



Anticipated guilt and pleasure in a healthy food consumption context



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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the increasing importance of healthiness in food-related businesses, this study attempted to investigate the role of consumers' affective responses in a healthy food consumption context. To achieve its objectives, this study incorporated anticipated emotional constructs in a decision-making model and investigated the relationships among perceived healthiness, anticipated guilt and pleasure, and behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase, spreading positive word-of-mouth, and recommending the food) in a quick service restaurant setting. The results of this study suggest that anticipated pleasure positively influenced behavioral intentions and mediated the relationship between perceived healthiness and behavioral intentions, whereas anticipated guilt did not influence behavioral intentions. Additionally, this study investigated the moderating role of dietary concerns in consumers' decision-making processes and found that the low dietary concerns group was more susceptible to anticipated pleasure compared to the high dietary concerns group. Further findings and implications are provided in the main body of the paper.

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1. Introduction

Healthiness is a critical factor influencing the success of food-related businesses. Especially for quick service restaurants (QSRs hereafter), which have often been targeted as contributing to the national obesity epidemic by providing large portions with excessive calories and non-nutritious ingredients, healthiness has become a key to survival (Burton et al., 2009; Chandon and Wansink, 2007; Howlett et al., 2012). QSRs have made intensive efforts to change consumers' negative attitudes toward their foods by providing healthy options (e.g., McDonalds' under 400 calories healthy items) and launching healthy menu promotions (e.g., Subway's Jared Fogle story). However, QSRs still suffer from an unhealthy image. Their fun-based marketing practices aimed at children have been a particular target of criticism. Hence, marketing practitioners are always looking for effective ways to promote the healthiness of QSRs.

Recognizing the increasing importance of healthiness in the restaurant industry, scholars have emphasized studying consumers' decision-making processes in healthy food consumption contexts (McEachan et al., 2011). Perceived healthiness, a cognitive response based on processing health-related information,

has been acknowledged as a significant determinant of consumers' healthy food choices (Chandon and Wansink, 2007; Kozup et al., 2003) as well as consumers' satisfaction with food quality (Namkung and Jang, 2007, 2008). However, the interplay of consumers' cognitive-affective responses in a healthy food consumption context has not drawn much attention from researchers, even though affective responses have been incorporated in influential decision-making models (e.g., theory of planned behavior, theory of goal-based motivation, and cognitive appraisal theory) to increase their explanatory power (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003; Richard et al., 1996; Ravis et al., 2009). The previous literature on healthy food consumption has mainly focused on the disclosure of health-related information on consumers' food choice behaviors (Howlett et al., 2012). Although the significant relationships between affective responses (e.g., positive or negative current emotions) and behavioral intentions (e.g., patronage, recommendations, staying longer at a restaurant, and spending more) have been investigated in general restaurant experience contexts (Kim and Moon, 2009; Ryu and Jang, 2007), there has been little research on how affective responses influence consumers' healthy food decision-making behaviors in connection with cognitive responses. Thus, this study explores the role of affective responses, particularly anticipated emotions, in consumers' decision making behaviors considering the unique aspects of a healthy food consumption context.

Consumers' decision-making processes regarding healthy food consumption differ from general food consumption contexts since

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healthy food consumption decisions are more likely to be influenced by consumers' diet goals and/or perceived social pressure and judgements (e.g., eating healthy is good or food at QSRs is unhealthy) (McEachan et al., 2011). Hence, in a healthy food consumption context consumers may connect their food choice behaviors to expected outcomes in order to achieve long-term well-being (e.g., healthiness). Previous research has identified that "anticipated emotions," or how an individual expects to feel when imagining the outcomes of a particular behavior, help people to determine an optimal course of action (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). Anticipated emotions work as a feedback system following if-then contingency rules (e.g., If I did it, then how would I feel?) and regulate or promote intended behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2007; Gollwitzer, 1999). Thus, investigating consumers' anticipated emotions in connection with consumers' cognitive responses in a healthy food consumption context would provide a more elaborate explanation of consumers' decision-making processes and may suggest effective ways to promote healthy menu items.

Consumer behavior studies have emphasized the importance of goal-based motivation in decision-making processes (Britain, 1985; Houben et al., 2010). When consumers are highly motivated to achieve their goals, they exert a greater effort to control or promote cognitive and affective decision-making processes (Fedoroff et al., 1997; Oatley and Johnson-Laird, 1987). In a healthy food consumption context, goal-based motivations can be represented by the level of consumers' dietary concerns (Carels et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2013). The ways in which consumers process their cognitive (e.g., perceived healthiness) and affective (e.g., anticipated emotions) responses in decision-making can differ depending on the level of consumers' dietary concerns. For example, consumers with high-dietary concerns would react more favorably toward healthy menu items since the menu items help them to achieve dietary goal, and the positive attitudes toward the menu items would facilitate links among perceived healthiness, positive anticipated emotions, and behavioral intentions. Thus, investigating the moderating effect of consumers' dietary concerns in a decision-making model would explain how consumers' motivations to eat healthy influence their decision-making processes in healthy food consumption contexts.

