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Odor-Induced Saltiness Enhancement: Insights Into The Brain Chronometry Of Flavor Perception

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Abstract—Flavor perception results from the integration of at least odor and taste. Evidence for such integration is that odors can have taste properties (odor-induced taste). Most brain areas involved in flavor perception are high-level areas; however, primary gustatory and olfactory areas also show activations in response to a combination of odor and taste. While the regions involved in flavor perception are now quite well identified, the network's organization is not yet understood. Using a close to real salty soup model with electroencephalography brain recording, we evaluated whether odor-induced saltiness enhancement would result in differences of amplitude and/or latency in late cognitive P3 peak mostly and/or in P1 early sensory peak. Three target solutions were created from the same base of green-pea soup: i) with a “usual” salt concentration (PPS2), ii) with “reduced” salt (PPS1: –50%), and iii) with reduced salt and a “beef stock” odor (PPS1B). Sensory data showed that the beef odor produced saltiness enhancement in PPS1B in comparison to PPS1. As the main EEG result, the late cognitive P3 peak was delayed by 25 ms in the odor-added solution PPS1B compared to PPS1. The odor alone did not explain this peak amplitude and higher latency in the P3 peak. These results support the classical view that high-level integratory areas process odor–taste interactions with potential top-down effects on primary sensory regions.

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Key words: Olfaction, Taste, Integration, Perception, Food, Electroencephalography.

INTRODUCTION

We experience food as a unitary perception, which we commonly call “taste”. This common “taste” is actually a holistic perception of at least olfactory and gustatory inputs, called “flavor perception”. Odor-induced taste enhancement (OITE) is a phenomenon that derives from the integration of taste and odor into flavor perception. For example, it was shown that a strawberry odor could increase the sweetness of a whipped-cream with sucrose. This result was first highlighted by Frank and Byram (1988). They also defined a fundamental principle of OITE, namely that only congruent odors and tastes would produce OITE, therefore pointing at the role of experience in shaping OITE. Indeed congruent, familiar, and complex flavor mixtures -which are more prone to be perceived as configural units- are more effective in producing OITE (Prescott et al., 2004; Small and Prescott, 2005; Labbe et al., 2006). Several independent labs have later replicated this finding and further demon-

strated odor-induced taste enhancement of other tastes (Frank and Byram, 1988; Schifferstein and Verlegh, 1996; Sakai et al., 2001; Djordjevic et al., 2004; Prescott et al., 2004; Lawrence et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2019). OITE is, therefore, a reliable phenomenon. Other odor–taste interactions have also been established, such as the taste-induced odor enhancement (i.e., the reverse effect of OITE) (Lim et al., 2014; Linscott and Lim, 2016). In our study and the discussion of the results, we focused on the odor-induced saltiness enhancement only.

Most studies on OITE used water with sugar or salt and aroma, which produced non-ecologically relevant, unfamiliar and likely unpleasant perceptions (Prescott et al., 2004; Welge-Lüssen et al., 2005; Marshall et al., 2006; Prescott and Murphy, 2009; Welge-Lussen et al., 2009; Lim and Johnson, 2011, 2012; Seo et al., 2013). To overcome this issue, one can use close-to-real food models, which produce more familiar and holistic food representations. It may also facilitate the OITE with appropriate congruent aroma and smooth out significant hedonic variations that could mask subtle integration mechanisms (Prescott, 1999; Small, 2012; Mroczko-Wąsowicz, 2016; Thomas-Danguin et al., 2016). Other studies used more complex and familiar food models.

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Abbreviations: EEG, Electroencephalography; ERPs, event-related potentials; fMRI, functional magnetic resonance imaging; OISE, odor-induced saltiness enhancement.

For example, ethyl 2-methyl butanoate was used in a fruit juice to enhance sweet perception (Barba et al., 2018). In another study, the authors used a sardine aroma to significantly enhance saltiness in a cheese model (Syarifuddin et al., 2016). In the present study, we studied odor-induced saltiness enhancement (OISE). A salty food model has been designed from a green-pea soup base, which was chosen for its composition with a negligible quantity of salt and an easily identifiable odor component. Five conditions with different salt and aroma quantities were selected to produce OISE according to previous results (Lawrence et al., 2009; Nasri et al., 2013). The first condition was the soup added with a standard (usual) level of salt (6.25 g/L), to record the most familiar level of saltiness in this kind of product and to test whether OISE could reinforce saltiness up to a “normal” saltiness intensity. The second solution was 50% salt reduced. The third condition, which is the target beverage, was reduced in salt (50%) and supplemented with a “beef stock” odor chosen for its potential to increase saltiness perception. Finally, two controls were tested, the base soup alone and the base soup with the odor component, to test the effect of added odor in the food model.

Endogenous mechanisms produce OITE in the brain. Several functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies have investigated brain areas involved in flavor perception, leading to the identification of a relatively consensual flavor network (Rolls and Baylis, 1994; Rolls, 1997; De Araujo et al., 2003; Small and Prescott, 2005; Seo et al., 2013; Seubert et al., 2015). In these studies, supra-additive activations for the odorant-tastant mixture were found in high-level areas, in the orbitofrontal cortex, the dorsal mid-insula, and the perirhinal cortex (De Araujo et al., 2003; Seo et al., 2013; Small et al., 2013; Seubert et al., 2015). However, odor–taste convergence was also found in the primary gustatory cortex, more precisely in the anterior insula and frontal operculum (De Araujo et al., 2003; Seubert et al., 2015). Regarding these fMRI results, two views exist i) one consists in a hierarchical integration, starting with a parallel unimodal encoding of odor and taste in their respective cortices and further elaborated by higher-order unimodal zones, before converging onto multisensory integrative areas to form the flavor perception; ii) while the second proposed that odor and taste are already integrated into primary olfactory and gustatory cortices (Small and Prescott, 2005; Verhagen and Engelen, 2006; Verhagen, 2007; Prescott, 2012; Small et al., 2013).

To understand whether odor and taste already interact in the primary cortices or later in higher cortices, we need to study the chronometry of odor–taste integration and interaction. Electroencephalography (EEG) is of particular interest to gain insights into these questions. It permits quantitative measures of global brain activations with a resolution of milliseconds. Olfactory-gustatory event-related potentials (ERPs) give access to the chronometry of interactions between gustatory and olfactory cortices. To do so, one should select appropriate stimuli, which permit to isolate variables of interest (e.g., real saltiness or induced saltiness). An

event-related potential (ERP) is a sequence of brain components identified by the maximum amplitudes of a series of positive and negative peaks, from P1 the earliest to P3 the latest measurable. ERP reflects the different steps of information processing in the cortex. The peak amplitude and latency provide a quantitative measure of the intensity and/or amount of neurons discharging in a synchronized way in response to the stimulus provided at t0. The early P1 peak mainly occurs in primary sensory areas and represents the processing of sensory and chemically related properties of food. The late P3 peak occurs mostly in high integratory and cognitive areas and illustrates endogenous processing such as emotional, semantic, decisional, and top-down mechanisms towards primary regions.

