

Human bias against new ideas amplifies safety concerns about GMOs, study confirms

Recency bias states that more recent memories come to mind more quickly. But specific ideas and objects that have “stood the test of time” can overcome recency bias. How do we take longevity into account when making judgments? Are old conserved ideas better than the novel? In the attention economy, novel wins. What about in our day-to-day lives?

Researchers [considered that question](#) specifically for new technology foods, like GMOs, where there is a great deal of public opposition. They made use of Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, the Internet version of college students taking an introduction to psychology. The participants answered questions regarding food crops that were new and old, and were the result of traditional breeding or new technologies, like genetic modification or irradiation. The participants were asked whether they would be willing to consume the product, where it was safe for them or society, and whether it was moral to grow it at all.

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People prefer food that has “stood the test of time,” a heuristic rule that is captured in Taleb’s Lindy Rule, where old ideas and objects are more resilient to the buffeting winds of change. While some opponents of GMOs argue that they are not safe despite significant testing and can produce examples to prove their point, it is also clear that this cognitive bias, what the researchers termed “recency negativity,” is also at play. The more widespread acceptance of GMOs or other genetically modified crops may well require the passage of time more than any logical argument.

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