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Do consumers respond to nudges? The case of bitter vegetables

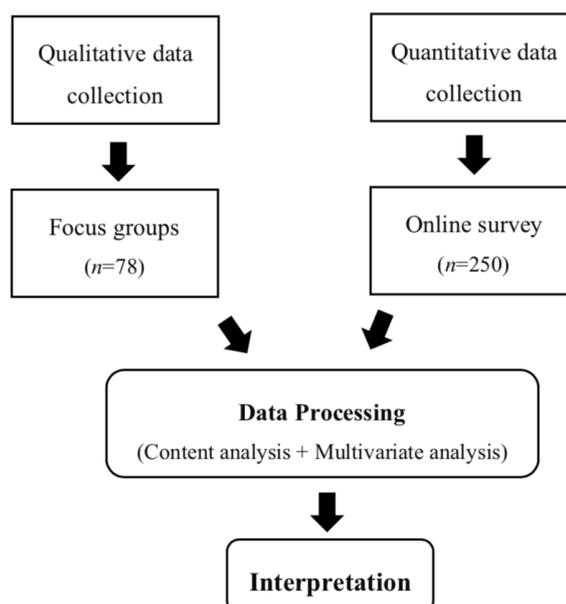
Carla Cavallo *, Riccardo Vecchio, Department of Agricultural Sciences, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II; Via Università, 100 Portici (NA), Italy

*corresponding author; email: carla.cavallo@unina.it

Abstract

The current study analyzes young consumers' preferences towards bitter tasting food and the effectiveness of nudges in changing dietary behavior. Therefore, a convergent mixed methods design collected qualitative and quantitative data in parallel (Figure 1). The product that has been used as a case study is broccoli, being the most famous vegetable from the Cruciferae family and being their most salient characteristic in the mind of consumers their

Figure 1 – Convergent parallel mixed methods design



bitter taste (Cornelis, Tordoff, El-Sohehy, & van Dam, 2017). Focus groups have been

conducted to collect consumers' preferences for bitter tasting products in general. Focus groups' sample is composed by 78 consumers (43 male), aged between 18 and 32. The discussions were aimed at understanding the opinions of participants about bitter foods, their current food habits, and the core barriers and drivers to bitter food consumption. In addition, with the aim of collecting practical marketing directions, according to the brand personality theory, participants were asked what was the personality best matched with broccoli (Aaker, 1997). In parallel, an online survey has been administered to 250 consumers of the same age category, to collect specific information and test the effectiveness of providing simplified health information (nudges) to foster behavioral changes. The survey also focused on broccoli consumption.

Figure 2 – Proximity plot for the word “bitter” as recurring during the focus groups

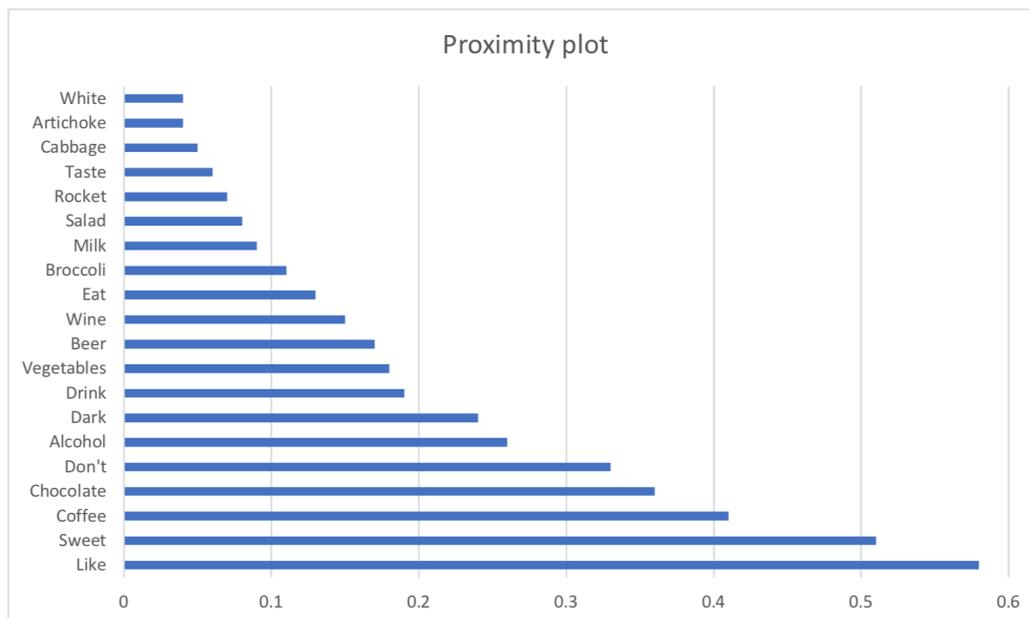
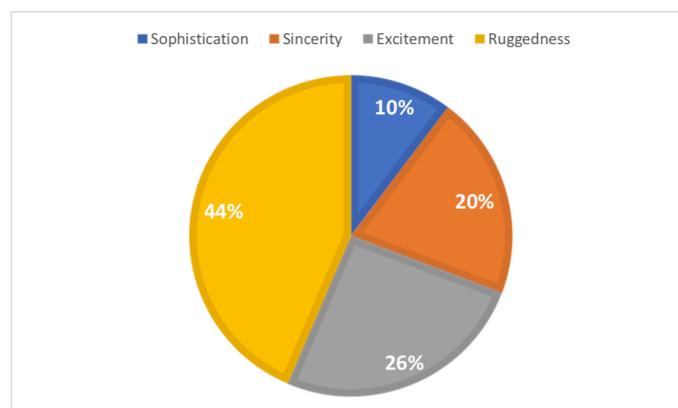


Figure 3 – Distribution of the recalled personality for broccoli during the focus groups



Focus groups' data analysis yielded a proximity plot (Figure 2) that confirmed previous research indicating that chocolate, coffee and alcoholic beverages represent foods for which the acceptance of bitter taste has been reached (Donadini, Fumi, & Lambri, 2012; Geel, Kinnear, & De Kock, 2005; Harwood, Ziegler, & Hayes, 2012; Li, Hayes, & Ziegler, 2014; Masi, Dinnella, Pirastu, Prescott, & Monteleone, 2016; Varela, Beltrán, & Fiszman, 2014).

Furthermore, the analysis of the section devoted to the identity of broccoli, suggests that the majority of preferences were directed toward a “ruggedness” image, as shown in Figure 3.

Survey results suggest that approximately 71% of the sample expressed a favorable opinion for broccoli, using the positive emoji. More interestingly, 38% of respondents stated to be willing to enhance their bitter vegetables consumption in the next future after receiving a health nudge.

Keywords: consumers' preference, bitter taste, vegetables, nudging

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