While an extensive literature exists on food-related visual event-related potentials (ERPs) (for review, see Carbine et al., 2018), very few studies were based on the senses directly involved in flavor perception: olfaction and gustation. To the best of our knowledge, no EEG studies showed the brain mechanisms of odor-induced taste enhancement. However, Welge-Lüssen et al. (2005), Welge-Lüssen et al. (2009) designed two studies to show the effect of taste (sucrose or lemon pulp) on odor (vanilla) or trigeminal perception (elicited by CO2) respectively. In these studies, participants were sucking on a taste dispenser when an odor was sent orthonasally (Welge-Lüssen et al., 2005) or retronasally (Welge-Lüssen et al., 2009) with an olfactometer. This moment corresponded to the start of the ERP, which therefore highlighted the odor processing modulated by the taste. Although sensory results did not show odor or taste enhancement, ERPs tended to higher amplitude and reduced early and late peak latencies (P1 and P3), only when the taste matched the odor. These two peaks represent the earliest and latest observable brain mechanisms of the evoked potential measured with EEG. Therefore, Welge-Lüssen’s studies showed that taste sped up the processing of a congruent odor from the very first processing mechanisms (P1 peak). Although these results did not permit observing supra-additive effects for a flavor mixture compared to its odorant-tastant components, they were interestingly discussed in terms of priming. To observe supra-additive effects, one should synchronously stimulate the olfactory and gustatory cortices and compare activation for the mixture to the single components. Recent electrophysiological results in animal reconsidered the classical view of late odor–taste integration. They indeed showed activations in a region of the primary olfactory cortex, i.e., the piriform cortex, in response to sucrose (sweet taste), which the authors considered early interactions (Maier et al., 2012, 2015; Maier, 2017). These results, therefore, challenge the classical theory of late brain interactions between odor and taste and suggest that primary olfactory and gustatory areas may interact as early as the primary EEG peaks such as P1 (100–200 ms).

Therefore, we addressed the chronometry of the integration of odor and taste into flavor perception, in

174 humans, by studying the chronometry of brain
 175 mechanisms leading to OISE. The classical view, which
 176 consisted of a hierarchical integration of flavor, from
 177 primary gustatory and olfactory areas to secondary or
 178 tertiary integratory cortices, has been further expanded
 179 to explain OITE (Verhagen and Engelen, 2006;
 180 Verhagen, 2007; Small, 2008; Prescott, 2012). Following
 181 the integration of odor and taste into the flavor, top-down
 182 feedback may control activations in gustatory areas pro-
 183 ducing an increased endogenous perception of saltiness
 184 intensity. Following this reasoning, the odor-induced salti-
 185 ness enhancement should be observed only on the ERP's
 186 late components. Therefore, we hypothesized that differ-
 187 ences of amplitude and/or latency could be observed
 188 mostly on the latest peak of olfactory-gustatory ERP
 189 (the late P3 peak) and not on the P1 peak involving brain
 190 circuits responding to exogenous properties of the food
 191 such as tastant concentration. In the study, we did not
 192 address whether retronasal odor stimulation is necessary
 193 for the supra-additivity of the flavor solution. Still, to avoid
 194 any potential bias, we used only retronasal odor percep-
 195 tion. Because of the presumed importance of oral referral
 196 in flavor perception (Small, 2008; Spence, 2016), which is
 197 supported by EEG results (Welge-Lüssen et al., 2009;
 198 Masaoka et al., 2010), participants should be stimulated
 199 in-mouth so that aromas could be perceived through the
 200 retronasal route. However, the aroma perception is sup-
 201 posed to be maximal when participants are swallowing.
 202 A dedicated paradigm was designed to account for the
 203 swallowing artifacts and the need for synchrony between
 204 odor and taste perceptions.

205 EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

206 Participants

207 Twenty-one participants naïve to olfactory and gustatory
 208 testing were recruited (18–30 years old, 15 women).
 209 Data from 8 participants were discarded because of
 210 their low number of epochs after artifact rejection (less
 211 than 6 epochs in at least 2 stimulus conditions). The
 212 stimulation of participants in-mouth during EEG
 213 recording is tricky due to tongue and jaw movements
 214 during stimulation, which induce many artifacts. Power
 215 analysis (GPower) showed that 13 participants were
 216 sufficient to have adequate power on the amplitude and
 217 latencies of peaks (power = 0.82). Participants were
 218 asked not to drink or eat, at least 1 h30 min before the
 219 test sessions, to minimize food exposure. All
 220 participants were right-handed (self-reported) and
 221 normosmic (European Test of Olfactory Capabilities,
 222 ETOC; Thomas-Danguin et al., 2003). The experimental
 223 procedure was explained to each participant before
 224 recruitment and again before each test session. Partici-
 225 pants signed an informed consent form to participate in
 226 the study. They received 10€ compensation for each hour
 227 spent performing test sessions. The study was conducted
 228 following the Helsinki Declaration and was validated by
 229 the ethics committee CPP EST 1N°2016/62 (ID RCB:
 230 2016-A01732-49).

Solutions

231 Three stock solutions were prepared: (1) the base
 232 solution was a green-pea soup extracted from an
 233 unsalted green-pea puree (Nestlé®, green pea
 234 NaturNes). The puree was centrifuged at 15,000 RPM
 235 for 20 min at 20 °C (rotor JLA 16–250, Beckman
 236 Coulter), and the supernatant, which contained
 237 everything but the non-soluble particles, was collected
 238 and stored at –20 °C. (2) A salty solution was prepared
 239 at 12.5 g/L NaCl in Evian® water (Danone, France). (3)
 240 The aromatic solution (B) was prepared at 500 ppm of
 241 Beef Bouillon Flavor (YF 555,768 CB, Firmenich) in
 242 Evian water. Evian water was chosen because, in Dijon,
 243 it is the bottled water perceived as the most neutral
 244 (Teillet et al., 2010). Solutions 2 and 3 were prepared
 245 24 h before the test and kept at 4 °C. The test's day, the
 246 base solution was defrosted in the microwave for 5 min-
 247 utes (defrost position). All solutions were then heated at
 248 35 °C (all tubes of the gustometer are water bath) in the
 249 gustometer to match the buccal temperature, 1 h before
 250 the test. Five target solutions were then mixed using the
 251 gustometer: PP (50% base solution + 50% Evian Water),
 252 PPB (50% base solution + 25% aromatic solution
 253 + 25% Evian water), PPS1 (50% base solution + 25%
 254 salty solution + 25% Evian water), PPS1B (50% base
 255 solution + 25% salty solution + 25% aromatic solution),
 256 PPS2 (50% base solution + 50% salty solution). Evian
 257 water, PP, and PPB contained negligible levels of salt
 258 (maximum 0.25 g/L), which are lower than the standard
 259 detection threshold in water (0.58 g/L) (Bartoshuk,
 260 1974). Furthermore, B contained minimal salt (0.03 g/L).
 261

262 Experimental procedure

263 The entire experiment took place in a ventilated air-
 264 conditioned room (23 °C), dedicated to EEG recording,
 265 with controlled light and acoustic insulation. The
 266 procedure was planned over two sessions: 1) a training
 267 session and 2) an EEG recording session, spaced by a
 268 maximum of 8 days, to keep the training effective.

