

Effect of Packaging on Consumer Expectations and Acceptance of Ready-to-Eat Meals

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INTRODUCTION

Packaging is often the first point of contact between the consumer and the product and can shape expectations before tasting. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of packaging on consumer expectations and the sensory liking of six ready-to-eat meals, including three vegetarian (Chickpea Curry, Lentil Bolognese, and Mushroom *Feijotto*) and three animal-based (*'Transmontana'* Bean Stew, Tuna with Black-Eyed Peas, and Cod with Chickpeas) meals.

METHODOLOGY

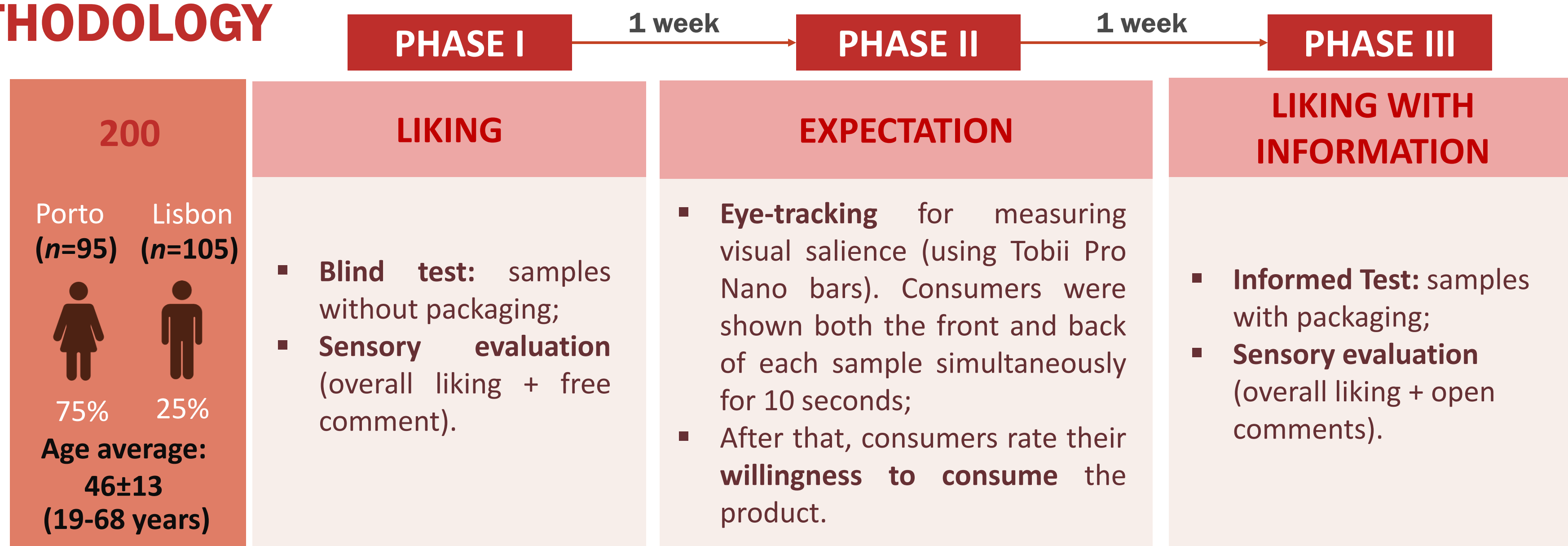


Figure 4: Eye-tracking data collection equipment - Tobii Pro Nano.

