

Vidal, María Miquel; Castellano-Tejedor, Carmina

Article

Identification of marketing strategies influencing consumers' perception of healthy food products and triggering purchasing decisions

Businesses

Provided in Cooperation with:

MDPI – Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, Basel

Suggested Citation: Vidal, María Miquel; Castellano-Tejedor, Carmina (2022) : Identification of marketing strategies influencing consumers' perception of healthy food products and triggering purchasing decisions, *Businesses*, ISSN 2673-7116, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 2, Iss. 4, pp. 410-422, <https://doi.org/10.3390/businesses2040026>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/338690>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Article

Identification of Marketing Strategies Influencing Consumers' Perception of Healthy Food Products and Triggering Purchasing Decisions

María Miquel Vidal ¹ and Carmina Castellano-Tejedor ^{2,3,4,*} ¹ Food and Technology Faculty, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Bellaterra, 08193 Barcelona, Spain² Research Group on Stress and Health (GIES), Department of Basic Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Bellaterra, 08193 Barcelona, Spain³ RE-FIT Research Group, Parc Sanitari Pere Virgili & Vall d'Hebron Institute of Research, 08023 Barcelona, Spain⁴ Psynaptic, Psicología y Servicios Científicos y Tecnológicos, S.L.P., 08192 Sant Quirze del Vallès, Spain

* Correspondence: carmina.castellano@uab.cat

Abstract: (1) Background: Marketing and advertising strategies for food products are very diverse and have a differential effect on consumers' behaviours and attitudes towards products. (2) Objectives: To examine the influence of point-of-purchase (PoP) marketing and advertising strategies and the promotion of products employing opinion leaders (celebrities) on the healthy perception of pre-packaged food and buying behaviour of young consumers. (3) Methods: Online survey ($N = 130$) of 18–31 years old participants. (4) Results: "Price" was the most influential factor when purchasing a snack (66.2%), although "salt and macronutrient content" had a major influence on females ($\chi^2_{(1,N=129)} = 14.02, p < 0.001$). Participants with low or no weight satisfaction were more prone to consider "low fat" ($\chi^2_{(1,N=130)} = 5.02, p = 0.025$) and chose "green" as the most suitable colour for healthy snack packaging. Male celebrities were more picked by males than female participants ($\chi^2_{(1,N=129)} = 6.41, p = 0.011$). (4) Conclusion: Using green packaging, nutritional claims related to low-calorie intakes or accentuating salt and macronutrient content, and using opinion leaders with whom consumers can relate to, were the most influential factors in fostering a healthy perception of pre-packaged food products. These results highlight the need for policies to limit marketing strategies to avoid misleading consumers' opinion of a product as healthy when it is not.

Keywords: consumer response; healthy food; media advertising; social media advertising; social networks; perception; point of purchase



Citation: Miquel Vidal, M.; Castellano-Tejedor, C. Identification of Marketing Strategies Influencing Consumers' Perception of Healthy Food Products and Triggering Purchasing Decisions. *Businesses* **2022**, *2*, 410–422. <https://doi.org/10.3390/businesses2040026>

Academic Editor: Lester Johnson

Received: 9 August 2022

Accepted: 28 September 2022

Published: 3 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In the last few years, consumers have become more conscious of the importance of maintaining a healthy diet, which has had a direct effect on their food consumption patterns [1]. Research shows that there has been significant growth in low-calorie packaged products within the last decade. This situation has motivated companies to develop healthier products and alternatives to their original items [2]. Although consumers are more aware of the importance of a balanced and healthy diet, most of them frequently consume high-processed foods, which are usually more calorie-dense compared with fresh food products. The main reasons for higher consumption of processed products rather than fresh food are a more extended expiration date or a shorter preparation time since most of them do not need to be cooked. For these high-processed foods to become more appealing to health-conscious consumers, brands use marketing and advertising strategies to create a healthy image for these products [3].

The marketing and advertising strategies that are used for food products are multiple and very diverse. Some main strategies take place at the point of purchase (POP). A

few of these approaches involve using logos, brands and appealing images, competitive pricing and promotions, product placement in convenient locations or using priming cues [4]. The POP marketing strategies aim to tackle the non-cognitive process information system, activated when people make decisions quickly, without effort and often with no self-conscious sense of control [5]. As an example, non-cognitive decision-making is known to be influenced by very subtle changes such as the font size, the order of the items or the use of specific words when writing a menu [6], or the placement of a product at eye level on the stores' shelf [7].

A very common marketing strategy is associating a product with a famous personality, which becomes the image for that specific brand or food product. This strategy has gained popularity among adverts on social media. Brands use these platforms to gain consumers' attention by tackling their emotions rather than offering detailed and precise information about their products [8]. Furthermore, some brands also use marketing to associate their products with sport, which evidence shows, makes calorie-dense, nutritionally poor products seem healthier and could create a false link between unhealthy products and physical activity [9]. In this sense, Dixon et al. [10] showed that people have a healthier perception of food products when athletes endorse them than the same food products not endorsed at all.

On the other hand, labels and packaging are among the main marketing strategies, and they also help communicate and give relevant information to the consumer. However, the research presents discordant conclusions about their specific effect on consumers' purchasing behaviour. It is known that labels help consumers make healthier choices and, therefore, these could be used as a strategy to tackle unhealthy diets associated with chronic diseases. Specifically, illustrative nutrition labels such as traffic light systems are believed to be more effective in helping consumers choose healthier products compared with labels containing a significant volume of information, making them more complex and increasing consumers' scepticism toward food labels [11]. Miller and colleagues conducted an investigation where they monitored the eye movements of US adults while performing a shopping task. The results showed that participants who paid more attention to food labels were more likely to consume healthier products, which undermarked the influence of food labels in following a healthy diet [12]. Furthermore, studies on food labels show that cultural, economic and demographic differences among consumers might have an effect on label use [13]. As an example, Glanz et al. [14] showed that nutrition was more important to women and older individuals and, as a consequence, these groups were more receptive to menu labels than young males. When low-fat product consumption was analyzed among young consumers (18–25 years old), information and visual cues became more relevant than nutritional information. This study also demonstrated that information credibility could influence product health perceptions and attitudes toward a product and create an effect on the brand's overall trustworthy perception [15]. The written label has an effect when it is time to make a choice and the stimulus that consumers receive from olfactory, gustatory or visual cues [16]. For example, a study performed in 2011 examined the role of colour in snack and soft drink intake. This study concluded that a red colour, when integrated as a subtle cue in the environment, reduced the consumption of soft drinks and salty snacks compared with blue or white colour cues. This study related the results to the cultural and biological association of the red colour with prohibition, danger, or cancellation. Even though the intake seemed affected by the colour red, the appeal of the food or drinks was not reduced [17]. Another study performed by Grabenhorst et al. [18] concluded that there could be increased flavour pleasantness when a positive label was placed instead of a neutral one.

