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A SENSE OF TASTE

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Title:

Large-scale multidisciplinary studies to uncover influences on food preferences and choice

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Food choice is a complex process involving several dimensions among which the sensory perception of food plays a pivotal role. Food choices are not simply dictated by taste related preference and liking but rather depend on the interplay of food intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics with person-related dimensions that are biological, physiological, psychological, and socio-cultural. Furthermore, food preferences and choices are dynamic, changing from situation to situation and across the lifespan. The multidimensional and complex nature of food choice is well recognized within sensory science, and different research groups in Europe are currently working on determinants of food choice. Most of studies focus on a few variables related to specific aspects of one or two dimensions regulating choices, preferences or behaviours. However, in the last years, a few projects have been carried out in Europe exploring the inter-relationships between the different dimensions of food perception and preference taking into account demographics, psychosocial and attitudinal traits, taste sensitivity and sensory and hedonic response to foods.

The presentation deals with the potential of large-scale multidisciplinary studies to uncover influences on food preferences and choice considering the Italian Taste project experience. This is a large-scale study (more than three thousand respondents in three years) aimed at exploring the associations among a variety of measures (sensory and hedonic responses to food stimuli, genetic, physiological, psychological and personality-related) describing the dimensions of food preference and choice. The importance of the large scale of the sample to investigate the associations between variables, taking into account gender and age differences, in determining food preferences and choice will be discussed. Furthermore, the potential of consumer segmentations on sensory and liking responses to realistic food stimuli for interpreting the meaning of food sensory cues in association with person related factors will be presented.