that were more weakly correlated with each other and overall liking:

Different or better than others | Conceptual associations | Functional associations

Finding 3: Questions can provide diagnostic insight even if they don't add to understanding of overall performance

Exactly Right questions are defined by the product experience - they do not improve understanding of overall performance BUT they do help diagnose and identify optimization opportunities.

Figure 2: Exactly Right analysis, counted within product, correlated across products

Exactly Right metric	Correlation to Liking
Mid point below threshold	r = -0.92
Mid point below threshold and clear skew	r = -0.86
Weighted penalty>1	r = -0.80

CONCLUSION

Although intentionally exploratory, the emergence of 4 complimentary metrics aligns with MMR's Dual Drivers of Reward Theory[1] – that behavior is influenced by two complementary reward systems:

- Ability to **delight** the senses - Overall Liking and Better/Different versus others
- Ability to **deliver** against Emotional and Functional motivations

To encapsulate this into a single summary measure - **Product Potential Rating™**:

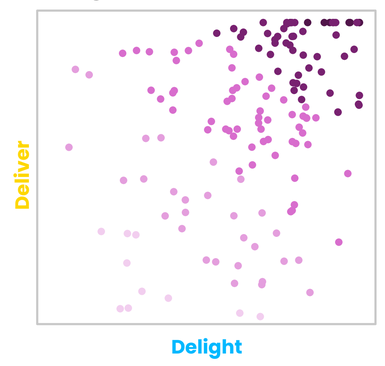
- Scores standardized and combined into 2 dimensions
- Dimensions benchmarked using norms
- Dimensions combined into a composite index and stress-tested across categories, markets and product types - multiple weighting approaches evaluated to optimize discrimination, stability and interpretability.

>150 Product Potential Ratings™ successfully generated since launch, across 6 categories and 9 markets.

The dimensions remain uncorrelated (r≈0.3), supporting the conclusion that each captures a distinct aspect of the product experience.

The most interesting learnings come not from the highest scoring products but from those that fall short, adding real diagnostic and optimization power to even simple product tests.

Figure 3: Product Potential Ratings™ based on real tests



IN ACTION: WELL LIKED ≠ RIGHT EXPERIENCE

A recent launch that was struggling to drive repeat purchase achieved strong blind liking scores.

While the product was easy to consume and broadly enjoyable, conceptual profiling identified it failed to deliver the more extravagant and differentiated experience implied by its proposition.

The brand team now know they need to make the sensory experience work harder, even if that means making something a little more polarizing on appeal.

Figure 4: Product Potential Ratings™ and KPI performance

	PRODUCT POTENTIAL RATING™	2 Test product	4 Benchmark
DELIGHT	Immediate Pleasure	●	●
	Impact	●	●
DELIVER	Emotional Alignment	●	●
	Functional Delivery	●	●
	Performance versus norms:	● Excellent	● Average - Good

Figure 5: Emotional Alignment

	Test Product
	Key concept associations
! Associated with concept but not product	Quirky
	Extravagant
✓ Concept and Product aligned on key associations	Adventurous
	Playful
! Associated with product but not concept	Easy-going
	Relaxed
	Key product associations

Product experience is multi-dimensional. Products should not only provide initial delight, they must deliver against the role they are expected to play - this should be designed from the outset, not just measured at the end.

1- Thomson, D.M.H. & Coates, T. (2021). Are unconscious emotions important in product assessment? How can we access them? Food Quality & Preference, 92, Article 104123