Happiness as a barrier to food literacy in detecting healthwashing

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Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025

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Abstract

This research investigates *when* food literacy is activated or deactivated in protecting consumers from redundant healthwashing—health claims that are inherently true but irrelevant or unnecessary for the product. Through two experimental studies, we demonstrate that happiness weakens, while sadness strengthens, the role of food literacy in detecting such misleading claims. These effects were observed across two food items: cholesterol-free peanut butter (Study 1) and gluten-free steak (Study 2). The findings suggest that positive emotions have an inhibitory effect, while negative emotions have a facilitative effect in activating food literacy as a defensive mechanism against misleading health claims in food advertising.

Keywords: healthwashing, food literacy, emotion