

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

**REWRITING DESIRABILITY: AN EXPLORATION OF  
NORTH AMERICAN “UGLY” FOOD MARKETING CAMPAIGNS**

by

Sienna Dawn Ing Tozios

HBA. University of Toronto, 2017

The Major Research Paper is submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Professional Communication

Ryerson University

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

© Sienna D. I. Tozios 2019

**AUTHOR’S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this Major Research Paper and the accompanying Research Poster. This is a true copy of the Major Research Paper and the Research Poster, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this Major Research Paper and/or Research Poster to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this Major Research Paper and/or Research Poster by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I understand that my Major Research Paper and/or my Research Poster may be made electronically available to the public.

**ABSTRACT**

The application of aesthetic and cosmetic standards to fresh fruits and vegetables results in the discrimination and elimination of an abundance of “ugly” foods. The systematic elimination of “ugly” foods, which are foods deemed suboptimal in their appearance, weight, shape, or size, greatly contributes to the global problem of food waste in a time of increasing food insecurity. Grocers and food retailers in Canada and the U.S. have begun promoting the sale of “ugly” foods in an attempt to combat the issue of food waste. This MRP (Major Research Paper) examines the names and titles of eleven North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns. This project explores how “ugly” foods are communicated to consumers in North America and how the chosen language used in these campaign titles works to normalize “ugly” foods and attempts to alter their desirability to consumers. The analysis is conducted using textual coding and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. Moreover, this MRP reflects on the power of grocers and food retailers to encourage the consumption of “ugly” foods, reduce food waste at the retail level, and effect change in the global food system.

**Keywords: “ugly” foods, retailers, marketing, consumers, North American, desirability, normalize, food waste, language**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This Major Research Paper (MRP) was made possible by the energy and support of my supervisor, Dr. Jessica Mudry, and of my second reader, Dr. Ava Cross. I wish to thank both my supervisor and my second reader for their guidance throughout the MRP process, for their aid and enthusiasm in bringing this research in food and communication to light, and lastly, for all of their time that was given to see this through.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	5
The Issue of Food Waste	5
Defining “Ugly” Food	8
Aesthetics and Beauty	13
Normalization and Classification	19
The Marketing of “Ugly” Foods	24
METHODOLOGY	29
Data Collection Method	29
Method of Analysis	32
RESULTS	36
ANALYSIS	41
The Personification of “Ugly” Food	41
Altering the Desirability of “Ugly” Foods	44
Unmentioned: Flavour and Nutrition	48
GENERAL DISCUSSION	51
CONCLUSION	55
REFERENCES	57

**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Table 1</b> Names and Titles of North American “Ugly” Food Marketing Campaigns	31
<b>Table 2</b> Codebook	33

**LIST OF FIGURES**

<b>Figure 1</b> Coding Results	36
--------------------------------	----

## INTRODUCTION

Displays of choice are common in North American grocery stores. The picking up and putting down of fruits and vegetables in the produce section, the examining, the squeezing, the weighing of this versus that, stealing a grape from the bag in which it is packaged to test its sweetness – these are only a few of the ways in which we exercise choice, particularity, pickiness, and preference. Many consumers take pride in being picky eaters; in North America we prize the idea of freedom of choice. This is especially true when it comes to food.

Our choices, of what we come to eat and drink, however, are not entirely our own. Many of the decisions that are made about food are made for us well before any fruits and vegetables reach the shelves of the produce section in the grocery store. What types of foods are available to us, where they come from, and what goes into their growth and production – these decisions are made for us. Additionally, unknown to many consumers, the fruits and vegetables that we see and that are made available to us to pick from make up only a fraction of what is actually produced for potential consumption.

There is a volume of food that we do not see and from which we do not get to choose. The reason for the secret kept, for the removal and subsequent waste of around  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the total amount of food produced globally for human consumption (FAO, 2019; de Hooze, van Dulm, & van Trijp, 2018, p. 698), is that grocers and food retailers believe that consumers will not purchase fruits and vegetables that they perceive as “ugly” (Louis & Lombart, 2018, p. 256). “Ugly” foods, as opposed to conventionally beautiful foods or normal foods, are those which are deemed suboptimal in their appearance, weight, shape, or size. “Ugly” foods may be blemished by spots or marks or

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

they may be dented or misshapen in a way that some might see as unnatural. It is possible that the grocers and food retailers are right, that food made available to consumers that is too unattractive to the eye will remain unpicked, unweighed, unbought and ultimately uneaten. Though this may be the current reality, in a time of growing global food insecurity an issue of major food waste is not a loss that we can or should afford.

There are a number of people in the food system from farm to table that apply a set of aesthetic or cosmetic standards to food resulting in the discrimination and elimination of an abundance of “ugly,” yet edible and healthy food. From producers to distributors to retailers and to consumers, “ugly” foods are culled and then destined to be thrown away. Recently, however, there are a number of grocers and food retailers that are showing their awareness of the problem that is the systematic elimination of “ugly” foods. In an attempt to combat the problem of food waste a number of North American grocers and food retailers have begun promoting the sale of “ugly” foods in stores.

In this Major Research Paper (MRP) I examine the types of words, terms, and keywords that are used in “ugly” food marketing campaigns by grocers and food retailers in Canada and the U.S. This project explores how “ugly” foods are communicated to consumers in North America and how the chosen language used in these campaigns works to normalize “ugly” foods and attempts to alter their desirability to consumers. The significance of this research lies in the need to combat the problem of food waste and in the potential of grocers and food retailers to reconceptualize the normative notions of beautiful/ugly and edible/inedible food to affect change in the global food system.

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

The first section of this MRP is a literature review that will provide greater detail on the main topics discussed in this MRP, the contextual lens and theories that I will be using to support my research, and a summary of the existing research previously conducted on the marketing and consumption of “ugly” foods. The literature review is comprised of five main topics. The first topic, the issue of food waste, requires a detailed explanation for one to clearly understand the significance of this research and how power is currently distributed and operates within our global food system. The second topic, the definition of “ugly” food, requires clarification for one to fully understand the central topic of this MRP. The third topic, aesthetics and beauty, details the type of lens (i.e. an aesthetic lens versus a nutritional lens) through which I will conduct this MRP. The fourth topic, normalization and classification, which draws on the work by Foucault and the work by Bowker and Star, details the main theories that make up the critical lens through which the analysis of this MRP is conducted. The last topic, the marketing of “ugly” foods, provides a summary of the current research conducted on the marketing of and consumption of “ugly” foods, which effectively places this MRP in the context of current and past studies. Following the literature review I detail the methodology chosen for this MRP, the results of my data collection and analysis, and general discussion.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This MRP considers the following research questions:

**RQ<sub>1</sub>:** *What types of words, terms, and keywords have been chosen by grocers and food retailers in Canada and the United States to sell “ugly” foods?*

**RQ<sub>2</sub>:** *How do the words, terms, and keywords chosen by grocers and food retailers in Canada and the United States to sell “ugly” foods attempt to alter the desirability of “ugly” foods?*

**RQ<sub>3</sub>:** *How does altering the desirability of “ugly” foods work to reclassify and normalize “ugly” foods as edible in the eye of the consumer?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Issue of Food Waste

Of the total amount of food that is produced globally for human consumption roughly  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  is removed from the food supply chain to be disposed of and wasted (FAO, 2019; de Hooge et al., 2018, p. 698). It is important to note that much of the data collected on food waste is difficult to obtain and is subsequently rather incomplete due to the fact that food waste, as opposed to food marked for profit, is rarely recorded by farmers and food producers. With this, it is possible that the total amount of food wasted may be greater or less than what has been estimated at this point in time. From the data that is available on the quantities of food wasted in North America, however, food waste percentages are generally recorded between twenty and fifty percent by farmers and food producers (Moore, 2017, p. 507; Porter, Reay, Bomberg, & Higgins, 2018, p. 870). Much of the disposal of fresh fruits and vegetables happens at the production level, namely on farms, but the most food waste occurs at the retail level where the rejection of suboptimal foods, or “ugly” foods, follows via the actions of grocers, food retailers, and consumers. In the discussion on the issue of food waste is it important to identify the people within the food system who have the power to dispose of healthy and edible food, essentially making it impossible for this food to reach the tables of a great number of North Americans.

At present, the issue of food waste is problematic because so many people, both globally and domestically, are experiencing food insecurity. According to Moore (2017), food security “exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (p. 497). To be without access to a sufficient quantity of

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

safe, affordable, and nutritious food is to be food insecure. It is important to note that the primary cause of food insecurity in North America is not inadequate food production but rather that food insecurity is an effect of poor and inequitable food distribution and of poverty (Moore, 2017, pp. 489-499). Roughly 1 in 8 households in North America (i.e. 32 million people in the U.S. and 4 million people in Canada) are food insecure (USDA, 2018; PROOF, 2018, Household Food Insecurity in Canada section, para. 2) and yet estimates of up to one half of the total amount of food produced for human consumption is thrown away and wasted. When it comes to having healthy and edible food on one’s table the option of having suboptimal or “ugly” food is always better than none. Still, aesthetic or cosmetic irregularities in food are enough reason to dispose of and deny healthy and edible food to people in Canada and in the U.S.

Food industry standards and product specifications concerning the cosmetic appearance of fresh fruits and vegetables were initially imposed on fresh produce as a way to ensure the quality and safety of food that is grown or produced for human consumption. Product standards and cosmetic specifications “govern rules concerning the product’s appearance, weight, shape, and size” (de Hooge et al., 2018, p. 699). Though cosmetic requirements are believed to be important for ensuring food quality and safety, Porter et al. (2018) note that a greater number of prescribed elements apply to the appearance of fresh fruits and vegetables than to nutritional or food safety characteristics (pp. 869-870). One example of such cosmetic specifications is, according to USDA grade standards, upon inspection “carrots must be ‘fairly well colored,’ ‘fairly smooth,’ and ‘well formed’” (Moore, 2017, p. 512). With regulations such as those imposed by the USDA that use tremendously vague language, it is up to the farmers and

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

food producers, grocers and food retailers, and consumers to decide what food passes as attractive, appealing, safe, tasty, and ultimately as edible or as waste.

