

University of Groningen

## Deserving to Indulge and Donate: Drivers of Virtuous Consumer Behavior

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DOI:  
[10.33612/diss.191424739](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.191424739)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
van der Heide, M. (2021). *Deserving to Indulge and Donate: Drivers of Virtuous Consumer Behavior*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen, SOM research school. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.191424739>

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# 1

**Chapter 1 | Introduction**

Unless we broaden the set of outcomes we study and change how we interpret marketing's role, marketing scholars risk becoming detached from many of the most important challenges facing the world today. (Chandy et al., 2021, p. 1)

Societal challenges such as growing obesity rates and income disparities are both positively and negatively influenced by consumer behavior and marketing actions (Kotler & Levy, 1969). As a negative case in point, global increases in the consumption of processed calorie-dense foods (Pan et al., 2006; WHO, 2020) significantly contribute to weight gain, with up to half of the global adult population estimated to be overweight or obese by 2030 (Finkelstein et al., 2012). As a more positive example, Dutch food banks distributed about 44 million donated food packages to consumers with insufficient disposable income in 2019 (Voedselbanken Nederland, 2021), a target group that represented over 6% of the Dutch population that year (CBS, 2020).

To help alleviate societal challenges, today's organizations increasingly focus on corporate social responsibility and "win-win" strategies—corporate practices that maximize innovation and growth while also offering greater benefits to society—which have become critical to their corporate reputation and success (Porter & Kramer, 2019; Torres et al., 2013; Webster & Lusch 2013). For example, Coca-Cola has invested an increasing share of marketing dollars into its low- and no-sugar variants (Forbes.com, 2018), and Procter and Gamble established a partnership with UNICEF to aid in the global elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus by providing one tetanus vaccination for each purchase of Pampers (Vanhamme et al., 2012).

The American Marketing Association acknowledges the close ties between societal challenges, marketing, and consumer behavior, as it has updated its definition of the field by stating that "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for

customers, clients, partners, *and society at large* [emphasis added]”. Following this trend, a 2021 Journal of Marketing special issue was themed “Better marketing for a better world” (Chandy et al., 2021). Similarly, Journal of Consumer Psychology’s forthcoming special issue is themed “Consumer psychology for the greater good”. These trends are also related to the transformative consumer research movement, described by David Mick as “consumer research in the service of quality of life” (2006, p. 3).

This dissertation focuses on determinants of quality of life that fall under the umbrella term of *virtuous* consumer behaviors. Virtuous behaviors are behaviors that provide delayed benefits to the self or indirect benefits to society or others and are in line with standards, such as ideals, values, morals, and social expectations (Baumeister et al., 2007; Read et al., 1999). However, virtuous behaviors concurrently come at a (short-term) cost to the self (e.g., the investment of time, effort, or money), and often require self-control (Hoch & Loewenstein, 1991). Hence, virtuous behaviors involve inherent dilemmas. The behavior may, for instance, involve a trade-off between short-term or delayed benefits to the self, or between benefits (vs. costs) to the self or others. For example, a virtuous consumer might forego a tempting creamy ice dessert in favor of a low-fat yogurt dessert. As another example, a consumer might donate money to charity instead of saving it for herself.

The virtuous behaviors from these examples—healthier eating (Chapter 2) and prosocial behavior (Chapter 3)—are central to this dissertation. Past literature has already investigated various drivers of these forms of virtuous consumer behavior. For example, both healthier eating and prosocial behavior relate to individual factors such as active self-control (DeWall et al., 2008; Herman & Polivy, 2004), personal goals and values (Step toe et al., 1995; Schwartz, 2010), as well as environmental factors such as peer influence (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Kalavana et al., 2010) and marketing and

media campaigns (Chandon & Wansink, 2012; Wakefield et al., 2010). This list could easily be extended. However, in light of the inherent and complex tension between costs and benefits consumers face in each domain, important research gaps remain, pointing to relevant ways to understand and stimulate virtuous behavior.

With regard to the healthy eating domain, food choices often involve trade-offs between a short-term indulgence goal and a long-term health goal (Dhar & Simonson, 1999; Laran, 2010; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). This self-regulation dilemma could explain why many consumers continue to overconsume calories, and may imply that consumers also balance these goals across multiple choices. Indeed, the sequential-choice literature suggests that an initial choice can stimulate similar subsequent choices, *reinforcement*, or dissimilar choices, *balancing* (Huber et al., 2008). It remains unclear which dynamic effects dominate during longer sequences of choices and whether the effects apply to both category-level healthiness and within-category healthiness during a shopping trip.

With regard to the prosocial behavior domain, psychological entitlement has been identified as driver of reduced prosocial behavior (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014; Zitek et al., 2010). Consumers with a sense of psychological entitlement (hereafter *entitled consumers* for brevity) essentially feel that they deserve more than others, irrespective of their performance level (Campbell et al., 2004; Kivetz & Zheng, 2006; Naumann et al., 2002). Entitled consumers take a larger share of common goods (Campbell et al., 2004), are less likely to volunteer or help (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014; Zitek et al., 2010), and donate less to charity (Strong & Martin, 2014). Hence, they seem particularly inclined to prioritize own benefits over others' in navigating virtuous behavior dilemmas. Consequently, literature largely concludes that entitlement has a "pervasive and largely unconstructive impact on social behavior" (Campbell et al., 2004, p. 29). However, much remains to be understood about the

nature and malleability of this impact.

