

Exploring advertising strategy for restaurants sourcing locally: The interplay of benefit appeal and regulatory focus

Sun-Hwa Kim^{a,*}, Ran Huang^b, Seeun Kim^c

^a Hospitality and Tourism Management, 343 Reid Hall, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT, 59717-3370, USA

^b Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture + Design Indiana University, Bloomington Kirkwood Hall 115 130 S Woodlawn Ave, Bloomington, IN, 47405, USA

^c Department of Consumer and Design Sciences College of Human Sciences, 308G Spidle Hall Auburn University, Auburn, AL, 36849, USA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how benefit (self-benefit and other-benefit) appeals and regulatory (prevention and promotion) focus work jointly in advertising messages for restaurants sourcing locally (RSLs). Despite the significant interest in RSLs, how such restaurants effectively communicate their “sourcing locally” to consumers remains unclear. We conduct two experimental studies to fill the void in the literature on the RSL context. Our findings indicate that other-benefit (vs. self-benefit) appeals elicit higher perceived authenticity, positive affect, and patronage intention (Study 1) whereas other-benefit appeals with prevention focus generate a higher level of consumer responses. This study demonstrates that a positive affect mediated the interactive effect of benefit appeal and regulatory focus, enhancing patronage intention (Study 2). The interplay of benefit appeal and regulatory focus suggests that RSLs should consider using these two types of advertisements to promote their sourcing locally practice.

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has led to a global food system crisis. For example, logistics interruptions and supply–demand inconsistencies due to COVID-19 have impacted the distribution and inventory levels of food, thereby increasing the insecurity in food systems (Ewing-Chow, 2020). The disruptive effects of COVID-19 on food supply chains have encouraged consumers to look further into local food consumption. In a study of behavioral changes in food purchasing after the pandemic broke out, researchers have found that approximately 34% of consumers increased their local food consumption (Hassen et al., 2020).

With an increasing number of consumers adopting the “buying more local food” policy, the restaurant industry has been forced to switch to “sourcing locally.” Sourcing locally refers to selecting or sourcing food containing ingredients produced within the same state or a certain radius (Shin et al., 2016). Indeed, different types of restaurants, from well-known branded ones to local corner restaurants, have fallen to the sourcing locally trend. For example, Chipotle made public their support to local growers, while McDonald’s launched several campaigns to prove that their menu is largely locally sourced (Torres, 2016). The farm-to-table trend is even more apparent in independent local restaurants. Particularly, in the United States, local food production has seen a

surge in popularity in the past two decades (Galzki et al., 2015; Sadler et al., 2015). As a growing share of the U.S. food system, local foods have generated \$ 11.8 billion sales in 2017 (Johnson, 2019). In 2020, local food sales have increased by 360% in the online context (Thilmany et al., 2021). Therefore, professionals in the restaurant industry expect the practice of sourcing locally to become stronger than it was before the COVID-19 era in order to overcome supply-chain problems or ensure consumer confidence with food safety (“Brendan Corkery,” 2020).

However, local sourcing comes with several challenges as restaurants endeavor to offer locally sourced menus. One of the challenges relates to advertising “sourcing locally” because many consumers doubt the restaurants’ claims of sourcing locally (Shafieizadeh & Tao, 2020). Restaurants have not yet found convincing ways to advertise their “sourcing locally” practice. Moreover, the role of content characteristics in local food advertising has been underexplored (Golden, 2014). Therefore, restaurants pursuing or intending to pursue local sourcing need an informative tool to better communicate with customers and influence their decision making. This untouched agenda of the restaurant industry needs to be investigated further. Moreover, with the rising interest of consumers in local food, theoretically driven strategic approaches become important (Kareklas et al., 2014) as reports show that most consumers do not agree with or doubt most restaurants sourcing locally

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: sunhwa.kim@montana.edu (S.-H. Kim), huangran@iu.edu (R. Huang), szk0145@auburn.edu (S. Kim).

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(RSLs) advertisements (Kim et al., 2019).

Existing local food studies show two categories of motives in local food consumption: to benefit others, such as local farmers and businesses, and to benefit the consumers themselves, for example, by consuming fresh and tasty food (Frash et al., 2005; Lillywhite & Simonsen, 2014). These motives can be further re-categorized by their benefit views: self-benefit and other-benefit views. For example, if consumers purchase local food for their own benefit (e.g., for better taste or freshness), they focus on their “self-benefit” view in decision making. Similarly, if consumers seek local food in order to help local businesses or farmers, they focus on their “other-benefit” view. Importantly, benefit view has significant implications for consumer decision making. An array of research topics such as green campaign (Miniero et al., 2014) and charity (White & Peolza, 2009) result in self- or other-benefit appeals (Bock & Kenhove, 2010). However, studies of self- and other-benefit appeals have not been able to provide conclusive results, with the efficacy of benefit appeals contingent on the specific consumption context (Gao et al., 2020), suggesting that some other variables contribute to the efficacy of one appeal over the other (Green & Pelozo, 2014).

Benefit views may prompt individuals to adopt either prevention or promotion focus as reference value (Crowe & Higgins, 1997) because people avoid pain or approach pleasure when seeking a benefit (Higgins, 1998). Prevention and promotion focus are motivational principles; they are called regulatory focus and have a major impact on people's behaviors and feelings (Higgins, 1998). The notion of regulatory focus is that one is motivated to either “reach the desired consequence (i.e., promotion focus)” or “avoid an undesirable outcome” (i.e., prevention focus) (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). In other words, individuals with promotion focus regulate their behaviors toward positive consequences, whereas those with prevention focus regulate their behaviors away from negative outcomes (Aaker & Lee, 2001). These distinct goals influence the acceptance of persuasive messages (Kim, 2006) and thus guide their decision making (Aaker & Lee, 2001). The persuasiveness of messages under regulatory focus has been extensively studied in behavioral research, where positive (promotion focus) or negative (prevention focus) messages are shown to influence consumers' decision making (Aaker & Lee, 2001). However, research findings on the efficacy of message appeals under regulatory focus are seemingly inconsistent and context contingent (Kim, 2006). For example, Miniero et al. (2014) found that prevention-focused appeals led individuals to green behavior, whereas Bhatnagar and McKay-Nesbitt (2016) reported that promotion-focused messages led to consumer environmental concern and favorable attitude.

