The Social Marketing of Food

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BEhavioral Engineering Research Center

http://feb.kuleuven.be/BEE/

Overview

- Goal of BEE – BEhavioral Engineering Research Center

  - Stimulate and support **decision-makers** in making welfare enhancing decisions
    - Example: Reduce sugar consumption
  - Inspire **policy-makers** to design policy in support of such decisions
    - Classic example: offer healthy alternatives in vending machines in schools, ban sugared drinks
    - BEE example: change preference for sweet, dampen the motivation to consume sweet if it emerges

- **Goals of the presentation:**

  1. Discuss the factors that determine food consumption
  2. Illustrations of social marketing of food from our lab
  3. Discuss the potential to apply it to the consumption of the target food

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A simple model of food choice
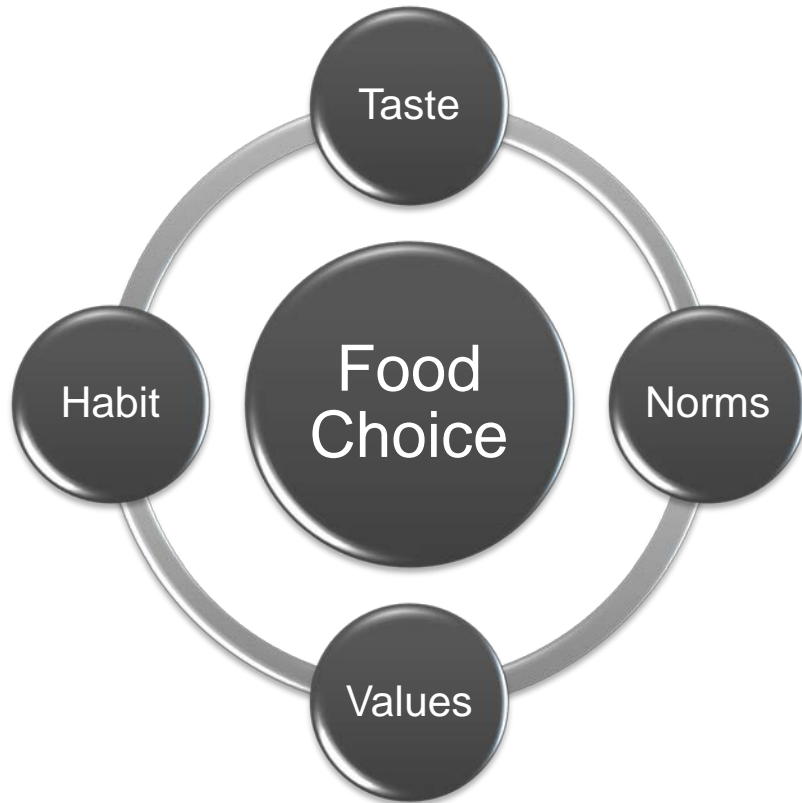
Taste (flavor, texture, …)

→ Objective: ingredients and processing

→ Subjective: preferences

Norms

→ Objective: laws, prices

→ Subjective: others' expectations, fashion

Values (e.g. respect for life, planet, farmer / hedonism)

Habit (e.g. what people usually eat, cuisine..)

What is the focus of classic food marketing?

Focus of classic food marketing

COMMERCIAL	POLICY

Taste
→   *Objective: ingredients and processing*
→   Subjective: preferences

Norms
→   Objective: laws/subsidies, *prices*
→   Subjective: *others' expectations (image advertising)*

Values (e.g. *stress hedonism at the cost of 'respect'*)