Considering all these premises, the main goal of this study is to explore and describe the influence of different marketing strategies based on the point-of-purchase (PoP) methods, as well as the impact of opinion leaders (such as celebrities and influencers) on young adult consumers' perception of pre-packaged food (specifically, snacks) as healthy or not.

Specific research questions (RQ) and corresponding preliminary hypothesis (H) are the following:

- RQ1. What PoP marketing strategies and/or other factors could influence the customer when buying a snack?
 - H1. It is hypothesized that females are more likely to be influenced by “caloric value”, “macronutrients” and “extra nutritional information” when choosing a snack than males [14].
- RQ2. Which PoP marketing strategies and/or other factors could influence the perception of a snack as being healthy or not?
 - H2. It is hypothesized that participants with a certain level of dissatisfaction with their body weight would choose “light” and/or “fat-free” as an indicator for healthiness [11–13].
- RQ3. How can opinion leaders influence the healthiness perception of a snack?
 - H3. It is hypothesized that respondents are more likely to consider a snack “healthier” when it is endorsed by “sportive” and/or “fit-looking” opinion leaders [8–10].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design

This study follows a cross-sectional population survey design.

2.2. Participants and Sampling

A non-probabilistic sample of community-based adults was recruited for the study via the snowballing method using social media and messaging apps to complete an online survey. Inclusion criteria required being between 18–35 years old. Exclusion criteria were (a) not being able to understand (read) the Spanish language well enough to complete the questionnaire, and (b) not residing permanently in Spain at the time of completing the survey. These criteria were stated in the informed consent presented before the survey.

2.3. Data Collection

The current study was performed between December 2020 and January 2021. Participants were asked to answer a survey entitled “What is your opinion on snack food marketing?” distributed via mailing lists and social media (WhatsApp, Instagram) and using the Google Forms platform. Participants were encouraged to distribute the survey to their contacts whose ages fell into the study targeted age range. A brief advertisement explaining the research objectives, the usefulness of the results and outlining the main ethical and privacy details accompanied the survey link. The survey was available only in Spanish, as we aimed to reach as many respondents as possible in our country.

2.4. Assessment/Variables Collected

An ad hoc online questionnaire was developed for the purposes of the present research. This questionnaire included the following subsections and factors:

- Demographics including gender, age, province of residence, civil status, cohabitation, field and level of education, employment situation and perceived socioeconomic status were collected.
- Physical composition and self-perceived body image: body weight and height followed by the participant’s satisfaction with their weight.
- Dietary habits: Special diet, food allergies.
- Description of purchasing behaviour: role, frequency, influencing factors when purchasing a snack and healthiness perception of additional nutritional information (i.e., packaging colour, illustrative images, location of the product within the store)

- Social media weekly usage and previous influence on purchasing a food product. Opinion leaders' association with a healthy image, based on a selection of eight distinguished Spanish actors (Miguel Ángel Muñoz) and actresses (María León), tv show presenters (Cristina Pedroche), athletes (Mireia Belmonte, Jorge Lorenzo), chefs (Jordi Cruz) and social media influencers (Paula Gonu, El Rubius), were employed in these questions.

2.5. Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all baseline and outcome variables using measures of central tendency (mean, standard deviation, the range for continuous variables; frequencies and total percentages for categorical variables). For bivariate analysis, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was used to determine whether parametric or non-parametric tests were indicated. Bivariate comparisons were performed through either Student's t-test and ANOVA for variables with more than two categories or levels, the Mann–Whitney U test for continuous variables or the chi-square test (and Fisher's exact test when $n < 5$) for dichotomous variables. The correlation of the two variables was compared using Pearson's correlation. The level of statistical significance was 5% ($p \leq 0.05$). Appropriate post hoc analyses were performed in all cases, and 95% confidence intervals were reported. All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS version 25 (IBM Corp. Released 2017. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. Armonk, NY, USA: IBM Corp.)

2.6. Ethical Aspects

The research ethics procedures of this study complied with European and national legislation (e.g., the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals concerning the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data). All data was collected and kept with all guarantees of confidentiality, and codification procedures were employed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of information. All participants were informed about study purposes, and direct informed consent was requested from all respondents before sending their responses. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire with no incentive for taking part. Data were kept confidential and were not disclosed unless for study purposes.

3. Results

3.1. Participants Characteristics

A total of 130 participants from different Spanish provinces, mainly from Barcelona (63.1%, $n = 82$) and the Balearic Islands (22.3%, $n = 29$), filled in the survey. Sociodemographic characteristics are comprehensively presented in Table 1. Most respondents were Females (66.2%, $n = 86$), young adults (22.35 ± 2.57 years old, range 18–31), with 59.2% being students ($n = 77$) and living with parents (66.2%, $n = 86$).