269 Training session

270 Before the training session, participants were tested for
 271 their general olfactory abilities using the ETOC
 272 (Thomas-Danguin et al., 2003). This test consists of an
 273 odor supra-threshold detection task combined with an
 274 identification task for 16 different odors using a 4-
 275 alternatives forced-choice procedure (1 vial odorized
 276 among 4, then 1 correct odor descriptor among 4). The
 277 minimum score required to consider normal olfactory abil-
 278 ities was 12 (out of 16). All participants succeeded in the
 279 ETOC test.

280 The training session's objective was twofold: 1) to
 281 familiarize participants with the gustometer and the
 282 testing room and 2) train participants to breathe with the
 283 velum opened. Solutions were delivered with a GU002
 284 gustometer (Burghart, Wedel, Germany). Initially, the
 285 gustometer is designed to spray raw taste solutions on
 286 the extended tongue; however, we delivered solutions
 287 directly in the mouth to produce the retronasal

perception in the present study. To avoid movements that could cause artifacts during EEG recordings, excess solution and saliva were slowly and continuously withdrawn from the mouth, and participants did not need to swallow. A spray head was hand manufactured specifically for each participant to fit the mouth cavity (modification of the Burghart spray head and fixation on a piece of a hygoformic® Orsing tubing). The solutions were sprayed as a thin mist over a large part of the tongue, permitting homogeneous taste perception over the tongue and odorant diffusion. It also reduces somatosensory and motor artifacts that may occur when the participant has to drink from a glass or even when drops are delivered on the tongue. Furthermore, a salivary ejector head (hygoformic® Orsing) connected to a peristaltic pump permitted removing excess solution and saliva from the mouth to minimize swallowing artifacts during EEG recordings. Participants kept both tubes (external diameter: 4 mm) in the mouth by gently clenching the teeth around them. Participants were asked not to swallow during the sessions.

To trigger as much as possible odor and taste perception in a synchronous way, we trained participants during a dedicated session to inhale through the mouth and exhale through the nose while maintaining an open velum throughout the recording session (free circulation of aromas to the nasal cavity). The combination of in-mouth stimulation for retronasal perception and the open-velum breathing favored the passage of a maximum of odorant volatiles into the nasal cavity. It allowed an increased synchronization between odor and taste perception compared to velum closed (Buettnner et al., 2002; Bonny et al., 2017). The participants were monitored with a breathing sensor (Burghart) coupled with an oscilloscope to receive feedback on their breathing during training. They had to maintain a constant amplitude and regular frequency of the sinusoid for 3 min. Finally, they were trained to maintain breathing while receiving in-mouth stimulations with each solution of interest (5 repeated stimulations for each solution).

EEG recording sessions

Participants started the EEG session by training again on the opened-velum breathing technique (3 min opened-velum breathing). EEG electrodes (Ag/AgCl) were fixed on the head with a conductive paste (EC2 electrode Cream, Natus®) after cleaning the skin (Everi, Spes medical®). Five electrodes were fixed on Fz, Cz, C3, C4, and Pz following a 10/20 system. Ground electrodes were positioned on the mastoids and reference electrodes on the ear lobes. One electrode was fixed above the right eyebrow to record vertical blinking artifacts. Impedance was kept below 30 kΩ. Participants were not notified of the stimulation. They received a flow of Evian water interrupted by air (400 ms water followed by 400 ms air) to limit the quantity of liquid in the mouth. Every 16 or 20 s, they received a target stimulation (400 ms); brain activity was recorded only for target stimulations (500 ms before and 1500 ms after the start of the stimulus). Air pressure

was fixed at 850 mbar. This design permitted fast habituation to somatosensory stimuli (Plattig, 1989). Participants were stimulated 40 times in a row for each of the 5 solutions. Every 20 pulses, a 2 minutes break was made for the participants to relax. Solutions were presented in a counterbalanced order. To maintain a relatively low level of attention during the task, participants had to perform a tracking task (keeping a dot inside a slowly moving square). The game and the sensory evaluation questionnaire were displayed on a monitor (GustOlf custom-made software, adapted from “Tracking performance” software, from the Smell and Taste Clinic Dresden). The tracking task stopped one second after the stimulation, and participants were prompted to rate saltiness intensity after each trial on an unstructured visual analog scale anchored on the left with “low intensity” (corresponding to 0) and on the right side of the scale with “high intensity” (corresponding to 100). To control for noise, participants were listening to “brown noise” through earphones. Brain activity was sampled at 1000 Hz using an EEG Burghart system (OL026) (analog high pass filter 1st order: 0.072 Hz, analog low-pass filter 3rd order: 186 Hz). The recording was triggered by the gustometer and started 500 ms before stimulation and ended 1500 ms after stimulation.

Data analysis

Normality and homogeneity of variances were checked with QQplot and residuals vs. fitted values plots. Furthermore, the homogeneities of variances were confirmed for all models tested (Levene test, $p > 0.35$).

Sensory data analysis

Saltiness intensity was rated for each of the forty stimulations delivered during the EEG recording (R software, R package: nlme (Pinheiro et al., 2015)). A first linear mixed model tested the effect of repetitions to measure habituation to solution in the course of the recording (*repetitions*solutions*, with *participants* as a random factor), no interaction between solutions and repetitions, nor the main effect of repetitions were significant ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, in a second model, the variability of ratings across *participants* was modeled as a random factor, and *repetitions* were nested within each participant, thus taking into account repeated measures, while *solutions* were modeled as fixed factors. Finally, post-hoc tests were performed, pairwise comparisons between solutions were computed with a Tukey test, and p -values were corrected for multiple testing with the false discovery rate (FDR, $p_{corr} < 0.05$).

