

Making sense in times of COVID-19: pathogen threat shifts consumer preferences for portion size and luxury cues

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Abstract

Drawing on the meaning making paradigm, the present research explores consumer preference shifts for portion size and luxury cues under pathogen threat. We test the notion that, under normal conditions, people perceive a bigger food portion as more appealing for regular products (i.e., the portion size effect), but that this reverses for luxurious products (exclusivity implies small portions). However, when under pathogen threat, consumer meaning making shifts because of the motivation to cope with the threat. Thus, under pathogen threat the portion size effect may “backfire” since people may not see a bigger portion as more appealing, but possibly as a larger source of contamination, unless they receive cues that the bigger portion signals safety. Luxury cues, by signaling exclusivity and great care in producing, may fulfill this role, and hence this effect may again be reversed for luxurious products. A set of two experimental studies provides support for our conceptualization.

Keywords: *Pathogen-threat; Portion; Luxury*

Track: Consumer Behaviour