Given that the significant trend toward local food could persist in the restaurant industry, we consider it important to explore the conditions under which a message appeal can promote the sourcing locally image of a restaurant, especially with regard to local restaurants trying to overcome the current situational and operational hardships. We thus argue that benefit appeal and regulatory focus can serve as two critical content characteristics useful to communicate with consumers and influence their perceptual, emotional, and behavioral responses.

Overall, we examine how benefit appeal and regulatory focus jointly contribute to the efficacy of message appeals in promoting restaurants' sourcing locally image. Specifically, the objectives of this study are threefold: (1) examine the effect of benefit (self-vs. other-benefit) appeal on consumer responses (i.e., perceived authenticity, positive affect, and patronage intention); (2) investigate the moderating role of regulatory focus on the effects of benefit appeal on consumer responses; and (3) test the mediating role of perceived authenticity and positive affect on the path of interaction between benefit appeal and regulatory focus on patronage intention. We conduct two experiments for a better understanding of local food campaigns in customer decision making and suggest how RSLs can advertise their businesses.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. RSLs

As consumers become more aware of the industrialized food system, they look for alternative food sources such as local food (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). Thus, the demand for local food has surpassed the demand for organic food (Boys & Blank, 2016). The drivers of local food consumption largely arise from consumers' concerns over food transparency and beliefs. For instance, the origin of food and food miles became increasingly important (Birch et al., 2018), with local food regarded as fresh and healthy (Frash et al., 2015). Moreover, consumers' health consciousness and community attachment affect the consumption of local food (Shin et al., 2018).

In a similar vein, one of the significant motives for visiting RSLs is to support the community of local restaurants and growers (Lang et al., 2014). Most recently, a consumer group called *locavores* was identified as significant group in the restaurant industry (Kim & Huang, 2021) with strong purchasing power. For instance, this group consistently expressed their willingness to pay a premium (Frash et al., 2015). Notably, various conventional articles and anecdotal occurrences have suggested that RSLs will become a major phenomenon in the restaurant industry, particularly after the COVID-19 era (“Brendan Corkery,” 2020).

2.2. Self-benefit and other-benefit

For choosing message frames, marketers often used two benefit appeals: self-benefit and other-benefit appeals (White & Peolza, 2009). The theoretical rationale for using the benefit view as marketing tool is that framed messages in self- and other-benefit appeals can meaningfully influence consumer attitudes and behavior (Fisher & Hopp, 2020). Self- and other-benefit appeals are congruent with egoistic and altruistic motives (White & Peolza, 2009). In self-benefit appeals, “I or me” is the main beneficiary of a service, action, or product, whereas in other-benefit appeals, “some other individual” is the main beneficiary of things (Fisher et al., 2008).

Studies related to self- and other-benefit message appeals have been carried out in three streams. First, the efficacy of a self- or other-benefit message appeal depends on whether the appeal is activated (White & Simpson, 2013). Thus, the different benefit message appeals need to be strategically implemented to be effective. For example, Fisher and Hopp (2020) found that messages activating other-benefit appeals rather than self-benefit appeals are effective in building trust with stakeholders in an organizational context. The basic reason is that individuals find message appeals more convincing when the benefit is congruent with the major beneficiary in mind. Second, self- and other-benefit studies have largely been conducted in the context of civic matters such as charitable support (e.g., White & Peolza, 2009), pro-environmental behavior (Rizzi et al., 2020), and ethical consumption (Ryoo et al., 2020). Third, benefit appeal as a variable often works with other variables such as consumer response types (White & Peolza, 2009) or purchasing motives (Ryoo et al., 2020) in influencing the effectiveness of marketing and advertising messages. However, self-benefit and other-benefit views explain that one's inclination focuses on a benefit (self vs. other) to determine the individual's response to a message appeal. Although benefit frames are helpful to market a particular restaurant type, their roles have not been fully examined in the restaurants setting, particularly RSL setting.

2.3. Regulatory focus

Regulatory focus is based on people's approaches to pleasure and pain (Higgins, 1998). The basic notion is that individuals operate two motivational principles in decision making – promotion focus and prevention focus (Higgins, 1998). Individuals with promotion focus pursue goals and maximize positive outcomes, whereas those with prevention

focus avoid goals and maximize the absence of negative outcomes (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Kim, 2006). A consumer with promotion focus may purchase locally produced products by standing in a queue to pursue the superior taste of locally sourced food, whereas one with prevention focus may purchase locally produced products to avoid the pitfalls of unhealthy lifestyle.

Promotion goals represent the ideal self; for example, one regulates the self-achievement of rewards with emphasis on hopes and aspirations (Higgins, 1997). Thus, individuals with mainly promotion focus try to solve problems and take risks. For example, Gino and Margolis (2011) found that individuals with promotion focus take more risks than those with prevention focus (Kark & Dijk, 2007). In contrast, prevention goals indicate the ought self and include duties and responsibilities (Higgins, 1997). Thus, prevention goals are often associated with ethical or pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Miniero et al., 2014).

Regulatory focus can be temporarily induced (Higgins, 1998; Liberman et al., 2001). For example, task instructions may induce a temporary promotion or prevention focus, whereas regulatory focus can be a situational or persistent variable (Kark & Dijk, 2007). Thus, regulatory focus is often used for advertising involving social issues such as anti-smoking, green behavior, donation, or healthy behavior (Bhatnagar & McKay-Nesbitt, 2016). In general, messages have greater effects on consumers in terms of persuasive effectiveness when the regulatory focus of individuals matches the message frames (e.g., benefit appeal, Aaker & Lee, 2001).

2.4. Perceived authenticity

Authenticity is broadly defined as being genuine (MacCannell, 1989) and characterized by originality and credibility (Fine, 2003). Authenticity increases consumers' purchase (Gilmore & Pine, 2007) and revisit intentions (Kim & Baker, 2017). For example, a diner experiencing authenticity will most likely revisit the restaurant. Typically, consumers seek authentic products and services (Kim & Jang, 2016) in order to satisfy their self-image through consumption. As individuals' consumption behavior reflects their identity and worldview (Gilmore & Pine, 2007), consumers develop an authentic sense of self through the purchase of particular products (Sims, 2009). For example, Yeoman et al. (2006) described authenticity as "authentic-seeking," meaning that consumers look for authenticity in the use of products or services and within themselves.

