Feeding the feed healthy food: Exploring persuasive effects of sources and norm communication

Bram Spruyt[a]*, Käbi Vanwinkelen[a], Yara Qutteina[a] and Tim Smits[a]

[a]*Media, Information and Persuasion Lab, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium*

*Bram Spruyt, Media, Information and Persuasion Lab, KU Leuven, Parkstraat 45 PO box 37603 300 Leuven, Belgium. E-mail: bram.spruyt@kuleuven.

Abstract

Obesity and overweight continue to threaten adolescents' future health. Social media feature an abundance of unhealthy foods, but simultaneously present opportunities to promote healthy eating. Yet, more insights are needed to understand how healthy social media food messages can be crafted to enhance persuasiveness. The current field experiment employed a 2 (time: pre- vs. post-measurement) x 2 (source: health organizations vs. food influencers) x 2 (explicit norm communication: absent vs. present) mixed design to investigate persuasive effects of different sources and of norm communication. Based on analysis of 566 matched pre- and post-questionnaires, effects on eating outcomes was rather modest. Source and norm communication independently influenced perceived expertise and trustworthiness, and conjointly shaped perceived persuasive intent. Mediation analyses showed indirect effects of source via perceived expertise and trustworthiness on norm perceptions and healthy (overall) eating intentions.

Keywords: Social media, healthy food messages, experiment, source, norms, Adolescents