The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Department of Marketing

How Coupons Impact Children’s Healthy Choices in a Developing Economy:
An Immediate Boost, A Long-Term Deficit, and a Lesson on Message Design

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Date: 7th May 2021 (Friday)
Time: 10:00a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Venue: Online Meeting via Zoom
Invitation Link: https://hkust.zoom.us/j/2358770000?pwd=OFNUS3RYOS9VTk11VDRSYkVtRU10UT09

This research examines how coupons—a classic marketing tool—affect children’s choice of healthy options in a developing economy. We partnered with UNICEF to launch three field experiments at three elementary schools in Panamá among a total of 2,242 children. Three insights emerged: (1) Monetary coupons promoting healthy options effectively increased immediate demand among Panamanian children 6-12 years old, replicating previous findings documented in developed economies; (2) Different from findings in developed economies, however, a long-term deficit occurred after repeated launch of coupons in Panamá, except when the promoted product was relatively inexpensive compared to other options; (3) Coupon messages that required more cognitively demanding processing (i.e., System 2 processing) rather than intuitive processing (i.e., System 1 processing) were more effective among older Panamanian children, whereas the reverse occurred among younger Panamanian children. This research enriches the dialogue on health interventions and childhood obesity by investigating a unique and understudied context of a developing economy. Furthermore, we advance the extant understanding of the long-term consequences of incentive-based health interventions, offering rich avenues for future research at the intersection of field interventions, children’s healthy eating, and segmentation and targeting.