



## What's in a claim?

How to develop and validate successful sensory claims

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# What's in a claim? – How to develop and validate successful sensory claims

Crunchier, creamier, now with thicker chocolate ... sensory claims can get the taste buds tingling and the mouth watering. In this white paper, Mala Choudhury discusses how claims can set your product apart from its competitors and how a combination of techniques to substantiate claims can protect companies against scrutiny.

The food and drink industry is an incredibly competitive market where consumers have an immense amount of choice available to them. With the product a key factor in the marketing mix, marketing professionals need to ensure the sensory attributes of their product are effectively communicated to the consumer. This is where sensory claims can be a useful tool. The ASTM Standard Guide for Sensory Claim Substantiation (E1958 – 12) defines a claim as *“a statement about a product that highlights its advantages, sensory or perceptual attributes, or product changes or differences compared to other products in order to enhance its marketability”*.

## Types of sensory claim

There are two types of sensory claims that can be made:

- Non-comparative / communications
- Comparative

### Non-comparative / communications claims

Non-comparative or communications claims are used to communicate product performance in terms of hedonic acceptability (product

liking) or specific attribute perception without comparing it in relation to another product.

### Example 1: Nestlé Shreddies (hedonic)



Nestlé describe their Shreddies product as “Deliciously satisfying”. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2015).

### Example 2: Walkers Crispy Crackers (attribute perception)

Walkers have incorporated the importance of crispness into the name of their ‘Crispy Crackers’ product. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2016).



### Example 3: Twinings Comforting Liquorice Tea (combination hedonic/perception)



Twinings describe their Liquorice Tea as “Comforting”. This non-comparative claim is more focused on what the product

feels like to consume from an emotional aspect rather than hedonic or sensory perceptual attributes. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2016).

The examples above focus on one or two key attributes for a product which the company wants to highlight as a selling point to attract consumers. In these instances they are not making direct comparisons to any other product – i.e. they are not stating that they are more deliciously satisfying, crispier or more comforting than their competitors. This is where comparative claims come in.

### Comparative claims

There are several types of comparative claims that can be made. These can either be to claim superiority or to claim parity.

### Superiority claims

Superiority claims are used to indicate one product is superior to another. This can be for liking or preference, or for specific attribute intensities. It can also be against a competitor product or against a previous formulation.

#### Example 4: Costa Cappuccino (preference against competitor)



In 2010, Costa ran an advertising campaign which claimed that “7

out of 10 coffee lovers preferred Costa cappuccino” compared to a leading competitor.

This claim was then challenged by the competitor for being misleading and unqualified. However, the Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) ruled in favour of

Costa and the complaint was not upheld. This was because Costa had specifically stated that the claim was based on their cappuccinos and after explaining how they came to the conclusion that seven out of ten people preferred its products. (Image sourced from iStock, 2016).

#### Example 5: Bertolli Spread (preference against previous formulation)

Bertolli claim that their spread has their “Best Ever Taste”. A similar claim that is also often made is “new and improved”. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2010).



#### Example 6: Cathedral City Cheese (outright superiority – hedonic)



Sometimes superiority claims do not make reference to a specific competitor but

rather indirectly claim they are “better than all others”. Cathedral City do this with their cheese range by stating on pack that they are “The Nations Favourite” cheese. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2016).

#### Example 7: Cadbury Flake (outright superiority – attribute perception)



Cadbury claim that their Flake

product is “The Crumbliest Flakiest Milk Chocolate”. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2015).

Example 8: Nature Valley Crunchy Granola Bars (attribute superiority against a previous formulation)



When consumers complained about Nature Valley Crunchy granola bars being too crunchy and hard to bite, a new recipe was formulated which was claimed to have a “Better Crunch” and as being “Easier to Bite”. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2016).

**Parity Claims**

Parity claims can be further broken down into two types:

- Equality claims – where two products are claimed to be equal either hedonically or for sensory perception
- Unsurpassed claims – where the claim states that the comparative product is not better or more intense in a particular attribute

Example 9: Pilgrims Choice Mature Cheddar (equality)

Pilgrims Choice changed the packaging of their cheddar cheese range but placed a label on pack to claim “New Look, Same Great Taste!”. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2015).



Example 10: Bastogne Biscuits (unsurpassed)



Lu claim that “Nothing surpasses the unique

flavour of Bastogne” biscuits. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2016).

**How do you substantiate claims?**

Once you have decided that you would like to make a claim about your product, it is vital that you choose the right methodology to substantiate the claim and minimise the risk of your claim being scrutinised for poor substantiation.

There are three accepted methods to substantiate a sensory claim:

- Consumer data
- Trained panel
- Analytical data

If a claim can be supported by two out of the three methods, then it builds a very strong case to avoid scrutiny.

**Consumer data**

Where any kind of preference claim is made, then consumer data is essential for substantiating that claim. This can be for an overall preference claim to indicate preference for Product A over Product B (e.g. Example 4 where Costa claim “7 out of 10” consumers prefer their product over a leading competitor).

Where claims are made against previous formulations such as “New improved recipe” or “Best Ever Taste” as in Example 5 for the Bertolli spread, then it is advisable to test this

with regular consumers of the product to verify that the new formulation is in fact preferred.

Claims that indicate outright superiority as in Example 6 where Cathedral City claim to be “The Nations Favourite”, it is advisable to include an adequate market share of other brands in the category in the consumer test.