Body mass index (BMI) was calculated according to the World Health Organization's BMI formula (body mass index-BMI 2021): participant's weight in kilograms divided by the square of the person's height in metres (kg/m^2). Considering the whole sample, 77.7% ($n = 101$) had normal weight according to WHO criteria ($\text{IMC} = 18.5\text{--}24.9$), 8.46% ($n = 11$) were underweight ($\text{IMC} < 18.5$), 10% ($n = 13$) were within the pre-obesity range ($\text{IMC} = 25.5\text{--}29.9$), and 5% ($n = 5$) were obese ($\text{IMC} > 30.0$). Participants with higher IMC were more likely to have none or low weight satisfaction ($t_{(56,957)} = 3.345$, $p = 0.001$, $\text{CI}_{95\%} [1.030\text{--}4.103]$).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Age of participant in years; mean $\pm$ SD	22.3 $\pm$ 2.57
Participant gender; n (%)	
Female	86 (66.2)
Male	43 (33.1)
Non-binary	1 (0.8)
Province of residence; n (%)	
Alicante/Alacant	1 (0.8)
Araba/Álava	2 (1.5)
Balears, Illes	28 (22.3)
Barcelona	82 (63.1)
Girona	5 (3.8)
Lleida	3 (2.3)
Madrid	1 (0.8)
Málaga	2 (1.5)
Tarragona	5 (3.8)
Civil status; n (%)	
Married	2 (1.5)
Cohabiting couple	6 (4.6)
Non-living couple	43 (33.1)
Separated	1 (0.8)
Single	78 (60.0)
Cohabiting status; n (%)	
Living with my parent/s; Family member/s	86 (66.2)
Living with their partner and children	1 (0.8)
Living alone	6 (4.6)
Living with partner	6 (4.6)
Living with flatmates/friends	31 (23.8)
Employment status; n (%)	
Full-time job	27 (20.8)
Part-time job	16 (12.3)
Unemployed	2 (1.5)
Temporary employment regulation	2 (1.5)
Student	77 (59.2)
Seasonal job	5 (3.8)
Other	1 (0.8)
Perceived socioeconomical status; n (%)	
Low	20 (15.4)
Medium-low	28 (21.5)
Medium	61 (46.9)
Medium-High	14 (10.8)
High	2 (1.5)
Not-answered	5 (3.8)
Level of education; n (%)	
Secondary education (E.S.O) (Completed)	3 (2.3)
High school (completed)	4 (3.1)
University degree (completed)	33 (25.4)
University degree (Incomplete)	52 (40.0)
Master's degree (completed)	7 (5.4)
Master's degree (Incomplete)	16 (12.3)
Professional qualification FP (Completed)	2 (1.5)
Superior professional qualification (Completed)	8 (6.2)
Superior professional qualification (Incomplete)	5 (3.8)
Field of study; n (%)	
Arts and humanities	8 (6.2)
Biosciences	5 (3.8)
Sciences	4 (3.1)
Healthcare Sciences	56 (43.1)
Social and Juridical Sciences	30 (23.1)
Engineering	23 (17.7)
Other	4 (3.1)

3.2. RQ1 PoP Marketing Strategies and Other Influencing Factors When Buying a Snack

Results show that when participants were asked which elements influence them when buying a snack (see Figure 1), the most selected ones were “price” (66.2%; $n = 86$), followed by “salt and macronutrient contents (sugars, fats, protein)” (46.9%, $n = 61$) and “price-quality” ratio (46.2%, $n = 60$). The least selected ones were “packaging (easiness to consume)” and “organic product”, both with 18.5% ($n = 24$) of participants answering these options. These factors had a different influence depending on the participant’s gender. In this sense, “salt and macronutrient content” had a major influence on females ($\chi^2_{(1, N=129)} = 14.02$, $p < 0.001$) as well as the “ingredient list” ($\chi^2_{(1, N=129)} = 5.09$, $p = 0.024$), and a trend showed that males are more influenced by the products’ “brand” ($\chi^2_{(1, N=129)} = 3.65$, $p = 0.056$).

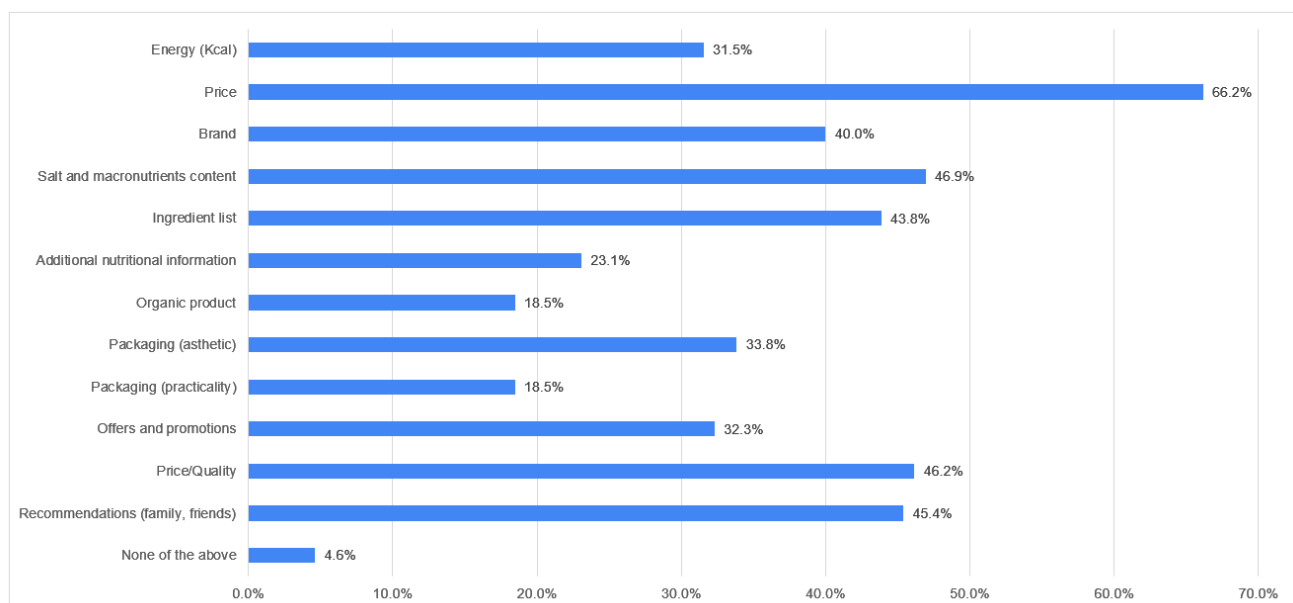


Figure 1. Influencing factors when buying a snack.

3.3. RQ2 PoP Marketing Strategies’ and Other Influencing Factors’ Effect on Healthiness Perception

Participants were asked to select which nutritional claims and additional nutritional information they considered an indicator of a healthy product (see Figure 2). Results show that 56.2% of participants ($n = 73$) believe that “nutri-score” (with “A” rating) is the best indicator for a healthy product. Meanwhile, 36.2% ($n = 47$) selected “bio-organic” as a healthy food indicator, and 22.3% ($n = 29$) believed that none of the options presented were a reliable indicator of healthy food. Results show that participants with low or no weight satisfaction were more prone to consider “low fat” ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 5.02$, $p = 0.025$) and “free from artificial flavours and preservatives” ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 4.14$, $p = 0.042$) as healthiness indicator compared with participants satisfied with their weight. Similarly, an almost significant tendency to consider “light” as a healthy indicator was also observed in the subsample of more dissatisfied with their body composition individuals ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 3.63$, $p = 0.057$).