As mentioned above, the issue of food insecurity is a problem of inadequate and inequitable food distribution and of poverty rather than a problem of inadequate food production. At the same time that this issue is so prevalent in North America there is a major problem of food waste where food that could feed millions of people in North America is disposed of and wasted. At this point we must ask how these two issues are happening simultaneously. We must also call into question the current food system and those that are a part of it who have the power to permit or prevent the continuation of these two issues.

There is a global food system in place that operates and encourages all people from farm to table to discard perfectly healthy and edible food. Those who have the power to cull and discard “ugly” foods are food producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers. Though food waste occurs at every level of the food system, food retailers are one of the most significant drivers of food waste as they “retain the right to reject portions of crops, or even entire crops, if the physical appearance of the product is substandard” (Loebnitz, Schuitema, & Grunert, 2015, p. 408). It can be argued that food retailers have more power than food producers in the food system since they have the ability to either accept or deny any of the food that the farmers grow; in this way, food producers are ultimately at the mercy of food retailers. Additionally, it can be argued that food retailers have more power than consumers in the food system since they determine exactly what food is made accessible to consumers in grocery stores. Though consumers have the ability to “vote with their dollar” for foods that they prefer or dislike in grocery stores, they can only essentially vote on what is made available to

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

them. It is with this revelation that food retailers hold much of the power that depicts what types of food, in addition to how much food, is accessible to North Americans that Loebnitz et al. (2015) state that food retailers should be the ones to “pave the way to decrease food waste” (p. 418). Though much of the effort must come from grocers and food retailers in the fight against food waste and food insecurity in North America, it is evident that they cannot be expected to act alone. The onus is additionally on food producers, distributors, and consumers to do their part in affecting change in the global food system.

The significance of the research conducted in this MRP lies in the need to combat the problem of food waste and in the potential of North American grocers and food retailers to be the forerunners of this cause. North American grocers and food retailers who have previously been encouraged to dispose of “ugly” foods, marking them as inedible and as waste, must work to reconceptualize the normative notions of beautiful/ugly and edible/inedible food in the eye of consumers. There is the potential to accomplish this through effective marketing of “ugly” foods in American and Canadian grocery stores. North American grocers and food retailers have the power and potential to affect change in the global food system by re-educating consumers on the edibility of “ugly” foods and by taking a proactive stance in reducing food waste at the retail level.

### **Defining “Ugly” Food**

“Ugly” food can be defined as food deemed suboptimal in its appearance, weight, shape, or size. Additionally, Moore (2017) writes that “ugly” foods and “ugly” produce are often culled based on additional appearance criteria such as colour, blemish level, and Brix (i.e. a measure of sugar content) (pp. 508-509). Tu, Lee, and Wei (2018)

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

define “ugly” fruits and vegetables as “crops that do not meet purchasing conditions because of poor appearance, defective appearance” and abnormalities in shape and in size (p. 2). “Ugly” foods are also commonly known as “aesthetically imperfect,” “wonky” (Porter et al., 2018, p. 869), “off-grade,” “Not Good” (NT) (Tu et al., 2018, p. 2), “abnormal,” “suboptimal,” and “inferior” produce (Jaeger, Machín, Aschemann-Witzel, Antúnez, Harker, & Ares, 2018, p. 17). As mentioned above, all fresh fruits and vegetables that are sold in North America are subjected to a set of cosmetic standard criteria, which results in the categorization of conventionally beautiful foods or normal foods that are marked for sale and “ugly” foods that are destined for waste. Premium and high grade standards for fresh fruits and vegetables, for example, additionally require that the food be free from various types of cosmetic damage from insects, disease, growth defects such as cracking, mechanical damage, and from weather events such as hail (Moore, 2017, p. 513). With so many specifications for the outer appearance of fresh produce it is not surprising that close to half of what is grown and produced for human consumption fails to meet retail standards.

It is scarcely remembered that fresh fruits and vegetables have “natural variability in terms of size, colour, and shape” and that cosmetic appearance is not naturally uniform among fresh produce (Porter et al., 2018, p. 873). Because the selection of fresh fruits and vegetables that most consumers see and have access to in grocery stores have been pre-sorted and selected by the grocer or food retailer prior to being put on display, consumers have been regularly exposed to premium grade, high grade, beautiful, and what is currently considered as normal foods. If “ugly” produce were to be added to the current displays of fresh fruits and vegetables in grocery stores it is probable that consumers would pick out the “optimal” foods and leave the

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

“suboptimal” foods, which would then end up as waste all the same. In a way, consumers have been trained indirectly to do the same as food retailers in picking out what is perceived as the best quality food based on the foods’ outer appearance. It is here that we must recognize the power of food retailers in determining what passes as edible food, as normal food, in the eye of the consumer and in the potential of grocers and food retailers to re-educate consumers on the edibility of “ugly” foods.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the appearance properties of food and how consumers’ perceptions of these properties affect or contribute to consumers’ sensory experiences with food. Jaros, Rohm, and Strobl (2000) found that in addition to food quality descriptors such as texture, flavour, and aroma, appearance properties lead to expectations and associations of food even before the food is tasted (p. 324). Essentially, appearance descriptors such as colour and physical form become associated with foods’ expected texture or flavour (Jaros et al., 2000, p. 320). In another study conducted on how visual appearance affects consumers’ experiences with food, Reinoso-Carvalho, Dakduk, Wagemans, and Spence (2019) found that due to a kind of “perceptual illusion” people tend to “judge important aspects of a tasting experience based on visual appearance” (p. 21). Reinoso-Carvalho et al. (2019) argue that visual cues and appearances set expectations for consumers concerning the likely taste, flavour, and properties of food, which then anchor the consumer’s subsequent tasting experience (p. 21). Much of what consumers believe they will experience and taste when they eat a particular food has to do with the qualities of the food that they perceive from observing the food’s outer appearance. Therefore, with “ugly” foods, such as a non-spherical apple, which most consumers believe in its best form would be perfectly

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

spherical, consumers will most likely expect to experience poorer flavour than when eating a conventionally beautiful food.

“Ugly” foods exist as a category because “optimal,” “perfect,” “best,” “premium,” and “beautiful” foods exist as their alternative. In reality, both “ugly” foods and conventionally beautiful foods can be highly nutritious and flavourful. Similarly, at times, both “ugly” foods and conventionally beautiful foods can be poor in nutrition and in flavour. The important thing to note is that neither of these two factors, nutrition or flavour, can be definitely pre-determined prior to actually eating the food. There are times when the most saturated in colour, round, and unblemished apple can be rather tasteless. Often, apples that are displayed in grocery stores have been harvested before their peak ripeness and are then stored at a very low temperature (i.e. for the purposes of distribution safety and longer storage life), which ultimately results in a lower nutritional content and poorer flavour than an apple that is picked and consumed at its peak ripeness. Alternatively, it is commonly known that bananas reach their peak in flavour and in sweetness when they are covered in brown spots. It does occur at times, however, that a greener banana with fewer or zero spots may be in fact sweeter than a banana with multiple spots on it. What is to be taken from these examples is that the aesthetic or cosmetic appearance of fresh fruits and vegetables does not definitely determine the nutritional ripeness or flavour of the food. Therefore, the category of “ugly” food and abnormalities in foods’ shape, size, weight, and colour do not exist as indicators of poor nutrition and of poor taste but rather the category exists because we, as consumers, have been trained to believe that “beautiful” foods exist, that they are the best foods, and that their inferior are “ugly” foods.

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Many researchers have called for the re-education of consumers on foods’ natural variability in appearance, food quality, and on the validity and edibility of “ugly” foods (Loebnitz et al, 2015; Louis & Lombart, 2018; Helmert, Symmank, Pannasch, & Rohm, 2017; de Hooge et al., 2018; Tu et al., 2018). If consumers are exposed to information on “ugly” foods that will change their preconceptions of food quality and taste based on appearance properties, then it is possible that consumers will one day judge “ugly” foods equally to conventionally beautiful foods. Grunert (2015) warns, however, that “providing consumers with more information may not solve the problem” as information can often be ignored or misinterpreted (p. 385). Grunert’s observation is valid in that providing consumers with more information cannot be the only effort made toward reducing food waste at the retail level. Though it would be an effort on the part of grocers and food retailers to provide this new information on “ugly” foods to consumers, informing consumers on the potential taste, experience, and quality of “ugly” foods is only one act of many that needs to be done in an effort to increase “ugly” food consumption and to decrease food waste. Within the scope of this MRP, however, I analyze only the marketing efforts of grocers and food retailers in North America via “ugly” food marketing campaign titles as a way to expose consumers to “ugly” foods and in their potential to re-educate consumers on the edibility of “ugly” foods.

It is important that we recognize how the language that is used to describe and name particular foods has a great impact on consumers at both the point of purchase as well as in streamlining consumers’ tastes and preferences. For example, the application of the word “ugly” to particular foods attributes a negative characteristic to the food and has the potential to turn consumers away solely based on the use of that word. People have different food preferences; what may be called “ugly” in name might actually be the

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

type of food that some consumers prefer. For example, there are consumers that prefer mushy bananas, tart apples, and soft grapes. These consumers, however, may feel disinclined to purchase “ugly” foods, which again, may have all of their preferred characteristics, because of the language that is used to describe and name those particular foods. The type of language and words that are used to describe and name particular foods have a great impact on whether foods are ultimately consumed or wasted. We must be cognisant of the impact that language can have on dictating the fate of particular foods in grocery stores.

### **Aesthetics and Beauty**

The essence of beauty has long been contested in academic literature and scholarly debate. How is it that we come to know what true beauty is and that beauty even exists? Does beauty exist in its own right, does the word describe an inherent characteristic that we all recognize and come to know of through observation? Or is beauty a fact of social construction, something that is learned and taught to us from our community, from our peers, and through our relationships with things and with others? Does what we know of beauty only exist if we know what is not beautiful, what is hideous, unattractive, ugly? How is it that some things in a category, for example an apple, though all the same by name can be considered both beautiful and not beautiful? How far does beauty extend among things and is it ever forever and total? Ultimately, we have to wonder who decides what is beautiful and what the source of true beauty is, if such a thing exists. Aesthetics, which are a set of principles concerned with perceived beauty or the appreciation of beauty and which are usually evaluated through design or appearance, too have long been contested in academic literature and remain just as elusive as the essence of beauty.

