



When health meets hedonics: modelling consumer acceptance of cocoa for sexual well-being

Beatriz Londoño-Giraldo[1]*, Juan Diego Torres-Oquendo[2], Camilo Restrepo-Estrada[3]

[1][3] Universidad de Antioquia, Grupo de Investigación en Marketing Imark, Medellín, Colombia. [2] Universidad de Antioquia, Grupo de Investigación en Ciencia Sensorial, Medellín, Colombia.

Graphical Abstract



Introduction

Cocoa is strongly associated with pleasure, indulgence and hedonic enjoyment.

Evidence on cocoa flavanols opens opportunities for functional positioning linked to vascular and mental health.

Positioning cocoa for sexual well-being is sensitive: acceptance depends on sensory expectation, perceived value, and emotions such as embarrassment.

Method

Data gathering
Online survey

98
consumers
exploratory sample

PLS-SEM
Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling

ANTECEDENTS

- CRA** Craving
- SEN** Sensory expectation (appearance, aroma, taste, texture)
- HCS** Health consciousness
- NCS** Novelty consciousness

ATTITUDINAL & EMOTIONAL

- ATA** Attitude toward the advertisement
- EMB** Embarrassment

OUTCOMES

- EFBS** Expected functional benefits for sexual well-being
- WPM** Willingness to pay more
- FPI** Future purchase intention



Sensory Expectation — Four Dimensions

Appearance
Visual impression of the product before tasting

Aroma
Retronasal and orthonasal smell perception

Taste
Overall flavour and sweetness balance

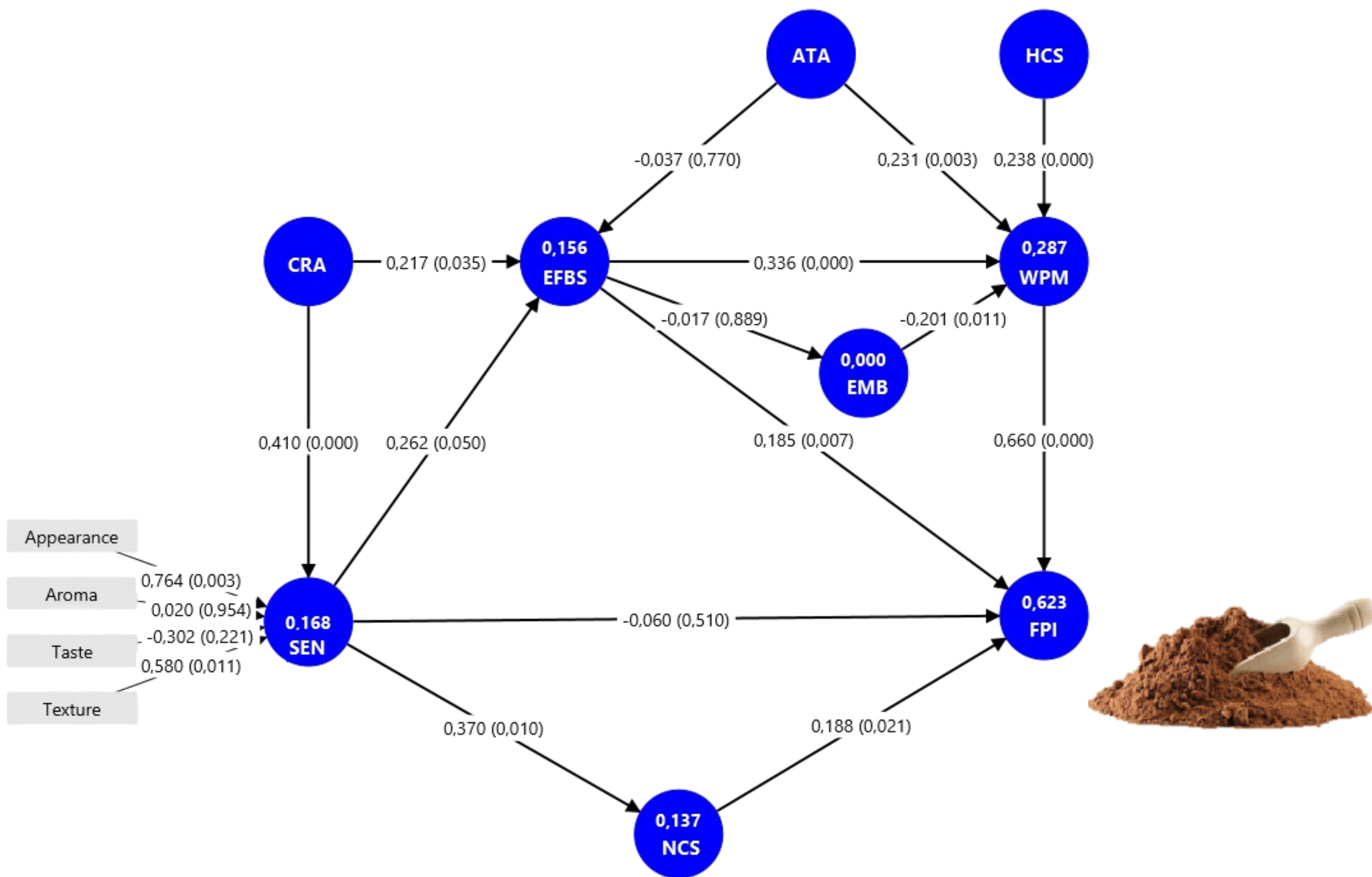
Texture
Mouthfeel and tactile perception

Limitations & Future Research

- Exploratory sample (n = 98): results are preliminary and should be confirmed with larger, more diverse consumer samples.
- Cross-sectional design: future work could test how acceptance evolves with repeated exposure and product trial.
- Single functional category tested: extending the model to other stigmatised or sensitive health claims would test its generalisability.

Conceptual Model & Hypothesised Relationships

This exploratory study develops and tests a structural model of how craving, sensory expectation, expected functional benefits, health and novelty consciousness, attitude toward advertising, and embarrassment jointly shape willingness to pay a premium and future purchase intention, aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being).



Key Findings

- Sensory appeal alone does not drive decisions: sensory perceptions and craving operate mainly through the extent to which the product is seen as delivering meaningful sexual well-being benefits.
- Expected functional benefits increase willingness to pay more.
- Willingness to pay more is the strongest driver of future purchase intention.
- A positive attitude toward the advertisement facilitates acceptance.
- Embarrassment reduces willingness to pay more.
- In sensitive health-related categories, the meaning consumers attribute to functional claims is central to behavioural intention.

Contribution & Industry Implications

By integrating sensory science and consumer psychology in a stigmatised functional-food context, this study offers exploratory evidence on how cocoa-based innovations can be positioned responsibly for sexual well-being.

Credible benefit framing
Ground functional claims in physiological plausibility, not hedonic appeal alone.

Stigma-aware communication
Address embarrassment directly in messaging to protect willingness to pay.

Value-based strategy
Anchor pricing and positioning in perceived benefit, aligned with SDG 3.

Conclusion

Acceptance of cocoa positioned for sexual well-being is not a purely sensory decision. It is shaped by the meaning consumers assign to functional claims, balanced against sensory expectations, perceived value, and the emotional discomfort a sensitive category can evoke. Credible, stigma-aware communication of functional benefits, rather than sensory appeal alone, is key to unlocking willingness to pay and purchase intention in this emerging category.

Exploratory study (n = 98). Findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence, to be confirmed with larger and more diverse samples.