Authenticity in restaurants is considered from two perspectives (Jang et al., 2012), objective and subjective. From the objective perspective, authenticity refers to whether the ingredients are locally sourced, the menu is unique or local, or the design is exterior (Sidali & Hemmerling, 2014). From the subjective perspective, authenticity is a socially and individually constructed perception of cultures and objects (Ebster & Guist, 2005; Kim & Jang, 2016), which are often influenced by consumers' preexisting images or knowledge (Jang et al., 2012). Thus, the perceived authenticity of the same business (e.g., restaurant or retail store) may vary between customers (Wang & Mattila, 2015). The subjective perspective of authenticity implies that consumers are likely to develop their own interpretation of authenticity even if they are unfamiliar with the objects or cultures (Lu et al., 2015). Therefore, regardless of consumers' familiarity with a specific culture or object, authenticity is a critical tool for restaurants to create competitive advantage (Jang et al., 2012).

2.5. Positive affect

According to Watson et al. (1985), emotional reactions are categorized by two affects, positive and negative. Positive affect refers to positive emotions, such as pride and joy. A positive (or negative) affect in advertising facilitates consumer acceptance (or rejection) of a message appeal or marketing stimuli. In particular, message appeals in advertisement evoke a positive affect and thereby influence consumer

decision making (So et al., 2015). Thus, marketers pursue the type of message appeals that elicit positive affect in the audience (Rossiter & Percy, 1991). In other words, effective advertising is how to deliver an emotional appeal in a compelling and/or engaging manner (Rossiter & Percy, 1991).

Previous studies have discussed the close relationship between emotional responses and advertising (e.g., Laros & Steenkamp, 2005). For example, Edell and Burke (1987) found that feelings predict the effectiveness of an advertisement. Some studies have shown that positive affect predicts customer behaviors, for example, positive word-of-mouth and revisit intention. Gracia et al. (2011) examined the role of positive affect in creating customer loyalty for hotels and restaurants, while Kemp et al. (2012) showed that positive affect derived from advertisement leads to positive consumer attitude and behavioral intentions.

Numerous studies applying the theory of emotion and adaptation (e.g., Lazarus, 1991) to discuss the role of affect in consumer behavior have shown how emotional responses connect appraisal to behavioral intention. Empirical studies have supported the mediating role of positive affect in explaining consumers' decision making. For example, positive affect mediates the relationship between service quality perception (appraisal) and customer loyalty (Gracia et al., 2011).

2.6. Patronage intention

Service studies have shown that patronage intention is crucial to the success of service organizations. Therefore, patronage intention is one of the most commonly tested dependent variables in service studies, particularly pertaining to hospitality businesses such as restaurants and hotels. Patronage intention refers to the likelihood of a person visiting a place (e.g., shop or restaurant) and recommending it to others (Zeithaml et al., 1996). As consumption attitude and behavior are complex phenomena, various factors contribute to patronage intention; factors such as service interaction or atmospherics quality determine patronage intention, and layers of a mediator such as perceived value or emotions lead to patronage intention (Baker et al., 2002).

The growing popularity of sustainable consumption has resulted in an emerging body of literature investigating the valuables that affect consumers' behavioral intentions to patronage and purchase sustainable products (Agag et al., 2020). Particularly, in the context of hotels, patronage intention relating to sustainable consumption has been investigated with such variables as beliefs, norms, and subjective control (i.e., major variables used in the Theory of Planned Behavior; Ajzen, 1991). For example, existing studies have found that one's beliefs induce the intention to stay at green hotels through attitude and behavioral control and risk perceptions influence the intention of guests to stay at a green luxury hotel (Nimri et al., 2020; Peng & Chen, 2019). Similarly, Line and Hanks (2016) contend that one's beliefs either indirectly through attitude or directly influence the patronage intention of green hotels.

Although the impact of a broad range of individual factors on patronage intention toward sustainable consumption seems to be evident, there are still few studies on local food consumption examining consumers' responses to restaurants sourcing locally (Bacig & Young, 2019). Further, there is a discrepancy between intentions and behaviors in consuming green products (Agag et al., 2020). The intention-behavior gap is possibly reduced by framing a message(s) which increases the contextuality of the intention; research suggests that message framing and presentation affect one's attitudes toward sustainable consumption, thereby influencing consumer behavior (Line et al., 2016).

3. Hypothesis development

Restaurant advertisements have become a challenge because consumers have an array of options. Advertisements using the words "fresh and healthy ingredients" or "environmentally friendly" may not be

enough for RSLs to generate consumer traffic. Prior studies relating to local food consumption in restaurants have tried to find the factors contributing to such consumption behavior and perception toward RSLs (Kim & Huang, 2021). Studies argue that consumers perceive local food as having high quality (e.g., fresh ingredients) and enhancing health (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015). This explains why local food has become synonymous with “healthier, fresher, and better” (Lillywhite & Simonson, 2014). While this suggests that consumers seek self-benefit from local food consumption, we also show that consumers perceive local food as supporting the community and sustainability. Other benefits of local food consumption have been popularly shown in media communication; for example, state government websites emphasize the other benefits of local food consumption (e.g., helping local farmers). While there is a strong demand for RSLs, an overall effective communication strategy for *local sourcing* may determine the success of restaurants in the competitive restaurant market. However, research on promotion and advertising for RSLs is scant (Vieregge et al., 2007).