EEG preprocessing

Data were preprocessed in Letswave (open-source MATLAB EEG signal processing toolbox NOCIONs, Institute of Neuroscience, Université Catholique de Louvain). They were first filtered (Butterworth, bandpass filter: 0.01–30 Hz, filter order 4) and baseline corrected [$y_i = x_i - \text{mean}(b_i)$] using the 500 ms recorded before the stimulation. Epochs contaminated by blinking artifacts

were removed (amplitude criteria $> 90 \mu\text{V}$). Finally, epochs with large alpha waves for most of the epoch duration were visually rejected. The mean number of epochs accepted was 21 ± 7 . After computing the mean across epochs for each participant, a Grand Mean was calculated by weighting each participant's mean by the number of epochs accepted. This weighting, suggested by Mouraux (2015), allowed taking into account the number of epochs included in the individual means to reduce the noise effect on the Grand-Mean and linear mixed models.

EEG RESULTS ANALYSIS

Peak amplitudes and latencies were measured with ERPLab implemented in the EEGlab toolbox from MATLAB (Lopez-Calderon and Luck, 2014). We started the definition of time windows from the literature using gustatory ERPs for P1, which appeared between 120–180 ms (Mizoguchi et al., 2002; Franken et al., 2011), and on olfactory or gustatory ERPs for P3, which appeared between 550–750 ms (Pause et al., 1996; Welge-Lüssen et al., 2005; 2009; Franken et al., 2011; Huart et al., 2012). We used relatively small windows (windows with a minimum of 100 ms and a maximum of 150 ms) to avoid overlaps between peaks. Local peak amplitude was searched in each time window within averages of 10 points on each local peak side. Local peak amplitude is defined as having a greater voltage than the average of the n number points on either side (Luck, 2014). When no peak was found, the NA value (non-applicable) was used. Time windows were checked and adapted to have as few as possible NA values on Cz, Fz, and Pz electrodes. Following these criteria, the P1 peak was analyzed within a 100–200 ms time window, and the P3 peak was analyzed within a 560–710 ms time window.

Before peak analysis, following Luck recommendations (Luck, 2014), data were filtered once more using a mild low-pass filter (half amplitude cutoff of 30 Hz, slope of 12 dB/octave). Finally, local peak amplitude and latency were measured for each participant at each electrode position. Data were analyzed with a linear mixed model (R package: nlme, lme function (Pinheiro et al., 2015)). The factor *participant* was modeled as a random factor, while solutions and electrodes were modeled as fixed factors. The interaction between solution and electrodes was also tested to highlight electrodes that may behave differently regarding solutions. The estimation of variance components followed the method of Restricted Maximum Likelihood (ReML) estimation. The variance of the response variables (amplitude or latency) measured on the peak of average ERP per participant and condition were weighted by the number of epochs accepted for each participant to reduce the impact of noisy mean, to correspond to grand-average ERP. Because no interactions between electrodes and solutions were found (cf. Results), electrodes that did not significantly differ were included in the models to highlight global brain responses and restrict the analysis to major effects. Only electrodes that did not vary from the elec-

trode with the highest amplitude were analyzed. Finally, the effects of electrodes (used as a repeated measure) and solutions were tested without the interaction effect. Pairwise, Tukey's tests for defined contrasts were computed in cases of significant fixed effects. The contrasts were PPS1B vs. PPS1, PPS1B vs. PPS2, PPS2 vs. PPS1, PP vs. PPB, salted solutions vs. unsalted solutions, solutions with beef stock aroma vs. solutions without beef stock aroma. Pearson correlation was tested between P3 amplitude and the saltiness intensity evaluated for all participants and all conditions. Linear effects and correlation were considered significant at $p < 0.05$. Pairwise comparisons were FDR corrected for multiple comparisons ($p_{\text{corr}} < 0.05$).

RESULTS

Sensory results

Intensity evaluations did not decrease in the course of the 40 repetitions ($F [39, 2548] = 0.19, p = 1$). Moreover, no interaction between solutions and repetitions ($F [156, 2388] = 0.74, p = 0.99$), nor main effect of repetitions ($F [156, 2388] = 0.46, p = 0.99$) was significant. These results highlighted the lack of habituation to the different solutions in the course of the 40 repetitions.

Saltiness intensity differed significantly between solutions ($F [4, 2076] = 939.21, p < 0.0001$, sd random effects = 18.18). Sensory results revealed a small odor-induced saltiness enhancement (OISE) by the “beef stock” aroma in the salt-reduced green-pea soup (PPS1B). PPS1B (mean of intensity ratings of 40 repetitions across participants: $M = 63.60$, standard error of the mean: $SEM = 0.86$) was perceived as slightly more salty than PPS1 ($M = 60.53$, $SEM = 0.96$; $z = 2.72$, $p_{\text{corr}} = 0.007$, estimate = 3.06, sd = 1.13.), although not as salty as PPS2 ($M = 72.80$, $SEM = 0.81$; $z = 8.16$, $p_{\text{corr}} < 0.0001$, estimate = 9.20, sd = 1.13). All salt-added solutions (PPS1, PPS1B and PPS2) were perceived as more salty than the control solutions (PP, $M = 17.87$, $SEM = 0.70$, and PPB, $M = 26.42$, $SEM = 1.05$) ($p_{\text{corr}} < 0.00001$). PPB was rated as more salty than PP ($z = 7.59$, $p_{\text{corr}} < 0.0001$, estimate = 8.56, sd = 1.13) which support the odor-induced salty taste of the odor since no salt was added in this sample.

EEG results

No interaction was found between *electrode position* and *solution* for any of the peaks (P1, P3) regarding amplitude or latency (all comparisons: $F [16, 282:288] < 1.06, p > 0.39$). Therefore, this interaction was never included in the models. Because no interactions occurred, electrodes that did not significantly differ were included in the models to highlight global brain responses and restrict the analysis to major effects. P3 and P1 peaks were analyzed to determine whether odor-induced saltiness enhancement could be observed in early and/or later brain processing (Fig. 1).

