Stimulating healthy food choices in the worksite cafeteria through nudging and social marketing strategies

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Elizabeth Velema (1984), born in Wageningen, The Netherlands, graduated secondary school, Atheneum Pantarijn in Wageningen in 2002. Velema studied Human Movement Sciences at the University of Groningen. After finishing the two-year research master she moved to Amsterdam to expand her knowledge of a healthy lifestyle by conducting the master of Health Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Velema combined two directions in the master: prevention and public health and nutrition and health. During this second master she completed an internship at the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) on the health effects of weight cycling, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Health.

A food choice may seem a conscious act: you want something tasty, maybe healthy or ready-to-eat and preferably not too expensive. However, a lot of food choices are made quick and automatically, without well deliberated considerations what to choose, for example choices made in the worksite cafeteria.

Besides the availability of food itself, food choices are influenced by many individual factors like habits, food preferences, and (sub)culture. In addition to those elements, environmental factors like the way food is displayed, the following order in which you pass by the food products, laying in front or at the back, being available in abundance or being scarce, are also steering food choices.

Thus, also when having lunch at work, peoples’ food choices are influenced by the environment of the worksite cafeteria. Many employees use the worksite cafeteria numerous times during their lives, which has a significant impact on their food intake. It is therefore essential to investigate how worksite cafeterias can support healthier food choices and can contribute to the prevention of overweight.

The studies outlined in this thesis describe the development and evaluation of the intervention called The healthy worksite cafeteria. The aim of the intervention is to entourage Dutch employees to purchase healthier lunch items as an effect of nudging and social marketing strategies.
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