

Transparent n° 1

- Communication based on work in progress :

- . the fieldwork : the creation of a new range of fruit juices ;
- . the research problem : identification and characterization of the different ways those new products and the consumers come to be attached to each others.

- Communication focused on taste as a constitutive element of the relationship between food products and the consumers :

- . social constructionist model versus mediation model ;
- . supplementary question : how does taste come to set a specific relation between the product and the consumer ?

- The point we would like to develop :

- . taste is performed through a series of trials ;
- . those trials put the product and the consumer in co-presence according to well-defined scripts ;
- . example : a tasting whose objective is to generate descriptors for pure orange juices.

Commentaires du transparent n° 1

Our communication draws upon work in progress. We are currently studying the creation of a new range of fruit juices, and we are especially interested in identifying and characterizing the different ways those new beverages and the consumers come to be attached to each others.

This communication is focused on the question of taste. Indeed, taste comes naturally to mind as one constitutive element of the relationship between food products and the consumers. There are actually two ways to approach this question of taste :

- 1°) the first way is social constructionist in style. In this model, taste is conceptualized as a double reality : as part of the intrinsic characteristics of the product on one hand ; as embedded in the consumer's preferences on the other hand. The relationship between the object and the subject of taste is then depicted as socially constructed through a series of representations of the product and the consumer ;

- 2°) the second way is grounded in a mediation model. It supposes that the object and the subject of taste are not given as autonomous entities, but are co-defined by various mediators that relate them.

As far as our research is concerned, the social constructionist model is not appropriate, for we are precisely looking for the constitution of taste in the relationship between the product and the consumer. We therefore lie upon the mediation model, to which we would like to add a question : how does taste come to set a specific relation between the product and the consumer ?

The point that we would like to develop here is that taste is performed through a series of trials. Those trials put the product and the consumer in co-presence according to well-defined scripts. Tasting is one of those trials. We will describe one tasting whose objective is to generate descriptors for pure orange juices. But first, we would like to say a few words on fruit juices in order to show how sensitive the question of taste is for those products.

Transparent n° 2

- Fruit juices are paradoxical products :

. they are highly determined products ;

price	packing material	origin of fruit	...
location on the shelves	packaging techniques	pressing techniques	...
advertising campaign	marketing targets	% of fruits	...
...

. they are loosely differentiated products : a difficult equation between mixing and specifying ;

- The taste : a sensitive problem

. taste is strongly constructed but not completely determined ;

. taste must be identifiable whereas products are radically changing.

- The proliferation of tastings

Commentaires du transparent n° 2

Fruit juice is somehow a paradoxical product, for it is highly determined by a large range of criteria on one hand, and loosely differentiated on the other hand.

Both professionals and consumers describe and judge fruit juices with a mix of criteria related to each others and to particular profiles of consumers :

price	packing material	origin of fruit	...
location on the shelves	packaging techniques	pressing techniques	...
advertising campaign	marketing targets	% of fruits	...
...

Let's just take one example here : the packing material. It partly determines the marketing targets : glass for instance is regarded as a sign of luxury goods. It also has effects on the quality of the juice, for it allows certain packaging techniques to be applied.

So on one hand, fruits juices are highly determined products. But on the other hand, they are loosely differentiated. This is mostly due to the economics of fruit transformation industry itself. We would not go into too much details here, but in the case of pure orange juice for instance, the quantity and the quality of the product witness great fluctuations. The firm that we are studying is thus forced to order mixtures that cannot be fixed once and for all. Therefore, the specificity of the juice is not easy to appreciate, as the consumers themselves come to say.

Given those two characteristics of fruit juices, the question of taste is very sensitive. On one hand, taste is strongly constructed, and still, it is not completely determined through the conception and the selling process. On the other hand, the firm is caught into fierce competition and is forced to innovate, and still, it must ensure the continuity of its product, through its colour, its perfume, its nature, in one word, its taste.

In order to maintain the taste of its product, the firm multiplies tastings, at the factory, at its headquarters, at the research center of its holding, with the

members of the firm, with newcomers, with clients and various visiting professionals, with consumers, etc. Tastings are set up so as to make the product and the consumer meet under specific conditions. To illustrate this point, we will now describe one tasting, whose objective is to generate descriptors for pure orange juices.

Transparent n° 3

- The script of the tasting :

- . tasters deliberately choose to participate in the panel ;
- . tasters are equipped in a specific way : they learn to appreciate their own sensitivity to different flavors, but they are deprived from ordinary resources for judgement (no price, no packaging, no element of advertisement...);
- . liquids are anonymously displayed in identical glasses ;
- . liquids must be qualified one after the other, first according to mouth feelings, then nose feelings, and finally eye sensations.

- Taste results in a trace of the co-presence of the product and the consumer according to a specific script :

- . tasting is organized as a meeting between a product endowed with an independant space and a taster motivated to define taste through flavor-driven vocabulary.

Commentaires du transparent n° 3

The tasting is set up according to a well-defined script. The main elements of this script are the followings :

- tasters, all members of the firm, deliberately choose to participate ;
- they are equipped in a specific way : (i) they regularly attend tasting courses in order to be able to recognize the four basic flavors (sweet, salty, sour, bitter) and the specific flavors of fruit juices. What is actually at stake in those courses is for the tasters to learn about their own sensitivity to those flavors. Through those courses, tasters are equipped to appreciate and to speak about their sensory feelings ; (ii) but they are not equipped with ordinary resources, since they have to taste anonymous liquids, deprived from their packaging, price, advertisement, etc., and displayed in identical glasses. We thus can say that the setting organizes a specific meeting between products, each of them being endowed with an independant space, and consumers, each of them being equipped so as to be motivated to define taste through flavor-driven vocabulary ;
- the tasting protocole is designed to avoid technical descriptions and personal opinions. The organizer reminds participants to describe the liquids with their own words, but to refrain from expressing hedonistic judgements. The tasting is scheduled very precisely : the products must be tasted one after the other, first according to mouth feelings, then to nose feelings, and finally to eye sensations. This protocole prevents product to product global comparison, and helps to be analytical. The setting makes the product and the consumer meet under specific conditions.

We do not have time here to develop other examples, but all of them will show that the tasting is done in such a way that taste results in a trace of a situated meeting between the product and the consumer, escaping both from the object and from the subject.

Transparent n° 4

- **Taste : a local and transitory attachment between the product and the consumer.**

- **The proliferation of tastings :**

. for making taste exist ;

. for sustaining taste.

Commentaires du transparent n° 4

We just would like to make two remarks to open the discussion. First, we would like to stress the fact that taste is performed as a local and transitory attachment between the product and the consumer. That might explain the proliferation of tastings : taste is but enacted through those situated trials. But here is more. We have been quite surprised by the fact different tastes performed through various tastings are never summed up. Sometimes, they are talked about together, but a total judgement is nowhere to be seen. Here is a tentative and provisional explanation to that. It appears to us that the proliferation of tastings is deliberately searched for by the firm we are studying, for it helps actors to embody sensory and language competencies so as to be able to perform taste whenever and wherever it is necessary. In other words, proliferation is a procedure for sustaining taste, both as a characteristic of the product and as a competence embodied by the subject (l'exemple du formulateur qui goûte les appros est un bon exemple, au cas où).