

The effect of animality on disgust response at the prospect of meat preparation—An experimental approach from Norway

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Abstract

This paper presents an experimental design approach to measure the effect of disgust elicitors related to the symbolic concept of “animality” on consumers’ disgust at the prospect of meat preparation. Three factors of animality were operationalised and tested; Meat Typicality, Animal Nature Typicality, and Personification. The consumer sample consisted of 119 adolescents and 117 adults from Norway (118 females and 118 males). The study employed a full factorial design (2^3) with these three disgust-eliciting factors as design variables. L-PLSR was performed on the data as well as a more traditional approach for hypothesis testing (ANOVA). The manipulations demonstrated for each factor that the more the meat stimuli could be animalised the more disgust they provoked. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Despite its high status as proper food, meat seems to embody many negative symbolic associations with its link to the living animal, blood, slaughter, aggression, and violence (Elias, 1978; Guzman & Kjærnes, 1998; Lupton, 1996; Twigg, 1983). Simoons (1994) furthermore stated that of all groups of food avoidances, those that pertain to foods from animal origin are the ones that are accompanied by the strongest negative feelings. In the psychological literature the emotion of disgust has been related to animal products (Angyal, 1941; Rozin & Fallon, 1980, 1987).

Disgust is an important emotion in every-day life, and it is realised when consumers think of or experience

unpleasant situations (Mela, 2000; Rozin & Fallon, 1987). Disgust as a primary and distinct emotion is motivated through “taking in or being close to an indigestible object or idea, metaphorically speaking. Rozin and Fallon (1987) proposed a Theory of Disgust and defined disgust as “a food-related emotion which is characterised by revulsion at the prospect of (oral) incorporation of an offensive and contaminating object”. More precisely, this definition encompasses all the stages in product-person interaction where there is a potential for ingestion. This can especially refer to pre-ingestion stages as sight on the plate, or in physical contact with the body, for example during preparation. Studies confirm that consumers may be reluctant to prepare food from animal origin in order to escape from touching and smelling raw meat and meat cuts (Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, & Risvik, 2002; Santos & Booth, 1996). However, situational disgust like this has not been tested previously. This study focused on the measurement of disgust at the prospect of meat preparation.

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According to Rozin and Fallon (1987) the offensiveness or indigestibility in the disgust response is centred around *animality* as the starting point. Angyal (1941) proposed that all disgusting items have animal origin, which is further supported through the contributions of Rozin and his colleges (Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994; Rozin & Fallon, 1980, 1987). According to Miller (1997) the disgust for animals is just like a mirror: the animals that disgust us do not disgust us as animals, but because they have gestalt characteristics that are similar to our own.

This study has attempted to operationalise and test three concepts of animality that have not previously been subjected for empirical testing. Methodologically, this article employed the so-called L-PLSR (L-shaped Partial Least Squares Regression) method (Martens et al., 2003) as well as traditional ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to study the disgust responses. First, the intention was to demonstrate how L-PLSR could be applied to data from an experimental setting, with the aim to understand the relationship between disgust responses, consumer backgrounds and stimuli. Secondly, the aim was to compare (and validate) this method to a more traditional approach to data analysis such as ANOVA.

The scope of the study was to manipulate symbolic elicitors of disgust related to animality in an experimental setting and then measure disgust responses at the prospect of meat preparation in different consumer segments (young, old, females, males, high and low disgust sensitive consumers).

2. Conceptual development and hypotheses

2.1. Three aspects of animality

The first aspect of animality was named *Meat Typicality*. Disgust has shown to be particularly attributed to red meat varieties and less to white meat such as chicken (Kubberød, Ueland, Rødbotten, Westad, & Risvik, 2002; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al., 2002). Some claim that the meat's white appearance is less likely to be associated with blood (Gregory, 1997; Guzman & Kjærnes, 1998). This factor is therefore conceptualised to deal with the stimulus' association to the category meat due to bloodiness, which has shown to be a very powerful symbolic stimulus (Adams, 1990; Elias, 1978).

The second aspect of animality was named *Animal Nature Typicality*. Most of the meat and meat products are prepared and cut in a non-recognisable form in order to disguise their animal nature (Angyal, 1941). Processing or cooking the meat before consumption, removes its origins and makes the meat less likely to evoke disgust (Gregory, 1997; Rozin & Fallon, 1987).

In this respect, hamburgers and other processed products are examples of non-typical animal foods. The opposite is true for entrails and related products, which can be associated with distinct animal body parts, and ultimately remind the respondents of the once living animal (Elias, 1978; Kenyon & Barker, 1998; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al., 2002; Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Santos & Booth, 1996). This aspect was therefore concerned with the meat's form of presentation.

The concept of *Personification* was developed as the third aspect of animality. The Norwegian anthropologist Runar Døving has worked with a relational classification taxonomy for edibility of animals in the modern culture, according to the cognitive distances between human and animals (Døving, 2003). Rejected animals (as potential foods) are typically those emotionally close to humans, like pets (Leach, 1964; Rozin & Fallon, 1987). As animals get closer to humankind, they become more disgusting as consumption objects, thus they become subjects that are more personified (Guzman & Kjærnes, 1998).

To summarise, the first two facets of animality can actually be seen as dealing with the distance from the living animal to the food, while the third factor is dealing with the emotional distance between the animal and the individual.

2.2. Adolescents, females, and meat resistance

Although there are men who avoid meat, it is predominantly a female phenomenon, especially among young females around the age of 16 (Gregory, 1997; Santos & Booth, 1996; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998; Wright & Howcroft, 1992). Mooney and Walborn (2001) found that among women, those who were meat avoiders reported greater dislike and disgust in response to meat in contrast to any other avoided foods. Young females reluctant to eat red meat found it emotionally disturbing due to the difficulty of separating the living animal from the meat on the dinner plate, and young females more often seem to display discomfort at preparing and touching meats (Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, et al., 2002; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1998). These aspects differ from those that older consumers report as major reasons for not choosing meat (Gregory, 1997; Worsley & Skrzypiec, 1997).

2.3. The trait of disgust sensitivity and meat stimuli

Haidt et al. (1994) developed the general Disgust Sensitivity Scale. Seven domains of elicitors representing animal, body products, sex, body envelope violations, death and hygiene were found to show positive interrelations. An individual who was more sensitive than the average to one domain of the scale, tended to be more sensitive than the average on the other domains as well.

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