

# Fear and Loathing in Food Meaning Markets: Socio-Evolutionary Responses Elicited by Users of Symbolically Loaded Products

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## **Abstract**

We urgently need more sustainable food consumption choices. To uncover how more or less sustainable food choices are societally appreciated or depreciated, we offer a novel conceptualization that formalizes how socio-cultural and evolutionary forces shape the emotional and behavioral responses toward consumers who use symbolically-laden foods. The results of our e-survey (N = 810) suggested that users of symbolically loaded foods really propel socio-evolutionary emotional responses from observing consumers. We found that, in the Nordic context, moose food users evoke simultaneously strong admiration and envy in observing others and that insect food users provoke contempt – a sign of a dissociative affiliation need being fired. Moreover, strong self-enhancement values may sensitize observing others more generally to making emotional judgments about fellow consumers on the basis of their product choices that convey symbolic messages. This research raises several conceptual implications.

**Keywords:** *Food; Evolution; Socio-culture*

**Track:** Consumer Behaviour