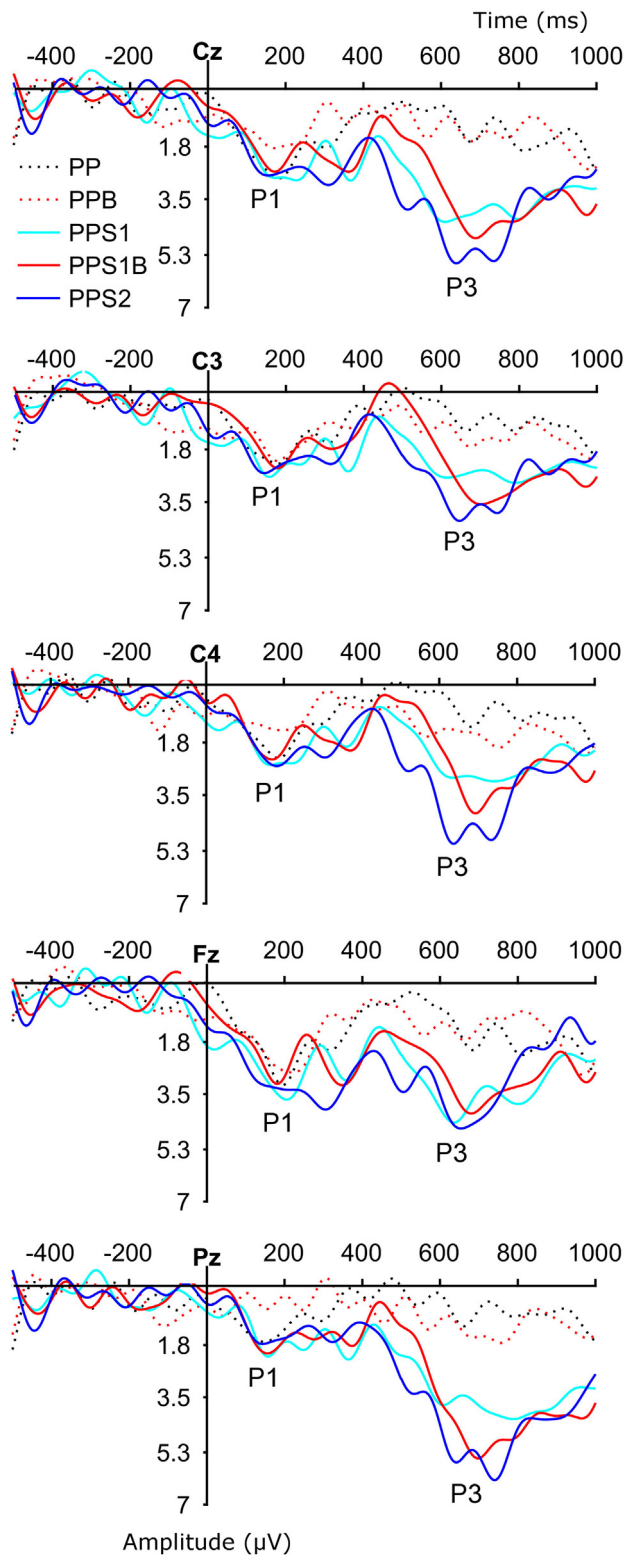


Fig 1. Event-related potentials for all solutions and all electrodes. The curves are Grand Mean weighted by the number of epochs finally accepted for each participant (amplitude (μV) as a function of time (ms) for each solution). The solutions were green-pea soup (PP), PP with beef stock aroma (PPB), PP with a reduced level of salt (3.125 g/L) (PPS1), PPS1 with beef stock aroma (PPS1B) and PP with a usual level of salt (6.25 g/L) (PPS2). The five recorded electrodes are shown (Cz, C3, C4, Fz and Pz). To improve graphical representation of ERPs, grand means were filtered with a Butterworth low-pass filter at 20 Hz and baseline was corrected.

P1 peak

There was a significant effect of channel on amplitude ($F [4, 298] = 4.52, p = 0.002$). Fz presented the highest P1 mean amplitude ($M = 3.98, \text{SEM} = 0.33$) and did not significantly differ from Cz ($z = 1.45, \text{pcorr} = 0.26$) but differed from Pz, C4 and C3 (for all comparisons: $p < 0.02$). Therefore, Fz and Cz were included as repeated measures in the following analyses.

There was no significant difference in the amplitude of P1 between solutions ($F [4, 98] = 1.22, p = 0.31, \text{sd random effects} = 10.14$) but the latency of P1 differed ($F[4, 98] = 3.31, p = 0.01, \text{sd random effects} = 108.6029$) (Fig. 2). P1 for PPS2 ($M = 143 \pm 5 \text{ ms}$) appeared earlier than PPS1B ($M = 164 \pm 4 \text{ ms}$) and PPB ($M = 163 \pm 5 \text{ ms}$). Indeed, P1 for PPS2 appeared respectively 21 ms ($z = -3.22, p = 0.01, \text{estimate} = 21, \text{sd} = 6.45$) and 20 ms ($z = -3.05, p = 0.01, \text{estimate} = 20, \text{sd} = 6.44$) earlier than PPS1B and PPB, which means that P1 for PPS2 appeared earlier than the two “aromatic” solutions (beef stock odor). Latency did not differ between PPS1B, PPS1, PPB and PP ($p > 0.13, \text{estimates} < 13.6, \text{sd} < 6.99$).

P3 peak

There was a significant effect of electrode position on the amplitude of P3 peak ($F [4, 287] = 2.45, p = 0.05$). Cz presented the highest mean amplitude of P3 ($M = 5.03, \text{SEM} = 0.53$) and did not significantly differ from the Fz, C4 and Pz electrodes ($p > 0.75$) but differed from C3 ($z = 2.77, p = 0.05$). Therefore, Cz, Fz, C4, and Pz were included as repeated measures in the analysis.

A significant difference was found on the amplitude of P3 peak between solutions ($F [4, 204] = 18.52, p < 0.0001, \text{sd random effects} = 12.76$). PPS1, PPS1B and PPS2 induced significantly larger P3 peaks than PP and PPB (contrast between unsalted and salted solutions, $z = 8.443, \text{pcorr} < 0.0001, \text{estimate} = 9.02, \text{sd} = 1.07$, Fig. 3A). A weak but significant positive correlation was found between saltiness intensity ratings and P3 peak amplitude ($z = 3.05, p = 0.002, \text{tau} = 0.26$) (Fig. 4). The P3 peak amplitudes for PP and PPB did not differ from a null amplitude ($\text{pcorr} > 0.39, \text{estimates} < 0.16, \text{sd} < 0.55$). There was no difference of P3 amplitude between PPS1, PPS1B and PPS2 ($\text{pcorr} > 0.30, \text{estimates} < 0.69, \text{sd} < 0.56$).

There was a significant difference on latency of P3 between the tested solutions ($F[2, 102] = 9.05, p = 0.0003, \text{sd random effects} = 152.85$). The P3 peak appeared later for PPS1B ($M = 662 \pm 6 \text{ ms}$) compared to PPS1 ($M = 637 \pm 5 \text{ ms}, z = 3.93, \text{pcorr} = 0.0003, \text{estimate} = 26.3, \text{sd} = 6.70$) and to PPS2 ($M = 642 \pm 4 \text{ ms}, z = -3.24, \text{pcorr} = 0.002, \text{estimate} = 20.58, \text{sd} = 6.36$) (Fig. 3B). In summary, the P3 peak was significantly different from zero amplitude only for the solutions PPS1, PPS1B and PPS2. The P3 peak, in response to PPS1B, was delayed of 25 ms and 20 ms compared with PPS1 and PPS2 respectively. Finally, the amplitude of the P3 peak increased as a function of the saltiness intensity rated.

