

How to counter the reasons for rejecting insects as food? : An Abstract

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ABSTRACT

Although insects are nutritional and their consumption plays an economic and environmental role globally, they are viewed as inedible within French culture. The aim of this research is to study to what extent strategies for regulating people's ambivalence (Health-Illness, Pleasure-Displeasure, Life-Death) would make it possible to counter the reasons for rejecting insects as food – danger, aversion and disgust – and to promote their acceptance. Using an original interdisciplinary theoretical framework, we examine whether linking studies on food behaviour in sociology on the one hand and in psychology on the other can resolve a marketing issue with regard to the culturally defined consumption of insects. A qualitative study conducted with 37 participants validates this theoretical approach and puts forward marketing suggestions for producers.

To answer the objectives of the research, we conducted a qualitative study in two French cities (Nantes and Angers). 21 individual interviews were carried out together with two focus groups (2 x 8 participants: focus group 1 = Angers, focus group 2 = Nantes), the advantage of these being that more varied or even innovative responses could be obtained than in the individual interviews. Interview guides are subdivided into five stages. Stage 1 explores the world evoked (or the mental representations) by insects and entomophagy. Stages 2, 3 and 4 are concerned with the participants' acceptance of different types of insects or insect products. Stage 5 addresses the motivations, reluctance and circumstances of target consumers and levers for acceptance. The participants were selected from an adult and urban student population – since such a population is less neophobic (Tuorila et al. 2001, Verbeke 2015) –, on a voluntary basis, making sure that none of them suffered from food allergies or had a specific diet for reasons of health or religious belief. All the discourses collected were subjected to a thematic manual content analysis and a lexicometric analysis carried out with IRaMuTeQ software.

This study shows that the perception of danger associated with entomophagy could be reduced by providing information on the nutritional benefits, provenance, and methods of production, slaughter and harvesting of insects. Health-related messages may, on the other hand, increase people's interest in consuming insects. Familiarization could overcome aversion and could help to regulate pleasure-displeasure ambivalence. Finally, our study shows that the transformation (into granular or ground form) and concealment of insects overcomes disgust on the part of respondents. So, insects combined with or incorporated into familiar foods are less likely to activate mental representations preventing their consumption.

Keywords: entomophagy, taste, disgust, culture, acceptability

References Available Upon Request