

Consumers' Reaction to Taste-based Product Modification

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Abstract

We examine how consumers react to products that undergo taste-based modifications. Product modification has been studied largely with respect to objective improvements, but scant attention has been devoted to examining how more subjective taste-based changes affect consumers. In a series of studies, we provide evidence that consumers are pre-disposed to regard taste-based changes negatively, especially when applied to products for which the creative process is more relevant. We find the tendency toward a negative response is due to consumers perceiving the taste-based modification as an alteration of the essence of the product itself. The results extend previous work on product modifications, while also informing the literature on essentialism, illuminating when and how consumers may perceive changes to a product's essence. From a managerial point of view, this project provides useful insights for managers on whether or not to publicize product modifications.

Keywords: *modifications; attitude; essentialism*

Track: Consumer Behaviour