

The Role of Sensory Attributes in Stimulating Healthy Food Choices

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Jennifer Yanyu Hu

1611075

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ABSTRACT

The obesity rates have nearly tripled in the last 50 years and are one of the root issues of many illnesses like heart diseases, diabetes, strokes and numerous cancers. The reason for this increase is the food consumption behaviour of individuals. Previous research has investigated the unhealthy-tasty intuition which implies that individuals tend to choose healthier food items since they seem to be tastier. As a consequence of the unhealthy-tasty intuition, the marketing of healthy dishes is especially difficult. With the rising popularity and effectiveness of sensory marketing, using the five senses – see, hear, smell, taste and touch – there has been an insight that the food decision-making process can be influenced. Sensory marketing, the addition of sensory attributes, might be useful in stimulating healthy eating options. However, changing the food consumption behaviour is quite complex as it is dependent on the previous experiences, attitudes toward a healthy lifestyle and the current environmental cues.

As the trend of dining in restaurants has tremendously increased during the last years, this thesis solely focuses on food choices in restaurants. Recent research has already dealt with the effectiveness of the addition of sensory descriptive attributes to food items in order to influence the food decision-making process in restaurants, however, sufficient research in the area of expertise is still missing.

For this purpose, an experimental research design has been implemented to investigate the effectiveness of sensory descriptive attributes on food choices. Respondents received dessert menus with dishes described using either a multisensory attribute, a health attribute or no attribute. The results of the experiment provided ambiguous findings regarding the unhealthy-tasty intuition. On the one hand, taste and health expectations did not directly correlate and on the other hand, respondents seem to associate health with taste attributes. Additionally, the study supports the main claim that the usage of sensory attributes can increase the tastiness expectation. Moreover, the experimental study revealed that taste expectations have a higher impact on purchase intention compared to health expectations. Overall, health attributes are not necessarily correlated with worse taste and descriptive sensory attributes can stimulate taste expectations which influences purchase intention. Thus, the results of this study contradict with the prevailing notion of the unhealthy-tasty intuition.