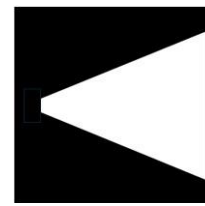


Blind Tests are Silly



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Research Papers

Ong, J. J.-X., & Delarue, J. (2025). Milking the label: The impact of category labels on consumer liking and category fit of non-dairy milks. *Food Quality and Preference*, 123, 105312.

Chen, Y.-L., & Chen, Y.-C. (2025). Impact of brand and testing method on coffee taste perception between genders: A comparative study of two leading coffee brands in Taiwan. *SAGE Open*, 15(1), 1–12.

Overview

Blind tests are often used to eliminate bias, but what if they strip away the very thing that makes a product enjoyable? These two studies challenge the idea that consumers objectively judge products based solely on taste or experience. Instead, category labels and brand information significantly shape how we perceive and enjoy products like plant-based milk and coffee. The first study (Milking the Label) shows that the way non-dairy milks are labelled impacts liking and category fit, consumers enjoy almond milk more when they know it's almond milk, rather than being given a vague or misleading category label. The second study (Brand Influence on Coffee Taste) finds that coffee tastes better when consumers think it comes from a preferred brand. Women, in particular, show a strong assimilation effect, meaning their taste ratings shift depending on whether they know or are misled about the brand. Together, these studies suggest blind testing is silly as it removes the very expectations, context, and associations that define real-world consumer enjoyment.

Key Findings & Insights

Category Labels Shape Consumer Expectations and Enjoyment (Plant-Based Milk Study)

Consumers rated almond milk higher when it was explicitly labelled "Almond Milk", compared to vague labels like "Milk" or "Plant-Based Milk".

Liking scores were lowest when consumers weren't given any label at all (blind condition).

What changed? Sensory expectations. People expect creaminess from "milk," but nutty flavours from "almond milk"—misaligned expectations reduced enjoyment.

Lesson: If you label a product correctly, people enjoy it more. If you strip away labels, they struggle to fit it into their expectations and rate it lower.



Brand Bias is Real: Coffee Tastes Better When It Comes from the "Right" Brand (Coffee Study)

Women's coffee preference flipped depending on whether they knew the brand. When they knew it was Starbucks, they rated it higher; but in a blind test, they actually preferred the cheaper 7-Eleven coffee! Men were less influenced by brand knowledge but still showed some variation. Incorrect branding (misleading consumers about which coffee was which) confused taste perception and lowered ratings.

Lesson: People don't just taste coffee; they taste their expectations of coffee. Brand recognition isn't just marketing fluff; it shapes the way consumers experience flavour.

| Testing Method | Starbucks Rating (Women) | 7-Eleven Rating (Women) | Starbucks Rating (Men) | 7-Eleven Rating (Men) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Blind Test | 53.9 | 60.2 | 63.7 | 64 |
| Correct Information | 64.8 | 51.1 | 60.2 | 60.1 |
| Incorrect Information | 57.2 | 59.4 | 52.2 | 53.1 |

| Condition | Mean Liking Score | Category Fit Rating |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Broad (Milk) | 4.4 | 4.04 |
| Intermediate (Plant-based Milk) | 4.89 | 5.77 |
| Specific (Almond Milk) | 5.26 | 5.39 |
| Control (No Priming) | 4.61 | |

Conclusion

Blind tests might sound scientific, but they miss the point: **people don't consume products in a vacuum**. Labels, brands, and expectations are an integral part of enjoyment. These studies prove that **what people think they're consuming matters just as much as what they're actually consuming**. So, if you're testing a product, don't strip away its identity, **because blind testing is silly**.