Although both self-benefit and other-benefit appeals induce consumers to purchase local food, prior studies have shown that focusing on other-benefit appeals greatly influences consumer attitude and behavior, particularly in terms of green products or public accountability (White & Simpson, 2013). For example, Chen et al. (2020) and Tih et al. (2016) found that focusing on other-benefit rather than a self-benefit appeals is more effective in encouraging consumers to purchase green products. As regards charity involving monetary donations, other-benefit (vs. self-benefit) appeals are found more effective, as other-benefit appeals focusing on public accountability increase consumers' public self-awareness. In turn, other-benefit appeals enhance consumers' positive responses to advertising messages related to self-benefit appeals (White & Peolza, 2009). Considering the two motives of local food consumption (i.e., for self- or other-benefit), we propose that local food consumption is the context for public accountability (e.g., supporting local business, Green & Peolza, 2014). Thus, a message with other-benefit appeal may have greater influence on consumer responses such as perceptions, attitudes, and/or behavior than self-benefit appeal messages in advertising local food. Additionally, perceived authenticity can be motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The crux of authentic motivation may not be the satisfaction of personal pleasure, but the genuine desire to help others (Barasch et al., 2014). That is, consumers may consider restaurants more reliable and trustworthy when they support the local community by consuming locally produced food. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Other-benefit appeals in a local food advertisement will elicit higher (a) perceived authenticity, (b) positive affect, and (c) patronage intention than would self-benefit appeals.

The efficacy of benefit appeals is contextual and contingent; consumers respond differently to self-benefit and other-benefit appeals depending on their goal compatibility (Gao et al., 2020). While some studies have correlated self-benefit appeal with promotion focus, others have demonstrated that other-benefit appeal is comparable with prevention focus (e.g., Higgins, 1998; Kareklas et al., 2014). For instance, in charitable donations, individuals concerned with their public accountability or self-image are most likely to respond to other-benefit (vs. self-benefit) appeals, whereas those not concerned with public accountability or self-image respond to self-benefit appeals (White & Peolza, 2009). Lee et al. (2000) found the individuals with interdependent self-construal, who are characterized as focusing on the betterment of community as individuals with other-benefit behavior (Fiske et al., 1998), are more responsive to prevention-focused (vs. promotion-focused) information.

Thus, other-benefit appeal with prevention focus increases the consumers' positive responses to purchasing local food. Aaker and Lee (2001) delineated the principles of self-regulatory focus, showing that individuals with accessible interdependent self-view (focusing on others) are persuaded more by prevention-focused information. Thus,

customers can be persuaded by a prevention-focused local food advertisement that focuses on other-benefit appeal. The compatibility between other-benefit appeal and prevention focus is especially salient in local food consumption because a unique consumer group, *locavores*, holds a shared ideology of supporting their local community (i.e., being other-benefit-oriented) (Lang et al., 2014). Thus, a prevention-focused message for RSLs can be more persuasive when it comes with other-benefit appeal.

Unlike an effective prevention-focused advertisement with other-benefit appeal in the RSL context, promotion-focused information leads to favorable responses regardless of benefit appeal. This is because local food consumption is likely to extend beyond self-benefit and include other-benefit appeal (Kareklas et al., 2014). This argument is concurrent with the motives driving local food consumption with public accountability. Such promotional motives may diminish the focus of specific self-benefit and other-benefit appeals. Thus, the focus of self-benefit and other-benefit appeals may not be registered if they are featured with promotion focus. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2. When a local food advertisement includes a prevention-focused message, other-benefit appeals (vs. self-benefit appeals) elicit higher (a) perceived authenticity, (b) positive affect, and (c) patronage intention.

H3. For local food advertisements that include a promotion-focused message, there is no difference between self-benefit and other-benefit appeal in terms of consumer response.

Consumer behavior studies utilizing communication approaches have documented emotions as mediating between advertisement content effect and consumer behavior. In a seminal work, Holbrook and Batra (1987) argue that emotional responses mediated the relationship between advertisement content and consumer attitude. Similarly, Shimp and Stuart (2004) report that affect mediated the relationship between advertising and purchase intention. As for regulatory focus, researchers have indicated that people may find advertisements easier to process and appropriate when the messages fit their regulatory focus (Lee & Aaker, 2004). This fit effect leads to positive affective responses to objects and enhances favorable attitudes and behavioral intention (Florack & Scarabis, 2006). Although authenticity is essential to advertising effectiveness (Becker et al., 2019), developing authenticity in advertising is challenging because the nature of advertising is mass communication, which typically undermines authenticity (Beverland & Luxton, 2005). We focus on authenticity because of a recent consumer concern on a local food claim of restaurants (Shafeizadeh & Tao, 2020). Authenticity in this study is operationalized as consumers' perception of whether RSLs deliver what they promise in message advertisements. Furthermore, it is a multidimensional variable (Bruhn et al., 2012).

However, prior studies have found that advertising elicits an affective response from consumers (So et al., 2015) and thereby influence their attitude or behavior toward a product or brand. For example, Beverland et al. (2008) argue that consumers develop authenticity from certain cues such as color or messages that influence their behavioral intentions. In a literature review examining television advertisements across brands, Becker et al. (2019) found that the authenticity of advertisements influences consumer behavior. In particular, when an advertisement reflects the brand's essence (e.g., image, slogan, or colors), the message has a positive effect on sales consistency. From the above discussions, we thus propose that perceived authenticity and positive consumer affect mediate the interactive effect of benefit appeals and regulatory focus on consumers' patronage of RSLs. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis. Fig. 1 illustrates the research framework of this study.

H4. Perceived authenticity (a) and positive affect (b) mediate the interactive effect of benefit appeal and regulatory focus on patronage intention.

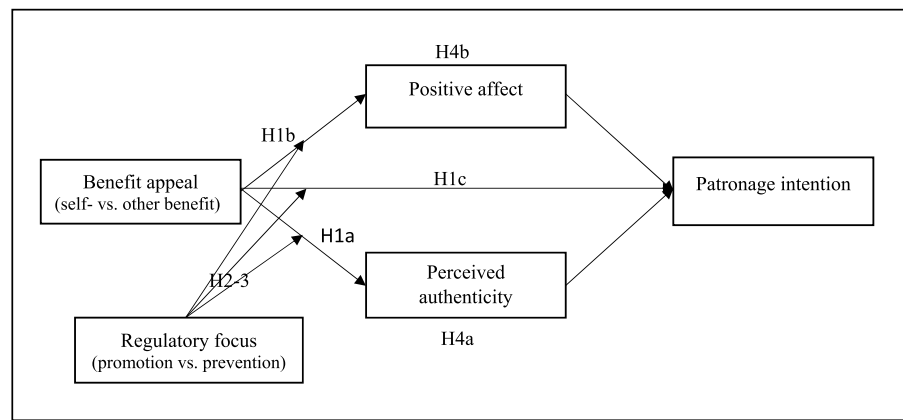


Fig. 1. Research framework.