Habit (e.g. what people usually eat) *install a habit*

Taste
→   Objective: ingredients and processing
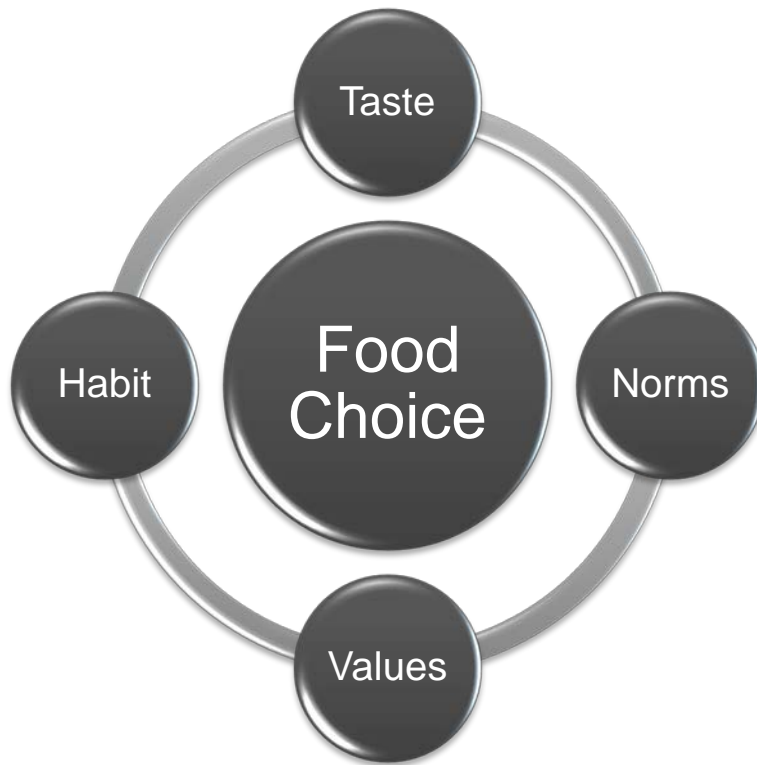→   Subjective: preferences

Norms
→   Objective: *laws/subsidies,* prices
→   Subjective: *others' expectations (image advertising, fear appeals)*

Values (e.g. *stress 'respect' or health*)

Habit (e.g. what people usually eat) *Break bad habits and install good new habits*

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The Focus of BEE

Taste
→ Objective: ingredients and processing
→ Subjective: preferences

Norms
→ Objective: laws, prices
→ Subjective: others' expectations

Values (e.g. Activate relevant values at the moment of choice)

Habit (e.g. what people usually eat)

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Can preference be changed?

Food preferences have deep roots

- Biology : sweet signals energy
- Learning : sweet is abundant and imprints our system
- Social reinforcement of sweets, the use of sweets as rewards

- Self-reinforcing processes
  - Technology caters our desires, which makes the use of sweets more prominent

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1. Can this basic preference be reduced?

- Phase 1: physical exposure to temptation in a context with task goal that competes with consumption
  - Control conditions: no temptation or mere picture of temptation
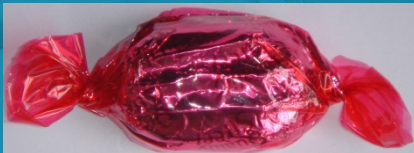
- Phase 2: taste test with similar temptation

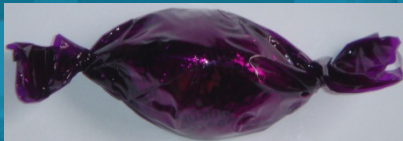Geyskens, Dewitte, Pandelaere, Warlop *J Consumer Research 08*

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Milkchocolate filled with fudge