When respondents were asked to pick a colour for a healthy snack packaging, the majority of them (50.0%, $n = 65$) chose the option “green” (Figure 3). “White” and “blue” were the two other most selected colours with 21.6% ($n = 26$) and 11.5% ($n = 15$) of answers, respectively. Although males and females tended to differ in colour preferences (see Figure 4), these differences do not reach statistical significance. A direct association was found between participants who selected “nutriscore” on the previous question and the colour “green” ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 3.41$, $p = 0.036$).

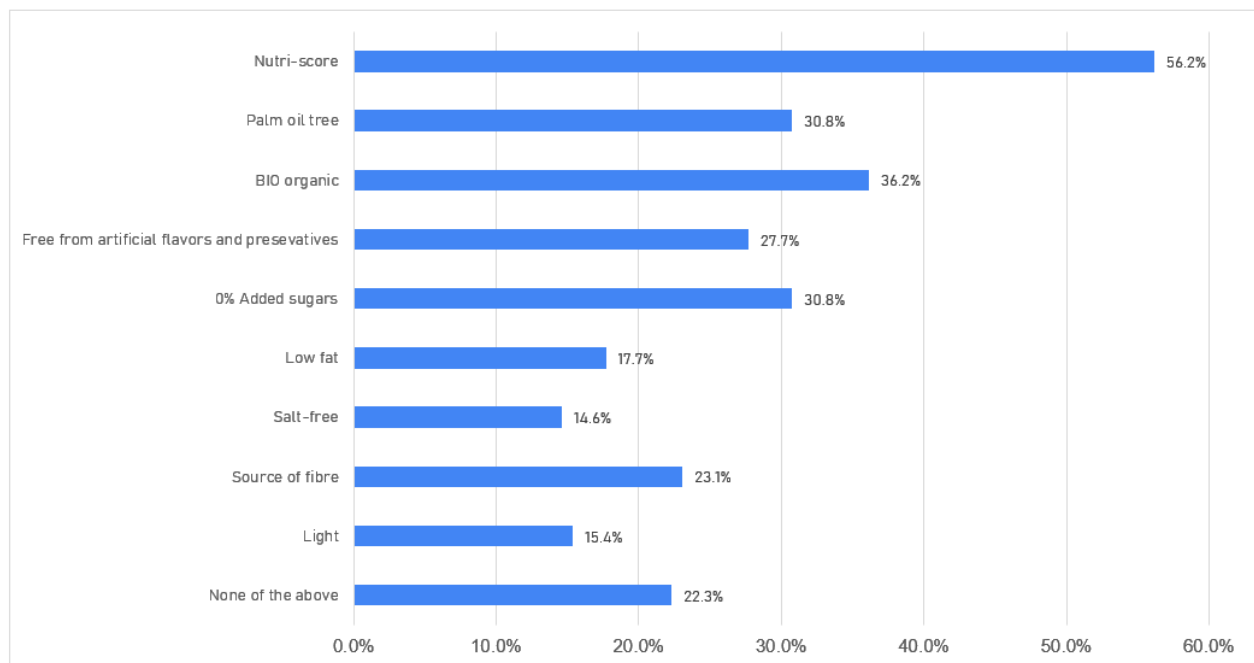


Figure 2. Nutritional claims and additional nutritional information.

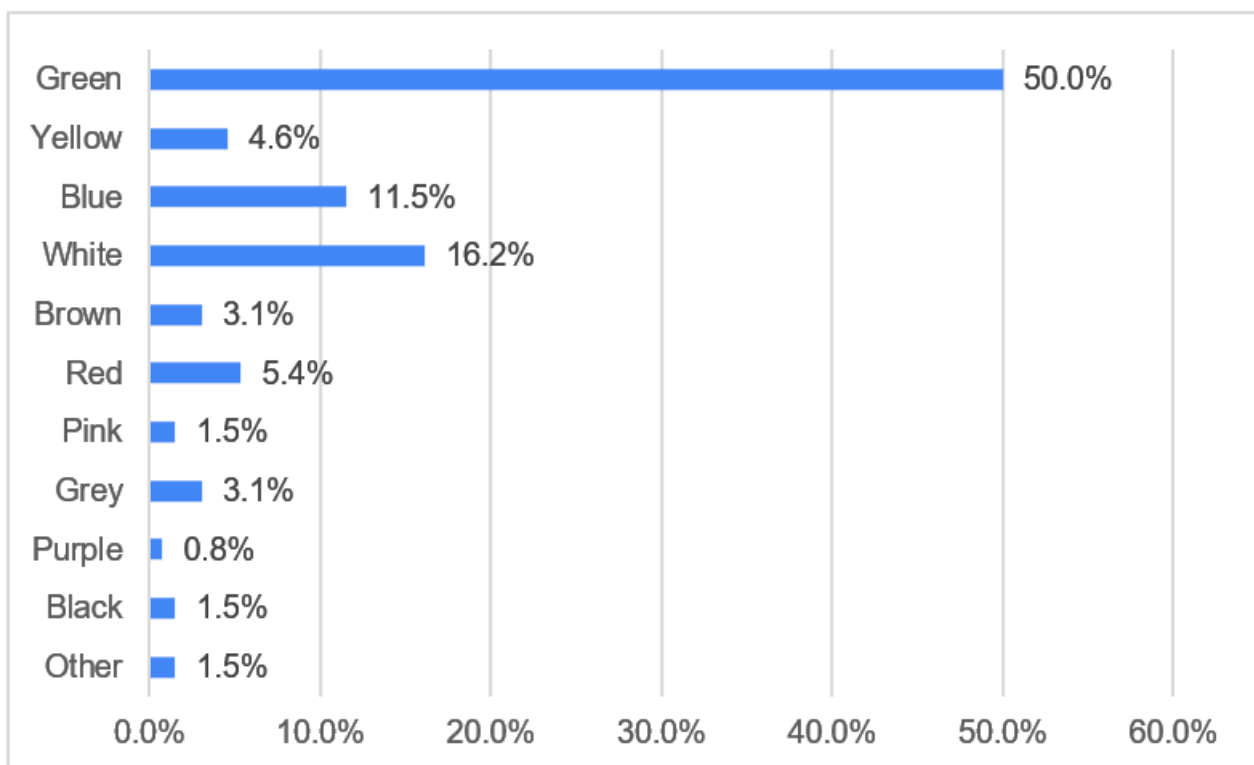


Figure 3. Packaging colour related to “healthy”.