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Hopkins (2001) argues that aesthetic judgements, namely judgements concerning the beauty of an object or one’s “judgement of taste,” are “expressions of pleasure responses” (p. 167; p. 182). Hopkins (2001) writes, “an aesthetic judgement just is an expression of aesthetic response,” which can only be made appropriately “by someone who has so responded to the object judged” (p. 166). To Hopkins (2001), people determine which objects are beautiful by responding to them with either pleasure or displeasure (p. 169). If the object the judgement concerns is responded to, or in other words is experienced, pleurably then the object is beautiful. Conversely, if the object the judgement concerns is not experienced pleurably then it is not beautiful. Regarding food, if one eats a particular type of food that is spherical in form, for example, and experiences some type of pleasure it is probable that that person will judge that food as beautiful whenever it is aesthetically spherical in form. To Hopkins, beauty is determined through experience. The fundamental idea of aesthetic properties, Hopkins (2005) writes, is that they are “necessarily there to be experienced” (p. 131). Aesthetic judgement based off of individuals’ experiences results in dichotomies of pleasurable/not pleasurable and of beautiful/ugly.

On the topic of aesthetic judgement and discrimination, Hopkins (2005) argues that an aesthetic feature of an object “figures in experience only if the subject can discriminate cases in which the feature is present from those in which it is not” (p. 119). Further, Hopkins (2005) writes, that “there is no aesthetic difference without an experiential difference, and no experiential difference without a difference in discriminatory response” (p. 119). By this, Hopkins means that one must have at least two different experiential responses to the same object in order for aesthetic differences to be realized. Using an example with food once again, if one were to eat a spherical

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

apple and were to find it delicious, and having found another apple of the same type but less spherical in form rather tasteless, then the person would say that the two apples are aesthetically different; the spherical apple, having been pleurably experienced, would be considered beautiful and the non-spherical apple, having been poorly experienced, would be considered not beautiful, or ugly. One’s conceptualization of beauty, according to Hopkins, is resultant from pleasurable experiences and therefore leads one to equate beauty with “good” as a pleasurable experience is believed to be a good experience. With this, categorization of objects based on pleasurable/not pleasurable experiences, or in other words on aesthetic features had or missing, results in the discrimination of certain things that are considered beautiful versus others.

Expanding on Hopkins’ conceptualization of aesthetic judgement, Danto argues that aesthetic judgement is derived from more than one’s experiences with objects. Danto (2002) writes, “finding something beautiful is more than simply taking pleasure in experiencing it” (p. 43). To Danto (2002), beauty symbolizes morality (p. 43) and beautiful objects are those that endorse the highest moral good (p. 40). Given Danto’s perspective, if the thing that the aesthetic judgement concerns is morally good then it is considered to be beautiful. Conversely, if the thing the judgement concerns is considered morally bad or foul then it is not considered to be beautiful. Danto’s argument becomes fuzzy, however, when one considers the idea or construct of morality, which has long been contested. If one believes that morality is a social construction then beauty too, by this belief, is socially constructed as well. If one believes, however, that morality is inherent in all beings and that morality is based on universal principles and natural law then all things that are beautiful must be inherently so and natural as well. Depending on one’s conception of morality and on one’s beliefs

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

regarding the division of “good” versus “bad,” aesthetic judgement, and ultimately what is considered beautiful, can vary quite greatly.

Danto’s argument of beauty as morality reinforces the notion that beauty equates to “good” and that things that are not beautiful, or ugly, equate to “bad”. To bring in the issue of food waste and that of the disposal of “ugly” foods, by Danto’s argument, encouraging consumers to buy and eat “ugly” foods is an encouragement to consumers to do something bad, and by extension is immoral. But how can this be? Encouraging food retailers to sell “ugly” foods and encouraging consumers to buy and eat “ugly” foods is not a call for consumers to begin consuming garbage, like foods that have rot or grown mold or that carry insects and diseases. Encouraging consumers to buy and eat misshapen or blemished foods is not a call for consumers to eat foods that will make them ill. So much food is currently being wasted at the retail level. The encouragement of the consumption of “ugly” foods is a matter of reducing food waste and of feeding Americans and Canadians with perfectly healthy and edible food that would otherwise be discarded based on nothing other than its abnormal appearance, shape, weight, or size. Conventionally beautiful foods can be “good” in flavour and in nutritional value but so can “ugly” foods. Encouraging food retailers to sell “ugly” foods and encouraging consumers to purchase and eat “ugly” foods is not an act of immorality. It can be argued, in fact, that proactively fighting the issue of food waste and attempting to find a way to feed millions of food insecure North Americans would be acts of moral “good.”

To Danto (2002), beauty as morality is natural; morality is the model of natural beauty, people are naturally attracted to what is beautiful, and the appreciation of beauty, namely aesthetic judgement, is natural (pp. 52-53). Additionally, Danto (2002) posits that with natural beauty one cannot be argued into feeling it (the aesthetic

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

experience) (p. 54). With this, Danto posits that aesthetic judgement is autonomous. Hopkins too argues that aesthetic judgement is autonomous, that what one finds beautiful cannot be determined by what another deems beautiful. Hopkins (2001) writes, that what pleases others can never serve as the grounds of an aesthetic judgement (p. 167) and that “the fact that others disagree cannot justify a change of mind” (p. 168). Beauty, and aesthetic judgement, to both Danto and to Hopkins are natural, non-cognitive responses to the world (Hopkins, 2001, p. 169). Danto (2002) even goes so far as to argue that aesthetic judgement is psychobiological, “a product of evolution” concerned with the rejection of the bad, the disgusting, the ugly (p. 47). Beauty, and what is considered to be beautiful in this world, to Danto and to Hopkins, are decided autonomously through one’s own experiences and one’s own experiences alone.

In contradiction to both Danto and Hopkins’ argument of aesthetic judgement as autonomous, Wohl (2015) argues that beauty is dictated by a “community sense,” which is described as the “public face of shared aesthetic judgement that is communicated and upheld within a group” (p. 299). Wohl (2015) argues that there is a strong relationship between “aesthetic judgement and feelings of group belonging” (p. 299) and that aesthetic judgement is not autonomous but rather constructed and upheld through social interactions within communities. From this perspective if the object that the aesthetic judgement concerns is deemed beautiful by the group or community then it shall be considered beautiful by individuals within that community. Conversely, if the object that the aesthetic judgement concerns is not deemed beautiful by the group or community then it will not be considered as beautiful by individuals within that community. It is here that there lies a tension between one’s own experiences and

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

personal beliefs and those that must be adhered to and upheld within one’s own community.

The issue of food waste that results specifically from the culling of “ugly” foods is uniquely an issue in North America and in much of the Global North. Given Wohl’s insight, there is much to be said about the issue of food waste and the culling of “ugly” foods within communities and whole countries that are privileged enough to dispose of up to half of the food that is grown and produced for human consumption. It is important here to draw attention to the privilege that many North American consumers enjoy at grocery stores where what is believed to be the best food (i.e. conventionally beautiful foods) is the only thing made accessible to consumers. North American consumers are quite literally able to pick from “the best of the best” food produced.

Food retailers in North America create and display this privilege. It is a privilege, and it is unmistakably so, because the ability and luxury to choose which foods are the most edible or are the most aesthetically pleasing and to dispose of the rest is not universally exercised by all. The choice to dispose of food because it looks unappealing is a privilege that many others do not get to enjoy. Being able to display “the best of the best” to consumers is a display, whether intentional or unintentional, of this privilege. Communities in North America have become accustomed to grocery stores that display conventionally beautiful foods. The people within these communities have been allowed and have been encouraged to believe that what they see on the shelves in the produce section of the grocery store are the best and most beautiful foods. It is through this type of accessibility and privilege that so many North Americans come to believe that conventionally beautiful foods are best, that they are normal and that they are edible in

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

contrast to “ugly” foods, which are believed to be disgusting, abnormal, and ultimately inedible.

Food is often considered through an aesthetic lens. Though we often consider food through a scientific lens, for example, when comparing the nutritional content or value of particular foods, many of our decisions on what to eat and what not to eat depend solely on the appearance characteristics of food and our perception of the quality of the food based on how it looks. This is not to say that decisions on what we come to eat cannot be made using both scientific and aesthetic judgement. It is merely to say that the aesthetic component of food contributes greatly to our daily decisions on what to consume and what not to consume. It is through an aesthetic lens that this MRP is conducted.

### **Normalization and Classification**

Foucault’s theory of normalization or normalizing judgement forms the critical theoretical lens that is used in the analysis of this MRP. What will be discussed in this section is how one might apply Foucault’s theory of normalizing judgement to aesthetic judgement regarding food. Foucault’s (1995) theory of normalization or normalizing judgement refers to the regulation of individual action, behaviour, and ideology in a field of comparison where social rules, as value-giving measures, constrain and conform individuals’ actions (p. 183). Within this field of comparison, one’s actions and thoughts are constantly being evaluated by the values (e.g. good or bad) given to particular thoughts and behaviours. Foucault (1995) writes that within this field of comparison, an overall rule (i.e. a particular set of social rules) is “made to function as a minimal threshold,” “as an optimum towards which one must move” (p. 183). This particular set of rules are ultimately socially-constructed ideas of right and wrongdoing, which come

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

to define differences and deviation from the overall rule as “abnormal” or “shameful” (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). In normalizing judgement, all actions, behaviours, and ideas are compared, differentiated, and homogenized (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). Essentially, with normalization, socially-constructed and enforced ideas of what is right, good, and normal become one with anything in opposition becoming bad, wrong, and abnormal.

We can bring Foucault’s theory of normalizing judgement into the discussion of how conventionally beautiful foods have come to be recognized as good and as edible versus “ugly” foods that have been deemed as bad, inedible, and as waste. We start with Danto’s (2002) statement on beauty and how aesthetic judgement in its nascent form is “the psychobiology of disgust” (p. 47). Danto (2002) writes that aesthetic judgement is a “product of evolution concerned ‘basically with the rejection of food’” (p. 47). Disgust, Danto (2002) argues, is a biological and natural reaction to all things perverse (p. 47). To tie Danto’s argument in with Foucault’s theory of normalizing judgement, if some foods tastes disgusting or induce nausea, illness, or discomfort then those foods are considered as bad, wrong, and abnormal. There must be, however, in keeping with Foucault’s theory of normalizing judgement, foods that exist in contrast then that represent the good, right, and normal.

