

Title:**Cultural influences on product associations and attitudes**
A comparison between Asia and Europe**Authors & affiliations:**

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Every time sensory attributes of a product are perceived by an individual, certain associations are being triggered unconsciously in a split second. Depending on the different cultural background, associations can vary among consumers. Companies are eager to find out which sensory attributes activate which product associations, because of the deep connection between associations and the consumers' motive system. Consumers are usually seeking for products that stimulate their reward system. In order to feel rewarded their current motives need to be addressed. In order to develop products that trigger the right product associations of the consumers, it is important to gather substantial information on which sensory dimensions (appearance, odor, taste and texture) trigger which product association and therefore produce and market the "right" product in each culture.

The aim of the study was to explore how one product category triggers different product associations when being consumed by respondents with different cultural backgrounds. Due to the integrated processing mechanism of sensory stimuli, consumers are most of the time not fully aware which sensory perception influences their judgement. Therefore, it seems necessary to assess not only the explicit associations triggered by certain sensory stimuli, but also the implicit ones. For this holistic approach, in a first step, qualitative focus groups in Germany and China were conducted with the aim to show which product associations differ from one another. Then, implicit associations were uniquely gathered by collecting forced-choice data from consumers. This not only revealed the hidden implicit associations but also the underlying motive structure.

The collected hits and reaction time data for verbal and non-verbal stimuli prove that culture has a significant influence on implicit measured product associations and attitudes. To achieve maximum acceptance by consumers it therefore seems necessary for companies to identify consumer associations in early stages of product development.