4. Method

4.1. Study 1

4.1.1. Research design and participants

To test **H1**, we employ a one-factor (benefit appeal: self vs. other) between-subjects design with a scenario-based approach. We recruit 149 participants from consumer panels of a U.S. market research company Dynata. Of the participants, 62.4% were female, 56.4% were married, 45.6% were baby boomers aged 55–73 years, and 24.8% were aged 23–38 years. The majority of participants were Caucasian (80.5%) and 35.6% had a bachelor's degree. Approximately 72.5% of participants worked full-time and 34.2% had an annual household income of \$ 50,000–\$ 100,000. Participants reported to perceive locally grown food to be good ($M = 5.83$) and important ($M = 5.22$).

The participants were directed to the online survey page at Qualtrics and randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. Prior to the experiments, participants were informed with the definition of locally sourced food. Each scenario was presented as an advertisement for Restaurant W that served locally sourced food. The advertisements had a series of pictures of food provided by Restaurant W. Participants were asked to consider the time they would take looking for a local restaurant, and to review the advertisements very carefully. Extant literature has demonstrated that two distinct self-views (e.g., self- and other-benefit) can be activated through situational manipulations (Aaker & Williams, 1998). In addition, some motives of green product consumption are altruistic reasons such as environmental benefits (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Schultz, 2001). Thus, for the self-benefit appeal condition, the advertisements for the local food restaurant stated that choosing Restaurant W is “a personal health-conscious choice.” For the other-benefit appeal condition, the advertisements asserted that selecting Restaurant W is “a local community-conscious choice.” The designed manipulations were checked for their reality and falsifiability by restaurant managers. After exploring the advertisement messages of the local food restaurant, participants completed a self-administered questionnaire on the dependent variables, manipulation check, and demographics.

4.1.2. Measures

The measurement items to assess the variables were adapted from previous studies. To assess the manipulation of benefit appeal in the advertisement messages for the local food restaurant, two items (i.e., “The ad message highlights the local community's interests or benefits” and “The ad message highlights individual's interests or benefits”) were adapted from White and Peolza (2009) in a 7-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree). Five items of perceived restaurant authenticity were employed from Bruhn et al. (2012) in a 7-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree).

To assess the consumers' positive affect, participants responded to four items from the study by Petrick (2002) on a 7-point rating scale (1: not at all; 7: very much so). Finally, two items were employed from Grewal et al. (2009) to measure patronage intention (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree).

We performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs ($\chi^2[41] = 96.804$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.361$, RMSEA = 0.082, IFI = 0.966, TLI = 0.955, and CFI = 0.965). The composite reliability scores of the variables exceeded the recommended standards, confirming construct reliability (Table 1). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct was over 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Further, for each variable, the AVE score was greater than the squared correlation coefficient between the pairs of constructs, confirming discriminant validity of the research constructs (Table 2).

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Manipulation check

An independent *t*-test suggested a significant difference between

Table 1
Measurement model statistics (Study 1/Study 2).

Variables	Std. Factor Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived authenticity		.939/.943	.755/.769
● My experience with this restaurant makes me believe that it keeps its promises.	.846/.855		
● This restaurant delivers what it promises.	.896/.907		
● This restaurant's promises are credible.	.906/.888		
● This brand makes reliable promises.	.894/.904		
● This restaurant is very reliable.	.798/.829		
Positive affect		.957/.962	.848/.865
● This restaurant makes me feel good.	.944/.938		
● This restaurant makes me delighted.	.919/.943		
● The restaurant gives me a sense of joy.	.933/.948		
● The restaurant gives me happiness.	.886/.889		
Patronage intention		.805/.880	.725/.786
● I would be willing to pay more for this restaurant.	.754/.854		
● The likelihood that I would visit this restaurant is very high.	.884/.918		

Table 2
Convergent and discriminant validity (Study 1/Study 2).

	1	2	3
1. Perceived authenticity	.755/.769		
2. Positive affect	.516/.605	.848/.865	
3. Patronage intention	.442/.426	.715/.661	.725/.786

Note: Diagonal entries are the AVE for each construct.
Off-diagonal entries are the squared correlation coefficients between constructs.

benefit appeals. Specifically, participants found the advertisements with self-benefit appeals delivering more individual interest than those with other-benefit appeals ($M_{\text{self vs. other}} = 5.12$ vs. 4.44 , $t = 2.910$, $p < .01$) and the advertisements with other-benefit appeals delivering more local community interest than those with self-benefit appeals ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.66$ vs. 4.95 , $t = 3.096$, $p < .01$). This confirmed the manipulation check of benefit appeals.

4.2.2. Hypothesis testing

Additional t-tests to verify H1 showed that participants tended to perceive local food restaurants more authentic when viewing advertisements with other-benefit appeals than self-benefit appeals ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.23$ 4.62 , $t = 3.609$, $p < .001$). Moreover, advertisements with other-benefit appeals induced a higher level of positive affect ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.08$ vs. 4.24 , $t = 3.966$, $p < .001$) and patronage intention ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 4.92$ vs. 4.22 , $t = 3.201$, $p < .01$) toward local food restaurants compared to those with self-benefit appeals. Therefore, H1a, H1b, and H1c are supported.

4.3. Study 2

4.3.1. Research design and participants

We use a 2 (benefit appeal: self vs. other) $\times$ 2 (regulatory focus: promotion vs. prevention) between-subjects experiment design to test H2 and H3. We first recruited 251 participants from U.S. consumer panels in a market research company. Majority of the participants were women (61%) and married (55.8%); 39.8% were baby boomers aged 55–73 years, 27.9% were Gen X (39–54 years), and 24.3% were millennials (23–38 years). Of these, 78.9% were Caucasian and 37.5% held a bachelor's degree. Most of them worked full-time (70.9%) and had an annual household income of \$ 50,000–100,000 (39%). Participants reported to perceive locally grown food to be good ($M = 5.88$) and important ($M = 5.18$).

