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Simulations of consumption situations make food attractive

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Introduction

We apply a grounded cognition approach to food and eating behavior (Papies & Barsalou, 2015) and suggest that people think about food in terms of actually eating it, in other words, they simulate (i.e., re-experience) a consumption situation.

Do simulations of the consumption situation contribute to food attractiveness?

Hypotheses

- Unhealthy foods are more likely to trigger simulations of consumption situations than healthy foods.
- Focusing on what makes you want to eat a food is more likely to trigger simulations of consumption situations than thinking about typical features of the food, especially for unhealthy foods.

Methods

Participants

116 participants with a mean age of 42 years (SD= 13.63).

Design

2 (unhealthy vs. healthy food) x 2 (typical vs. attractive condition) mixed factorial design with consumption situation features as dependent variable.

Feature Listing Task

Participants were presented with food items, one at a time, and asked to write down features of the food product. This is assumed to reflect situated simulations (Santos, Chaigneau, Simmons, & Barsalou, 2011).

- Typical condition: "Imagine the product. **Which features are typically true of this product?"**
- Motivation condition: "Imagine the product in a situation in which you would like to eat it. **Which features of the product make you want to eat this product?"**

Items

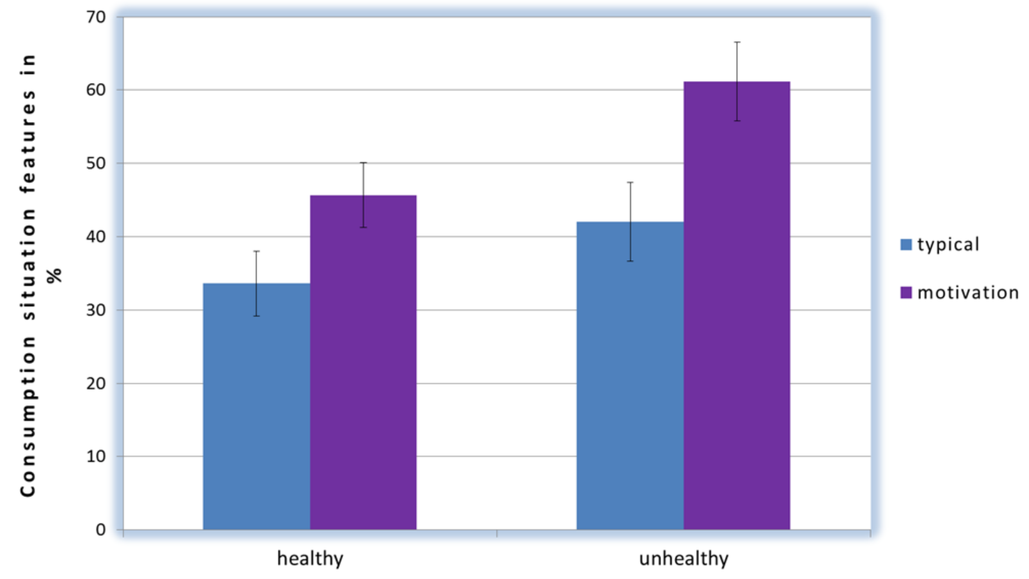
- 7 unhealthy, tempting food pictures
- 7 healthy, less tempting food pictures
- 1 neutral food picture

Coding

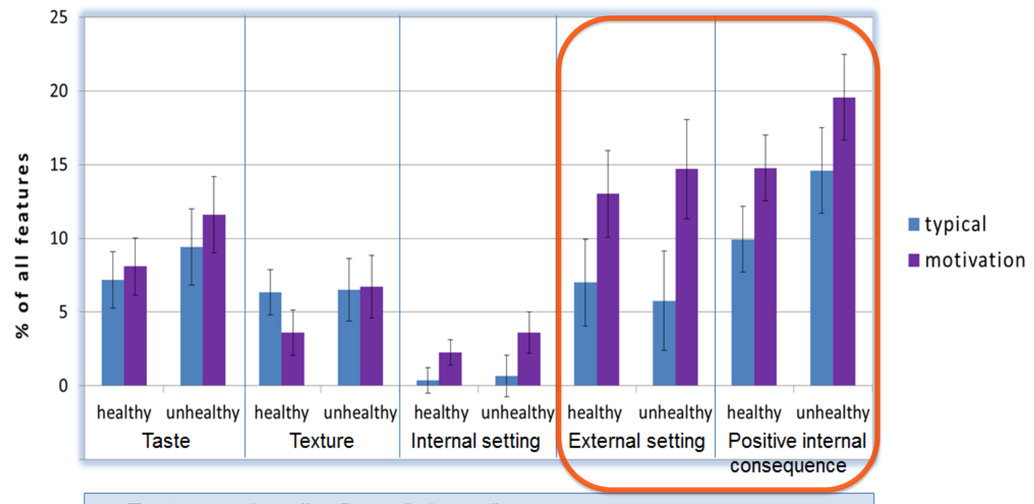
Systematic coding of features based on a coding scheme (Keesman, Papies, Lindner, & Barsalou, in prep.) using

- 3 main categories ("consumption situation", "non-consumption situation", and "situation independent") and
- 40 subcategories (such as "positive bodily consequence", "food preparation", and "visual").

Results



- **Consumption situation features :** sensory system (e.g. "spicy", "cold", "crunchy"), context (e.g. "hungry", "in a restaurant", "with family", "with a spoon") immediate consequences (e.g., "full stomach", "makes me happy", "refreshing"), and action (e.g. "chewing it").



- **Taste:** e.g., "paprika flavour", "sweet"
- **Texture:** e.g., "watery", "soft", "crunchy"
- **Internal setting:** e.g., "hungry", "when I'm sad", "when I'm on a diet"
- **External setting:** e.g., "with friends", "adding fruits to it", "in a bar"
- **Positive internal consequence:** "tasty", "full stomach", "satisfying"

- Individuals listed on average 4.83 features (*SD* = 1.13), using on average 3.93 (SD = .88) representation categories.

Main findings

- Food products trigger simulations of consumption situations, especially unhealthy foods.
- Focusing on what makes you want to eat foods increases the number of consumption situation simulations.
- More specifically, focusing on what makes you want to eat a product triggers simulations of the internal positive consequences of eating and of the external setting experienced when eating.

Implications

- The results suggest that simulations of consumption situations (e.g., social setting and positive bodily consequences) make food products attractive.
- The theoretical framework provided here can be used to systematically manipulate the evaluation of food products and to guide developing relevant interventions for healthy eating.

References

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Further information

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