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Diversity in the determinants of food choice: A psychological perspective

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Abstract

Eating, drinking and food choices are among the most frequent human behaviours. Although seemingly simple, they are complex behaviours that are determined by many factors and their interactions. The complexity of the research field stresses the necessity to attack problems in an interdisciplinary way. Unfortunately, truly interdisciplinary approaches are still rare in both sensory and consumer research. Although the number of publications has grown rapidly, there is little methodological progress and much repetition of easy mono-disciplinary research. Furthermore, and perhaps worst of all, there is very little influx from the fascinating fundamental insights about human behaviour gained over the last two decennia in physiology and psychology. Thus, findings about intuitive reasoning and the clear demonstration of the unconscious nature of most of our decision making do not seem to have touched sensory and consumer research, although they probably play a more important role in food-related behaviour

than anywhere else. Instead, people still strongly adhere to theories like the theory of reasoned action and planned behaviour that are based on the idea of rational and conscious decision making and have come under severe criticism on the basis of their low predictive validity, their weak methodology and their strong theoretical bias. Past behaviour, habit and hedonic appreciation are usually better predictors of actual food choice behaviour than psychological constructs like attitudes and intentions. New insights and especially the realisation that much decision making occurs at a non-conscious level, should lead to a rethinking of the methods used in sensory and consumer research. Situational analysis, observational methods and memory and expectation research have the advantage that they leave the interactive integration of the behaviour determinants with the subject, where it belongs, instead of dissecting and reconstructing it via isolated single factor research.



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Keywords

Sensory consumer research; Food-related behaviour; Interdisciplinarity; Intuitive reasoning; Non-conscious decision making; Situational analysis; Interactive integration of behaviour determinants

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