Once they arrived at the online survey, the participants were instructed with the information about local sourced food and randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. As in Study 1, Study 2 manipulated the benefit appeals with focus on either a “personal health-conscious choice” or “local community-conscious choice.” The regulatory focus of the advertising messages was also manipulated. In the promotion condition, advertisements with self-benefit appeal stated that Restaurant W serving locally “promotes a healthy lifestyle,” “increases health benefits of more nutrient-dense locally sourced foods,” and “enhances the dining experience with the superior taste of locally sourced foods.” The advertisements with promotion focus and other-benefit appeal asserted that Restaurant W “promotes a vibrant local economy,” “strengthens the local food culture,” and “achieves a healthy local food system.” Those with prevention-focus and self-benefit appeal indicated that Restaurant W “avoids the pitfalls of an unhealthy lifestyle,” “protects individual’s health by unselecting ultra-processed foods,” and “reduces unhealthy experiences.” Likewise, advertisements with prevention-focus and other-benefit appeal stated that Restaurant W “prevents the decline of the local economy,” “protects the loss of local food culture,” and “reduces the environmental footprint of foods caused by long food-miles” (see the appendix). The reality and feasibility of the designed stimuli were checked and confirmed by industry managers. After exposure to the advertisements, each participant completed a self-

administered questionnaire measuring the dependent constructs, manipulation checks, and demographic information.

4.3.2. Measures

The same manipulation check benefit-appeal items used in Study 1 were employed in Study 2. In addition, the study adapted three items from Poels and Dewitte (2008) on the participants’ perceptions of advertisements developed to assess the manipulation of regulatory focus using a 7-point semantic differential scale (“avoiding something negative – attaining something positive,” “more about protection – more about enhancement,” and “more about prevention – more about promotion”). The research variables such as perceived authenticity, positive affect, and patronage intention were measured using the same items used in Study 1.

We conducted a CFA to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs ($\chi^2[41] = 145.303$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 3.544$, RMSEA = 0.085, IFI = 0.966, TLI = 0.954, and CFI = 0.965). Construct reliability was confirmed, with the variables’ composite reliability scores exceeding the recommended standards (Table 1). The AVE of each construct was over 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, for each construct, the AVE score was greater than the squared correlation coefficients between pairs of variables, supporting discriminant validity of the research constructs (Table 2).

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Manipulation check

We carried out an independent t-test to confirm the advertisement messages’ benefit appeal and regulatory focus manipulation. Participants found the messages with self-benefit appeals focusing more on individual interests or benefits compared to those with other-benefit appeals ($M_{\text{self vs. other}} = 5.29$ 4.39 , $t = 4.711$, $p < .001$). However, participants found the messages with other-benefit appeal delivering a higher level of local community interest or benefits compared to those with self-benefit appeal ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.71$ 4.99 , $t = 3.860$, $p < .001$). An additional t-test suggested that participants found the promotion-focused messages more positive and focusing on enhancement and promotion compared to prevention-focused messages ($M_{\text{promotion vs. prevention}} = 4.73$ vs. 4.21 , $t = 2.737$, $p < .01$).

4.4.2. Hypothesis testing

We also carried out a two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to analyze whether regulatory focus moderates the benefit appeals effect embedded in advertisement messages on consumer approaches to local food restaurants. The analysis showed a significant interaction between benefit appeal and regulatory focus ($F = 3.725$, $p < .05$, Wilk’s $\Lambda = 0.956$). The between-subject effects for the interaction of benefit appeal and regulatory focus were significant on perceived authenticity ($F = 10.357$, $p < .01$), positive affect ($F = 4.292$, $p < .05$), and patronage intention ($F = 4.639$, $p < .05$).

The planned contrasts showed that participants found a local food restaurant using prevention-focused advertisements more authentic with other-benefit appeal than self-benefit appeal ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.44$ 4.79 , $t = 2.95$, $p < .01$), supporting H2a. They also showed a higher positive affect toward local food restaurant when the messages focused on prevention focus with other-benefit appeal rather than self-benefit appeal ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 5.16$ 4.46 , $t = 2.56$, $p < .05$), supporting H2b. Furthermore, participants showed higher patronage toward local food restaurants when the advertisements included prevention-focus with other-benefit appeal rather than self-benefit appeal ($M_{\text{other vs. self}} = 4.90$ vs. 4.25 , $t = 2.28$, $p < .05$), supporting H2c. The local food restaurant’s promotion-focused advertisements, however, showed no significant differences in consumer responses between self-benefit and other-benefit appeals ($p > .05$), supporting H3.

Finally, we used a PROCESS model, introduced by Hayes (2013, Model 8), with a bootstrapping sample of 10,000 to test the mediation

effects of perceived authenticity and positive affect. The model results suggested a significant indirect benefit appeal and regulatory focus effect on patronage intention through positive consumer affect ($B = 0.5794$, $SE = 0.2799$, 95% CI [0.0231, 1.1326]), supporting H4b. Specifically, the indirect effect of benefit appeals – positive affect – patronage intention was higher for prevention-focused messages with other-benefit appeal than self-benefit appeal ($B = 0.5453$, $SE = 0.2202$, 95% CI [0.1248, 0.9870], Fig. 2). Nevertheless, the indirect effect for promotion-focused messages was not significant because the 95% CI contained 0 ($B = -0.0341$, $SE = 0.1834$, 95% CI [-0.3839, 0.3433]). Further, the interactive effect of benefit appeal and regulatory focus on patronage intention via perceived authenticity was insignificant ($B = 0.0711$, $SE = 0.0934$, 95% CI [-0.0994, 0.2732]), thus rejecting H4a.

5. Discussion

Despite the sourcing locally trend in the restaurant industry, how restaurants position and deliver it to consumers effectively remains unclear. Drawing from regulatory focus theory and concepts of self-benefit and other-benefit, this study shows that message frames have different effects depending on their congruency with the message recipients' goals. Specifically, this study comes to the following conclusions. (1) Other-benefit appeals have a stronger influence on consumer behavior for RSLs. (2) When benefit appeals are used with regulatory focus messages, other-benefit appeals (vs. self-benefit appeals) paired with prevention-focused message are more effective in advertising RSLs, but self-benefit and other-benefit appeals show no difference when paired with promotion-focused messages. (3) Positive affect mediates the interactive effects of benefit appeals and regulatory focus on consumers' patronage intention, but perceived authenticity does not mediate the relationship.