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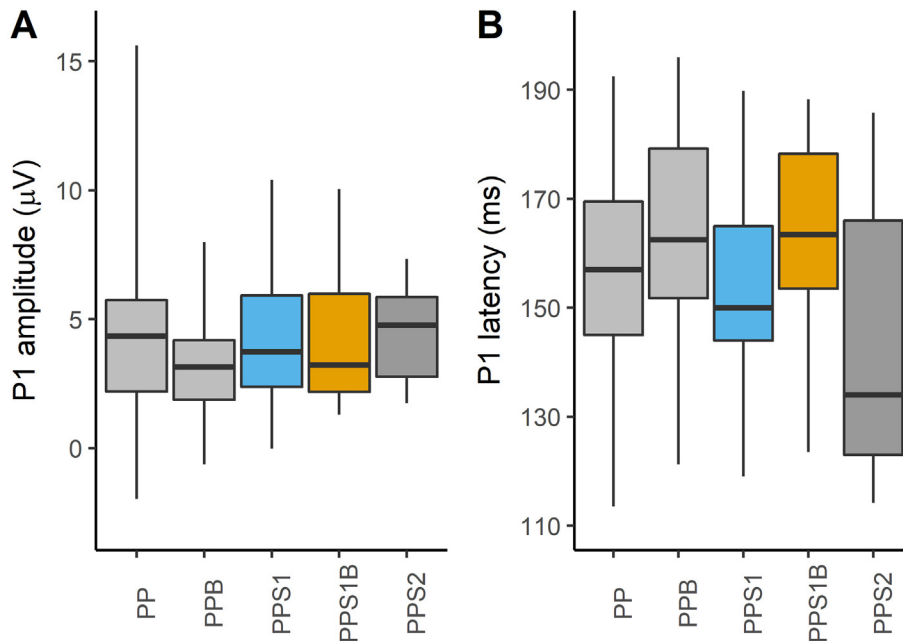


Fig 2. P1 peak amplitude and latency. Weighted mean P1 amplitudes (A) and latencies (B) (\pm CI95%) for electrodes Fz and Cz for each solution: green-pea soup (PP), PP with beef stock aroma (PPB), PP with a reduced level of salt (3.125 g/L) (PPS1), PPS1 with beef stock aroma (PPS1B) and PP with a usual level of salt (6.25 g/L) (PPS2).

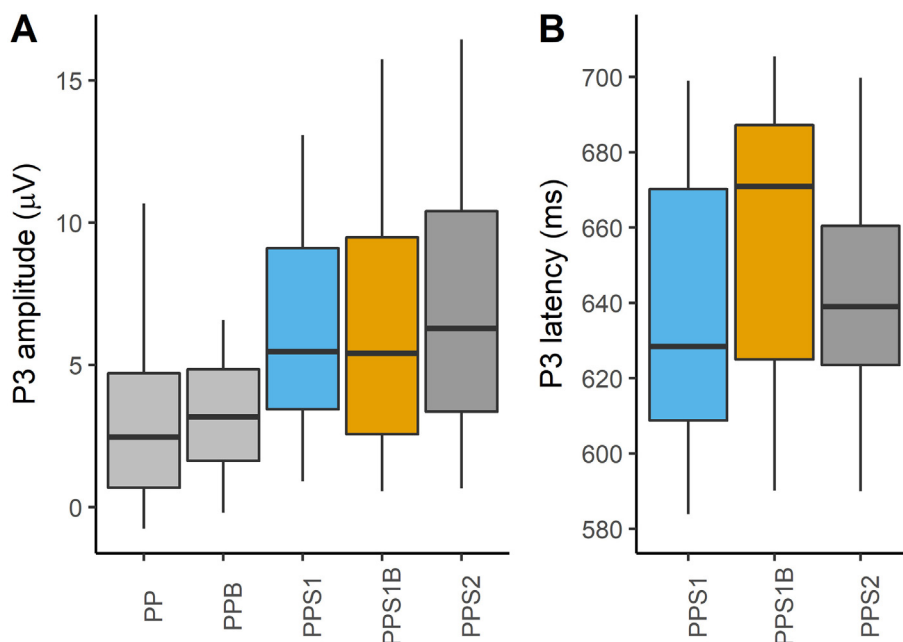


Fig 3. P3 peak amplitude and latency. Weighted mean P3 peak amplitudes (A) and latencies (B) (\pm CI95%) for electrodes Fz, Cz, C4, and Pz for each solution: green-pea soup (PP), PP with beef stock aroma (PPB), PP with a reduced level of salt (3.125 g/L) (PPS1), PPS1 with beef stock aroma (PPS1B) and PP with a usual level of salt (6.25 g/L) (PPS2). A P3 peak was not found for PP and PPB. Therefore, mean latencies were calculated only for PPS1B, PPS1, and PPS2.

DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to highlight the brain chronometry of odor–taste integration using OISE. Our hypothesis, based on the classical view of odor–taste integration, was that differences of amplitude and/or latencies between solutions with and without OISE would be observed on the late P3 peak of olfactory-gustatory ERP, but no difference would appear on the early P1 peak. The sensory results showed a significant OISE using the “beef stock” aroma (PPS1B vs. PPS1) in the green pea soup. The ERP results showed an increased latency on the P3 peak with the same solutions (PPS1B vs. PPS1). No difference in amplitude or latency was observed on the P1 peak between PPS1B and PPS1. Therefore, our results support the hypothesis of late brain integration in the high cognitive areas as proposed in the classical view of flavor perception (Verhagen and Engelen, 2006; Verhagen, 2007; Small, 2008; Prescott, 2012).

