Are drivers of liking the same as drivers of purchase intent?
Bayesian networks give us the answer

Background & Objectives

In consumer studies, **Overall Liking is the primary indicator of product performance.** Blind overall liking measures the brain's emotional response to the product's multisensory integration (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2013). After a product is bought and consumed, the product's sensory properties and their elicited response serve as additional knowledge towards repurchase, **therefore a positive correlation exists between Purchase Intent and Overall Liking** (Mueller & Szolnoki, 2010).
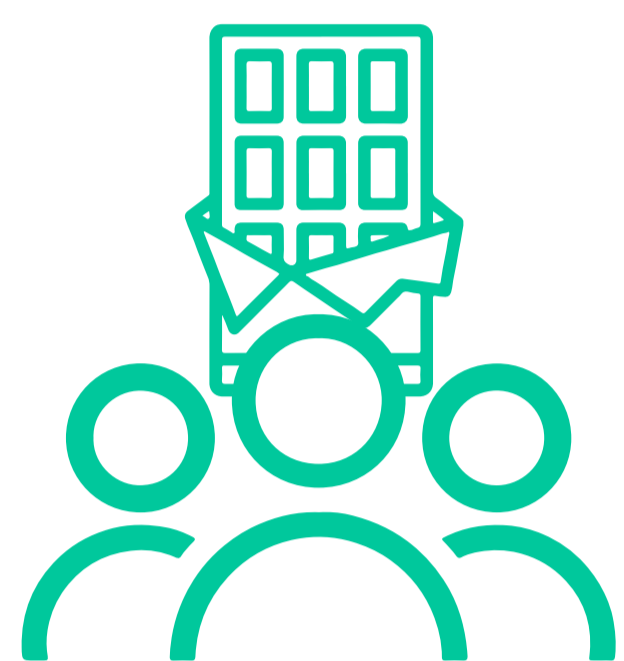
Are Overall Liking and Purchase Intent the reflection of similar deep motivations, or are there differences between them?

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Test Design

A Category Appraisal study was performed on 16 different dark chocolates, tested in blind in sequential monadic by 360 consumers. Evaluation was done using a thorough research questionnaire including **overall liking, purchase intent** but also organoleptic criteria, emotions, claims perceptions, expected benefits and usage situations.

Analysis
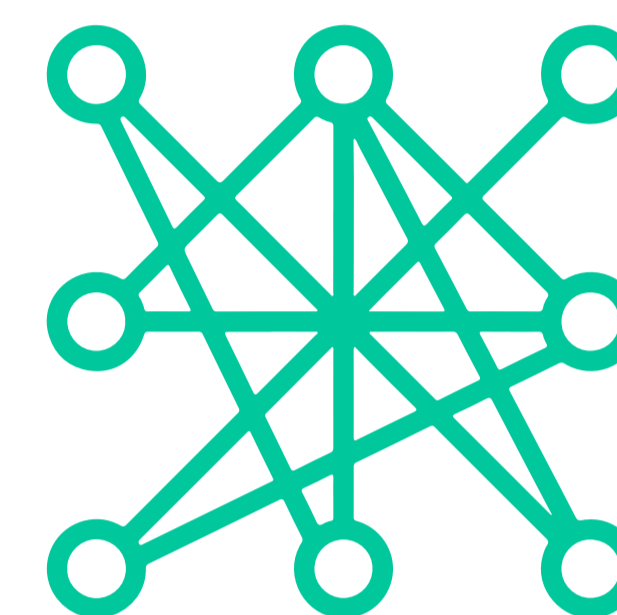
Bayesian Networks are a graphical representation based on the Bayes Theorem, that allow **to observe the probabilistic dependence or independence between a set of variables** to obtain a model of joint probability that can best explain the relationships between observed variables in a complex domain.
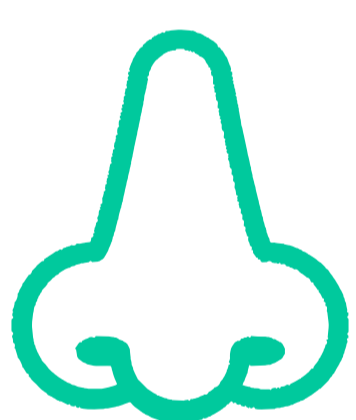
Outputs

GLOBAL NETWORK

Variables were grouped into different **factors: Aromatics, Organoleptic** characteristics, **Consumption habits,** Consumption **frequency, Extrinsic attributes,** Habits of sharing, **Expectations** etc...

