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**An investigation of several psychological factors impinging on the
perception of fresh fruits and vegetables**

*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University
of New England.*

by
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Declaration

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification. I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in the thesis.



Abstract

The subject of this thesis is fresh fruit and vegetable perception in Australia. A review of the literature in this field reveals very little systematic study, with most investigations having been conducted by various public and private industry groups. Given the embryonic stage of research into fresh fruit and vegetable perceptions and choice, a particular program of research is warranted, with an emphasis on inductive processes progressing to deductive methods. That is, initial research attempts should be concentrated upon the collection of fundamental, descriptive data relating to consumer knowledge structures of fresh fruits and vegetables. This type of research is facilitated by relatively unstructured research methods. The data thus yielded can be subjected to deductive methods, which require a more experimental, structured research method, involving testing hypotheses that suggest themselves from the inductively-derived data. A review of existing (largely industry-based) studies reveals methodological difficulties that centre around a tendency of researchers in this field to conduct deductively-derived studies in the absence of existing fundamental data that should properly inform these studies.

A research program is introduced that closely approximates the stages of knowledge acquisition posited by Aristotle and accepted by contemporary scientists. The Word Association Method is presented as an unstructured methodology which is beneficial in providing descriptive, relatively context free data. This method is used to provide fundamental information on the knowledge structures (repositories of information relating to an object) relating to ten fruits and ten vegetables. This particular methodology also affords an opportunity to analyse the content and structure of these cognitive repositories which, in turn, allows for an informative discussion of the relative merits of two theories of cognitive processing, namely unitary- and dual-processing theories.

The above-mentioned review of existing literature necessarily extends to a discussion of contemporary marketing and consumer behaviour theories, and it is proposed that the influence of the psychological construct of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) on consumer attention to product attributes is

relevant to the present thesis. The fundamental data provided using the Word Association Method is analysed to provide insight into the proposed influences of self-monitoring on consumer behaviour. That is, a specific exploration of the extent to which individuals differing in self-monitoring propensity attend selectively to particular product attributes is undertaken. The present thesis thus combines inductive and deductive research methods in the study of fresh fruit and vegetable perception and choice.

The thesis is concluded with a discussion of the implications of the findings of the present thesis for the study of cognitive processing models, self-monitoring, and the nature of subsequent studies relating to fresh fruit and vegetable perception and choice.

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