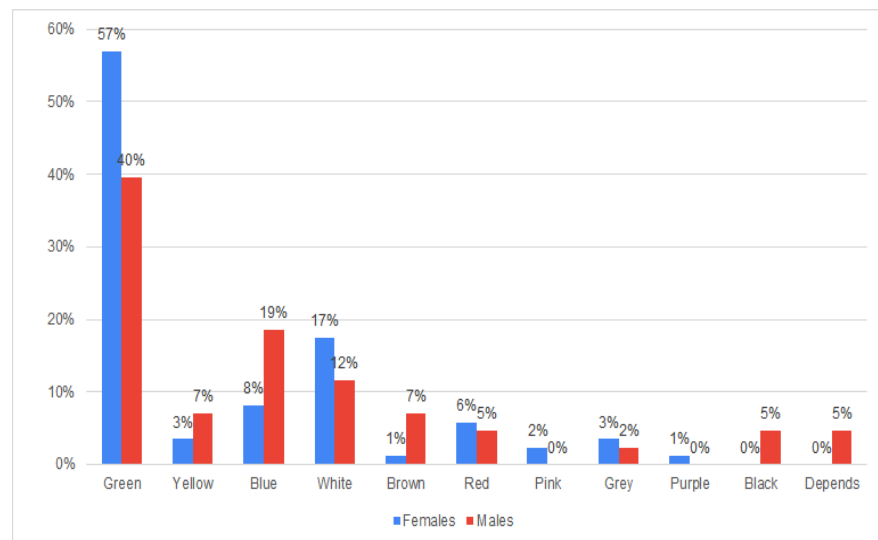


Figure 4. Colour preference by gender.

When participants were asked in which area of a supermarket they would place a healthy snack, 60.0% ($n = 78$) of them responded that it should be located in the “healthy products” section and 52.3% ($n = 68$) responded that it should be found in the “snacks” section (see Figure 5). Considering the whole sample, 60.5% of participants who selected “price” in RQ1 chose “snacks section” as their desired section to place a healthy snack product ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 6.78, p = 0.009$).

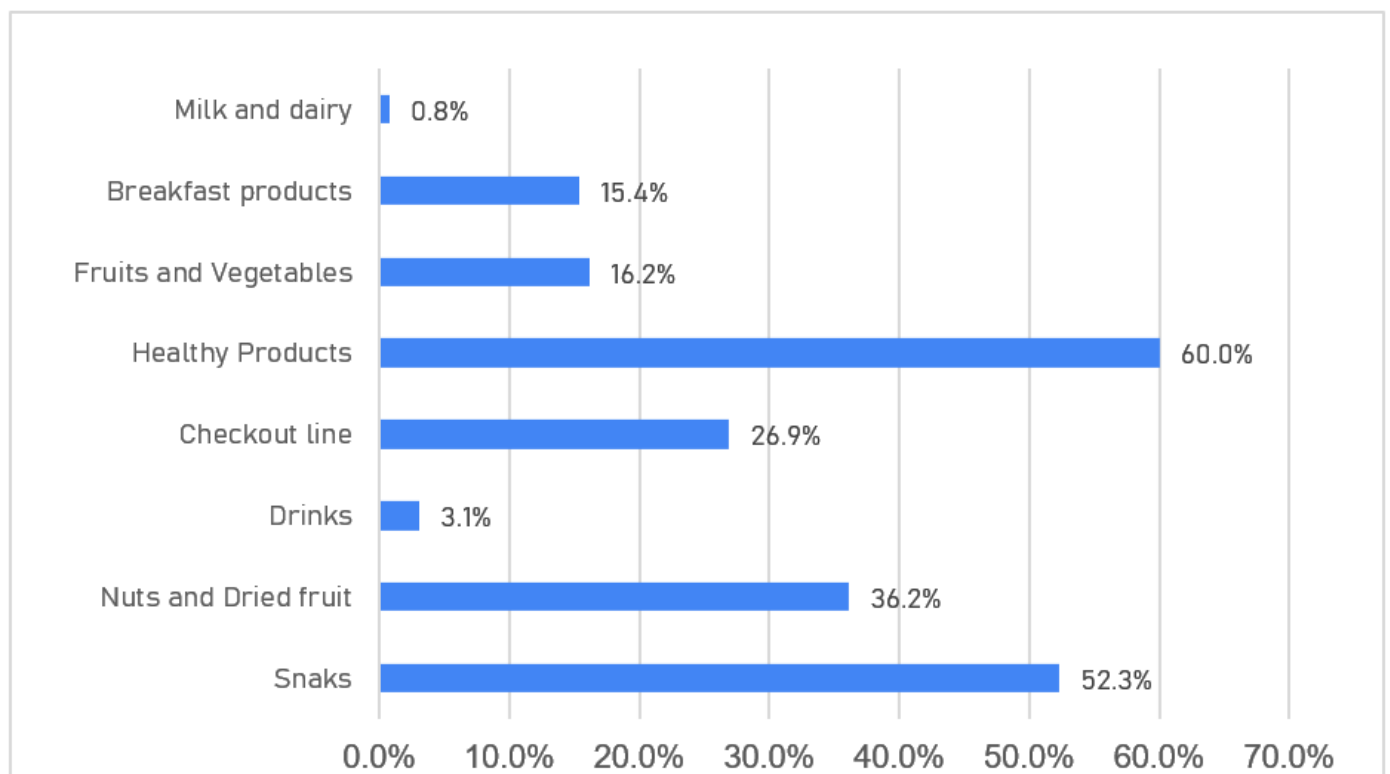


Figure 5. Healthy snack allocation within the supermarket.

3.4. RQ3 Opinion Leaders' Influence

When asked which opinion leader would best promote a healthy snack, the swimmer Mireia Belmonte and the chef Jordi Cruz were the most selected by participants, with 57%

($n = 70$) of picks. The gamer influencer Ruben Doblas “El Rubius” with zero votes, and the fashion and style influencer Paula Gonu and the actress Maria Leon with one vote each, were the least selected ones, as shown in Figure 6. Male opinion leaders were significantly more picked by males than female participants ($\chi^2_{(1, N=129)} = 6.41, p = 0.011$). A positive association was observed between participants who chose the chef Jordi Cruz and those who had ever bought a snack product after being advertised to them on social media by an opinion leader ($\chi^2_{(1, N=130)} = 4.47, p = 0.034$). But no statistical significance was found between the mean ages of those who have never bought a snack product advertised to them on social media and those who have.

