



A STUDY OF FOOD NEOPHOBIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FOOD CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT :

With innovation in the food industry, many new products are coming to the market, however, how many of these products are consumed by the target market is a question to ask. A fear of unknown makes the consumers not to consumer it and resist. Food neophobia is defined as avoidance of, and reluctance to taste, unfamiliar foods. Objectives of the study are to identify the factors leading to the neophobia specifically towards food. Further, this study attempts to enumerate the possible ways to overcome this barrier to adopt innovative food items. There are many reasons for this behaviour from the consumers, from attitude towards food to distaste of the food.

KEYWORDS : Neophobia, food, consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Humans usually display some level of avoidance to new food, a trait that has been termed as food neophobia. Food nephobia is prevalent in omnivores and has been observed in various animals and species. Neophobia act as both protecting and limiting trait. If reduces the changes of consuming possible poison from unfamiliar and toxic food, however it would keep on limited dietary variety.

In today's situation when most of the food are safe to consumer, neophobia acts as a barrier to adopt new food choices. These food choices vary from fruit to meat (CookeL. et al, 2003). Given the importance offruit and vegetable consumption to health in childhood and adulthood, a better understanding of the cause of individual differences in neophobia would be valuable.

Food neophobia is defined as avoidance of, and reluctance to taste, unfamiliar foods (Birch LL 1998). It might be assumed that such a behaviour pattern would have negative dietary concerns in terms of the variety of foods consumed although logically, an exceedingly neophobic child need not have a limited dietary range given that he/she has formerly been familiarised with a wide range of foods. Some researchers have investigated the relationship between food neophobia and the number of foods served by parents or tried, liked and disliked by children. Other studies have examined the relationship between neophobia and consumption of specific food types. Neophobia is considered as an attitude that significantly affects the human feeding behaviour in many aspects among which food inclinations and food choices seem to be the most carefully considered. A strong link exists between food neophobia and both the variety in one person's diet and previous exposures to different foods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives are to identify the factors leading to the neophobia specifically towards food. Further, this study attempts to enumerate the possible ways to overcome this barrier to adopt innovative food items.

FACTORS LEADING TO FOOD NEOPHOBIA

Attitude towards food:

Among the psychological factors controlling an individual's relationship with food, the systematic reluctance to try novel or unknown foods (i.e., food neophobia; Pliner and Hobden, 1992) appears to play a critical role in the development of possible eating disorders (Benton, 2004). From an adaptive point of view, food neophobia protects an organism (animal or human being) from ingesting potentially dangerous foods. This mechanism has a cost, though, represented by the risk of avoiding even highly nutritious foods. Knaapila et al. (2011) stated that this attitude especially in women appears to be strongly genetically determined. The outcomes of the studies led so far on gender differences are still quite indecisive: Some authors have found that women are more neophobic than men (Frank and van der Klaauw, 1994)

Distaste as the chief reason behind food neophobia:

Distaste, a dislike of the food's taste or smell, plays a significant role in the rejection of food, and that what seems to be an antecedent for the disgust is the perception of the food texture (Yolanda Martins, 2004). Distaste eventually leads to the disgust feeling towards food which is a major reason for rejecting the food even though they are needed in a healthy diet. In kids it is very difficult to change as well as largely among adults. This feeling is more cognitive than quality of the food product.

Personality of the person

Among the Big Five personality traits, Openness personality types had lesser resistance to adopt the new food and showed lesser effect of neophobia. This was visible among both men and women related to openness personality types. Most extrovert men showed lesser fear to new food items than women. Men were comparatively more open than women. However, other personality types agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism people had smaller correlation with food neophobia (Knaapila et al. 2011).

Selective Eating Disorder:

Selective eating disorder (SED), is a type of eating disorder, where the consumption of certain foods is limited based on the food's appearance, smell, taste, texture, brand, presentation, or a past negative experience with the food (Fisher, Martin M. et al. 2014). Suffers of this disorder would restrict themselves to some types of foods or some specific brands. In some cases, one would leave a whole food group like fruit or vegetables. Colour could also be a triggering point to reject a specific food item. Some would like only very hot or very cold, very crunchy or hard-to-chew foods, or very soft foods, or avoid sauces.

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