In an attempt to ensure that people always ate good, right, and normal food, legislative bodies in North America came up with a number of product standards and specifications (e.g. USDA Specifications and Grade Standards) that were to be applied to food to ensure its safety and presumably its taste. Though it is not illogical that these legislative bodies would attempt to find a way to give the best, safest, and most flavourful food to their populations, it is quite puzzling how appearance factors such as shape, saturation of colour, and size came to be the ultimate quality indicators of food

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

safety and flavour. What is even more puzzling is how these product standards and specifications have become so rigid that any food that deviates from what is considered perfect or high-grade strictly becomes waste. Fresh fruits and vegetables are not naturally uniform in shape, weight, and size and they vary quite drastically in cosmetic appearance. Additionally, the quality of a particular food (i.e. flavour, free from insects, nutritional value) cannot be definitely determined from its outer appearance. Thus, consumers have come to identify conventionally beautiful foods as beautiful, good, and normal through a set of rules and regulations (i.e. product specifications) that have been placed on food, ultimately categorizing food as either beautiful/edible or as “ugly”/waste.

An important part of normalizing judgement is defining difference (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). On the one hand, what is normal and ideal must be defined and on the other hand, what constitutes difference and abnormality must be defined in contrast. Without these definitions the field of comparison that Foucault speaks of cannot exist, the concept of normal cannot exist, and subsequently the concept of what is abnormal cannot exist either. Maintaining relativity and defining difference is key to normalizing judgement. In a grocery store, conventionally beautiful foods, which are considered as normal and good in the eye of the consumer, are made accessible and are marketed in ways to consumers that reinforce their validity and edibility. From signage to stickers to displays and lighting, the fresh produce section of the grocery store markets conventionally beautiful foods to consumers as good and as edible. “Ugly” foods are nowhere to be seen. They are kept out of the consumer’s eye and in doing so grocers and food retailers reinforce the conception of “ugly” foods as inedible and as waste. Normalizing judgement of food is achieved through different marketing tactics and

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

techniques that ultimately aim to define differences between conventionally beautiful foods and “ugly” foods.

If, given Foucault’s theory of normalization or normalizing judgement, consumers can be encouraged and taught to see or define particular foods as good, normal, edible, and alternatively as bad or abnormal through the application of a particular set of social rules then it is possible that if these rules were to be changed, consumers’ perceptions of what is beautiful/ugly or edible/inedible could change as well. Essentially, if the definitions of difference were modified, if “ugly” foods were no longer excluded and disposed of but rather they were redefined as beautiful somehow or most minimally as edible then consumers might purchase and eat “ugly” foods and grocers and food retailers might reduce the amount of food wasted at the retail level.

The work by Bowker and Star on classification and its consequences is used additionally to form the critical theoretical lens through which the analysis of this MRP is conducted. Bowker and Star (2000) write that classifications in working infrastructures become relatively invisible without losing any of their power (p. 319). Within the scope of this MRP two mentionable working infrastructures are the global food system as a whole and grocery stores. The classifications used within these two infrastructures categorize fresh fruits and vegetables into edible/inedible and beautiful/ugly based on product specifications and grade standards. Linking in Foucault’s theory on normalization, food retailers have been classifying fresh fruits and vegetables as edible/inedible and as beautiful/ugly for so long that the effects or consequences of classifying produce in this way have essentially become invisible. With working infrastructures like the global food system and grocery stores, the act of classifying food based on appearance criteria and the consequences of doing so have

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

become invisible. The power of food retailers to operate these working infrastructures and to continue classifying fresh produced based on appearance criteria too remains invisible.

Bowker and Star (2000) argue that we must be critical of assumed classifications and of classifications thought to be natural, right, and reasonable because they are rooted in everyday life (pp. 319-320). They urge us to realize the power behind classifications and to be mindful of the consequences that arise from classifications (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 325). “Being sensitive to exclusions” and being aware of what happens to the things that are excluded, rejected, or eliminated is of equal importance (Bowker & Star, 2000, p. 325). “Ugly” foods are not typically made accessible to consumers in North American grocery stores. With this, the exclusion of “ugly” foods in grocery stores becomes normalized and the waste of “ugly” foods then becomes seemingly reasonable. As mentioned above, even if food retailers were to add “ugly” foods suddenly to the shelves of the produce section in the grocery store it is very likely that consumers would just pick out the conventionally beautiful foods and leave the “ugly” foods for waste.

There is hope, however, in grocers and in food retailers to use their power to affect change in the current global food system and to adjust the classifications of edible/inedible food. Surely, some classifications must be kept; food that shows sign of rot or disease, for example, should still be classified as inedible and must remain unsold to consumers. Food that merely differs in appearance, weight, shape, size, colour, or in blemish level, however, should be reclassified as edible and be made available to consumers for purchase. Bowker and Star (2000) argue that classifications should remain flexible and that they should allow for change (p. 321). Additionally, Bowker and

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Star (2000) write that we must “tune our classifications” to reflect new institutional arrangements and future trajectories (p. 326). If grocers and food retailers want to effectively combat the issue of food waste, then they must consider the reclassification of fresh fruits and vegetables at the retail level. Conventionally beautiful foods may remain as such and may remain classified as edible but “ugly” foods need to be reclassified as edible as well. Beyond reclassifying fresh fruits and vegetables in legislation and in regulations, effort must be put into effectively marketing “ugly” foods to consumers in a way that re-educates consumers to see “ugly” foods not only as edible but as good, desirable, and as normal.

### **The Marketing of “Ugly” Foods**

Marketing strategies geared toward increasing the exposure of “ugly” foods to consumers and educating consumers on the existence of “ugly” foods have been found to be a necessary step in the promotion of the consumption of “ugly” fruits and vegetables. Many researchers have called for an increase in marketing efforts that aim to educate consumers on “ugly” food consumption (Loebnitz et al., 2015, p. 418; Louis & Lombart, 2018, p. 264; Helmert et al., 2017, p. 46; de Hooge et al., 2018, p. 708). Without marketing efforts to drive key messages about “ugly” food consumption, it is likely that “ugly” food sales will be poor. If grocers and food retailers want consumers to purchase “ugly” foods then they need to convince consumers that “ugly” foods are desirable, ultimately through effective marketing. Danto (2002) writes that acceptance “happens through critical explanation” and that people have to be brought to understand things that are deemed beautiful (p. 41). Beauty, Danto (2002) writes, “often requires explanation if it is to be appreciated” (p. 41). “Ugly” foods, which most consumers are either unaware of or believe to be inedible, will require explanation from food retailers if

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

consumers are to be effectively encouraged to purchase them in the future. Without explanation and without effective marketing, “ugly” foods will remain invisible to consumers and the issue of food waste will be sustained at the retail level.

One major area of research on the marketing and sale of “ugly” foods has been the factor of price. If “ugly” foods are to be sold in grocery stores, grocers and food retailers need to know what pricing plan would work best to encourage consumers to purchase “ugly” foods. Currently, if “ugly” foods are displayed and sold at the same price as conventionally beautiful foods, consumers tend to continue to buy what they are the most familiar with, namely conventionally beautiful foods. de Hooge et al. (2018) found that consumer purchases of “ugly” foods are conditional on food retailers lowering the price relative to the prices of “perfect” products (p. 707). Additionally, de Hooge et al. (2018) write that the marketing potential of “ugly” foods would depend on the price setting for such products (p. 706). This means that any marketing efforts are likely to make little change in consumers’ purchasing behaviour of “ugly” foods so long as the price of “ugly” foods matches that of conventionally beautiful foods. It seems that at this point in time “ugly” foods should be sold at a lower price than conventionally beautiful foods to encourage the sale and consumption of “ugly” foods. A curious thing to note, however, is that though both “ugly” foods and conventionally beautiful foods are essentially the same product, a difference in price is necessary to sell two of the same things that just happen to look different from the outside.

Increasing awareness among consumers of environmental sustainability issues and the issue of food waste in relation to “ugly” foods has been argued to be potentially effective as a part of the marketing strategies used to sell “ugly” foods. Tu et al. (2018) argue that “if consumers understand the relevant [environmental] issues and pay

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

attention to the truth of vegetable and fruit production, they can use their consumption power to protect their own and environmental rights” (p. 1). Tu et al. (2018) urge grocers and food retailers to advocate the concept of food waste, to advocate the importance of environmental protection, and to link environmental sustainability education and advocacy to an innovative brand story for “ugly” fruits and vegetables (p. 21). Loebnitz et al. (2015) further argue that grocers and food retailers should increase awareness of food waste issues particularly among consumers “with strong proenvironmental self-identities” as a way to encourage consumers to purchase “ugly” foods (p. 408). Consumers found to have a higher commitment to environmental sustainability and awareness of the issue of food waste “show a higher preference for suboptimal fruits and vegetables” (Louis & Lombart, 2018, p. 257). Thus, increasing awareness among consumers of environmental sustainability issues as they relate to “ugly” foods may prove effective in increasing the consumption of “ugly” foods.

The marketing of “ugly” foods in North American grocery stores must also include effective ways of increasing awareness, exposure, and familiarity of “ugly” foods among consumers as well. Though increasing awareness and familiarity of “ugly” foods among consumers is arguably one of the first steps that must be taken into consideration in food retailers’ marketing efforts, this tactic must evolve as “ugly” food sales continue into the future. Louis and Lombart (2018) write that “consumers’ internal norms should evolve to include suboptimal products” (p. 264). With this, consumers must be gradually exposed to more and more “ugly” foods and their uses and benefits as time goes on. Louis and Lombart (2018) write that consumers’ “attitudes, and then purchase intentions and effective purchases, might change through exposure” of “ugly” foods “since consumers tend to prefer products they are familiar to” (p. 264).

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Grocers and food retailers should gradually introduce “ugly” foods to consumers through advertisements, displays, signage, and packaging to familiarize consumers with “ugly” foods. Over time, it has even been argued that grocers and food retailers should include “ugly” foods in their standard assortment of fresh fruits and vegetables to increase consumers’ purchase likelihood of “ugly” foods (Louis & Lombart, 2018, p. 264). Since the marketing and sale of “ugly” foods in North American grocery stores are rather new efforts, it is difficult to predict how well consumers will adapt to seeing more “ugly” foods among the standard assortment of conventionally beautiful foods in the future. It is imperative, however, that consumers become more familiarized with the existence of “ugly” foods if there is to be any chance for increased consumption of “ugly” foods in the future.

