

Designing menus to shape consumers' perception of traditional gastronomy: does it work for the Portuguese Alentejo cuisine?

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ABSTRACT: Restaurant menus have been shown to be important communicating and selling tools. In this online experimental study, we focused on the role of descriptive menus in influencing food choice and shaping customers' perception of a traditional restaurant. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two menu conditions. In the intervention menu, five traditional dishes from the region of Alentejo (Portugal) were described using sensory (e.g., “fresh”) and authenticity (e.g., “genuine”) labels, while in the control condition, the dish name and its ingredients were presented with no further description. No significant differences were found regarding hedonic expectations, choice intention or willingness-to-pay for any of the individual dishes. However, participants in the intervention condition imagined the restaurant to have better service and ambience and serving tastier and fresher dishes. This study adds to the evidence suggesting the potential impact of menus in shaping consumers' expectations of restaurants' service quality, which in turn may affect how people perceive and assess their dining experience.