

Embedding Nostalgia in Consumer Communication to Enhance Acceptance of “Ugly” Produce

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Impact on California Agriculture: Around 20% - 25% of fruits and vegetables are discarded by consumers and rejected by farmers and retailers only due to cosmetic reasons (Kummu et al., 2012; Swinford, 2013). The National Resource Defense Council estimated that, in California, we throw out around 5.6 million tons of food every year. In California, food recovery efforts are gathering edible food that would otherwise go to waste and redistributing it to feed the hungry. Senate Bill 1383 mandates that by 2025, California aims to recover 20% of edible food that would otherwise be thrown away to feed persons in need. Given that most of the misshapen, imperfect, unattracted fruits and vegetables are wasted or disposed with extremely low profitability for the farmers, the project intends to explore a new cost-effective intervention to increase the retail potentials for these produce by increasing consumers' acceptance.

Rationale/Introduction: Ugly food fall under the definition of edible food - food intended for people to eat, including food not sold because of appearance, size, age, and other reasons. The imperfect shape of the “ugly” food does not lower its taste or nutritional quality, but consumers continue to expect the fruits and vegetables to be look perfect all year aground (Walmsley 2017). We identify a new way to promote the purchase of “ugly” foods by inducing consumers’ nostalgic emotions. Nostalgia as an emotion can effectively strengthen people's patience and resilience, promote self-control, promote people's attention to long-term rewards, enhance the pursuit of important and beneficial things, and make decisions that are more in line with the standard of virtue. We expect that nostalgia will also increase consumer tolerance and that more tolerant consumers will be more receptive to ugly and imperfect fruit and vegetables.

Experimental Approach: We aim to show that embedding nostalgia emotions in marketing tools increases the likelihood of consumers purchasing “ugly” vegetables and fruits, and consumers are more willing to participate in and share information about an “ugly” food campaign. We conducted three consumer experiments to investigate the effectiveness of embedding nostalgia emotions in consumer communication such as ads and social media campaigns on consumers’ attitude and purchase intention on ugly food. Consumer experiments we between-subject designs were conducted via online survey with US consumer participants samples. Different nostalgia emotion manipulations (e.g., memory recall, external cues) and outcome measures (i.e., purchase intention of ugly vegetables and fruits, products that are made from ugly foods, and participate in and share about an ugly food campaign) will be used in the experiments.

Major Conclusions: We show that nostalgia will also increase consumer tolerance, making consumers more receptive to “ugly” and imperfect fruit and vegetables. We demonstrate that embedding nostalgia emotions in marketing tools increases the likelihood of consumers purchasing “ugly” vegetables and fruits, and consumers are more willing to participate in and share information about an “ugly” food campaign. Our mediation analyses show that increased tolerance drives the proposed effect.

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