One significant obstacle that grocers and food retailers will have to overcome is finding a way to market “ugly” foods to consumers on features such as taste. Since most consumers regularly regard conventionally beautiful foods as flavourful and “ugly” foods as being poorer in taste, re-educating consumers on the quality of “ugly” foods in terms of taste will be very important. Louis and Lombart (2018) write that food retailers need to teach consumers to separate the objective quality of “ugly” foods from their appearance” (p. 264). Helmert et al. (2017) further argue that grocers and food retailers need to educate consumers to accept visual imperfections on food items while promoting the taste and other quality criteria of “ugly” foods (p. 46). Demonstrations using “ugly” foods have become one effective way of re-educating consumers on the quality of taste of “ugly” foods. An example of one such demonstration includes blending “ugly” foods into smoothies for customers to drink and to taste (“How Sampling Free ‘Ugly Fruit’ Smoothies”, 2017). Another demonstration includes cooking

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

with or preparing “ugly” foods and creating dishes that customers can try in-store (“Making Meals From ‘Sparcs’”, 2018). Re-educating consumers on the quality of taste of “ugly” foods will be important for grocers and food retailers in their marketing efforts toward increasing the sale of “ugly” foods in grocery stores.

The marketing efforts of grocers and food retailers in North American grocery stores will have to be multifaceted in their approach to increasing sales and the consumption of “ugly” foods. Re-educating consumers on the quality of “ugly” foods will be gradual and tricky. It is not an easy task to convince consumers that food that they once believed should be thrown away and disposed of is, on the contrary, just as healthy and as edible as the foods that they normally consume. The marketing efforts of grocers and food retailers must be innovative and adaptive as the competition to “ugly” foods are firstly, essentially the exact same product and are secondly, perceived to be the best foods for multiple generations past and to present day. In sum, if North American grocers and food retailers hope to increase the sale and consumption of “ugly” foods, their marketing efforts should include price adjustments (at least at the beginning), aim to increase awareness of environmental sustainability issues, increase exposure and familiarity with “ugly” foods, and include marketing tactics that elucidate the quality of the taste of “ugly” foods.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Collection Method

This MRP uses a qualitative research method. More specifically, this MRP uses the multiple case study method or multiple-case design. With this type of research method, data is collected from several select cases in an effort to develop a more in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon than using a single case can provide (“Multiple-Case Designs”, 2010). The data collected for this MRP are the names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns that are used by American and Canadian grocers and food retailers. The name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign communicates to consumers firstly, what the product is and secondly, the product’s qualities or the experience that the consumer might have upon consumption of that particular product. The names and titles of North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns were chosen to be collected for this MRP because analyzing the ideas and meanings being communicated to consumers via these names and titles allows me to answer my three research questions.

Data was collected from seventeen North American grocers and food retailers for this MRP including:

- Discovery Organics (Canada)
- Food City (USA)
- Fortinos (Canada)
- Giant Eagle (USA)
- Hy-Vee (USA)
- IGA (Canada and USA)

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

- Kroger (USA)
- Loblaws (Canada)
- Meijer (USA)
- Metro (Canada)
- No Frills (Canada)
- Raley’s (USA)
- Real Canadian Superstore (Canada)
- Shoppers Drug Mart (Canada)
- Walmart (Canada and USA)
- Whole Foods (Canada and USA)
- Zehrs (Canada)

One name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign was collected from each selected North American grocer or food retailer. This resulted in the collection of eleven different names or titles in total. Here it is important to note that a number of the grocers or food retailers selected for this MRP run and use the same “ugly” food marketing campaign. For example, the grocers and food retailers Loblaws, Fortinos, Zehrs, Shoppers Drug Mart, Real Canadian Superstore, and No Frills run and use the same “ugly” food marketing campaign across the six different stores. Similarly, Hy-Vee and Meijer share the same “ugly” food marketing campaign. The name or title collected from the grocers and food retailers that share an “ugly” food marketing campaign is counted as one single data point. Additionally, it is important to note that one of the stores, IGA, runs two different “ugly” food marketing campaigns in its stores. Since the

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

two names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns used by IGA differ, they are counted as two data points.

The data was collected manually from the grocer’s or food retailer’s online website or from online articles that detailed the American or Canadian “ugly” food marketing campaign. **Table 1** lists the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign used by each North American grocer or food retailer.

<b>Name of Grocer or Food Retailer</b>	<b>Name or Title of “Ugly” Food Marketing Campaign</b>
Discovery Organics	Rebel Food
Food City, IGA	Practically Perfect
Fortinos, Loblaws, No Frills, Real Canadian Superstore, Shoppers Drug Mart, Zehrs	Naturally Imperfect
Giant Eagle	Produce with Personality
Hy-Vee, Meijer	Misfits
IGA	Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes (English translation: The Funny Fruits and Vegetables)
Kroger	Pickuliar Picks
Metro	Rebels
Raley’s	REAL GOOD
Walmart	I’m Perfect
Whole Foods	Imperfect Produce

**Table 1** Names and Titles of North American “Ugly” Food Marketing Campaigns

It is important to note that the textual data that was collected was specifically kept only to the names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns. With some of the marketing campaigns, additional or supporting text is provided to consumers. For example, Whole Foods’ “Imperfect Produce” campaign title is followed by additional text that reads “is perfectly delicious and nutritious” (Hayes, 2017). In this MRP, I analyze solely the names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns for two reasons. The first reason is that a campaign name or title is the first thing that

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

consumers see and read, whether it is displayed directly on the product, on packaging, on signage, or on other marketing materials. A lot of time is spent on deciding the name or title of a marketing campaign because of the amount of weight that is placed on how successfully that name or title can communicate the product to consumers. I chose to analyze only the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns because I want to study the meanings and ideas that are communicated to consumers through this component of the campaigns, independent of all other text and marketing factors. The second reason for analyzing solely the names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns is that not every “ugly” food marketing campaign uses additional or supporting text. To maintain a fair analysis of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaign names and titles any additional or supporting text was excluded.

### **Method of Analysis**

This MRP uses a qualitative method of analysis. The method of analysis used is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. The CDA method was chosen for this MRP because it allows for an in-depth study of the meanings and ideas that are communicated to consumers about “ugly” foods through the language used by American and Canadian grocers and food retailers. Using the CDA method allows me to analyze the words, terms, and keywords that are being used in the names and titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns, which ultimately allows me to answer my research questions. Using the CDA method also works as a tool for revealing how power relations function through the use of language. By using the CDA method in this MRP I am able to analyze how the words, terms, and keywords that are used in the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns work to construct ideas and meanings of “ugly” food as desirable or as undesirable, and ultimately as edible or as waste.

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Textual coding was conducted for the analysis in this MRP using the codes listed in the codebook detailed in **Table 2**.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Appearance-positive	The word(s) used in the name or title describe the appearance of “ugly” foods using positive language (i.e. words that describe a good condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result)	REAL GOOD
Appearance-negative	The word(s) used in the name or title describe the appearance of “ugly” foods using negative language (i.e. words that describe a bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result)	Imperfect Produce
Appearance-neutral	The word(s) used in the name or title describe the appearance of “ugly” foods using neutral language (i.e. words that describe neither a good nor bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result <i>or</i> words that describe both a good and bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result simultaneously resulting in the descriptors becoming neutral in effect)	Naturally Imperfect
Personification-positive	The word(s) used in the name or title attribute a personal nature or human characteristics to “ugly” foods using positive language (i.e. words that describe a good condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result)	Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes
Personification-negative	The word(s) used in the name or title attribute a personal nature or human characteristics to “ugly” foods using negative language (i.e. words that describe a bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result)	Misfits
Personification-neutral	The word(s) used in the name or title attribute a personal nature or human characteristics to “ugly”	Produce with Personality

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

	foods using neutral language (i.e. words that describe neither a good nor bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result <i>or</i> words that describe both a good and bad condition, characteristic, experience, situation, or result simultaneously resulting in the descriptors becoming neutral in effect)	
--	---	--

**Table 2** Codebook

Six codes were developed in total for the analysis. There are two root words among the six codes. These are “appearance” and “personification.” During the development process of the codebook I realized that a number of the names and titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns *describe the appearance* of “ugly” foods in their name or title or, interestingly, they *attribute a personal nature or human characteristics* to “ugly” foods in their name or title. This led me to develop the two root words, or primary codes, for the six codes as “appearance” and “personification.” If the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign used words to describe the appearance of “ugly” foods, it was coded as “appearance.” If the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign used words to attribute a personal nature or human characteristics to “ugly” foods, it was coded as “personification.”

The primary codes were then further divided into “-positive,” “-negative,” or “-neutral.” The words, terms, and keywords that are used in the names and titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns use a variety of positive, negative, and neutral language. The primary codes were further divided into “appearance-positive,” “appearance-negative,” “appearance-neutral,” “personification-positive,” “personification-negative,” and “personification-neutral” to accommodate the different

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

types of language used. With the development of the six codes the names and titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns were coded and then analyzed using the CDA method. The next two sections detail the coding results and the analysis of the results.

**RESULTS**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Name or Title of the “Ugly” Food Marketing Campaign</b>
Appearance-positive	Practically Perfect I’m Perfect REAL GOOD
Appearance-negative	Imperfect Produce Pickuliar Picks
Appearance-neutral	Naturally Imperfect
Personification-positive	Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes
Personification-negative	Rebel Food Misfits Rebels
Personification-neutral	Produce with Personality

**Figure 1** Coding Results

The coding results are displayed in **Figure 1**. Three of the names or titles from the selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns were coded as “appearance-positive.” These include Food City’s and IGA’s campaign titled “Practically Perfect,” Walmart’s campaign titled “I’m Perfect,” and Raley’s campaign titled “REAL GOOD.” The three campaign titles do not explicitly describe the appearance of “ugly” foods and are generally rather vague in meaning and in description. Since, however, these marketing campaign titles are a part of the strategy to sell “ugly” foods, which are at their core contested based on their appearance, one can infer that the chosen names or titles of these “ugly” food marketing campaigns do address and consider the

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

appearance of “ugly” foods. The three campaign titles were coded as “appearance-positive” based on the use of the words “perfect” and “good,” which are positive words that describe a good condition or characteristic in these cases.

