

Deconstructing Consumers' Acceptance of Novel Food Technologies: Role of Cultural Value and Information Format

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Advances in food technologies affect what and how people eat by offering foods with diverse benefits. Consumers' attitudes towards novel food technologies, however, are not uniformly positive. For example, the controversy around genetically modified food reveals a striking divergence of opinions between the public and scientists. Previous studies have shown that consumers' attitudes are shaped by various factors, such as knowledge, risk/benefit perception, trust, emotional heuristics, etc. Nevertheless, there are limited insights as to why public acceptance of new food technologies does not grow with exposure to more scientific information, and why attitudes have rather become more persistent and polarized.

On the basis of consumer data collected from an online discrete choice experiment during the summer of 2016, this paper aims to add insights to previous literature in two ways. First, the analysis examines whether attitudes to a controversial food technology is an expression of an individual's underlying and fundamental values, the effects of which have been omitted or underestimated previously in the economics literature. For example, the role of different human values – cultural worldviews, moral considerations, and intermediary food-related values – in affecting attitudes and valuations of novel food technology are examined. A second objective is to compare the effectiveness of two information communication formats in shaping food technology perceptions and attitudes. Although previous studies have examined the importance of different aspects of information (type, order, source, etc.) on attitudes towards food technology, very few studies have examined the influence of narrative vs. logical-scientific information formats. This study develops specific narratives about food biotechnology and nanotechnology as a means to delve more deeply into the effects of information on the consumer decision-making process.