The primary goal of this study is to identify the role of anticipated emotions in consumers' healthy food decision-making processes in a QSR context. More specifically, the objectives of this study are to investigate the relationships among perceived healthiness, anticipated emotions, and behavioral intentions (e.g., intentions to purchase, spread positive word-of-mouth, and recommend the healthy food) and to examine the moderating role of consumers' dietary concerns in these relationships. The results of this study provide not only theoretical insights by incorporating anticipated emotions into consumers' decision-making processes but also a valuable, practical guide for marketing practitioners that suggests effective ways to promote healthy menu items.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

2.1. Anticipated emotions and healthy food consumption

In decision-making contexts, people often anticipate how they will feel about future outcomes and use those feelings to guide their decisions (Mellers and McGraw, 2001). Anticipated emotions refer to "the prospect of feeling positive or negative emotions after performing or not performing a behavior" (Rivis et al., 2009 p. 2987). Anticipated emotions differ from experienced or current emotions in their influence on people's behaviors in decision-making contexts, although experienced emotions partially influence current and anticipated emotional states (Loewenstein and Lerner,

2003). Experienced or current emotions are immediate affective responses that arise almost instantaneously when people are in a decision-making context (Baumeister et al., 2007). Although these immediate emotions wear off fast, when they are intense they tend to influence impulse behaviors (e.g., impulse buying) and negate the probability of other options (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). On the other hand, anticipated emotions are more conscious affective responses where people think about future emotional consequences based on whether or not a particular behavior is enacted (Baumeister et al., 2007). Anticipated emotions provide feedback on prospective behaviors and guide subsequent behaviors by commanding attention and stimulating analysis, learning, and adapting to behavioral outcomes (Baumeister et al., 2007; Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003; Richard et al., 1996; Rivis et al., 2009). Anticipated emotions last longer and help people to make better decisions (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). Previous research found that anticipated emotions make an independent contribution to the prediction of behavioral intentions since people alter their behaviors based on feedback from anticipated emotions in order to obtain the preferred feedback (Richard et al., 1996; Rivis et al., 2009).

Consumers' healthy food consumption behaviors are closely related with the pursuit of long-term benefits as a return on consumers' decisions. Hence, consumers' behaviors are influenced more by conscious emotional responses, such as anticipated emotions, than immediate affective responses. Anticipated emotions can stimulate cognitive processing (e.g., health-related information) and encourage cautious choices (e.g., eating healthy foods). Previous studies have identified that anticipated emotions are stronger predictors of behaviors compared to experienced or current emotions (Vogel et al., 2005) and promote safer choices as well (Lindsey, 2005).

Guilt and pleasure are considered an important emotions in healthy food consumption contexts since consumers generally have two conflicting food consumption values: the utilitarian value of staying healthy and the hedonic value of enjoyment (Baumeister et al., 1994; Dhar and Simonson, 1999; Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999; Steenhuis, 2009; Wansink and Chandon, 2006). Guilt is a negative emotion aroused during an unpleasant emotional state. Feelings of guilt stem from the belief that one thinks that he or she is doing something wrong or undesirable (Baumeister et al., 1994; Roseman et al., 1994). In other words, guilt results from an individual's knowledge that he or she is acting against his or her own moral or ethical standards (Freedman et al., 1967). Therefore, guilt is associated with shame and regret and people often want to make amends for their actions (Burnett and Lunsford, 1994). Guilt is regarded as a dominant anticipatory consumption emotion among U.S. consumers (Rozin et al., 1999). When consumers feel guilty after eating a certain food, this experienced guilt is preserved in the individual's memory along with other cues (e.g., current emotions, personal interest in health concerns, or type of food) and influences their actions in similar situations. This anticipated guilt may steer a person away from certain behaviors, such as eating junk food (Baumeister et al., 2007; Wansink and Chandon, 2006). Thus, this study employed anticipated guilt as one affective construct in consumers' decision-making models and conceptualized anticipated guilt as the prospective feeling of negative emotions encompassing guilt, shame, and regret after performing a behavior.

Conversely, pleasure is a positive emotion that is part of a pleased, happy, and delighted emotional state. In a food consumption context, pleasure can stem from the oro-sensory stimulation of eating food (e.g., taste or palatability), satisfying one's hunger (Richins, 1997), or achieving one's diet goals, especially in a health priming condition (Wansink and Chandon, 2006). Previous research found that the perceived healthiness of a restaurant's food (e.g., nutritionally balanced diet, light calories, fresh and natural or

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