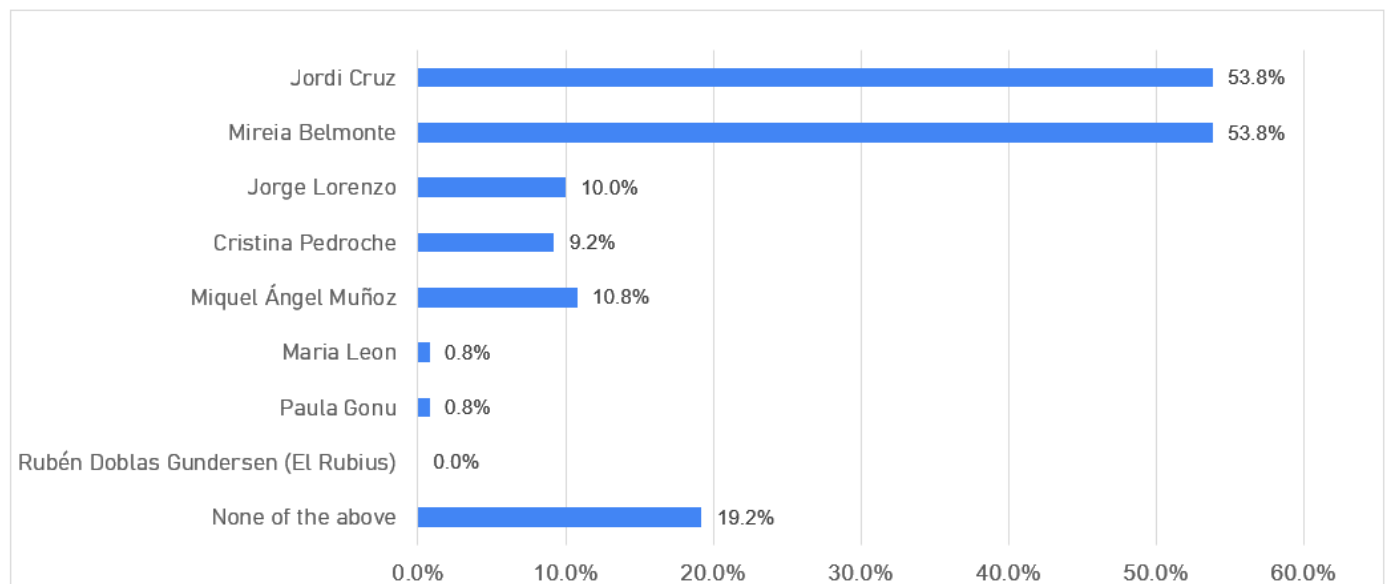


Figure 6. Best opinion leaders for healthy snack promotion.

4. Discussion

The objective of this study was to identify the influence point-of-purchase (PoP) marketing strategies and opinion leaders have on consumers when purchasing a snack and how these can affect their perception of a snack as being healthy or not.

Retailers frequently use PoP marketing strategies such as price, packaging, product organization or promotions to influence customers' purchasing decisions at the point of sale [19]. According to our study participants' responses, the product price and the price–quality ratio are two of the most influencing factors when purchasing a snack. Customers' perception of value is one of the main reasons companies consider a value-based pricing strategy when deciding the product's price instead of mainly focusing on a cost-based strategy [20]. Therefore, companies should increase their targeted customers' value perception of the product to maximize their profit, as it complies with their desired price–quality ratio.

Our first hypothesis was that females would be more health-conscious than males. Therefore, they were more likely to be influenced by health-related factors such as “energy (Kcal)”, “salt and macronutrients”, and/or “ingredients list”. Our results align with other studies that show that food choices can significantly differ between different demographic groups due to these being influenced by various factors such as cost, taste, nutrition, convenience and weight control concerns at the time of purchase [14]. Grzymisławska et al. [21] concluded that women have a higher level of trust in healthy nutrition and are more engaged in body weight management, which leads to choosing healthier foods than males. Moreover, the social environment also affects nutritional behaviours, with women being more frequently pressured by a society that promotes slim figures, which results in them relying on nutritional restrictions [22]. Multiple studies show how small changes in a product's packaging, labels or even the placement within a shop can affect people's perception of food. In this study, we have evaluated three aspects related to customers'

perception of snacks as healthy or not: (1) additional nutritional information, (2) colours in packaging and (3) product location in a supermarket. Firstly, we hypothesized that participants with a certain level of dissatisfaction with their weight would choose any additional nutrition claims that are often related to low-calorie intake diets like “light”, “low-fat” and “0% added sugars” as indicators of a healthy snack. Our results support this hypothesis, which also aligns with Balasubramanian et al.’s research [23]. These authors concluded that consumers’ characteristics were related to how the nutritional information is used. Specifically, overweight participants that were concerned with their weight increased their attention to products displaying “reduced fat” or “low fat” as a result of them intending to become more “health-conscious” [23]. Secondly, our results show that 50% of participants believed green is the most suitable colour to use in healthy snack packaging. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that green labels gave participants a more beneficial perception of poor nutritional food. In a two-part study by Jonathon P. Schuldt [24], participants perceived a candy bar to be healthier when it had a green label than a red one despite having the same caloric content. Moreover, our results show a positive correlation between participants who selected “Nutri-score” with an ‘A’ rating as an indicator of a healthy product and also chose the colour green as the most appropriate one for healthy snack packaging. These findings can be compared with Schuldt’s second study, in which he concluded that those who place a higher value on eating a healthy diet are more likely to think green-label foods are healthier [24]. Finally, participants were assessed on where they thought it was more appropriate to place a healthy snack product within a supermarket. Existing research proves the effectiveness of supermarket-based interventions on consumer food choice, despite environmental strategies being less effective than pricing strategies [25]. In our research, most participants considered the “healthy products” section the most suitable area to place a healthy snack product. Taking this into account, companies, in conjunction with other points of purchase marketing strategies, could manipulate a customer into believing they are purchasing a healthy snack product just by placing it in the “healthy products” section. Therefore, government policies encouraging the implementation of more accessible nutritional information for the general public—e.g., the implementation of “traffic light systems” [26] and/or regulations on calorie-dense pricing such as the UK soft drinks industry levy (SDIL) [27]—could facilitate and encourage customers to select a healthier product. Furthermore, our results show a statistical correlation between participants who said to be influenced by the products’ price when purchasing a snack and those who selected the “snacks” section as their desired location to place a healthy product. We could speculate that this is due to the fact that the “snacks” area of a store typically averages lower prices than other areas, such as the “healthy product” or “nuts and dried fruit” sections.

