

The “Healthy=light” Heuristic

Yi Li

Macquarie University

Nico Heuinck

IESEG School of Management

Mario Pandelaere

Virginia Tech

Cite as:

Li Yi, Heuinck Nico, Pandelaere Mario (2020), The “Healthy=light” Heuristic.
Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy, 49th, (63953)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



The “Healthy=light” Heuristic

Abstract

Seven studies demonstrate the “healthy=light” heuristic by showing that people infer food containing healthier ingredients to weigh less than food containing normal/unhealthy ingredients. At the same time, people also use weight as a cue to infer a product’s healthiness: lighter products are perceived as more likely to contain healthier ingredients compared to heavier products. We demonstrate this heuristic has downstream effects on consumers’ product choices, purchase intention, WTP, health claim beliefs, and actual consumption. Our research establishes that the “healthy=light” heuristic is based on an implicit association and shows that people use food healthiness to infer food weight, using both actual food items and brand healthiness perception to manipulate the food healthiness. We also turn to the other side of the heuristic and show that people use food weight to infer the food healthiness. Finally, we reveal that the calories estimate underlies this relationship between weight and healthiness perception, while ruling out food density/fillingness as alternative explanations.

Keywords: *Heuristic; Healthiness; Weight*

Track: Consumer Behaviour