Hazelnut in caramel

Milkchocolate with caramel
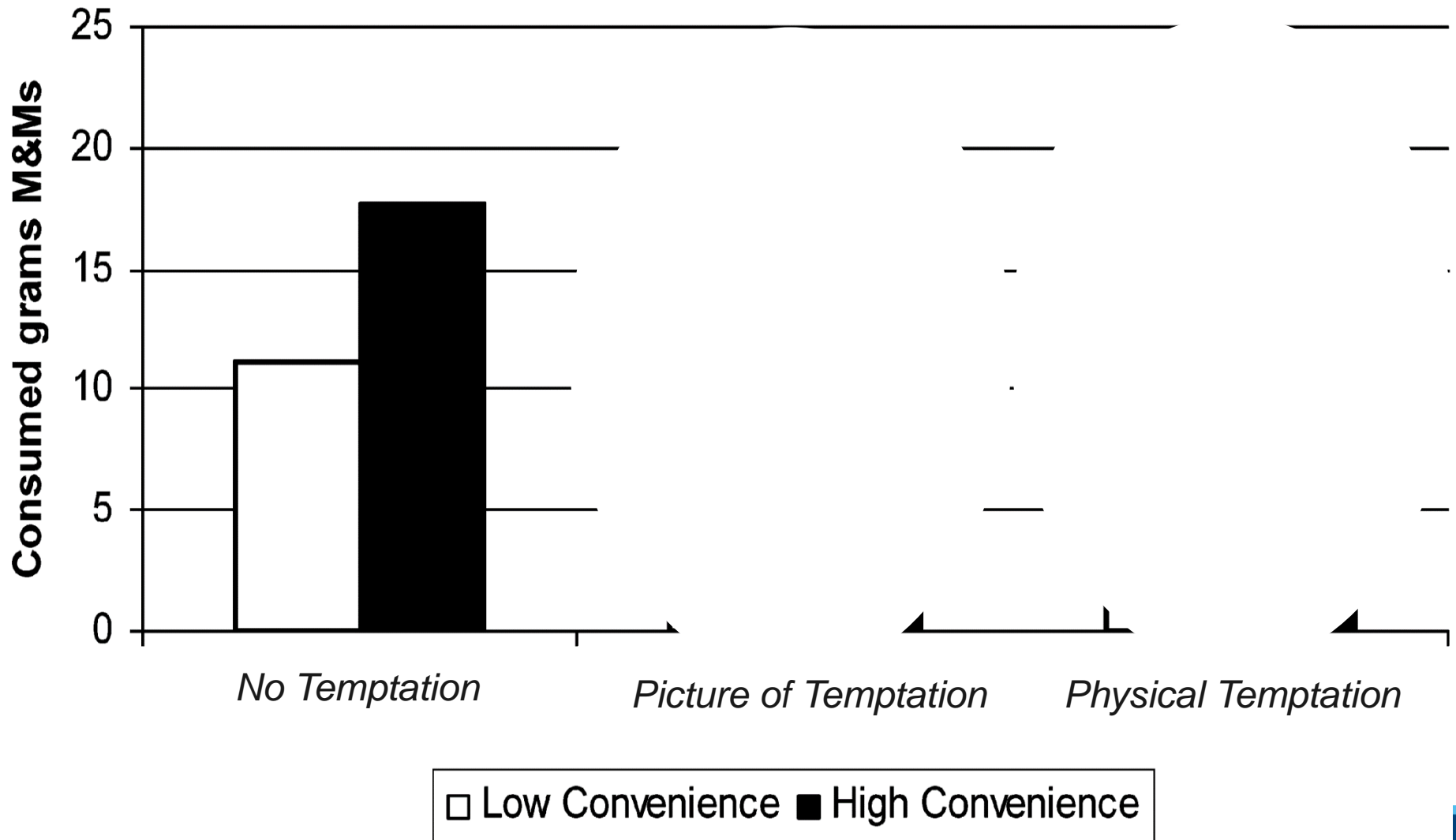
Coconut in milkchocolate

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Design

	No temptation	Exposure to pictures	Physical pre-exposure
Strong Marketing stimulus			
Weak Marketing stimulus			

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Design

- Marketing stimulus strength
  - Consumption convenience

  - Bakery scent

Behavioral results

Geyskens, Dewitte, Pandelaere, Warlop JCR '08

Further illustrations

- Children
- Other flavors
- Other populations (South-African students)
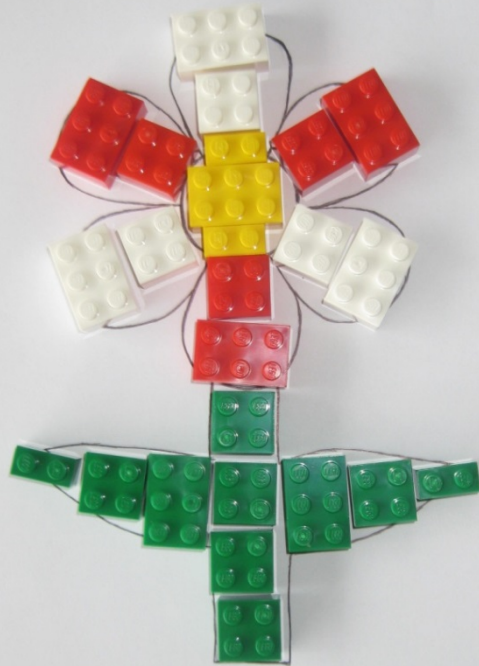- A day's delay
- Repeated treatments