Two of the names or titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns were coded as “appearance-negative.” These include Whole Foods’ “Imperfect Produce” campaign and Kroger’s “Pickuliar Picks” campaign. The two campaign titles do not explicitly describe the appearance of “ugly” foods but as mentioned above, since these marketing campaign titles are a part of the strategy to sell “ugly” foods, which are at their core contested based on their appearance, one can infer that the chosen names or titles of these “ugly” food marketing campaigns address and consider the appearance of “ugly” foods. Whole Foods’ “Imperfect Produce” campaign was coded as “appearance-negative” based on the use of the word “imperfect,” which is a negative word that describes or indicates a bad condition or characteristic of the produce in this case. Kroger’s “Pickuliar Picks” campaign was coded as “appearance-negative” based on the use of the word “pickuliar,” which is a play on the word “peculiar,” meaning strange, odd, unusual, or abnormal. The word peculiar is most often used as a negative word describing a bad condition or characteristic of something.

One of the titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns was coded as “appearance-neutral.” The campaign title that was coded as “appearance-neutral” is the “Naturally Imperfect” campaign used by Fortinos, Loblaws, No Frills, Real Canadian Superstore, Shoppers Drug Mart, and Zehrs. Similar to the names or titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns that were coded as “appearance-positive” and as “appearance-negative,” the “Naturally Imperfect” campaign title does not explicitly describe the appearance of “ugly” foods. Like the other coded names and titles of the

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

“ugly” food marketing campaigns mentioned above, one can infer that the chosen title of this “ugly” food marketing campaign addresses and considers the appearance of “ugly” foods. The “Naturally Imperfect” campaign was coded as “appearance-neutral” based on the use of the words “naturally,” which is a positive use of the word in this case (i.e. consumers regard natural food as good as opposed to unnatural food that is often regarded as bad), and “imperfect,” which as described above is a negative word. In the case of the “ugly” food marketing campaign title “Naturally Imperfect,” the use of a positive word coupled with a negative word resulted in a neutral title.

One of the titles of the selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns was coded as “personification-positive.” The name of the campaign coded as “personification-positive” is “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes,” which is run and used by IGA. The title, originally in French, can be translated into English as “The Funny Fruits and Vegetables.” The word “drôle” in French can be translated to mean funny or silly. The “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” campaign was coded as “personification-positive” based on the attribution of the characteristics of funny or silly to “ugly” foods, which in reality cannot be foolish, lack judgement or common sense, or cause laughter on their own. The word “drôle,” or in translation funny or silly, in this case where it is being attributed to food is taken in a light and positive way versus in a negative way. Thus, the “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” “ugly” food marketing campaign was coded as “personification-positive.”

Alternatively, it is important to note in the case of the “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” “ugly” food marketing campaign the word “drôle” can also be translated to mean bizarre, peculiar, or strange. It is tricky through just the translation of the title into English to know exactly what is meant by the use of the adjective “drôle” in this

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

case. It could be argued here that the “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” campaign could be coded as “appearance-negative” or “personification-negative” based on the translation of “drôle” into bizarre, peculiar, or strange, which are words that are often used to describe a negative or bad condition or characteristic.

Three of the names or titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns were coded as “personification-negative.” These include Discovery Organics’ campaign titled “Rebel Food,” Hy-Vee’s and Meijer’s campaign titled “Misfits,” and Metro’s campaign titled “Rebels.” The three campaign titles were coded as “personification-negative” based on the use of the words “rebel” and “misfits.” A rebel, by definition, is a person that participates in a rebellion or opposes, disobeys, or resists one in authority or control (Rebel, 2019). A misfit is a person who is poorly adapted to a situation or environment (Misfit, 2019). Both of these words describe characteristics of a person. The “Rebel Food,” “Misfits,” and “Rebels” campaigns attribute human characteristics to “ugly” foods and were therefore coded under the primary code “personification.” The words “rebel” and “misfits” are often used as negative words that describe a bad condition or characteristic. Since the “Rebel Food,” “Misfits,” and “Rebels” campaigns use these words, they were coded as “personification-negative.”

Lastly, one of the titles of the selected “ugly” food marketing campaigns was coded as “personification-neutral.” The marketing campaign that was coded as “personification-neutral” is Giant Eagle’s “Produce with Personality” campaign. To describe produce as having any personality is to attribute a personal nature to the produce, namely personifying “ugly” foods. The “Produce with Personality” campaign does not further indicate whether “ugly” foods “having personality” is good or bad, however, and with the absence of the use of positive or negative words the “Produce

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

with Personality” “ugly” food marketing campaign was therefore coded as “personification-neutral.”

## ANALYSIS

### **The Personification of “Ugly” Foods**

At first glance, in analyzing the coded data, one particular pattern emerges that warrants greater attention. Five of the eleven selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns used personification as a literary device in the name or title of the marketing campaign. The cases include IGA’s “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” campaign, Discovery Organics’ “Rebel Food” campaign, Hy-Vee’s and Meijer’s “Misfits” campaign, Metro’s “Rebels” campaign, and Giant Eagles’ “Produce with Personality” campaign. This pattern, of the choice to personify “ugly” foods in the marketing campaign title, is interesting because it is uncommon for consumers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables based on whether or not the produce has been attributed a personal nature or any human characteristics. Consumers are more likely to base their purchase preferences on factors such as appearance, taste, scent, texture, or even solely on familiarity. It is more likely that a consumer will purchase a fresh fruit or vegetable based on the assumption that it may be flavourful or tasty rather than on the belief that it has “personality,” it is “rebellious,” or that it is “funny.” Thus, personifying “ugly” foods in the title of a marketing campaign is an interesting strategy for attempting to encourage consumers to purchase “ugly” foods.

If one were to imagine a consumer walking into the produce section of a grocery store and seeing conventionally beautiful foods displayed on one shelf and “ugly” foods displayed on another shelf, the first thing that a customer might wonder, irrespective of price and other visual marketing tools, is how “ugly” foods differ from conventionally beautiful foods. As detailed in the literature review of this MRP, many consumers believe “ugly” foods to be of poorer quality in flavour and in nutritional value compared

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

to conventionally beautiful foods based on the difference or abnormality in their appearance. If a grocer or food retailer wishes to encourage customers to purchase “ugly” foods while correcting the misconception of “ugly” foods as poorer in quality in comparison to conventionally beautiful foods, why not address the elephant in the room? Consumers look at “ugly” foods and think, “these are ugly, weird, abnormal, not-as-good, bad.” It would make sense at this point if they were to read the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign that addresses the consumer’s concern with the appearance of the “ugly” produce. Attributing a personal nature or human characteristics to “ugly” foods do not address consumers’ concerns with the appearance or quality of “ugly” foods. At most, personification merely calls out the fact that “ugly” foods are just that, ugly, or odd, in comparison to conventionally beautiful foods, which at this point would have been already realized by the consumer.

Personification is often used as metaphorical language that “plays fast and loose with the truth” (Luu, 2016, para. 6). There is some truth in using words like “misfits” and “funny” to describe “ugly” foods. “Ugly” foods are like misfits in a way because they stand out and are poorly adapted to their environment (i.e. in the grocery store), where conventionally beautiful foods tend to outshine them in sales and in desirability. “Ugly” foods, though unable to act foolishly or cause laughter on their own, can be funny-looking or silly-looking in comparison to conventionally beautiful foods.

Using a word like “rebels” or calling “ugly” foods “produce with personality” is a little more unclear and ineffectual. Upon coming across the “Rebel Food” or “Rebels” “ugly” food marketing campaigns, consumers might wonder how “ugly” foods are rebellious or what exactly “ugly” foods are rebelling against. Additionally, upon coming across the “Produce with Personality” campaign, consumers might wonder how fresh

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

fruits and vegetables “having personality” affects the foods’ taste, ripeness, and nutritional value, among other factors. Though personification can often work well in many cases as a tool for playing with the truth, it is more effectual in some cases than in others when it comes to personifying food.

When it comes to selling food, one of the most important marketing objectives for grocers and food retailers is increasing demand and desirability of that particular food. With any product, if there is no demand or desire for that particular product, consumers will not purchase it. Increasing demand and fostering desirability is especially important, and difficult, with the introduction of new foods that consumers are unfamiliar with and when the particular food that the grocer or food retailer is attempting to sell has a number of successful competitors.

This is the case with “ugly” food; “ugly foods are rather new to the shelves of grocery store, meaning consumers have been generally unaware of their existence until recently, and “ugly” foods have many very successful competitors, namely conventionally beautiful foods, which have been epitomizing “perfection” and consumers’ conceptions of ideal produce for decades. Given consumers’ current unfamiliarity with “ugly” foods and the number of competitors, it is imperative that grocers and food retailers proactively work to increase consumers’ desire for “ugly” foods. The title of a grocer’s or food retailer’s “ugly” food marketing campaign can be used to help accomplish the task of altering and increasing the desirability of “ugly” foods among consumers. Here, I will mention again that it is interesting that five of the eleven selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaign titles have personified “ugly” foods in an attempt to increase their desirability among consumers and increase the sale of “ugly” foods. As mentioned above, from analyzing the five cases, at most,

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

personification merely calls out the fact that “ugly” foods are different or odd in comparison to conventionally beautiful foods. In analyzing the five cases that used personification in their “ugly” food marketing campaign titles, one can see that the personification of “ugly” foods might actually cause more confusion for consumers than an alternation in the perceived desirability of “ugly” foods.

### **Altering the Desirability of “Ugly” Foods**

For every grocer and food retailer that is included in this MRP the opportunity exists to potentially change consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” food as undesirable, inedible, and as waste. In choosing an “ugly” food marketing campaign name or title, each grocer or food retailer takes on the same challenge of attempting to alter consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods using only a handful of words. Most of the grocers and food retailers included in this MRP used one to three words in total for the name or title of their “ugly” food marketing campaign. Only one grocer, IGA, used six words in their “ugly” food marketing campaign title. In part addressing RQ<sub>1</sub> of this MRP, it is interesting to see what types of words, terms, and keywords the different North American grocers and food retailers used given the challenge of only using a handful of words to construct their “ugly” food marketing campaign name or title. In the section above, I analyzed the use of personification in the names and titles of the “ugly” food marketing campaigns. In this section, I analyze the use of positive, negative, and neutral words in the names or titles of the selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns.