In the last 15 years, there has been a change in how food companies advertise their products, majorly shifting to social-media-based marketing strategies that allow them to use algorithms to precisely reach the targeted customer [28]. In addition, opinion leaders are usually one of the brands’ key focuses when planning their social media marketing strategies, due to their potential to reach large audiences and their power to influence consumers’ perceptions of a product [29]. Despite our results showing that only 25.3% ($n = 33$) of participants had previously purchased a product after it being advertised to them on social media by a famous personality, when analyzing the products they had bought, we identified that $n = 19$ purchased an unhealthy calorie-dense product. This situation implies that if public policies were developed to regulate media platforms’ endorsement to support healthy food advertisements while limiting the calorie-dense ones, social media users could potentially be led to healthier choices and directly tackle the obesity epidemic. Results also show that males in our study believed Jordi Cruz to be a better representative for a healthier snack than females did. Jordi Cruz is a Spanish chef who holds 3 Michelin stars. He became popular for being a judge in the national version of MasterChef. Since then, he has participated in the advertisement of different food products, being featured

on the cover of the Spanish version of the magazine “men’s health”. He is also very active on social media platforms such as Instagram [30]. Our findings support a prior study that found that viewers exposed to “popular fit influencers” with whom they could relate and who were perceived as trustworthy sources had a higher purchase intention and a more positive attitude toward healthy food products [23,31].

Limitations of This Research and Future Research Directions

There are two major limitations to this study that should be considered. The first one is regarding the participants. Our study could have benefited from a larger number of respondents and an equal number of males and females, favouring the representativeness of the studied population and the generalization of these results. Smaller sample sizes get decreasingly representative of the entire population. A small sample size can also lead to cases of bias, such as non-response, which occurs when some subjects do not have the opportunity to participate in the survey. Alternatively, voluntary response bias occurs when only a small number of non-representative subjects have the opportunity to participate in the survey, usually because they are the only ones who know about it. Future research may benefit from a more homogenous population with a wider geographical area since this study’s questionnaire respondents were mainly from Barcelona and the Balearic Islands. The second limitation is about the questionnaire, which lacked a section to allow participants to subjectively identify the healthiness of their diet, which could have allowed our results to have a more accurate comparison to other previous studies focused on the perceived healthiness of the participants. Despite these limitations, we believe this study is relevant due to its applications for food companies and governmental institutions. This research has highlighted the different marketing strategies that have an effect on the customers’ final purchase decision targeting “health-conscious” customers. Food companies can benefit from applying our results to reach their audiences appropriately. On the other hand, public institutions should use this research when developing new policies to limit marketing strategies and raise awareness on properly identifying a healthy food product.

5. Conclusions

There are multiple reasons why a customer might choose a food product over another; through different marketing strategies, brands can influence their final decision. Firstly, our results have revealed that the product price and the price–quality ratio are two of the most influencing factors when purchasing a snack, especially among females, suggesting that companies should increase their targeted customers’ value perception of the product to enhance a favourable price–quality ratio. Secondly, nutri-score, bio-organic products and green labels and/or packaging reinforce the perception of the healthiness of a snack, which, according to respondents, would be better placed in the “healthy products’ section of a supermarket rather than in the snacks section or close to beverages. Finally, concerning endorsement of health snacks, opinion leaders from sports and/or the culinary world have appeared as the preferred ones. In summary, our study shows that input of additional nutritional information, the price, or the opinion leader companies choose to promote their product must be suitable to their targeted customer demographics to maximize their effect. When aiming to profile a healthy product, using green packaging, nutritional claims related to low-calorie intakes (“light”, “low fat”, etc.) or accentuating the salt and macronutrient content were proven to be some of the most influential factors. On the other hand, brands use these strategies to strategically trigger consumers’ purchasing decisions while ignoring the health implications. This highlights the need for government policies to limit some marketing strategies to prevent the general public from getting misled into believing a product is healthy when it is not.

Author Contributions: Actions related to conceptualization, methodology, software, validation and formal analysis, investigation, data curation, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, were all equally performed by C.C.-T. and M.M.V. Supervision and project