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Pre-exposure in 7-12 year old children

- Phase 1: form as many correct words as possible

- Phase 2: taste test, free consumption

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Pre-exposure in 7-12 year old children

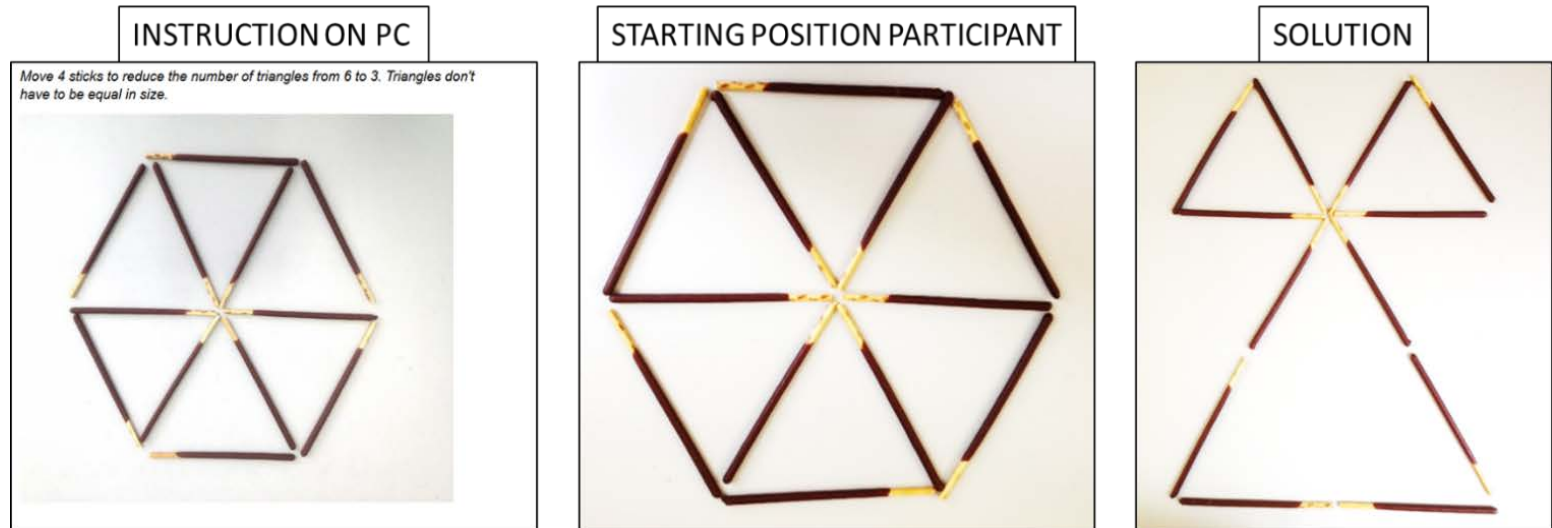**Control**

Pre-Exposure

Grubliauskiene & Dewitte, in prep

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Temptation is a-specific

- Pre-exposure phase with geometric shapes and sticks

- With either chocolate sticks, salty sticks, or wooden sticks
- Consumption of M&M or salty peanuts is measured

Goddyn & Dewitte, *Food Quality & Preference* '17

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In a school context

- Earning game
  - Distribute candy (Pre-exposure) or marbles (Control)
    - If they succeed to resist for 3 minutes, they get threefold
  - Four days in a row
 - Fifth day: taste test

Pre-exposure

Control

de Boer, de Ridder, de Vet, Grubliauskiene, & Dewitte. 15 *Applied Psy: H&WB*

Conclusion about changing preferences

- Evidence is emerging that
    - exposing people to an attractive food stimulus
    - With conflicting task requirements
    - Reduces their subsequent consumption.