Although there is the intention-behavior gap in consuming green products, research has indicated that the consumption behavior of green products can depend on the ad context in which consumers encounter it (Pittman et al., 2021). For example, consumers may purchase green products because the ad makes them think differently (Segev et al., 2015). The findings of this research are overall support the claim arguing that messages of a brand in green marketing influence the perceived authenticity of consumers toward the brand (Morhart et al., 2015). The findings of Study 1 are consistent with the results of the communication model proposed by Holbrook and Batra (1987), indicating that advertising messages can determine consumers' emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Specifically, this study endorses White and Peolza's (2009) conclusion that other-benefit appeals are more effective than self-benefit appeals when the messages are publicly accountable (White & Peolza, 2009). While previous studies suggested that self-benefit appeals incite local food consumption (e.g., Ostrom, 2006; Schneider & Francis, 2005), this study demonstrates that other-benefit

appeals are effective in increasing consumers' favorable responses (authenticity, positive affect, and patronage intention) to RSLs. This difference in benefit appeal effects may be linked to contextual focus. Previous studies are associated with the agri-food system factors such as farmers' market or organic foods, with focus on improving individual health or nutrition (i.e., personal benefits) through local food consumption. Thus, the value of self-benefit appeals must have been emphasized in these studies. However, this study focuses on restaurants. Typically, restaurants are a part of the local community where people interact with one another. The impact of restaurants on the community and their presence naturally highlight their relationship with others. Thus, this study's emphasis on the community from the restaurant context may magnify the effects of other-benefit appeals with regard to RSLs.

By extending the effect of benefit appeals, Study 2 investigates regulatory focus as a boundary condition for benefit appeals to lead to highly favorable consumer responses. In particular, Study 2 shows that consumers are more likely to develop perceptions of authenticity, positive affect, and patronage intention to RSLs if they deliver other-benefit (vs. self-benefit) appeals with prevention-focused messages. Further, the effectiveness of local food campaigns lies in the underlying benefits appeal–positive affect–patronage intention mechanism, particularly for prevention-focused messages. This suggests that relative to perceptual responses, emotional responses play a significant role in mediating the advertising effects on consumers' positive behavioral intentions toward RSLs. This is similar to the finding that positive emotions such as pride relate one's beliefs in local food to positive consumer behavioral intentions (Kim & Huang, 2021).

Interestingly, perceived authenticity has no mediating effect on the relationship between benefit appeal and regulatory focus or patronage intention. That is, the effectiveness of local food advertising is hardly explained by the benefit appeal–perceived authenticity–patronage intention mechanism regardless of regulatory focus type. This finding is consistent with a previous study on the mediating role of perceived authenticity in the relationship between iconic cues and behavioral intention (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018). Iconic cues, that is, context cues embedded in marketing and promotional messages, are proposed to encourage consumers' willingness to buy through perceived authenticity (Carsana & Jolibert, 2018; Leigh et al., 2006). However, perceived authenticity fails to serve as mediator in such a relationship. Similarly, the two types of content characteristics, benefit appeal and regulatory focus, cannot impact consumers' patronage intention through perceptions of authenticity. Thus, consumers' perceptions of authenticity evoked by given iconic cues on local food campaigns may not be sufficient to create a higher level of patronage intention. Consumers may therefore need additional communication support such as objective information (e.g., data or identified news source) supporting the claims of RSLs (Morhart et al., 2015) and thereby increase their perceived

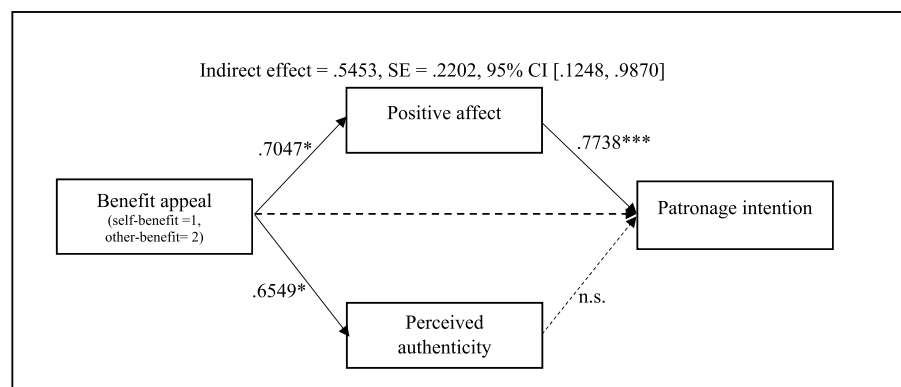


Fig. 2. Significantly moderated mediation for prevention-focus group
Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

authenticity and in turn enhance their behavioral responses.

6. Conclusion

This study designed a theory-driven strategic approach and tested its effect in advertising restaurants sourcing locally. The study presents a conceptual basis for the antecedents and consequences of positive affect and authenticity in the context of restaurant sourcing locally.

6.1. Theoretical implications

Local food studies in the context of restaurants have mostly been descriptive and lacking in theoretical base, thus underscoring the need for a better method to communicate with consumers patronizing RSLs. This study extends the previous work in this area by developing and examining a more convincing advertisement message system for RSLs. To the best of our knowledge, this is one of the few empirical studies investigating the influence of local food campaigns on consumer emotions, perceptions, and behavioral responses. This study provides evidence to guide restaurants in advertising and attracting consumers, considering the current local food phenomenon and future restaurant business. Although the theories considered in this study are widely used in communication, not many studies have investigated the interactive effects of benefit appeal and regulatory focus in advertising RSLs. This study provides theoretical explanations on how to advertise RSLs.