Together, literature from these domains suggests that the cost–benefit dilemma central to virtuous consumer behavior may be navigated differently from one moment to another, and from one consumer to another. Thus, these factors need to be taken into account when the aim is to successfully understand (and, ultimately, promote) virtuous behavior. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to shed further light on how dynamic effects and psychological entitlement shape food consumption and donation dilemmas—that is, to investigate when and why consumers feel “deserving to indulge and donate”. Overall, the following research question will be addressed: *What is the impact of past virtuous consumer behavior and psychological entitlement on current virtuous behavior, and how can virtuous consumer behavior be promoted?*

As discussed in the next two sections, both healthier eating and prosocial behavior are timely, relevant forms of virtuous behavior meeting all four criteria as they i) provide (delayed) benefits to the self, ii) provide benefits to society/others, and iii) are in line with societal standards, while iiiii) coming at a (short-term) cost to the self. In a subsequent section, various key contributions from both empirical chapters in this dissertation are discussed. These contributions may help enable the design of effective interventions to promote (sustained) healthier eating and prosocial behavior. The final section outlines the structure and content of the remaining chapters in this dissertation in more detail.

### **1.1 Healthier Eating as Virtuous Behavior**

With regard to the first criterion of virtuous behavior, delayed individual benefits, the benefits of healthier eating become apparent through the consequences of today’s worldwide obesity and overweight rates. The World Health Organization defines an individual as overweight when having a Body Mass Index (BMI)—the ratio

of one's weight relative to one's height—exceeding 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and as obese when having a BMI exceeding 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>, and highlights that obesity rates have nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016 (WHO, 2020). Being overweight or obese is the consequence of an imbalance between calories consumed and calories exerted, and it is related to negative health consequences and risks of chronic diseases such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and heart disease (Daviglius et al., 2006; Hill et al., 2003; Thorpe et al., 2010; Von Lengerke & Krauth, 2011). Hence, healthier eating offers a crucial delayed individual benefit by protecting individuals from illnesses.

Healthier diets also have significant benefits for society at large. First, one consumer's healthier eating exerts a social influence on other consumers, either facilitating or attenuating others' healthier choices by creating impression management desires or descriptive norms, among others (Herman et al., 2003). Second, healthier eating has substantial economic consequences. Obesity is estimated to be responsible for almost 10% of total annual medical expenditures in the United States—approximately \$147 billion (Finkelstein et al., 2009). In Europe, obesity-related healthcare costs are estimated to amount to €10.4 billion (Müller-Riemenschneider et al., 2008). Analyses demonstrate that encouraging and facilitating healthy eating behaviors may result in substantial economic savings (Anekwe & Rahkovsky, 2013).

Related to the third element of the virtuous consumer behavior definition, healthier eating is considered a desirable standard among policy makers, companies, and consumers. For example, the Netherlands is currently promoting active measures to stimulate healthier food purchases as part of the government's "Preventieakkoord" (prevention agreement; Rijksoverheid, 2018). Companies such as Nestlé aid in this promotion by introducing front-of-package labels such as Nutri-score labels to communicate nutritional information in an easy-to-understand format (Distrifood,

2019). Consumers favor healthier eating as well. For example, a recent global survey by The Consumer Goods Forum, Nielsen, and Boston Consulting Group (2020) found that 97% of the 7,000 surveyed consumers agree that their health is important to them, and FMI (2016) found that many consumers aim to replace high-calorie, high-fat foods with healthier alternatives.

Nonetheless, consumers struggle to put these aims into practice, as there are also (short-term) costs—both psychological and economic costs—to healthier eating. Unhealthy food is perceived to be tastier, and consequently often triggers an impulsive, short-term indulgence goal (Dhar & Simonson 1999; Laran 2010; Muraven & Baumeister 2000). Hence, overriding the temptation to indulge requires self-control (Trope & Fishbach, 2000). Furthermore, low-energy-density foods, which are generally considered healthier, are more costly per kilocalorie and have increased disproportionately in price compared to high-energy-density foods (Monsivais & Drewnowski, 2007). Thus, healthier eating meets all criteria of virtuous consumer behavior (see Table 1.1).

## **1.2 Prosocial Behavior as Virtuous Behavior**

Prosocial behavior—doing volunteer work, helping strangers and friends, donating blood, or even sacrificing one’s life for others—also meets the four criteria of virtuous consumer behavior. First, although prosocial behavior, by definition, mostly benefits others (Batson & Powell, 2003; Bénabou & Tirole, 2006), it does offer (delayed) benefits to the self as well. For example, donating to any charity may give the consumer a warm glow or inner happiness that results from doing good (Andreoni, 1990), or a *helper’s high* (Van der Linden, 2011). Helping others may also increase the likelihood that consumers receive needed help in return when they need it themselves (Nowak & Sigmund, 2005). A third individual benefit may be the fact that acting



prosocially can help signal to others that one possesses desirable traits, strengthening one's image (Ariely et al., 2009).

