HEDONIC RESPONSE TO CHEESE IN PRESCHOOLERS

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The hedonic response of preschoolers to six Protected Denomination of Origin Italian cheeses has been investigated. Cheese samples were Mozzarella di bufala, Parmigiano Reggiano, Fontina, Taleggio, Gorgonzola and Pecorino Romano. Sensory tests revealed that Mozzarella di bufala and Parmigiano Reggiano were the most liked cheeses. Gorgonzola was the least appreciated cheese.

Patterns of preference for cheese were not linear, depending on the joint effect of gender and cheese variety eaten. Hierarchical Cluster Analysis of the preference data identified five groups of children with different cheese likes and dislikes. Partial Least Square Regression modeling of cheese acceptability of sensory-driven children subgroups with homogeneous cheese preference revealed different focusing on sensory characteristics of cheese among clusters. Nearly one child out of two focused either on cheese flavors and textures whereas nearly one child out of eight exclusively on flavors. These results were substantiated by children open discussion in focus groups.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Sensory preference segmentation highlights valuable information on distinct groups of preschoolers who show different cheese liking and on the relative importance of specific attributes for preschoolers with radically different sensory preference. Drivers of liking are sensory attributes that are responsible for acceptance, and it is instructive to identify which particular attributes are the key to moving preschoolers’ acceptance of cheese. Nutritionists, dieticians, caterers and product developers understand what must be done in order to control cheese acceptance in preschoolers and to formulate more energy-balanced and sensory-appealing meals and snacks during school time.