Examples of factors:

Aroma / Taste

Liking items: Flavor, Sweetness, Cocoa taste, Bitterness, Smell
JAR questions: Cocoa/Milky balance, Sweet/Bitter balance, Mouthfeel, Smoothness, Thickness

Potential Use

Agreement items: "great gift", "great treat", "special celebration/reward", "relaxing", "satisfies sweet craving", "sophisticated", "uplift mood", "for sharing", "satisfies expectations"
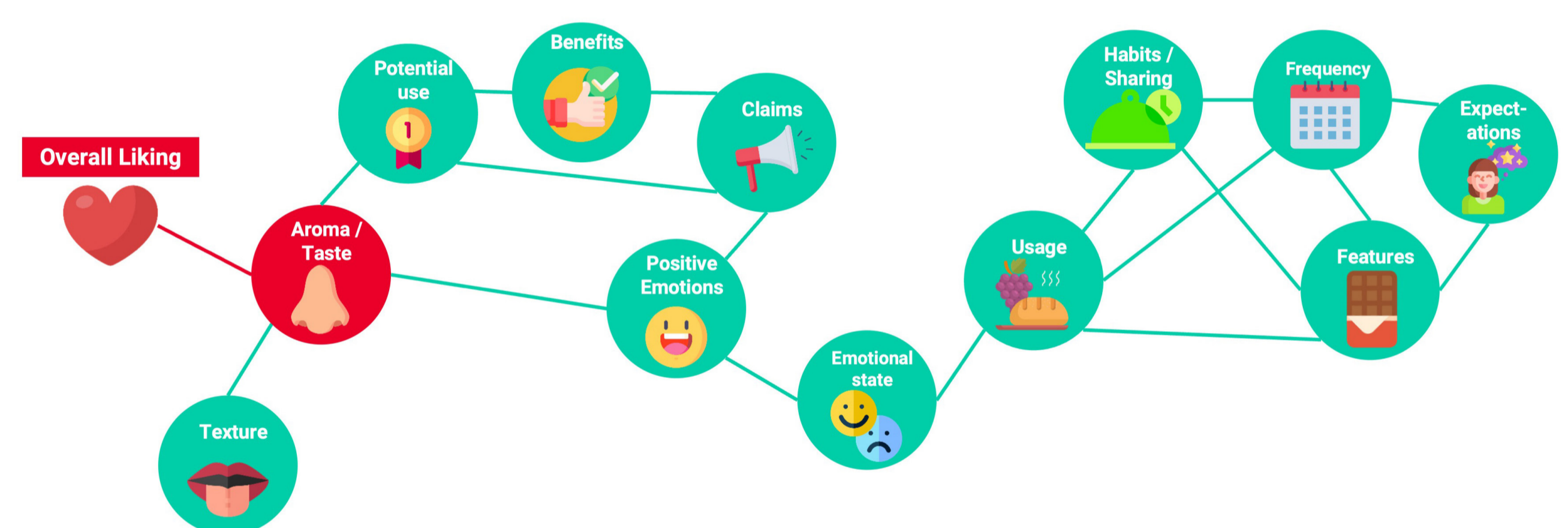
Claims
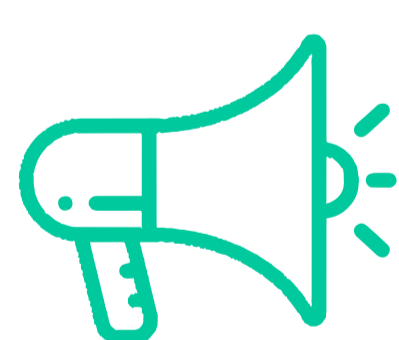
Agreement items: "overseas product", "natural taste", "premium", "authentic", unique"

OVERALL LIKING TARGET

The Aromatic factor (synthetizing flavor, taste and aroma characteristics) was the only one with a direct link to the overall liking.

