

Abstract

Which Messages about Healthy and Sustainable Eating Resonate Best with Consumers of Low Socio-Economic Status? [†]

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Abstract: Consumers of low socio-economic status (SES) face unique challenges in eating healthily and sustainably, and as a result, are disproportionately affected by the greater risks of chronic diseases and environmental degradation. This dietary inequity is further reinforced by inequalities in access to health information. In this research, we examine the missing perspectives of consumers of low SES to better understand which might be the most effective way to communicate to this target group about healthy and sustainable eating (HSE). To address this aim, we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods and conducted two studies with people who have been stricken by poverty (the beneficiaries of social supermarkets of the Caritas food charity in Italy). In Study 1, focus groups were conducted with customers and professionals of the Caritas association to explore information needs and preferences of consumers of low SES with respect to HSE. Based on these findings, communication materials (i.e., infographics) were developed and tested in a larger sample of Caritas customers via an online survey (Study 2). Consumers of low SES experience food insecurity (and the mental/psychological burden that accompany it), the lack of trust on the sources of information, and language/cultural barriers (for immigrants), which prevent them from using information about HSE. However, limited interest in HSE or contextual factors such as the lack of cooking skills/equipment or a limited access to fresh food also play a role in the limited uptake of HSE. Information material aiming at increasing motivation (e.g., the benefits of HSE on health or the environment), capability (e.g., flexible recipes with HS foods), and opportunities (e.g., access to HS foods that are affordable) for HSE are currently being tested, and the results will be available in October 2023. The results of this research will be used to develop a toolkit with evidence-based recommendations on how to best communicate about HSE with consumers of low SES.

Keywords: healthy eating; sustainable eating; low socio-economic status; health communication; mixed methods



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