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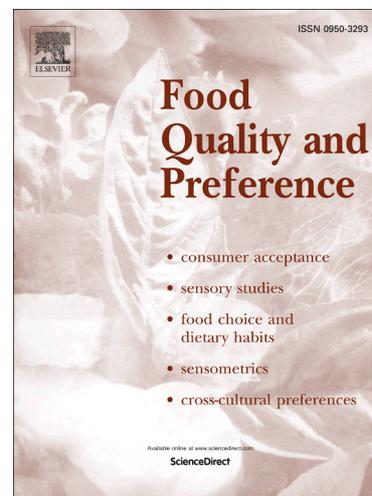
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The influence of psychological traits, beliefs and taste responsiveness on implicit attitudes toward plant- and animal-based dishes among vegetarians, flexitarians and omnivores

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Abstract

A global dietary transition, associated with negative effects on health and environment and characterized by an increase of animal-based diets to the detriment of plant-based diets, has occurred in the last few decades.

Many factors (biological, physiological, psychological and socio-cultural), are known to play a role in affecting food choices and should be considered in order to promote more healthier plant based-diets. The aim of this study was therefore to explore the associations among psychological and personality traits, attitudes, beliefs and taste responsiveness in affecting implicitly measured attitudes toward plant-based and animal based-dishes.

These attitudes were measured through three independent Implicit Association Tests (IATs), using images of culinary preparations of plant-based, meat-based and dairy-based dishes and positive/negative emotions. 125 subjects (39 omnivores, 55 flexitarians and 31 vegetarians) participated in each IAT. Questionnaires measuring psychological and personality traits, attitudes toward foods and beliefs about food animals were employed. Moreover, taste responsiveness was measured through the bitter intensity assessment of PROP. A Partial Least Square model was then adopted to study the individual variability in the implicit attitudes toward the plant-based and animal-based dishes in relation to psychological and personality traits, general food attitudes, beliefs on food animals and taste responsiveness measures.

Overall the implicit measures were found to be in line with declared eating habits, with Vegetarians and Flexitarians more inclined to implicitly associate positive emotions to meat-free dishes than Omnivores, and with Vegetarians showing a stronger association than Flexitarians. The results showed that positive attitudes toward plant-based dishes were positively related to the empathic sensitivity toward humans and animals, as well as to attitudes toward healthy and natural products, highlighting an important role of food consciousness in determining the eating habits. On the contrary, food involvement and attitude towards taste did not differ among the considered segments. Responsiveness to PROP and sensitivity to pathogen disgust were found to be lower in Vegetarians compared to Omnivores.

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