As mentioned in the section above, one of the most challenging objectives for North American grocers and food retailers is altering consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods in addition to increasing consumers’ demand and desire to purchase “ugly” foods.

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

In order for consumers to follow through with purchasing a product, they need to want or desire that product. In a situation where a consumer may not desire the product but is rather impartial to it, at the very least they need to consider the product as better than its competitors in some way in order for the consumer to choose it and purchase it.

Currently, without any type of marketing, when held next to their competitors, namely conventionally beautiful foods, “ugly” foods lose. In order for grocers and food retailers to increase the sale of “ugly” foods, they need to overcome the challenge of getting consumers to choose “ugly” foods either over or in addition to conventionally beautiful foods. To overcome this challenge, North American grocers’ and food retailers’ marketing strategies need to work toward changing consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods as undesirable, inedible, and as waste in comparison to conventionally beautiful foods. Choosing an effective name or title of one’s “ugly” food marketing campaign is a part of having an effective marketing strategy for the sale of “ugly” foods.

To start changing consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods, grocers and food retailers must encourage consumers to think positively about “ugly” foods. Eventually, “ugly” foods need to be perceived as good and not as bad or as abnormal, as desirable instead of undesirable, and as edible instead of as inedible. Only four of the eleven selected North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns used positive words in their campaign names or titles. These include Food City’s and IGA’s “Practically Perfect” campaign, Walmart’s “I’m Perfect” campaign, Raley’s “REAL GOOD” campaign, and IGA’s “Les Drôles de Fruits et Légumes” campaign. The “Naturally Imperfect” campaign run by Fortinos, Loblaws, No Frills, Real Canadian Superstore, Shoppers Drug Mart, and Zehrs should also be mentioned for using positive words based on the use of the word “naturally” in the campaign title. As mentioned in the results section of this MRP,

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

consumers generally prefer natural (i.e. naturally made or grown) foods in comparison to unnatural foods. Raley’s “REAL GOOD” campaign’s use of the word “real” makes use of consumers’ preferences and positive feelings toward natural and real foods as well. When consumers can associate “ugly” foods with positive words such as “perfect,” “good,” and “natural” they are more likely to feel more positively about “ugly” foods and are more likely to perceive “ugly” foods as desirable or having desirable qualities.

It should be noted here, however, that using positive words in one’s “ugly” food marketing campaign does not guarantee that consumers will automatically begin to perceive “ugly” foods differently or that they will not have difficulty understanding the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign. It is probable that consumers will have more positive feelings toward “ugly” foods if the marketing of the produce encourages them using positive language than if the marketing of the produce uses negative or neutral language. More research, however, is needed to test the effect of “ugly” food marketing campaign titles on consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods. The scope of this MRP includes only an analysis of how North American “ugly” food marketing campaign names or titles may attempt to alter the desirability of “ugly” foods and how the words used work toward redefining “ugly” foods in the eye of the consumer.

Interestingly, the “ugly” food marketing campaigns that used positive words in the names or titles may raise more confusion than understanding among consumers. For example, the three “ugly” food campaign titles that coded as “appearance-positive” (i.e. “Practically Perfect,” “I’m Perfect,” and “REAL GOOD”) are tremendously vague. If one were to pick up a fresh fruit or vegetable that was named “Practically Perfect,” one might be prompted to ask, “what exactly about this fruit or vegetable is practically perfect” and subsequently “what about this fruit or vegetable is imperfect?”

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Additionally, one might ask what is “perfect” or “real good” about “ugly” foods upon encountering one of the other “appearance-positive” “ugly” food marketing campaign titles. Titling “ugly” food as “perfect” or as “good” does not clearly explain to the consumer exactly which features of the produce the title is referring to. Is it referring to the appearance of the produce, the taste, the scent, the nutritional value, or all of these factors combined? The three “appearance-positive” campaign titles are potentially confusing to consumers even though they associate “ugly” foods with positive language. As Grunert (2015) notes, information provided to consumers “can often be ignored or misinterpreted” (p. 385). Using positive language in one’s “ugly” food marketing campaign, though potentially beneficial in terms of increasing consumers’ positive perceptions of “ugly” foods, can potentially cause more confusion and distrust of “ugly” foods among consumers.

The most puzzling of the cases, upon analysis of the coded “ugly” food marketing campaign titles, are the cases that use negative words in the campaign name or title. It is uncertain as to what is to be gained from associating “ugly” foods with negative language as a marketing strategy. Danto (2002) writes that beauty “often requires explanation if it is to be appreciated” (p. 41). If grocers and food retailers hope to alter consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods as bad and as undesirable, as inedible, and as waste, then they must explain to consumers how “ugly” foods represent the opposite. If grocers and food retailers hope to encourage consumers to appreciate “ugly” foods and to purchase “ugly” foods, then they must explain to consumers, using appropriate and effectual wording, how “ugly” foods can and should be appreciated. If grocers and food retailers hope to convince consumers that “ugly” foods are just regular foods, not “ugly,” not odd, not inedible, not waste, then they must explain to consumers how “ugly” foods

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

are just like the produce that consumers currently recognize as conventionally beautiful foods.

Part of the process of explaining “ugly” foods to consumers in the handful of seconds or minutes that consumers allocate to picking and choosing fresh fruits and vegetables is effectively communicating useful information to consumers through the marketing campaign name or title. If the campaign title does not communicate to consumers how “ugly” foods are good, just-as-good, beneficial, healthy, edible, tasty, or nutritious then consumers are most likely going to remain unwilling to purchase “ugly” foods in contrast to conventionally beautiful foods. If “ugly” foods are associated with negative words or words that cause greater confusion at the point of purchase the probability of consumers purchasing “ugly” foods over conventionally beautiful foods is likely to decrease. It is important that the “ugly” food marketing campaign name or title communicates to the consumer that “ugly” foods are good, desirable, and are edible.

### **Unmentioned: Flavour and Nutrition**

The edibility of “ugly” foods is often contested as many perceive “ugly” foods to be bad, potentially rotten, tasteless, odd-tasting, or poor in nutrition. Consumers often look at the appearance of an “ugly” food and attribute the abnormality or unattractiveness of its outside to the contents of its inside. As discussed above in the literature review, consumers often regard abnormalities in the appearance of “ugly” foods as quality indicators of poor flavour and poor nutritional value. It is curious then, that none of the selected eleven North American “ugly” food marketing campaign names or titles used words that reference the potential richness in flavour or high nutritional value of “ugly” foods. It is possible that the “Practically Perfect,” “I’m Perfect,” and “REAL GOOD” campaign titles reference the potential flavour and nutritional value of

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

“ugly” foods but as mentioned above, the three campaign titles are rather vague and it is uncertain as to what exactly the campaign titles are referring to. If consumers are unfamiliar with eating “ugly” foods and are unaware of the potential benefits and positive experiences that one can have upon consuming “ugly” foods, a name or title of an “ugly” food marketing campaign that communicates these features of “ugly” foods to the consumer would be very valuable.

As mentioned above in the literature review, there have been many studies on the current marketing of “ugly” foods that have called for greater effort on the part of grocers and food retailers to re-educate consumers on the potential benefits and edibility of “ugly” foods. One of the tools at the disposal of North American grocers and food retailers is developing a marketing campaign name or title that both works to re-educate consumers on the edibility of “ugly” foods and that works to increase the sale of “ugly” foods in stores. As Bowker and Star (2000) posit, we have the power and responsibility to “tune our classifications” to reflect new realities (p. 326) and to reclassify things in adaptation to a changing world. Grocers and food retailers have the power to help consumers make the connections between “ugly” foods and desire and between “ugly” foods and edibility. Grocers and food retailers have the power to help “ugly” foods reach dinner tables in American and Canadian homes. Part of the process, however, requires that grocers and food retailers effectively communicate “ugly” foods to consumers using appropriate and effectual wording in their marketing campaigns. Grocers and food retailers can encourage consumers to perceive “ugly” foods as good, as just as good as conventionally beautiful foods, as desirable, and as edible. On the road to normalizing the consumption of “ugly” foods and minimizing food waste at the retail

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

level, the connection and belief that “ugly” foods are good, tasty, healthy, and nutritious must primarily become normalized.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

This MRP sought to answer three research questions by analyzing the names and titles of North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns. In response to RQ<sub>1</sub>, the words, terms, and keywords chosen by North American grocers and food retailers were identified (Table 1) and then coded (Figure 1).

In response to RQ<sub>2</sub>, this MRP found that the North American “ugly” food marketing campaign names or titles that used positive words were found to have the most potential in altering the desirability of “ugly” foods as they may, at the very least, be successful in urging consumers to begin thinking positively about “ugly” foods. It was noted, however, that the use of positive words in the “ugly” food marketing campaign name or title does not guarantee that consumers will think positively about “ugly” foods or cause consumers’ desire for “ugly” foods to increase. In fact, this MRP found that the use of positive words without specific reference to any characteristics of “ugly” foods in the marketing campaign name or title can actually cause greater confusion among consumers, which may potentially deter consumers from purchasing “ugly” foods. The use of negative and neutral words in the names or titles of the North American “ugly” foods marketing campaigns was found to have the least potential success in altering the desirability of “ugly” foods and the greatest potential to cause increased confusion among consumers at the point of purchase.

Altering the desirability of “ugly” foods will require the reclassification of “ugly” foods and the reconceptualization of “ugly” foods as just “food.” This means that “ugly” foods must be recognized as food that is no lesser than conventionally beautiful foods and, if possible, “ugly” foods should be recognized as having the potential of being more flavourful or more nutritionally valuable than conventionally beautiful foods. Let us not

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

forget the flavour and nutritional lottery that we play with the consumption of all fresh fruits and vegetables – you never know what you are going to get!