EXPLICIT EVALUATION

OVERALL LIKING

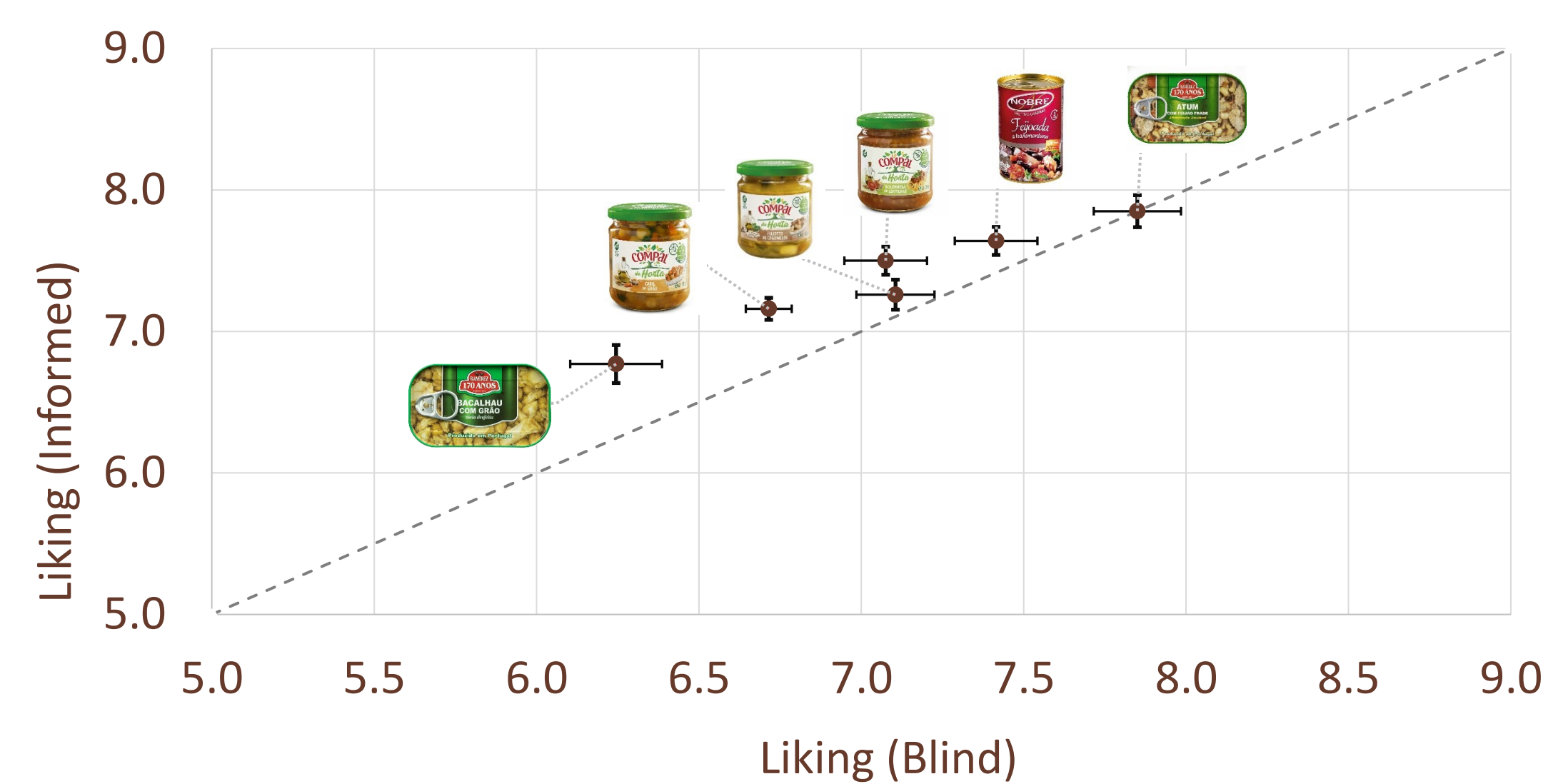


Figure 5: Overall liking scores under blind and informed conditions.