The ERPs measured in our study mainly reflect the gustatory component (specifically the saltiness processing) of the solutions, and its modulation by the olfactory component. Indeed the grand-averages showed ERPs with proper peaks, well-differentiated from noise, for the salted solutions and small ones for the control solutions apart from the P1 peak (Fig. 2). These control solutions (PP and PPB) were mainly odorant and had a poor taste. Furthermore, as the P3 peak correlated to the saltiness intensity (Fig. 4), it also supports that the ERPs represent mainly the gustatory brain activations and their modulation by the olfactory component. Therefore, any effect observed on P1 or P3 peaks will be either explained by the concentrations of salt or by the modulation of the gustatory processing by the olfactory one (i.e., odor-induced saltiness enhancement). This modulation

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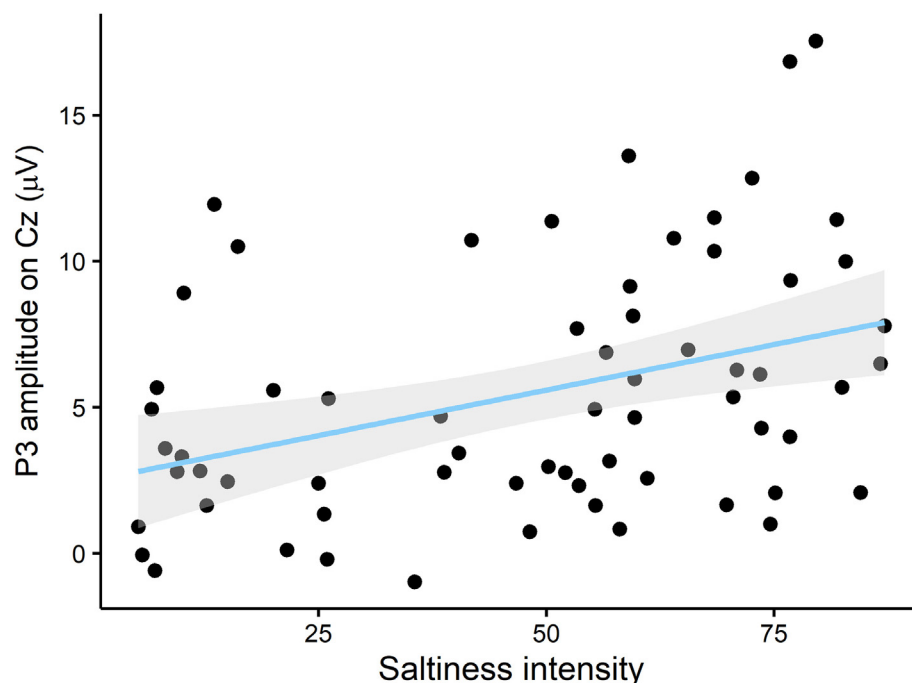


Fig 4. Correlation between the mean saltiness intensity ratings and the amplitude (μV) of the P3 peak at the Cz electrode. Each data point is the evaluation of one solution evaluated 40 times by one participant (13 participants and 5 solutions). The amplitude of the P3 peak increased as a function of the saltiness intensity. Kendall correlation: $z = 3.05$, $p = 0.002$, $\tau = 0.26$.

can either intervene early in the processing by direct interactions between primary olfactory and gustatory areas (emerging view) or occur later in the processing through top-down pathways (classical view). Because the modulation observed appeared on the P3 peak and not on P1, the results confirmed OISE's classical view.

We observed a higher salty taste intensity in PPB compared to PP. However, the effect in PPB likely implied an odor-induced saltiness perception (OISP), but no enhancement (OISE) as salt was not present in the solution. Because gustatory responses mainly drive the ERPs here, although we observed a perceptual difference between PP and PPB (OISP), we did not observe brain correlates of such sensory response. It could be that OISP and OISE involve different brain circuits or that the number of neurons involved by the OISP may not be sufficient to be visible in ERP, on the contrary to OISE. The sensory effects may seem contradictory, but the low range of salt concentration may explain this result. The OISE effect is statistically significant in the PPS1B solution, but the OISE appeared small and lower than the OISP (Fig. 1). The enhancement of salty taste induced by an odor is usually observed in the range of 10 to 30% (Lawrence et al., 2009). In the present study, the percentage of enhancement (5%) might have been flattened because of the evaluation of no-salt-added samples (PP and PPB) in the sample set. Indeed, these two samples' saltiness intensity was likely low compared to the three other salt-containing samples, which could have reduced the discrimination between PPS1, PPS1B, and PPS2. This

hypothesis is supported by the unexpected small difference between PPS1 and PPS2 that contained double salt.

One could think that rating saltiness intensity only at the end of each epoch recording would involve a dumping effect. A dumping effect occurs when "a salient attribute is not included on a ballot; the opinion about that aspect of the product may then be displaced onto another, sometimes inappropriate scale. In other words, if consumers are not given a rating scale in which they can voice some important opinion about a product, they will 'dump' this perception onto some other available rating scale or question" (Clark and Lawless, 1994). Dumping is usually considered as a bias in sensory rating because it could lead to perceived intensity overrating. However, several recent studies reconsider the dumping effect not as bias but as a proof of odor–taste integration, because flavor perception is by nature configural (Prescott, 2012; Onuma et al., 2018). There-

fore, when participants have no clue about the elements (odor and taste), the configuration (flavor) is attended, and the OITE occurs. The configural perception is a typical integratory perception described in the significant contribution of the "unique cue theory" (Rescorla, 1972, 1973). This theory was further developed by Pearce (2002) and finally demonstrated in the context of odor-odor and odor–taste configural perceptions (Le Berre et al., 2008, 2010; Sinding et al., 2011; White et al., 2020).

P1 peak

P1 peak, in chemosensory studies (70–302 ms), is associated to brain circuits responding to exogenous properties of the food such as tastant concentration (Funakoshi and Kawamura, 1971; Kobayakawa et al., 1999, 2007; Mizoguchi et al., 2002; Ohla et al., 2010). Here, we did not find early changes in the brain processing of PPS1B compared to PPS1 when considering amplitude or latencies of the P1 peak. Therefore, no effect possibly linked to OISE could be observed on the P1 peak amplitude. We found a delay on the P1 peak, between PPS2 vs. PPS1B and PPB. These contrasts could not account for the OISE phenomenon, which would suppose a difference between PPS1 and PPS1B. Both PPS1B and PPB solutions contained a "beef stock aroma" and were delayed compared to the most salted solution PPS2. This polarization of the two types of solutions (high salt solution vs. high odorant solutions) regarding their P1 latencies could highlight the differential processing between salient gustatory solution (PPS2) and salient olfactory solutions

(PPB and PPS1B). In the literature, it is reported that olfactory ERPs have a later P1 peak than gustatory ERP. In studies that showed a P1 peak in response to olfactory stimulation, this peak appeared between 200–280 ms (Tateyama et al., 1998; Iannilli et al., 2013), while it appeared at 120–140 ms for gustatory stimulation (Mizoguchi et al., 2002; Ohla et al., 2009, 2010; Jacquin-Piques et al., 2015).