PURCHASE INTENT TARGET

Purchase intent had a direct link with several factors: Aromatic (as Overall liking), but also with Claims and Potential Use.
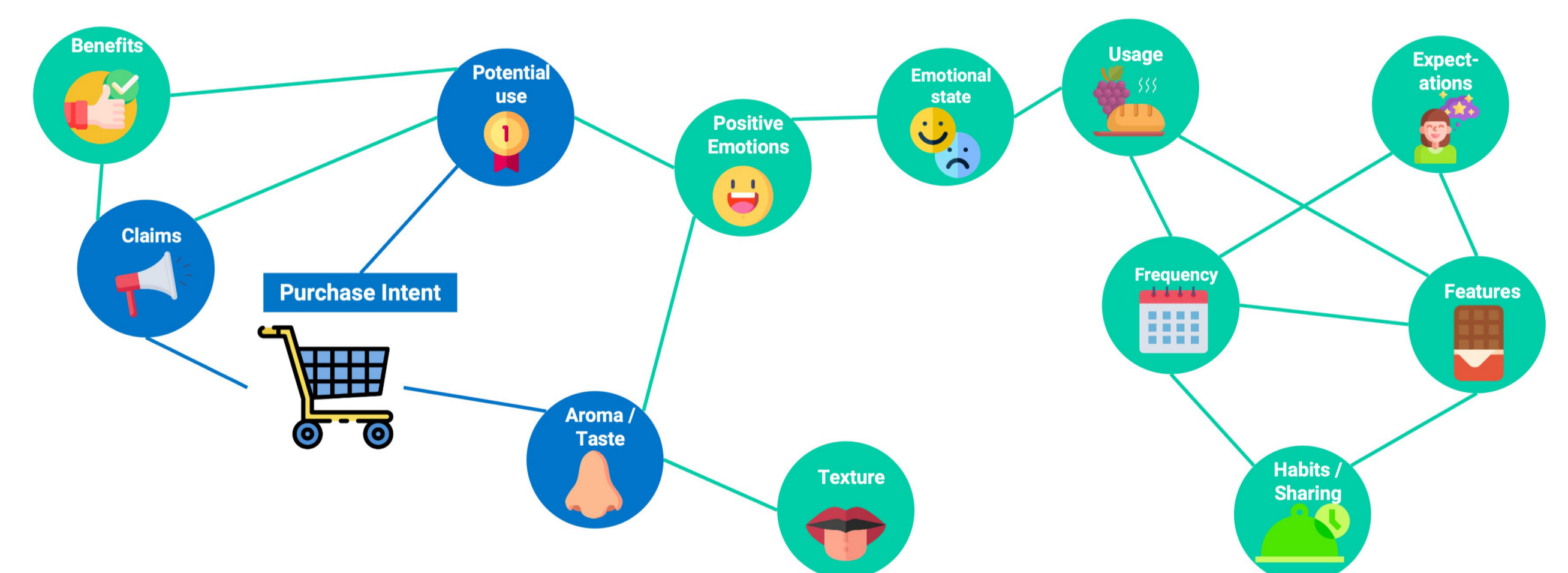
Both Overall Liking and Purchase Intent showed a direct connexion with Taste & Aroma, as expected. However, a **direct relationship was found between Purchase Intent and Products Claims** (associated to benefits), which was not the case for overall liking. This echoes to the **cognitive concept of "wanting": for Purchase Intent**, there is a **will of reward** (linked to Benefits) which makes consumers want more and more.

An additional non-exclusive explanation for the differences observed could be in the differentiation between these indicators themselves; **Overall liking is a more spontaneous / immediate reaction** to a sensory stimulus, here the product tasted (= Sensory characteristic). On the other side, **Purchase Intent is a more conscious / rational decision** as it is related to the intention to perform the behavior of purchase.

Conclusion :
This research helped to bring a new angle in the comparison between Overall Liking and Purchase Intent indicators. Further investigation to explore in more detail and quantify both links and differences between these 2 indicators could be really promising.

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