HEALTH AND TASTE BENEFITS OF FOOD: THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT

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HOW TO PROMOTE HEALTHY FOOD CHOICE WITHOUT COMPROMISING ON TASTE?
Healthy food is often perceived as boring and tasteless (e.g., boiled vegetables, porridge).

The food that is perceived as tasty (e.g., ice cream, chocolate, steak, fries) usually contains a lot of sugar and saturated fat, which is considered unhealthy by contemporary medicine.

People feel guilty when they eat “unhealthy” food, but when they eat “healthy” food, they do not enjoy it as much as they enjoy “unhealthy” food.
UNHEALTHY = TASTY
Experiments with tasting the same products (crackers and milk shakes), while the information about the amount of “bad fat” was manipulated, showed negative relations between “healthiness” and “enjoyment” (Raghunathan et al., 2006).

Unhealthy = tasty intuition affects food **enjoyment** and **choice**.

The actual choice of healthy/tasty products may be affected by **the situation** that activates health/hedonic needs (hospital/party).

Unhealthy = tasty intuition works at the **unconscious** level (similar to price = quality heuristics).
UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE

Enjoyment Ratings x Explicitness of Belief that Unhealthy Food Tastes Better

- Low belief that unhealthy food generally tastes better
- High belief that unhealthy food tastes better

Raghunathan, R., Walker Naylor, R. & Hoyer, W.D., 2006
Unhealthy food is not tastier for everybody:

- In France, a neutral food described as healthy is considered tastier, more pleasurable and of better quality than when it is described as unhealthy (Werle et al., 2013)

The French “paradox”:

- French consume relatively high amounts of high-fat foods, but have much lower rates of cardiovascular disease than Americans (Rozin et al., 1999)

Possible Explanations:

- Protestant Work Ethics & utilitarian attitudes to food vs. focus on pleasure, social interaction & hedonic food experience
Health labels are often **ignored** when shopping for everyday food products (Grunert et al. 2010).

While shopping for food, consumers first respond to **sensory cues**, i.e. the color and shape of the package, familiarity or ambient stimuli, such as scents and music.

Consumers are **confused** by conflicting product claims and sensory cues presented on food packages (brand, name, colors, materials, health and hedonic claims, ingredients, etc.)
STUDY 1. THE INFLUENCE OF FOOD LABELS ON TASTE EXPECTATIONS
“TRAFFIC LIGHT” FOOD LABELS

The labels allow the consumer to identify and avoid unhealthy products.

The information includes the number of calories, sugar, salt, saturated fat, and total fat.

Depending on how much of the daily needs of the different ingredients are in the product, these ingredients are categorized with a green label for healthy, a yellow label for neutral, and a red label for unhealthy.

The calories are in white.
INFLUENCE OF HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY LABELS ON TASTE EXPECTATIONS FOR HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY PRODUCTS

**H1:** Taste expectations are lower for a healthy product (salad) than for a less healthy product (spring rolls)

**H2:** A healthy label leads to a higher health expectation and a lower taste expectation
RESULTS

Mean taste expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>no label</th>
<th>healthy label</th>
<th>unhealthy label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy product</td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy product</td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="#" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No significant differences in taste expectations were found between the two experimental product.

“Unhealthy” traffic light label increases taste expectations for a healthy product (a salad).

Traffic labels do not significantly change taste expectations for a less healthy product (spring rolls).

Therefore, the unhealthy=tasty intuition is confirmed for a healthy product, but not for an unhealthy product.
STUDY 2. SKEPTICISM TOWARD FOOD LABELS
Hypotheses:

- **H1**: Consumers are more skeptical toward hedonic labels than toward health labels.

- **H2**: The higher the consumer skepticism toward the food labels is, the more negative is product evaluation, product experience, and purchase intention.

- **H3**: Consumers are less skeptical toward hedonic label when they can taste the product compared to situations in which they can only look at the product or hold the package.
SKEPTICISM TOWARDS FOOD LABELS
RESEARCH MODEL

Label (health vs. hedonic)

Presentation (vision, touch, taste)

Scepticism

Product Evaluation

Product Experience

Purchase Intention

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STIMULUS MATERIALS
RESULTS

Product Evaluation Cookie

Product Evaluation Juice

Purchase Intention Cookie

Purchase Intention Juice
STUDY 2: MAIN FINDINGS

Skepticism towards the food labels can be conquered by multisensory experience:

• Providing consumers with product samples could enhance their multisensory experience and help to overcome their skepticism towards hedonic labels, but not towards health labels.

The dominance of hedonic attributes in consumer food choice:

• The hedonic label influenced consumer responses to a hedonic product (a chocolate cookie) more positively than the health label.
• The health label had a negative effect on consumer responses to a more healthful product (apple juice).
STUDY 3. NUTRITION LABELS IN RESTAURANTS
WHAT INFLUENCES FOOD CHOICE IN RESTAURANTS?

- Nutrition label
  - Present
  - Absent

- Context
  - Healthy main course
  - Non-healthy main course

- Individual factors
  - General health interest
  - Attitudes towards labels

Starter choice
Main course
Dessert choice
The nutrition label states:

“These items are composed by a registered dietician for a better eating pattern. They contain <300 calories, <8gr saturated fat, <300mg sodium, and <50mg cholesterol”.

Fenko & Fassen, 2014
RESULTS: STARTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy main course</th>
<th>Unhealthy main course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Label</td>
<td>No label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy starter</td>
<td>Unhealthy starter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Healthy main course with label: 25
- Healthy main course without label: 29
- Unhealthy main course with label: 33
- Unhealthy main course without label: 32

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## RESULTS: DESSERT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Healthy main course</th>
<th>Unhealthy main course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No label</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy dessert</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhealthy dessert</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The main course had a significant “compensation” effect on consumers’ choice of a starter, but not on a dessert choice.

Nutrition labels had no effect on food choice.

Consumers’ attitudes towards nutrition labels on menu cards were less positive than towards nutrition labels on food packages.

In restaurants, hedonic goals are more salient than health goals.
Context is important in food evaluation and choice.

Health labels can negatively influence taste expectations and experience, but the effects depend on a product group and situational context.

People are generally skeptical towards food labels.

Multisensory experience can help to overcome skepticism towards hedonic labels, but not towards health labels.

People do not appreciate nutrition information in a hedonic situation (e.g., in restaurants).
QUESTIONS?

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