Significant differences in P1 amplitude regarding salt concentration in PP, PPS1, and PPS2 were not found, although these solutions were perceived as significantly different. This result is inconsistent with Kobayakawa and colleagues (Kobayakawa et al., 1996, 1999, 2008). It is generally assumed that P1 amplitude is related to tastant concentration. Three studies from two independent labs showed that P1 latency is more likely to reflect a change in tastant concentration, with lower latencies for higher concentrations (Funakoshi and Kawamura, 1971; Kobal, 1985; Tateyama et al., 1998). In our study, the solution with the highest concentration of salt (PPS2) was processed with the lowest latency, but the result is not significant. Altogether, these results could be explained by the concentrations of salt used in our study, which are not sufficiently extreme to show the expected latency difference. Studies that tackle the brain peaks associated with the perception of tastant concentrations use steps of concentrations 5 times larger than those used in our study. In Kobayakawa et al. (2008), differences of P1 amplitude were observed between 100 mM (5.84 g/L) and 1 M (58.4 g/L), or between 30 mM (1.752 g/L) and 300 (17.52 g/L), but not between 100 mM and 300 mM. In our study, salt concentrations were in line with a usual soup that is 6.25 g/L for PPS2 and 3 g/L for PPS1 (soup with reduced-salt level). Likely, the low, but food relevant, salt concentrations used in our study could explain why we did not observe significant differences in either amplitude or latency for P1 peak as a function of salt levels.

767 **P3 latency might be a marker of odor-induced taste** 768 **enhancement**

769 P3 peak might be linked to cognitive processing diversity,
770 including emotions integration, attention allocation, and
771 working memory, which have in common their endogenous
772 origin. Furthermore, the P3 peak is elicited
773 by multiple intracerebral generators revealing its
774 integratory component (Picton, 1992; Li et al., 2015). In
775 our study, the P3 peak was significantly delayed by
776 20 ms or more in response to PPS1B compared to
777 PPS1 and PPS2. Moreover, the brain processing of
778 PPB did not present a significant P3 peak; therefore, we
779 could exclude an impact of the odor component on P3,
780 and we could then directly compare PPS1B to PPS1
781 and PPS2. We can also exclude an earlier origin of this
782 delay, as no significant delay was present at the early
783 stages of brain processing (only 7 ms separated P1 peaks
784 for PPS1B compared with PPS1). Although the interpreta-
785 tion of latencies, in terms of neuronal activity, is challeng-
786 ing, we might consider this delay as evidence for a higher
787 number of synapses involved in processing the sensory
788 information for solutions presenting an odor-induced taste

enhancement (for review, see Woodman, 2010). This
result would comply with the classical view of flavor inte-
gration proposed by Verhagen (Verhagen and Engelen,
2006; Verhagen, 2007). In this theory, inspired by visual
studies, downstream areas activate heteromodal integra-
tion areas that then loop back to the primary sensory
areas to form a refined activation pattern. The activation
of these associative areas, and the back projections to
primary gustatory regions, may explain the higher latency
observed for the odor-induced taste enhancement solu-
tion. Heteromodal multisensory processing areas, such
as the superior temporal sulcus (Calvert, 2001; Calvert
and Thesen, 2004), were found to be activated between
518–730 ms after food odor stimulation, with magnetoen-
cephalography (MEG) (Kettenmann et al., 1997). This
timing is consistent with the latency of the P3 peak iden-
tified in the present study.

806 **P3 peak amplitude might be a marker of conscious** 807 **perception of the saltiness intensity**

808 An intriguing result is that the amplitude of the P3 peak
809 was significantly different from the null amplitude only in
810 solutions with added-salt. Furthermore, looking at
811 individual results, we found a small but significant
812 correlation of this peak amplitude with salty taste
813 intensity ratings. Several explanations may account for
814 these results and may rely on different cognitive steps
815 involved in the intensity rating task. These steps may be
816 decomposed: i) non-conscious salt concentration
817 processing, ii) conscious representation of saltiness
818 intensity, and iii) evaluation of/decision on saltiness
819 intensity. The difference in P3 amplitude did not
820 correspond to the first step, as we did not find a
821 significant difference in amplitude between PPS1 and
822 PPS2. These results could be linked to the evaluation/
823 decision on saltiness intensity rating, which occurred at
824 least 320 ms after the P3 peak. As the participants were
825 likely expecting to evaluate the saltiness intensity after
826 each stimulation, the P3 peak could reflect their
827 anticipatory evaluation. However, in this case, P3 would
828 have also been observed for PP and PPB solutions.
829 Finally, suppose these results are neither linked to “the
830 non-conscious salt concentration representation” nor “to
831 the evaluation/decision on the saltiness intensity”. In
832 that case, it could be an intermediate state: “a
833 conscious representation of the saltiness intensity”.
834 Notably, the expectancy of the intensity scale could
835 favor the conscious representation of the saltiness
836 intensity. This late conscious perception has been
837 shown in visual attentional blink studies (Sergent et al.,
838 2005). This task permitted us to decipher the peaks
839 involved in non-conscious processing versus conscious
840 one. Although such results were not yet shown in taste
841 sensory modality, we suggest that P3 might represent
842 the conscious perception of the saltiness intensity.

843 **The classical view of odor–taste integration** 844 **supported by our results**

845 Overall, our results support the odor–taste integration
846 theoretical framework proposed by Verhagen (Verhagen

and Engelen, 2006; Verhagen, 2007), Prescott (2012), and Small (Small, 2008). In this framework, the integration of odor and taste occurs in high-level brain areas (OFC, perirhinal, and dorsal mid insula), as brain correlations of odor-induced saltiness enhancement were found only at the later stages of brain processing. More recently, Small and colleagues (Small et al., 2013) proposed an emerging model of odor–taste integration relying on animal studies and fMRI human studies (De Araujo et al., 2003; Maier et al., 2012, 2015; Seubert et al., 2015; Maier, 2017). They showed early interactions between primary olfactory and gustatory regions. They proposed: i) a densely connected system between olfactory and gustatory areas and ii) that flavor might be already integrated into primary chemosensory cortices. Although our study did not refute the dense connections between primary olfactory and gustatory cortices, it did not show early modulation in response to odor and taste presented together. However, we cannot completely exclude that our EEG design was not powered enough to detect early changes.

Our results provide the first insight into the brain chronometry of odor–taste integration, focusing on salty flavor. We found that olfactory-gustatory interactions mainly occur in the late brain processing of sensory information carried by a close-to-real food solution. We have developed an adequate stimulation method to understand the chronometry of odor–taste integration in the flavor system. Other converging results on similar questions would be necessary to comprehend flavor perception and underlying brain mechanisms further. The enhancing effect was small in our solution, likely due to the type of evaluation (intensity scales) and context (during EEG recording). Therefore, our results' reproducibility should be tested with a more reliable sensory evaluation method and several food models. Due to the long recording time, we could neither test several solutions presenting an odor-induced taste enhancement nor control solutions without such an effect. A study comparing enhancing and non-enhancing aroma would be of interest.

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