administration was performed by C.C.-T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The research ethics procedures of this study complied with European and national legislation (e.g., the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals concerning the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data). All data was collected and kept with all guarantees of confidentiality, and codification procedures were employed to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of information. All participants were informed about study purposes, and direct informed consent was requested from all respondents before sending their responses. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire with no incentive for taking part. Data were kept confidential and were not disclosed unless for studies purposes.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from participants involved in the study to publish their results in combination with the rest of the participants' results.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments: We gratefully acknowledge all participants for their contributions to the study and for circulating this survey during the process of data collection.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Hanspal, S.; Devasagayam, P.R. Impact of Consumers' Self-Image and Demographics on Preference for Healthy Labeled Foods. *SAGE Open* **2017**, *7*. [CrossRef]
2. Crawford, E. *Sales Growth from Lower-Calorie Products Inspires Companies to Promote Healthier Options*; William Reed Business Media Ltd.: Crawley, UK, 2015; Available online: <https://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Article/2015/03/09/Sales-growth-from-lower-calorie-products> (accessed on 1 August 2022).
3. Houghtaling, B.; Serrano, E.L.; Kraak, V.I.; Harden, S.M.; Davis, G.C.; Misyak, S.A. A Systematic Review of Factors That Influence Food Store Owner and Manager Decision Making and Ability or Willingness to Use Choice Architecture and Marketing Mix Strategies to Encourage Healthy Consumer Purchases in the United States, 2005–2017. *Int. J. Behav. Nutr. Phys. Act.* **2019**, *16*, 5. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
4. Cohen, D.A.; Lesser, L.I. Obesity Prevention at the Point of Purchase. *Obes. Rev.* **2016**, *17*, 389–396. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
5. Bargh, J.A. Losing Consciousness: Automatic Influences on Consumer Judgment, Behavior, and Motivation. *J. Consum. Res.* **2002**, *29*, 280–285. [CrossRef]
6. Dayan, E.; Bar-Hillel, M. Nudge to nobesity II: Menu Positions Influence Food Orders. *Judgm. Decis. Mak.* **2011**, *6*, 333–342.
7. Chandon, P.; Wesley Hutchinson, J.; Bradlow, E.T.; Young, S.H. Does In-Store Marketing Work? Effects of the Number and Position of Shelf Facings on Brand Attention and Evaluation at the Point of Purchase. *J. Mark.* **2009**, *73*, 1–17. [CrossRef]
8. Vassallo, A.J.; Kelly, B.; Zhang, L.; Wang, Z.; Young, S.; Freeman, B. Junk Food Marketing on Instagram: Content Analysis. *JMIR Public Health Surveill.* **2018**, *4*, e54. [CrossRef]
9. Bragg, M.A.; Roberto, C.A.; Harris, J.L.; Brownell, K.D.; Elbel, B. Marketing Food and Beverages to Youth through Sports. *J. Adolesc. Health Care* **2018**, *62*, 5–13. [CrossRef]
10. Dixon, H.; Scully, M.; Wakefield, M.; Kelly, B.; Chapman, K.; Donovan, R. Parent's responses to nutrient claims and sports celebrity endorsements on energy-dense and nutrient-poor foods: An experimental study. *Public Health Nutr.* **2011**, *14*, 1071–1079. [CrossRef]
11. Fenko, A.; Kersten, L.; Bialkova, S. Overcoming Consumer Scepticism toward Food Labels: The Role of Multisensory Experience. *Food Qual. Prefer.* **2016**, *48*, 81–92. [CrossRef]
12. Miller, L.M.; Cassady, D.L.; Applegate, E.A.; Beckett, L.A.; Wilson, M.D.; Gibson, T.N.; Ellwood, K. Relationships among food label use, motivation, and dietary quality. *Nutrients* **2015**, *7*, 1068–1080. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
13. Kempen, E.; Bosman, M.; Bouwer, C.; Klein, R.; van der Merwe, D. An Exploration of the Influence of Food Labels on South African Consumers' Purchasing Behaviour. *Int. J. Consum. Stud.* **2011**, *35*, 69–78. [CrossRef]
14. Glanz, K.M.; Maibach, B.E.; Goldberg, J.; Snyder, D. Why Americans Eat What They Do: Taste, Nutrition, Cost, Convenience, and Weight Control Concerns as Influences on Food Consumption. *J. Am. Diet. Assoc.* **1998**, *98*, 1118–1126. [CrossRef]
15. Küster-Boluda, I.; Vila, N. Can Health Perceptions, Credibility, and Physical Appearance of Low-Fat Foods Stimulate Buying Intentions? *Foods* **2020**, *9*, 866. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
16. Toepel, U.; Ohla, K.; Hudry, J.; le Coutre, J.; Murray, M.M. Verbal Labels Selectively Bias Brain Responses to High-Energy Foods. *NeuroImage* **2014**, *87*, 154–163. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

17. Genschow, O.; Reutner, L.; Wänke, M. The Color Red Reduces Snack Food and Soft Drink Intake. *Appetite* **2012**, *58*, 699–702. [CrossRef]
18. Grabenhorst, F.; Rolls, E.T.; Bilderbeck, A. How Cognition Modulates Affective Responses to Taste and Flavor: Top-down Influences on the Orbitofrontal and Pregenuel Cingulate Cortices. *Cereb. Cortex* **2008**, *18*, 1549–1559. [CrossRef]
19. Areni, C.S.; Duhan, D.F.; Kiecker, P. Point-of-Purchase Displays, Product Organization, and Brand Purchase Likelihoods. *J. Acad. Mark. Sci.* **1999**, *27*, 428–441. [CrossRef]
20. Kotler, P.; Armstrong, G. *Principles of Marketing*; Pearson Education: London, UK, 2010.
21. Grzymisławska, M.; Puch, E.A.; Zawada, A.; Grzymisławski, M. Do Nutritional Behaviors Depend on Biological Sex and Cultural Gender? *Adv. Clin. Exp. Med.* **2020**, *29*, 165–172. [CrossRef]
22. Khor, G.; Cobiac, L.; Skrzypiec, G. Gender Differences in Eating Behavior and Social Self Concept among Malaysian University Students. *Malays. J. Nutr.* **2002**, *8*, 75–98.
23. Balasubramanian, S.K.; Cole, C. Consumers' Search and Use of Nutrition Information: The Challenge and Promise of the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act. *J. Mark.* **2002**, *66*, 112–127. [CrossRef]
24. Schuldts, J.P. Does Green Mean Healthy? Nutrition Label Color Affects Perceptions of Healthfulness. *J. Health Commun.* **2013**, *28*, 814–821. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
25. Wilson, A.L.; Buckley, E.; Buckley, J.D.; Bogomolova, S. Nudging Healthier Food and Beverage Choices through Salience and Priming. Evidence from a Systematic Review. *Food Qual. Prefer.* **2016**, *51*, 47–64. [CrossRef]
26. Cecchini, M.; Warin, L. Impact of Food Labelling Systems on Food Choices and Eating Behaviours: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Studies. *Obes. Rev.* **2015**, *17*, 201–210. [CrossRef]
27. Pell, D.; Mytton, O.; Penney, T.L.; Briggs, A.; Cummins, S.; Penn-Jones, C.; Rayner, M.; Rutter, H.; Scarborough, P.; Sharp, S.J.; et al. Changes in Soft Drinks Purchased by British Households Associated with the UK Soft Drinks Industry Levy: Controlled Interrupted Time Series Analysis. *BMJ* **2021**, *372*, n254. [CrossRef]
28. Montgomery, K.C.; Chester, J. Interactive Food and Beverage Marketing: Targeting Adolescents in the Digital Age. *J. Adolesc. Health* **2009**, *45* (Suppl. 3), S18–S29. [CrossRef]
29. Si, S.A.M.; Kom, S.I. A Phenomenological Study of Using Opinion Leader in Marketing Communication Understanding Food Blogger, Foodie, and Food Editor in Culinary Business in Indonesia. *J. Comm. Arts* **2015**, *33*, 1–7.
30. Gómez, F. Jordi Cruz: 'Yo También Voy a Hacer El RetoMHLive'. Men's Health. 7 April 2020. Available online: <https://www.menshealth.com/es/noticias-deportivas-masculinas/a32063631/jordi-cruz-entrevista-reto-mh-live-masterchef-8-portada-mens-health/> (accessed on 1 August 2022).
31. Folkvord, F.; Roes, E.; Bevelander, K. Promoting Healthy Foods in the New Digital Era on Instagram: An Experimental Study on the Effect of a Popular Real versus Fictitious Fit Influencer on Brand Attitude and Purchase Intentions. *BMC Public Health* **2020**, *20*, 1677. [CrossRef]