

Policy of promoting healthy eating – an international comparative analysis and research on the conditions of effectiveness of selected solutions

The project aims: 1) to identify selected public policy instruments aiming to promote healthy eating, 2) to compare their use across three European countries: Poland, France, and the United Kingdom, 3) to assess their effectiveness, 4) to explore the moderating role of consumer characteristics (demographic, socio-economic, and psychographic variables) in the relations between these policy options and healthy nutrition, and 5) to check whether nutrition knowledge mediates the examined relations. The policy instruments to be examined include: 1) social marketing campaigns targeted at stimulating healthy eating, 2) food labelling regulations, including information on ingredients, nutritional panel, health and nutrition claims, and front-of-package labelling systems, such as Nutri-Score; 3) organic certification, including European Union organic agriculture logo; 4) nutrition smartphone applications; 5) social media activities of dietitians. The potential moderators to be tested include: 1) consumer demographic characteristics, in particular gender, age, family composition, urban vs. rural place of living; 2) consumer socio-economic characteristics, in particular education, income, and occupation; 3) consumer Schwartz values; 4) food choice criteria.

The research problem is important and relevant, because chronic diseases related to unbalanced and unhealthy eating habits have definitely become one of the major issues of modern age. A major concern has been the large impact of ultra-processed food and drink products on weight gain and the risk of several noncommunicable diseases, which creates a need for major new policy initiatives. The impact of healthy eating policies falls behind policy makers' expectations.

Many innovative policy options to reduce overeating and improve diet quality remain largely unexplored. We identified a research gap concerning the role of selected public policy interventions in shaping actual healthy eating practices, moving beyond subjective evaluations of healthy eating. It is also necessary to explore potential moderators of the relations between the policy solutions and healthy eating as well as the mediating role of nutrition knowledge.

Our research project is characterised by a high level of innovativeness because: 1) it focuses on the effectiveness of selected public policy solutions related to healthy eating, exploring the impacts of those interventions on actual diet healthiness on the individual level; 2) it moves beyond the self-assessment of one's healthy eating, which is common for many consumer behaviour studies, as we opt for more objective indices of healthy eating, based on information about consumption habits for concrete food categories; 3) it combines valuable insights from public policy studies and consumer behaviour studies conducted within the marketing sub-discipline with constructs developed within health and nutrition sciences; 4) it adopts a complex, holistic research framework, examining not only the main effects between the key variables, but also exploring potential moderators and mediation effects; 5) it takes into account the latest technological developments in the field of disseminating information related to food and nutrition (smartphone apps and social media communications); 6) it adopts an international comparative approach.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods will be applied. We will start with analysing policy documents and scientific literature of the subject in the field of healthy eating policies. This review will have an international scope, with an emphasis on analysing the solutions adopted in Poland, France, and the UK. We will analyse the types of public interventions, their aims and objectives, implementation criteria and methods, budgetary implications, and evaluations of effectiveness if they are available. Second, we will conduct a series of individual in-depth interviews with policy-makers and experts in the field of healthy eating policies. These interviews will be conducted in three European countries: Poland, France, and the United Kingdom, in order to get valuable insights about policy options and their implementation models. The third task in our work plan deals with a survey among dietitians. This will enable us to get their insights about current healthy eating policy instruments as well as about certain modifications that could be introduced in future on the basis of experiences of Western European countries. Fourth, we will conduct a large-scale survey among Polish consumers. The survey methodology will be applied to determine the nature and type of relationships between the key variables of interest, namely: policy instruments, consumer characteristics, nutrition knowledge, and healthy eating behaviour.