The current study also contributes to the research on the self-other perspective by investigating a matching effect with regulatory focus appeal. The literature on green products or public accountability has investigated the effectiveness of self-benefit versus other-benefit ad appeals (e.g., White & Peolza, 2009) but has revealed inconclusive findings as to which ad appeals are more persuasive. Prior research has examined the possible moderators that may affect the self-other benefit message effects, including nostalgic emotion (Kim & Childs, 2021), social exclusion (Baek et al., 2019), public concerns (White & Peolza, 2009), and culture (Nelson et al., 2006). Our findings added to the literature by identifying how benefit appeals and regulatory focus work jointly in advertising messages for RSLs.

Consequently, we add a new perspective to the communication literature. Existing research has shown that promotion focus is more effective with self-benefit rather than other-benefit appeal (e.g., Aaker & Lee, 2001). However, this may not be applicable to local food consumption. We also add to the agricultural economic literature by showing that promotion focus alone is sufficient without self- or other-benefit appeal in local food communication. This study provides a novel perspective of prevention focus serving as boundary condition in which other-benefit appeal is more effective than self-benefit appeal in the context of local food advertising messages.

Finally, the current work is the first to investigate a key mediator—positive affect—and to explain how the two factors—benefit appeals and regulatory focus—interactively shape a favorable behavioral intention toward RSLs. Although researchers have argued that positive feelings are aroused when an advertisement claims fit consumer regulatory focus (Florack & Scarabis, 2006), the literature has no supporting empirical evidence for this. This study shows advertisement conditions that evoke positive emotions in RSLs. In doing this, the current research sheds new light on gaps in previous research by offering more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanism.

6.2. Managerial implications

As local food consumption becomes a critical part of restaurants, the effective communication of “sourcing locally” to consumers is important. The results of this study confirm that not all local food messages are equally effective when they come to the evaluation of the messages. The current local food literature in the context of restaurants has limitations in managerial approaches to effective advertising strategies. This study

suggests that RSLs use prevention focus with other-benefit appeal to deliver credibility in local sourcing and thereby generate more positive responses; this tactic may be simple but can be effective.

Currently, advertisements in the context of local food use neutral keywords such as “buy local and eat local” or “fresh from the source.” These messages may not be as effective in persuading consumers to consume local food as expected. Some advertisement messages for local food consumption claim to “prevent the decline of local economy” or “protect the loss of local food culture,” focusing on other-benefit appeal with prevention focus. This type of messages can increase consumers’ positive affect and lead to their patronage intention. Such an approach can differentiate the advertisements using promotion focus only or having neutral terms.

The findings of this study can be particularly useful for small local RSLs with limited financial resources for advertisement. Small local RSLs can use taglines such as “protect the loss of local restaurant” or “reduce long food miles, protect local food culture.” Such messages can be more persuasive to visit local RSLs. Local RSLs wanting to focus on other-benefit frames should use prevention focus with benefit appeal. Also, those taglines can be effective content marketing material. Using those taglines, local restaurateurs can create a “story” or “theme” by developing videos (e.g., recipe corner with local ingredients) or micro-blogging (e.g., meet our supplier). This marketing strategy helps to establish a local restaurant’s credibility and trustworthiness in offering information that consumers may have unexpected hear from a restaurant.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study has some limitations. Our intent to generalize the findings has limitations because we used a specific sample from the United States. Given that human behavior is influenced by various factors (Aaker & Lee, 2001), the results of this study may not be generalized. Due to broader criticisms of conventional food system and greater accessibility to affordable yet nutritious food, local food networks in U.S. have been expanding (Sadler et al., 2015). With similar culture of food value, Australian consumers are found to have similar egoistic and altruistic motivations related to health consciousness and environmental consciousness (Birch et al., 2018). While our research results could be replicated by using survey sample from Australia, it would be worth exploring countries with different local food system. Therefore, cross-cultural studies should be conducted by comparing countries with growing local food networks to others with limited local food access. Furthermore, the findings of this study are limited to advertisements for sit-down RSLs where social interaction and public accountability (i.e., e.g., supporting local business) are visible; such contextual settings may be helpful in generating a strong effect of other-benefit messages on consumer behavior. Self-benefit appeals can influence restaurants handling only pick-up or delivery because such services relate to consumer convenience. Thus, future studies should examine the interactive effects of benefit and regulatory focus appeals on different types of restaurants.

In addition, we examined the research framework of this study in a scenario-based online experiment setting. Online experiment cannot control over the setting in which participants provide their responses. Moreover, the current study does not directly assess participants’ real behaviors, but behavioral intentions were measured as a proxy for actual behaviors. Because there might be a substantial gap between behavioral intentions and actual behavior in the context of RSLs, the current study may provide limited practical values to the restaurant managers or to the policy makers. A field study examining an actual behavior will add our understanding of how consumers differently respond to a local food ad with different benefits in a real-world setting.

Furthermore, this study tested only the consumers’ patronage intention toward RSLs. Further studies need to investigate how advertisement messages affect consumers’ willingness to pay for locally sourced menus or restaurant rating. Overall, it will be interesting to

investigate how advertising messages framing a restaurant’s green action plans or the process of getting local ingredients can reduce the intention-behavior gap in sustainable consumption. Also, topics relating to greenwashing, such as the effect of additional information on perceived deceptions (greenwashing) or consumer response to

greenwashing, can be good research agenda.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Appendix A. Self-benefit promotion-focused advertising message



Restaurant W serving Locally Sourced Food
Choosing our restaurant means a personal health-conscious choice:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle
- Increase your health benefits of more nutrient dense locally sourced foods
- Enhance your dining experience with the superior taste of locally sourced foods

Appendix B. Self-benefit prevention-focused advertising message



Restaurant W serving Locally Sourced Food
Choosing our restaurant means a personal health-conscious choice:

- Avoid the pitfalls of unhealthy lifestyle
- Protect your health by unselecting ultra-processed foods
- Reduce your unhealthy dining experiences

Appendix C. Other-benefit promotion-focused advertising



Restaurant W serving Locally Sourced Food
Choosing our restaurant means a local community-conscious choice:

- Promote a vibrant local economy
- Strengthen the local food culture
- Achieve a healthy local food system

Appendix D. Other-benefit prevention-focused advertising message



Restaurant W serving Locally Sourced Food
Choosing our restaurant means a local community-conscious choice:

- Prevent the decline of local economy
- Protect the loss of local food culture
- Reduce the environmental footprint of foods caused by long food-miles

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