Abstract

Dutch Consumers’ Attitude toward (Ultra) Processing of Food †

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Abstract: Recently, industrial (ultra) processing of foods and its possible adverse effects on health have been widely debated in scientific literature and media. There is not much known about consumers’ attitudes toward the (ultra) processing of foods. Therefore, a survey was distributed (n = 463) and interviews (n = 11) were conducted with Dutch adult consumers to evaluate consumers’ attitudes and associations towards industrial food processing and to assess opinions about communications on food processing and health. The results showed that 51% of the consumers had a neutral attitude, 23% had a positive attitude, and 26% had a negative attitude towards food processing. Most respondents (75%) were not familiar with the term ultra-processed foods, especially those with a neutral attitude compared to those with a positive or negative attitude (p < 0.001). The survey showed that 69% of the respondents thought food processing had a (slightly) negative health effect, 17% did not know, and 9% indicated (slightly) positive health effects. Associations with industrial processing were as follows: additives, artificial, not fresh, low nutritional value, and unnatural, but also food safety, and convenience. All three attitude groups (negative, neutral, and positive) indicated both positive and negative associations. Respondents of the survey who were indicated to be (slightly) related to food/nutrition by profession (n = 159) more frequently had a positive attitude towards food processing (p = 0.008). Furthermore, many interviewees indicated that communication on food is scattered and chaotic. There is a need for clear and understandable information from a central source, especially for those with negative attitudes. In addition, 77% of the survey respondents with a negative attitude towards food processing indicated that they would like to have more information about nutrition and food (processing). In conclusion, most Dutch consumers in this study population have a neutral and nuanced attitude towards industrial food processing. Those with a background or connection with food via profession showed a more positive attitude, which may indicate a need for clear communication and education about nutrition, ingredients, and food processing.

Keywords: food processing; consumer; communication


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