EXPECTATION

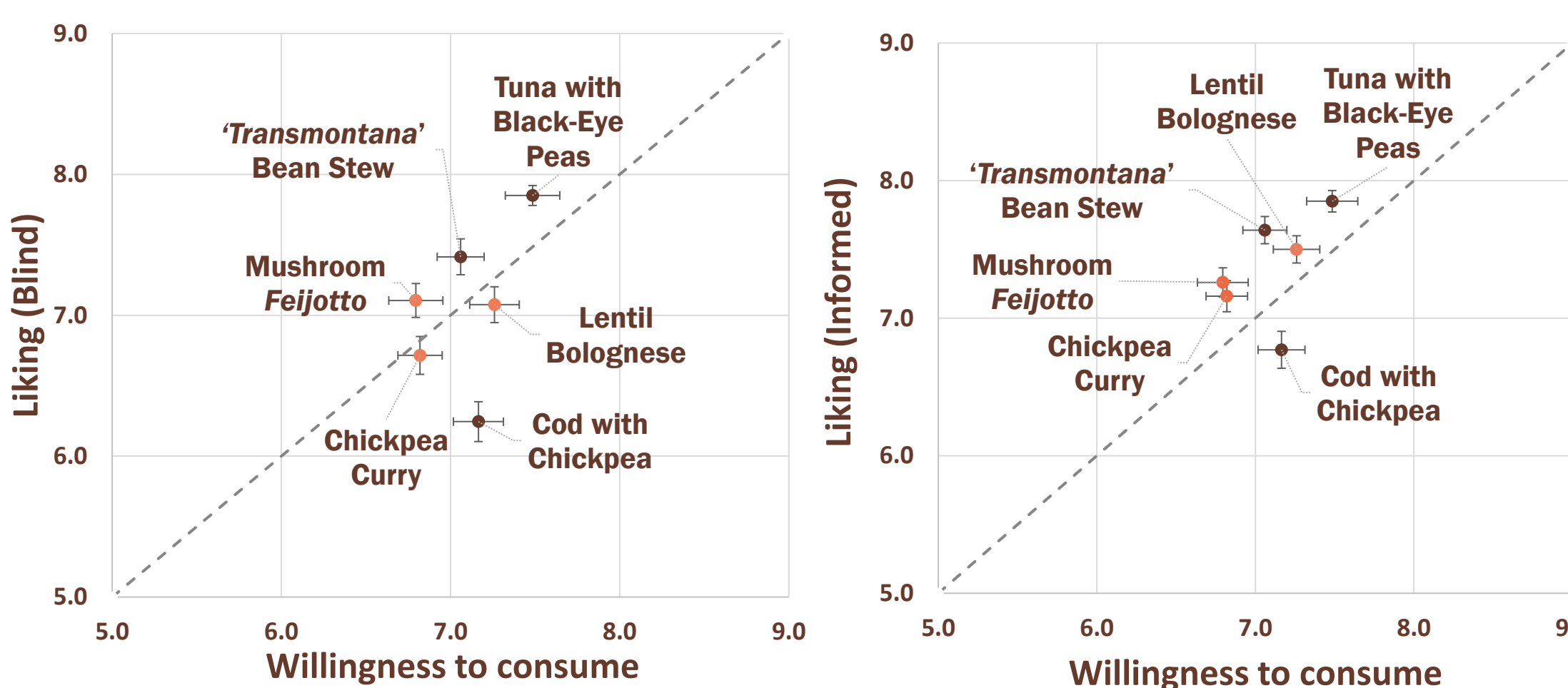


Figure 6: Overall liking blinded/informed vs. Willingness to consume.

PACKAGE ATTRACTIVENESS & OPEN COMMENTS

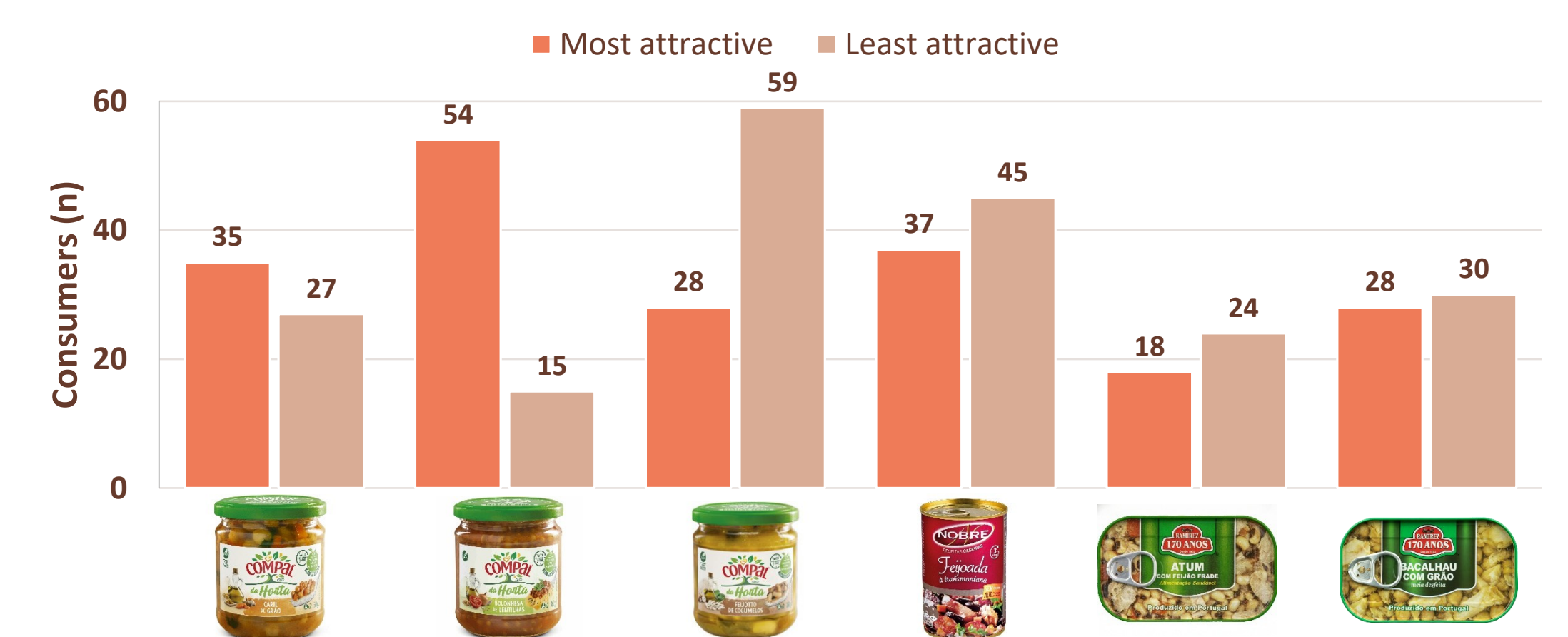


Figure 7: Most and least attractive meal, chosen from the packaging alone.

Tuna with Black-Eyed Peas received the highest number of positive comments regarding product, whereas Lentil Bolognese stood out for its packaging.	Ratio (Positive/Negative)	
	Informed	Blind
	3.83	3.23 ↑
Global		2.76

EYE-TRACKING



Figure 1: Areas of interest defined for each package (AOI's)

- The **product visible** inside the package and the **brand** kept the greatest visual attention, as indicated by the longest **total viewing time** and the highest **number of revisits**;
- The **nutrition claim** showed the **shortest time to first fixation**, whereas the sustainability symbol showed the longest time to first fixation.

CONCLUSION

Packaging positively influenced consumer expectations, although its impact on sensory acceptability was limited. The possibility of visualizing the product was a key factor driving the preference for glass jars, a finding supported by the eye-tracking results. Nevertheless, sensory quality remained the main determinant of overall meal acceptance.

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