



Editorial

Editorial for "A multi method exploration of marketing factors that can be used to improve access to healthy foods and increase healthy food consumption"

Consuming food is an essential part of a person's daily functioning. Recently, Marketing researchers have started to shift from a paradigm of viewing food as health – wherein food consumption is explored from a paternalistic perspective – to an integrative approach of food as a factor that impacts well-being (Block et al., 2011). This research recognizes the more holistic role food plays in consumers' lives as it relates to broader individual and societal barriers (e.g., when healthy food is not accessible; Connell et al., 2016; Connell et al., 2017, pp. 1–17; Scott & Vallen, 2019). Using this lens, it is possible to explore the role of marketing in improving well-being (e.g., by studying factors that can be used to increase fruit or vegetable intake, attenuating factors that hinder healthy food consumption, or examining the role of cultural practices in food consumption).

This special issue features thirteen articles and includes both positivist and interpretivist paradigms and includes participant samples that can often be difficult to reach in traditional laboratory experiments (i.e., young children and teens). I will outline two of the broad themes in this special issue below:

Sociocultural Influences on Food Consumption:

First, Stovall and colleagues find that cultural considerations are the primary driver of food choice among African American girls, thus suggesting that culture is an equally important (and often overlooked) driver for consumption as nutrition information. This has profound implications for healthy eating policy initiatives that frequently ignore the cultural context in which food decisions are being made. Second, Conroy et al. explore the use of functional foods as a means of coping with metabolic problems associated with changing lifestyles among Chinese consumers. In both of these papers, a deep understanding of the impact culture has on food choice and consumption is essential for understanding the choice to consume – or avoid – certain foods.

Field Studies and Community Approaches:

Three teams explored food choices in field settings, including restaurants and cafeterias. Migliavada and colleagues explore which consumers take advantage of pre-ordering meals (meal planning) and concomitant compensation effects (e.g., additional item add-ons) and food waste (uncollected orders). They do so by analyzing orders from over 900 diners in a university cafeteria. As pre-ordering meals is one technique people may use as a means of controlling and planning intake, understanding who plans their meals and how the addition of add-on items impacts the "portfolio" of items consumed is important.

Bauer and team also explore healthy food choices in cafeteria settings among infrequent and frequent diners to better understand when

health "nudges" work in these types of settings and for whom. Among a subset of frequent diners, healthful "nudges" can backfire, suggesting that curating nudges in these settings is complex and requires a deep understanding of various consumer segments.

Finally, Baskentli and colleagues explore how the temperature an item is served at – hot versus cold – impacts consumption. They find that compared to items served hot, consumers' intake increases when they consume a food or beverage served cold.

Two additional teams partnered with local community organizations, including businesses and public health officials. Specifically, Carins and Bogomolova partnered with supermarket staff to explore the intersection of retail spaces with local communities and their joint impact in promoting greater food well-being. Further, Horning and team examined how community designed and led meal-kit programs promote healthy food skills and healthy food accessibility. While usage of meal kits did not significantly increase overall fruit and vegetable intake in this initial study, this research suggests that meal kits can improve food preparation skills and healthy food access, two factors that may be important for increasing overall healthy food consumption. Thus, more research on community-based approaches is warranted.

While this editorial elaborates on roughly half of the papers in the special issue, I am deeply impressed with the contribution of all of the authors as we move towards more holistic and nuanced understanding of the impact of marketing, broadly defined, on food choice and consumption behaviors.

References

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Stacey R. Finkelstein, Associate Professor of Marketing
Stony Brook University College of Business, Stony Brook, NY, USA
E-mail address: stacey.finkelstein@stonybrook.edu

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