

B02: Plan, buy, cook, eat, repeat: perspectives for sustainable meal choices and food waste reduction

Session Chair: Mariam Nikravech

Room: B: Omnia, R: Quantum 1 (max. 30)

How do consumers handle food in surprise bags at home? The influence of product liking

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Surprise bags (e.g., TooGoodToGo) are well-accepted by consumers for the surprising experience that they provide. These bags contain food close to expiration, at large discounts. However, insights about how consumers deal with food in surprise bags after picking them up are lacking. This is important to investigate because it reveals whether this food is ultimately saved from being wasted or not. Therefore, we aim to examine how consumers deal with close-to-expiration food in surprise bags at home, focusing on the influence of consumers' degree of liking the food. Consumers do not know the food included when purchasing surprise bags, so large variability may exist in the extent to which they like this food.

According to the literature, food liking is a strong predictor of food consumption. Therefore, we expect that consumers tend to eat the food in surprise bags that they like (Hypothesis 1) and discard (throw away or give away) food that they dislike (Hypothesis 2). Meanwhile, food that consumers neither like nor dislike has insufficient reasons to be immediately discarded while is not liked sufficiently to be immediately eaten. Therefore, this neutral-liked food is more likely to be stored than liked or disliked food, which implies that the effect of product liking on storing behavior has an inverted U-shape (Hypothesis 3).

To test these hypotheses, we sent two surveys to users of the TooGoodToGo app in the UK. In Study 1, 196 participants imagined receiving a surprise bag containing one food product that they liked, one that they disliked, and one that they neither disliked nor liked. They reported what percentage of each of the three foods they would eat, store (in a cupboard/fridge/freezer), give to others, or throw away. In Study 2, several days after actually purchasing a surprise bag, 150 participants indicated their degree of liking three randomly chosen foods in the bag (dislike/neutral/like) and reported what percentage of each of these three foods they had eaten, stored, given to others, or thrown out. Data included various covariates, such as motives for buying surprise bags, food categories, and household size.

Using a zero-inflated Gaussian mixed model, results in both studies showed support for our hypotheses: Liked food was eaten more ($p_s < .001$), neutral-liked food was stored more ($p_s < .031$), and disliked food was given or thrown away more ($p_s < .001$). This research is the first to show how consumers handle close-to-expiration food in surprise bags. Important insights are that many food products are liked and eaten and that a large proportion of disliked food is given away rather than wasted. A point of concern is the (mostly neutral-liked) products that are