- Exploit the strength of the attraction to undermine itself

- Opens up opportunities for other foods to enter the diet

2. Values
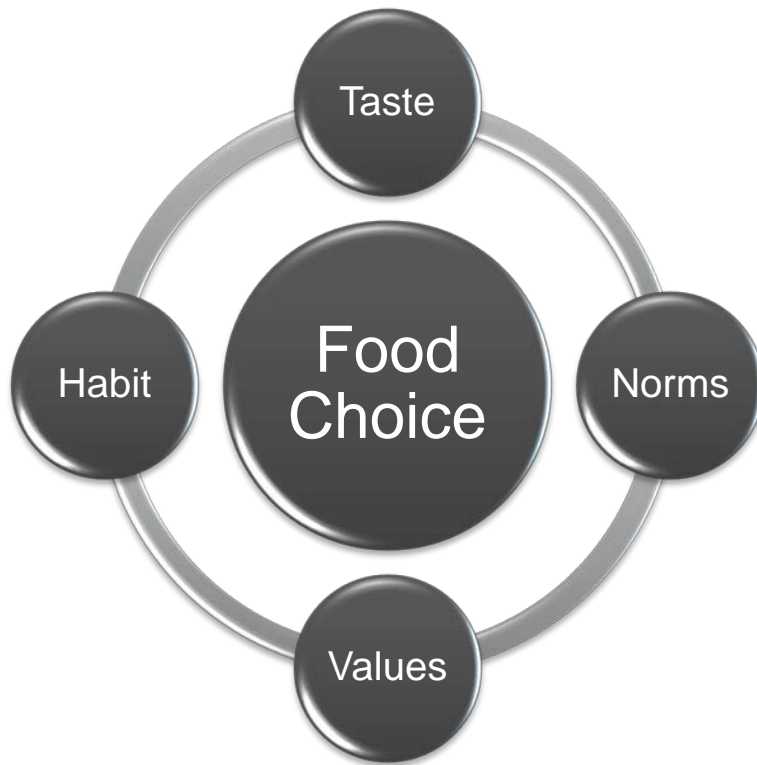
Taste
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Habit (e.g. what people usually eat)

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The weak role of values

- Most people have a positive attitude towards the environment or other ethical aspects of food, yet…

  - People prefer fish that is produced in a sustainable* way to fish that is not (or to meat), *all else equal*
  - But not all else is equal
    - Price, taste, experience in the mouth, opinions,…

  - Can the power of a value be boosted to help people overcome the 'not all else equal'?

  or local, or socially responsible, or biologically, …

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Social labeling

- ## Social labeling as a technique

  - Step 1: trigger desirable behavior with classic promotion factor

  - Step 2: trigger re-interpretation of the behavior to a desired characteristic of the person (=social labeling)

  - Step 3: self-perception of desired behavior changes self-concept
    - People learn about their attitudes by means of self-observation

  - Step 4: The need to be consistent triggers subsequent desirable behavior

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Social labeling, example

o Step 1: provide people with a product choice and make sure that the favorite option is 'accidently' the green option

o Step 2: state "*you chose product C, this suggests you care about the environment*"
- Technically, people are labeled as green

o Step 3: the self-concept has become a bit 'greener' than before, or the value of 'environmentalism" becomes somewhat stronger to them

o Step 4: consistency triggers subsequent desirable behavior
- Choice of more expensive organically produced crisps, or low packaging cookies

Klik op het product dat je verkiest en dan op 'ok'

Speculaas	Speculaas
250 gr	250 gr
per 25 verpakt	elk koekje apart verpakt
prijs: 1.05 €	prijs: 0.95 €

OK

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Alternative for step 1: bending previous experiences

- 3 sets of behaviors
  - o "high frequency" - 8 common ecological behaviors : POSITIVE CUEING
    - *How often do you use the bike for short distances, litter on the streets, recycle waste, ...*

  - o "low frequency" - 8 uncommon ecological behaviors: NEGATIVE CUEING
    - *How often do you use glass bottles, use locally produced food, mown the lawn with a scythe, ...*

  - o Control condition – not ecologically relevant
    - *How often do you read the newspaper, ...*

→ People in the 'high frequency' condition re-interpret their previous behavior as diagnostic of their environmental value, and start acting on it

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Application to specific foods (complements)

- Is the dominant food that hinders adoption to be more tasty?
  - If yes: is it possible to reduce attractiveness of that food with the pre-exposure procedure ?

- Is your offer related with an important value that most people endorse?
  - Make sure people know the link
  - Make target segment's values salient
  - Those who buy your product get social label → reinforces their behavior

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Thanks for your attention

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