

Gluten-free and Tasty? The Importance of the Unhealthy = Tasty Intuition for the Preference of Gluten-free Products among Consumers with Intolerance to Gluten

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Abstract

“Gluten-free” labels on products are highly prevalent in food retail. Currently, more and more followers of dietary trends are avoiding gluten-containing foods in order to promote their well-being and health, as wheat and gluten are often portrayed as unhealthy in the media. However, the explicit labeling of gluten-free foods plays an elementary role for consumers who react to gluten-containing products with various types of complaints (celiac disease or gluten intolerance). The explicit free-from-allergens claim on food products is therefore a visual aid for consumers affected by such intolerances to be able to exclude the non-preferred ingredients of a product from their decision-making. This research examines whether the so-called “unhealthy = tasty intuition” (UTI) can be transferred to consumers with gluten intolerance and highlights whether the UTI can be shown to affect the perception of consumers with and without existing gluten intolerance with regard to gluten-free and gluten-containing products. Thus, a study was conducted to explore whether consumers with a high UTI perceive products containing gluten as tastier when being framed to focus on indulgence (i.e., pursuing an indulgence goal) rather than to focus on health (i.e., pursuing a health goal). Results show that gluten intolerance per se did not affect tastiness but fosters choice of gluten-free alternatives when UTI is moderate or high. Further, the study demonstrates that gluten-free products are tastier for gluten-intolerant consumers, whereas products containing gluten are only rated as tastier by gluten-tolerant consumers. On this basis, it should be ensured that the tastiest product is the one that fits individual needs. These findings enable companies in the food industry to address specific needs and requirements through targeted marketing measures, for instance through appropriate labeling.

Keywords: intuition, food decision-making, health consciousness, consumer behavior