
Guest editorial: psychological perspectives on consumer obesity

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Introduction

The prevalence of obesity has increased at an exponential rate over the past decades (Petersen *et al.*, 2019; Thaïss, 2018). Currently, more than 39% of the global population are considered overweight, and 13% are obese (Yao *et al.*, 2022; Connors *et al.*, 2021). Thus, obesity rates at a global scale have escalated to the point of becoming a global epidemic (Pachali *et al.*, 2022; Moore *et al.*, 2017). From a marketing perspective, obesity research has tended to focus on issues such as how advertising and promotions influence a consumer's food consumption (Garg *et al.*, 2007) and the impacts of social marketing interventions to change food consumption practices and exercise behaviour (Manika *et al.*, 2017a, 2017b). Furthermore, researchers focusing on consumer health have examined the effects of various factors on food consumption, such as various physiological hunger cues, as well as several external cues, pricing and packaging issues, choice variety, colour lights, shapes and smells, distractions and distances, among others (Tangari *et al.*, 2019; Haws *et al.*, 2017).

However, despite the increasing interest of the scholar community on the intersection between marketing and obesity, there are several research areas that remain unexplored. In particular, there is a need for marketing scholars to develop multi-disciplinary and integrative knowledge and transformative theories to enhance the understanding of concepts, behaviours, problems and issues related to obesity, as well as to improve the insights on successful marketing practices in this area that can help battle obesity.

This special issue on "Psychological Perspectives on Consumer Obesity" presents cutting-edge scholarly research that provide novel ideas, theories, findings and directions in addressing the obesity problem. The articles in the special issue will be of interest to a wide range of social science disciplines (psychology, marketing, policy, organisation studies, sociology-culture), including medical science, as well as practitioners and policymakers concerned with obesity and the problems that arise from this pandemic.

Articles in the special issue

The 12 manuscripts that compose the special issue provide an exemplary illustration of the research conducted on the intersection between marketing and obesity.

To start with, Malik *et al.* (2022) investigate the influence of proximal (versus distant) depiction of food products within an advertising or online context on consumer responses across food types (indulgent versus non-indulgent) and display formats that lead to a single exposure versus multiple exposures. Based on five experimental studies, their findings show that:

- proximal food pictures are implicitly related with tastiness more for indulgent (vs non-indulgent) foods;
- lead to higher purchase intention for indulgent food upon a single exposure driven by increased perceived tastiness; and
- evoke satiation upon multiple exposures.

Yao *et al.* (2022) focus how the interaction effect of occasion-setting cues and consumers' cognitive styles affects their food intake intention. Using several scenario simulation studies, their findings show that, in the occasion-setting cue advertisement condition, field-dependent (vs



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field-independent) consumers display increased cravings for food and purchase intention, whereas mental simulation plays a mediating role and cognitive load acts as a moderator. The work by [Nwoba et al. \(2022\)](#) focuses on investigating the relationship between family units and obesity in Nigeria, as well as the social marketing interventions used to reduce and prevent obesity in the Nigerian context. By applying a qualitative methodology approach, the authors find that the family environment an individual grows up in influences their consumption behaviour, which drives their obesity. Adding to this, Nigerian citizens classified as obese are willing to live a healthier lifestyle because of the direct and indirect medical costs associated with obesity. Moreover, the findings illustrate that various social marketing interventions (e.g. reduced gym membership and affordable access to healthy foods and services) are used to prevent and reduce the rising rates of obesity in Nigeria. On a different note, [Souza-Monteiro et al. \(2022\)](#) investigate how a calorie counter, which displays the total amount of calories consumers add to a shopping basket, affects them in making food choices, and whether or not situational factors moderate this effect. Based on an online shopping experiment in the UK, their findings show that the calorie counter leads to a large and statistically significant reduction in calories purchased when compared to the no nutritional information condition and a small (but statistically insignificant) reduction in the number of calories chosen by consumers when compared to the nutritional information only condition. The results also show that the main effect is moderated by individual factors such as whether or not the person has a health condition and shopping situations that involve time pressure. Continuing, [Khan et al. \(2022\)](#) examine how compliance versus conformance social influence, each framed either prescriptively or proscriptively, may guide children's choice of healthy versus unhealthy food. Based on two experiments in Pakistan, the results show that proscriptive is stronger than prescriptive compliance influence in nudging children to pick fruits (healthy) over candies (unhealthy). However, frequency of fruits dropped as susceptibility to compliance strengthened. Moreover, a proscriptive compliance influence reinforced by a supportive conformance influence led to most children picking fruits. However, a conflicting conformance influence was able to sway some children away from fruits to candies.

