

The Trojan Horse burger: Do companies that 'do good' sell unhealthy food?

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When consumers see a company performing good deeds, they often assume that the company's products are healthy. According to a new study in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* this may be far from true, and the company's socially responsible behavior may be creating a "health halo" over unhealthy foods.

"Research demonstrates that [consumers](#) frequently engage in inference making when evaluating food [products](#). These inferences can be highly inaccurate, leading to unintended, unhealthy consumer choices," write authors John Peloza (University of Kentucky), Christine Ye (Westminster College) and William J. Montford (Florida State University).

The authors asked study participants to make assumptions about the healthiness of a future granola bar product. The people who were told that the granola bar [company](#) had won many awards for its public service predicted that the granola bar would therefore be extremely healthy.

The authors found that this "health halo" encouraged overconsumption and underestimation of calories consumed, adding that the current study could lead to important changes in advertising regulations—for example, limiting how much information about its social programs a company may include on its food packaging.

The authors believe that studies like these may help raise awareness among those consumers who genuinely want a healthy product, and who

don't want their emotions manipulated in ways that lead them to make unhealthy assumptions about food quality.

The study concludes with a warning: "If consumers seeking a healthy diet inaccurately estimate nutritional content of products marketed by firms with strong reputations for corporate social responsibility, it can lead to serious health consequences for both individuals and society."

More information: John Peloza, Christine Ye, and William J. Montford. "When Companies Do Good, Are Their Products Good for You?" Forthcoming in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

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