Any claims made also need to be statistically significant. In 2009, the ASA upheld a complaint made against an advert for Flora Butterly which claimed that “more people prefer the taste of Flora Butterly” because “out of 200 people tested, 48 per cent preferred Flora Butterly, 45 per cent Lurpak Lighter spreadable, 7 per cent had no preference”. Whilst technically, a slightly higher proportion of consumers preferred Flora Butterly, this was not statistically significant and so the advert had to be withdrawn. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2009).



The test method, the order in which questions are asked and the way in which questions are asked is also very important. In 2007, the ASA upheld a complaint made against an advert for Flora pro-activ. The advert claimed that “3 out of 4 doctors would recommend Flora Pro-activ”. Upon further investigation, it was found that the questionnaire allowed multiple responses so doctors that participated in the survey were able to select more than one product rather than making a single or ranked choice. The ASA ruled that the advert was



misleading as it implies that doctors would recommend the Flora Pro-activ product above all other brands of cholesterol-lowering mini drinks. (Image sourced from Mintel GNPD, 2006).

### Trained panel

A trained panel is used to obtain objective sensory data and therefore tends to be used for perception claims – e.g. “Product A is sweeter than Product B”.

If a claim based on data from a trained panel is intended to represent consumer perception, then the relationship between trained panel sensory perception and consumer preference perception should be known. In Example 8, it was evident to Nature Valley that consumers were unhappy with the hardness and crunch of their granola bars based on consumer complaints that the product was too hard and difficult to bite. Therefore, the focus of their claim was more around sensory perception – “Now Better Crunch” and “Easier to Bite”.

When data from both consumers and trained panel can be used to support a claim, then the more convincing the claim will be and the less it will be susceptible to scrutiny.

The types of trained panel sensory tests that can be used include discrimination tests and descriptive analysis. These can also be used to claim a difference in sensory perception – i.e. that a particular attribute in a product is more intense, equal or less intense compared to another product. Other uses are to claim that when using the product, it can increase or decrease the perception of another attribute – e.g. to claim that the use of a masking agent alongside sweetener X can mask the bitter aftertaste associated with that sweetener.

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Temporal methods are also acceptable for claim substantiation. For example, panellists could be asked to detect the intensity of flavour over time to substantiate a claim such as “long lasting flavour” as a non-comparative claim or “longer lasting flavour” as a comparative claim.

### **Analytical data**

Some sensory characteristics can be measured using analytical and laboratory methods. For example, a texture analyser can be used to measure hardness or viscosity to substantiate “crunchiness” or “thickness” claims. A shear force test could be used on meat to measure the amount of pressure required to slice the meat. Less pressure would be an indication of greater tenderness and this type of data is acceptable to support a “tenderness” claim.

Other instruments such as a gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer or a colour meter can be used to measure flavour/odour characteristics or visual appearance.

Like trained panel data, analytical data is an objective measure and assumptions cannot be made about preference. For example, results from running texture analysis may indicate that one product is harder than another, but only consumers can verify whether this is in fact a positive or a negative. Therefore it is recommended that consumer data is used alongside analytical data to support the claim.

### **Conclusion**

Sensory claims can be a powerful marketing tool to enable statements to be made about a product that appeals to consumers and

encourages them to buy it instead of the competitor product.

Developing the right claim involves careful consideration of the type of claim which is most appropriate for the product and the best methodology to validate the claim. Inaccurate interpretation of data can result in complaints against the claim being upheld by the ASA, and the claim having to be removed. The right blend of methodologies (whether this is consumer data, trained panel testing or analytical data) builds a strong evidence base to support a claim and protects a company from scrutiny.

Leatherhead’s sensory experts follow the ASTM guidelines and work with Leatherhead’s regulatory team to ensure the claim is legal, substantiated and does not mislead consumers.

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## **How Leatherhead can help**

Leatherhead Food Research supports clients with sensory claim substantiation. Our Consumer, Sensory & Market Insight team can advise on areas such as the most appropriate methodology to support a particular claim and minimum number of responses required depending on the type of claim that will be made, as well as carry out the fieldwork. Our Regulatory team can also advise if your claim is legal. Please email us at [insight@leatherheadfood.com](mailto:insight@leatherheadfood.com) to learn more.

## **About the author**

Mala Choudhury is a Senior Project Leader within the Consumer, Sensory & Market Insight team at Leatherhead Food Research. She graduated from Sheffield Hallam University with a BSc in Food & Nutrition. Since then she has also obtained an intermediate certificate in Sensory Science awarded by the IFST and is now close to completing her PGCert in Sensory Science from the University of Nottingham.

Prior to joining Leatherhead, Mala worked at Burton's Biscuits as a Sensory Technologist where she designed and implemented a sensory testing facility from scratch. Her role at Leatherhead involves liaising with clients regarding both sensory and consumer research projects and then managing those projects through to completion including fieldwork, data analysis and reporting. Mala joined Leatherhead in March 2016.

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## About Leatherhead Food Research

Leatherhead Food Research provides expertise and support to the global food and drinks sector with practical solutions that cover all stages of a product's life cycle from consumer insight, ingredient innovation and sensory testing to food safety consultancy and global regulatory advice. Leatherhead operates a membership programme which represents a who's who of the global food and drinks industry. Supporting all members and clients, large or small, Leatherhead provides consultancy and advice, as well as training, market news, published reports and bespoke projects. Alongside member support and project work, our world-renowned experts deliver cutting-edge research in areas that drive long-term commercial benefit for the food and drinks industry. Leatherhead Food Research is a trading name of Leatherhead Research Ltd, a Science Group (AIM:SAG) company.

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