Altering the desirability of “ugly” foods will require that we place less value on the outer appearance of all fresh fruits and vegetables. As noted in the literature review, one cannot definitely determine the inner contents of fresh fruits and vegetables from an observation of their outer appearance. Additionally, we must remember that the point of food is not its beauty (Danto, 2002, p. 41). The point of food, to human beings, is its edibility and its ability to sustain life. “Ugly” foods then, by this measure, are justified in that they are, in fact, edible. Danto (2002), reminds us that some things can be good without being beautiful (p. 49). “Ugly” foods are examples of such things.

With respect to RQ<sub>3</sub>, the process of altering the desirability of “ugly” foods will primarily require consumers and all others that are a part of the current global food system to reclassify “ugly” foods as edible instead of as inedible and as waste. Before “ugly” foods can be seen as desirable in the eye of the consumer, consumers need to be made aware of the fact that “ugly” foods are indeed edible and that they should not automatically be disposed of based on the fact that their outer appearance is different from what consumers are used to seeing in North American grocery stores. The next part of the process of altering the desirability of “ugly” foods will require the normalization of “ugly” food availability and consumption in North American grocery stores. This includes increased marketing efforts and the increased exposure of “ugly” foods to consumers in North American grocery stores.

In order for the normalization of the consumption of “ugly” foods to occur among North Americans, consumers must begin regarding “ugly” foods as edible, the methods of standardization for fresh fruits and vegetables (i.e. cosmetic standards and

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

regulations) must be altered, “ugly” foods must be made more regularly available to consumers, and consumers must be re-educated on the existence of “ugly” foods and the potential beneficial qualities of foods that may have a different outer appearance than conventionally beautiful foods. This part of the process of altering the desirability of “ugly” foods and of reclassifying “ugly” foods as edible in the eye of the consumer will require North American grocers and food retailers to help re-educate consumers on the existence and qualities of “ugly” foods. North American grocers and food retailers must educate consumers on the potential flavour of “ugly” foods, their potential nutritional value, their reality (i.e. they make up close to fifty percent of all fresh fruits and vegetables produced for human consumption; fresh fruits and vegetables are not naturally uniform in shape, weight, and size and vary quite drastically in cosmetic appearance), and the current environmental impact of the mass disposal of “ugly” foods. Consumers require greater knowledge of “ugly” foods if they are to be able to make informed decisions on the consumption of “ugly” foods and if they are to be encouraged to change their current consumption habits.

Here, we must once again recognize the power of North American grocers and food retailers to alter the desirability of “ugly” foods and to reclassify “ugly” foods as edible in the eye of the consumer. Without the proactive effort of North American grocers and food retailers to normalize the consumption of “ugly” foods the issue of “ugly” foods as one of the greatest contributors to food waste will inevitably persist. We must remember that the point of all of this, of this exploration and of this research, of asking how the desirability of “ugly” foods may be altered by the names or titles of North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns, is to find a way to eventually increase the consumption of “ugly” foods with an eye to substantially decreasing the contribution of

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

the disposal of “ugly” foods to the issue of food waste. The current reality of “ugly” foods in North American grocery stores is a part of the issue of food waste, which at its core is the result of exercised privilege by North Americans. “Ugly” foods are being disposed of and wasted based on perceived abnormalities in their appearance and the reality of their edibility is ignored. “Ugly” foods are edible; we must come to perceive them as such if we are to successfully fight the issue of food waste.

### CONCLUSION

This MRP examined the names and titles of eleven North American “ugly” food marketing campaigns using the CDA method. The purpose of this exploration was to analyze how the language that is used in North American “ugly” food marketing campaign titles works to construct and communicate ideas and meanings of “ugly” foods to consumers. More specifically, this MRP sought to analyze how the words, terms, and keywords used in North American “ugly” food marketing campaign names and titles attempt to alter the desirability of “ugly” foods and further, how altering the desirability of “ugly” foods works to reclassify and normalize “ugly” foods in the eye of the consumer.

This MRP warrants further research and analysis of the effect of North American “ugly” food marketing campaign names and titles on consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods and on consumers’ willingness to consume “ugly” foods. Though this MRP considered only the name or title of each selected “ugly” food marketing campaign, future research may benefit from considering additional or supporting text used in the “ugly” food marketing campaigns, the design aspects of displays and packaging, and the positioning or location of “ugly” food displays in grocery stores. Future research conducted on “ugly” foods that considers any of these additional visual marketing features or tools would greatly help to develop important insights into the communication of “ugly” foods and consumers’ perceptions of “ugly” foods. Further research would aid grocers and food retailers in addressing consumers’ concerns and desires regarding the consumption of “ugly” foods.

This MRP highlights the importance of “ugly” food marketing campaign names and titles in increasing consumers’ awareness and understanding of “ugly” foods and in

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

increasing consumers’ desire and consumption of “ugly” foods. Through the name or title of the “ugly” food marketing campaign, North American grocers and food retailers have the power and potential to reclassify and normalize “ugly” foods as edible in the eye of the consumer. Additionally, North American grocers and food retailers have the power to encourage consumers to purchase “ugly” foods in an effort to decrease food waste at the retail level. There is, without a doubt, much effort to be made on the part of grocers and food retailers in North America but we must remember that change will not come from their efforts alone. Food retailers, consumers, distributors, and producers must all play their part in this challenge if we are to see lasting change in the global food system and a significant reduction in food waste and in food insecurity in Canada and in the United States.

**REFERENCES**

- Bowker, G. C., & Star, S. L. (2000). *Sorting things out: Classification and its consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Danto, A. C. (2002). The abuse of beauty. *Daedalus*, 131(4), pp. 35-56. Retrieved from: [https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/stable/20027805?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/stable/20027805?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)
- de Hooge, I. E., van Dulm, E., & van Trijp, H. C. M. (2018). Cosmetic specifications in the food waste issue: Supply chain considerations and practices concerning suboptimal food products. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 183, pp. 689-709. DOI: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.02.132
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2019). *Key facts on food loss and waste you should know!* Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/save-food/resources/keyfindings/en/>
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & punish* (Alan Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Random House, Inc. (Original work published 1977)
- Grunert, K. G. (2005). Food quality and safety: Consumer perception and demand. *European Review of Agricultural Economics*, 32(3), pp. 369-391. DOI: 10.1093/eurrag/jbi011
- Hayes, L. (2017). Ugly produce getting the love it deserves. Retrieved from <https://georgia.growingamerica.com/features/2017/03/ugly-produce-getting-love-it-deserves>
- Helmert, J. R., Symmank, C., Pannasch, S., & Rohm, H. (2017). Have an eye on the buckled cucumber: An eye tracking study on visually suboptimal foods. *Food Quality and Preference*, 60, pp. 40-47. DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2017.03.009

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

- Hopkins, R. (2005). Aesthetics, experience, and discrimination. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 63(2), pp. 119-133. DOI: 10.1111/j.0021-8529.2005.00189.x
- Hopkins, R. (2001). Kant, quasi-realism, and the autonomy of aesthetic judgement. *European Journal of Philosophy*, 9(2), pp. 166-189. DOI: 10.1111/1468-0378.00134
- How Sampling Free ‘Ugly Fruit’ Smoothies Lead to Thousands of Subscriptions to the Economist. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.sense-nyc.com/ugly-fruit-smoothie-us/>
- Jaeger, S. R., Machín, L., Aschemann-Witzel, J., Antúnez, L., Harker, F. F., & Ares, G. (2018). Buy, eat or discard? A case study with apples to explore fruit quality perception and food waste. *Food Quality and Preference*, 69, pp. 10-20. DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2018.05.004
- Jaros, D., Rohm, H., & Strobl, M. (2000). Appearance properties—A significant contribution to sensory food quality? *Lebensmittel-Wissenschaft Und -Technologie*, 33(4), pp. 320-326. DOI: 10.1006/fstl.2000.0666
- Loebnitz, N., Schuitema, G., & Grunert, K. G. (2015). Who buys oddly shaped food and why? Impacts of food shape abnormality and organic labeling on purchase intentions. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(4), pp. 408-421. DOI: 10.1002/mar.20788
- Louis, D., & Lombart, C. (2018). Retailers’ communication on ugly fruits and vegetables: What are consumers’ perceptions? *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 14, pp. 256-271. DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.01.006

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Luu, C. (2016). Personification is your friend: The language of inanimate objects.

Retrieved from <https://daily.jstor.org/personification-is-your-friend-the-amazing-life-of-letters/>

Making Meals From ‘Sparcs’ – A live cooking demonstration at NY Federation

Conference. (2018). *Waste Advantage Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://wasteadvantagemag.com/making-meals-from-sparcs-a-live-cooking-demonstration-at-ny-federation-conference/>

Misfit. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misfit>

Moore, R. (2017). Nasty weather and ugly produce: Climate change, agricultural adaptation, and food waste. *Natural Resources Journal*, 57(2), pp. 493-518.

Retrieved from [https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/narj57&id=515&men\\_tab=srchresults#](https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/narj57&id=515&men_tab=srchresults#)

Multiple-Case Designs. (2010). In *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. Retrieved from <https://methods.sagepub.com/Reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n216.xml>

Porter, S. D., Reay, D. S., Bomberg, E., & Higgins, P. (2018). Avoidable food losses and associated production-phase greenhouse gas emissions arising from application of cosmetic standards to fresh fruit and vegetables in Europe and the UK. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 201(Complete), pp. 869-878. DOI: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.08.079

PROOF. (2018). *Household Food Insecurity in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>

## REWRITING DESIRABILITY: “UGLY” FOOD CAMPAIGNS

Rebel. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rebel>

Reinoso-Carvalho, F., Dakduk, S., Wagemans, J., & Spence, C. (2019). Dark vs. light drinks: The influence of visual appearance on the consumer’s experience of beer. *Food Quality and Preference*, 74(Complete), pp. 21-29. DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2019.01.001

Tu, J., Lee, Y., & Wei, M. (2018). Analysis and research on the key success factors of marketing ugly fruits and vegetables. *Sustainability*, 10(8), pp. 1-25. DOI: 10.3390/su10082783

United States Department of Agriculture. (2018). *Food security status of U.S. households in 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx>

Wohl, H. (2015). Community sense: The cohesive power of aesthetic judgement. *Sociological Theory*, 33(4), pp. 299-326. DOI: 10.1177/0735275115617800