On a different note, [Priporas et al. \(2022\)](#) develop a theoretical paper to delineate the phenomenon of stressful eating within generation Z and to extract propositions which elucidate phases of stressful eating within Zers. Continuing, [Pancer et al. \(2022\)](#) examine the moderating role of viewer mindset on consumer responses to digital foodmedia. Based on two experiments, the findings show that the relationship between nutrition and engagement is moderated by consumer mindset, whereas activating a more calculative mindset before exposure can elevate social media engagement for calorie-light foodmedia content. [Hussain et al. \(2022\)](#) investigate the influence of healthy food advertising (HFA) in preventing obesity through the meta-cognitive role of consumer wisdom (CW). Based on an online survey, the results show that HFA has a positive influence on CW dimensions. Moreover, all CW dimensions but one augment a positive healthy eating attitude, but only responsibility and sustainability enhance consumers' self-regulatory success. Adding to this, the findings show that CW acts as a mediator on the relationship between HFA and obesity prevention. Tong [Lau et al. \(2022\)](#) investigate the effects of environmental cues on food intake of elderly consumers. Based on a longitudinal study approach, the results show that the presence of auditory and olfactory cues significantly increase food intake, but the visual cue does not. Furthermore, [Luna-Cortes and Cuellar \(2022\)](#) find that masculine eating/drinking beliefs are associated with lower concern with unhealthy eating/drinking and, in turn, with higher binge drinking. Adding to this, the authors also find that information that influences these beliefs leads to lower binge drinking and unhealthy food ingestion intentions. Moreover, [Mazzù et al. \(2022\)](#) upgrade and strengthen the front-of-pack acceptance model with the mediating role of trust in front-of-pack labels, demonstrating a

positive effect of attitude on trust and, in turn, on behavioural intention. Finally, Singh and Sharma (2022) examine the role of social media and goal-directed behaviour in motivating healthy lifestyle intentions for customers experiencing obesity. Their findings show that weight-loss transformation posts by others on social media elicit distinct emotions for obese customers. Moreover, obese customers who feel guilt and shame because of shared weight-loss transformation posts show a stronger association between goal disclosure and healthy lifestyle intention.

In summary, the research included in the special issue showcases the topical variety of applying a marketing perspective to obesity, as well as the contextual (geographical) and methodological diversity that can be applied on examining obesity from a marketing point of view.

Conclusion

This special issue on “Psychological Perspectives on Consumer Obesity” presents a broad spectrum of marketing research that provides novel ideas, theories and findings from various parts of the world, in relation to the obesity problem. Adding to this, the research presented in this special issue provides recommendations for future research and offers thoughts on how the marketing scholar and marketing practitioner can help towards the battle against obesity. We hope that the articles in this special issue will inspire marketing scholars to conduct further innovative research connected to this grand challenge, the so-called obesity problem. Moreover, the research work included in this special issue illustrates that our discipline has an ample of tools and talented scholars with which to address such grand challenges. In conclusion, the quality of research and the number of submissions that we received for this special issue suggests that, the time is ripe for research on the interface of marketing and human health, such as the obesity pandemic, to take up a more central position in the marketing discipline.

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Further reading

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