

Potential Theses (MSc and BSc)

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The themes and topics in this document align with my research portfolio on how consumers respond to innovative foods and foods based on new technologies. I am **open for theses on any topic-conceptual theme combination.**

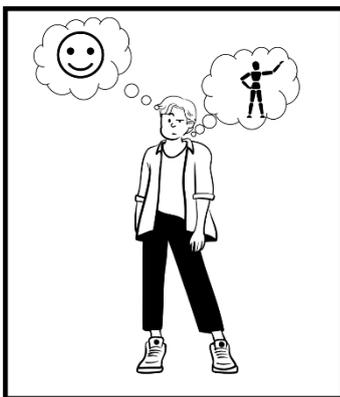
From time to time I may have a more detailed theses proposal that is available for limited time only, ask the thesis coordinator of MCB. Some of my theses are co-supervised with a PhD candidate, who is working on the same portfolio as me. Being supervised by a PhD candidate and experience their approach to consumer studies can be very useful if you considering yourself whether a PhD is something for you.

Topics that can be studied in a thesis include cultured meat and dairy, novel protein sources (such as insects, algae, duckweed, mycelia, oatmilk etc.), novel (plant and animal) breeding techniques such a genetic modification and gene-editing, and processing technologies such as nanotechnology. Next to foods I am also interested in consumer response to innovative packaging and fashion materials (e.g. mycelia leather).

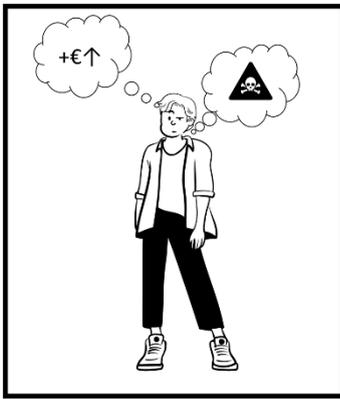
The conceptual focus in my work is on how associations and subsequent risk-benefit perception, emotions and heuristics influence attitude and consumer choice. My conceptual approach is subdivided in the following **conceptual themes** (in each theme most of the topics listed above can be selected):



- 1) **Understanding associations:** How do consumers form associations when confronted with new products, technologies, or ingredients. What properties and attributes trigger the first spontaneous associations. How does this depend on tacit knowledge structures such as schema and categorisation. How do consumer deal with ambiguous product that do not really fit in one category, but also not really in another. How are associations updated in different contexts. And how do such initial associations contribute to final response in terms of choice or attitude. Given that many food product are low involvement, repeat purchases understanding of the effect of associations on choice will help understanding the success potential of an innovation.

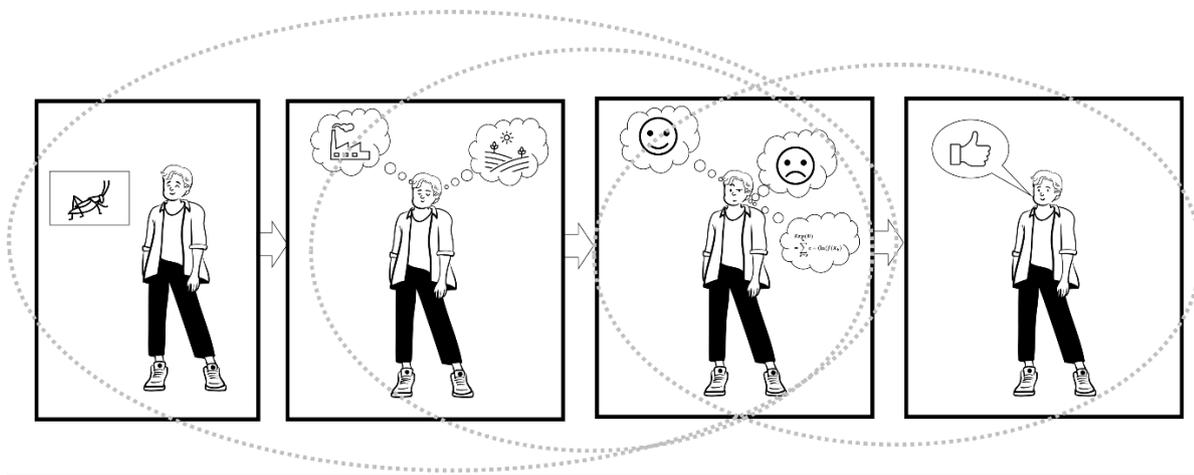


- 2) **Affective and heuristic responses:** Most consumer models still assume a dominance for cognitive reasoning; with the bulk of non-deliberate reasoning collapsed into the intuitive “system 1” thinking. Yet there is much more to this system 1 than only the associations in topic 1. This topic focussed on understanding the influence more deeply developed intuitions and emotions that can determine attitude and choice of product with innovative materials or technologies. This topic includes for example initial disgust response to insects or mycelia (mould) as food, curiosity that may be raised by using pineapple leaves to make bags and the role of heuristics such as “natural is good” and personality traits like neophobia.



3) **Cognitive trade-off and ambivalence:** How do consumers deal with potentially conflicting perceptions and heuristics when considering the different attributes of a novel technology, ingredient or product. In many cases consumers will perceive both benefits and risks. The rational actor model would indicate this would be easily resolved through trading these off. Consumers struggle however with the negative experience of cognitive conflict which may influence such trade-offs. In addition, more heuristic (system 1) experiences may not easily be traded-off against more deliberate (system 2) evaluations. These psychological issues can result in a different consumer response compared to what technology developers predict based on a rational actor assumption. Better understanding of such trade-offs and response to ambivalence will support prioritising the balance of pro's and con's in novel product development.

4) **Cross-cutting themes:** Besides zooming in on the three themes above I am open to cross cutting themes. For example: how conflicting emotional experience and cognitive deliberation are resolved. How cognitive deliberation results in re-appraisal of existing associations and categories.



Some example theses combining topics and research themes (by year):

- Adams, Huub (2022) A Silenced Spring? Investigating Differences in Consumer Perceptions of Gene Silencing and Gene Insertion. (BSc thesis)
- Van Berkel, Sanne (2022) The role of information on the consumer acceptance of meat substitutes through intuitive and deliberate responses. (MSc thesis).
- Van der Hout, Isa (2022) Consumer research concerning health and sustainability perception of insect products in the Netherlands. (BSc thesis)
- Hilboesen, Owen (2021) From residual stream to acceptable sustainable protein: The effect of the processing level and substrate source on the consumer acceptance of novel mycelium products. (MSc thesis).
- Marodin, Gabriel (2021) The acceptance of plant-based meat analogues in Brazil. (MSc thesis).
- Van Hassel, Anne (2020) Consumer acceptance of algae in meat substitutes: How familiarity and framing of information influence consumer emotions and how this can lead to consumer acceptance. (MSc thesis).
- Visser, Miriam (2019) 'Kipstuckjes' – Confusing or not. (BSc thesis)
- Kaan, Jiri (2018) 'High' expectations: The consumer knowledge structure of hemp food. (BSc thesis)
- De Beukelaar, Myrthe (2017) The effect of positive information and meal-fit on the acceptability of duckweed as human food, in the Netherlands. (MSc thesis)
- Van der Meulen, Lisa (2017) Meat the future: How consumer categorisation influences the adoption of a new hybrid product: the case of cultured meat. (MSc thesis).

For inspiration you may also have a look on some of my own writings on the topic at [Google Scholar](#).