

Abstract

This dissertation examined the psychological and social determinants of consumer acceptance of insect-based food in Poland. Across the four publications, acceptance was treated as multidimensional rather than as a single, fixed attitude, with affective, cognitive, and social factors influencing contact with the product, its purchase, and its consumption. Three quantitative studies and one qualitative study addressed four aims; (1) how the influence of labelling and the visual presence of insect ingredients affect acceptance (behavioural experiment, $N = 99$); (2) how general acceptance of insects as a meat/protein substitute relates to personal willingness to consume them at the population level (nationally representative Polish sample, $N = 1,096$); (3) whether informational framing (nutritional or environmental) reduces affect-driven rejection (online experiment, $N = 659$); and (4) how the figure of the insect consumer is socially constructed (reflexive thematic analysis, $N = 19$).

Four main findings emerged across the cycle. First, the label “contains insects” suppressed willingness to eat the product regardless of whether insects were visible, indicating idea-based rather than sensory rejection. Second, a significant discrepancy was observed between the general acceptance of insect protein and personal intention to consume it, and this gap widened due to food neophobia and disgust sensitivity. Third, informational materials failed to alleviate negative product assessments; products entirely lacking insect references were evaluated most positively, and prior positive attitudes towards entomophagy and variety-seeking traits were the main predictors of acceptance, whereas food neophobia and disgust had little impact on willingness to try. Fourth, eating insects was treated as a socially visible act, as the insect consumer was stereotyped in terms of normality, conformity and perceived status, with observers’ disgust appearing to play a prominent role in shaping these attributions. Together, these findings suggest that rejection of insect-based food in this cultural context is an affectively grounded and socially reinforced, and is therefore unlikely to be overcome by information alone. Insect consumption is further embedded in processes of social construction and stereotyping of the person who incorporates insects into their diet, in which moral disgust might serve a central function.

Keywords: entomophagy, insect-based food, disgust, neophobia, food labelling, social perception, stereotyping, affect heuristic