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The ugly and healthy intuition: How package design impacts food healthiness perception

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Attractiveness is extremely important in day-to-day life, but also in marketing. That is why when implementing strategies in packaging or product development, attractiveness plays a central role and designers are central for the development of products. We argue, though that attractiveness can play an important role only up to a point. When judging food products we propose that the role of external cues, in terms of shape and dimensions is more complex. Recent research has also showed that packaging aesthetics are not necessarily required to be salient and that neutral cues can also have important effects in consumer's experience. Thus the role played by aesthetics in food perceptions is under-researched and we therefore propose a deeper investigation in this field. In one experiment, using 101 international participants (58.8% female, $M_{age} = 31.05$) we found that a package of crackers that is perceived uglier and less attractive is also perceived more natural, more authentic and healthier (t-tests, $p < 0.015$). The aim of this project is to investigate the role of unattractive package design on perceptions and attitudes. In several experimental studies we show evidence that less attractive package design leads to a perception of the food as being healthier, more natural and more authentic. We propose that this perception is mainly due to the external aspect of the package, which signals a more natural origin of the product.

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