Second, prosocial acts offer many other-oriented, altruistic benefits (Batson & Powell, 2003), which remain highly relevant today. For example, even in countries with a relatively equal income distribution such as the Netherlands, the SWIID Gini index has increased from 24 to over 26 in the past 40 years (Brandolini & Smeeding, 2011; Solt, 2016) with over 1 million inhabitants at risk of poverty in 2019 (CBS, 2020). Income inequality slows economic growth, negatively affects health, and forms a barrier to quality institutions and schooling (Easterly, 2007; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015). Donations and volunteering may help alleviate such negative societal outcomes. Indeed, prosocial behaviors can enhance societal wealth (Knack & Keefer, 1997), affect the health and wellbeing of romantic partners (Le et al., 2018), make organizations perform better (Podsakoff et al., 1997), and even save strangers' lives (American Red Cross, 2020).

Third, prosocial behavior represents a desirable and universal societal standard. Research has long held that prosocial behavior relates to moral reasoning based on concepts of justice, fairness, rights, and obligations (Kohlberg, 1976), which can, with age, shape internalized prosocial values—prosocial values that transit into a consumer's personality (Staub, 1974). The value of benevolence is centrally valued across various religions and communities and it is admired from very early in life; even young infants prefer an individual that gives rather than takes (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the practice of “tithing” (i.e., giving 10% of one's income to church and to charity) is common among Catholics and Protestants (Forbes & Zambelli, 1997).

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<sup>1</sup> Yet, literature has debated about the existence of “pure altruism”, and conflicting notions on universal egoism (Mansbridge, 1990; Wallach & Wallach, 1983) are worth noting. See Batson & Powell (2003) for a review.

Fourth, prosocial behavior too comes at a cost to the self, usually in the form of time, effort, and/or money (Batson & Powell, 2003; Bénabou & Tirole, 2006). Therefore, prosocial opportunities often pose a dilemma between benefiting the self, in line with egoistic motives, and benefiting others, in line with altruistic motives, as the earlier example of a choice between donating money to charity or saving it for oneself illustrates. As exchange theories would suggest, the costlier the behavior becomes (e.g., a survey requiring more time to complete), the less likely consumers are to engage in it (Groves et al., 1992). Prosocial behavior may also elicit social costs, as overtly moral behavior can provoke annoyance and ridicule, or “do-gooder derogation” (Minson & Monin, 2012). Together, these benefits and costs lead to the conclusion that prosocial behavior also meets the criteria of virtuous consumer behavior (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1:** Healthier eating and prosocial behavior as virtuous consumer behaviors

Criterion	Healthier eating (Chapter 2)	Prosocial behavior (Chapter 3)
<b>Delayed benefits to the self</b>	Better mental health and lower incidence of chronic diseases (Daviglius et al., 2006)	“Warm glow of giving” (Andreoni, 1990); reciprocity (Nowak & Sigmund, 2005); image benefits (Ariely et al., 2009)
<b>Indirect benefits (to society or others)</b>	Social effects on others’ eating behavior (Herman et al., 2003); Reduced healthcare costs (Finkelstein et al., 2009)	Alleviating poverty (health) risks (Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015); Improving societal wealth (Knack & Keefer, 1997); Saving lives (American Red Cross, 2020)
<b>In line with standards</b>	Health is highly valued by consumers (The Consumer Goods Forum, 2020); health promotion through policy initiatives (Distrifood, 2009)	Prosociality as internalized value (Staub, 1974); “tithing” norms (Forbes & Zambelli, 1997); preference for prosocial others (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011)
<b>(Short-term) costs to the self</b>	Resisting indulgence goals (Dhar and Simonson 1999); healthy food is more expensive (Monsivais & Drewnowski, 2007)	Investing time, money, and/or effort (Batson & Powell, 2003; Bénabou & Tirole, 2006); risk of annoyance and ridicule (Minson & Monin, 2012)

### 1.3 Contributions of the Dissertation

This section introduces each chapter's specific contributions in more detail. As mentioned before, the dilemmas central to virtuous consumer behavior are shaped by temporal effects (short-term versus delayed benefits) and interpersonal effects (own versus others' benefits). Incorporating each factor, the empirical chapters aim to shed further light on how dynamic effects shape healthier eating (Chapter 2), and how psychological entitlement influences prosocial behavior (Chapter 3). As the following sections discuss in more detail, each chapter also considers a secondary driver—product category type and selectivity, respectively.

#### 1.3.1 Contributions to research on healthier eating (Chapter 2)

Based on the notion that food choices involve a dilemma between short-term indulgence goals and long-term health goals, Chapter 2 investigates how the healthiness of food choices evolves dynamically. It specifically investigates these dynamics across a *longer sequence* of choices in the supermarket, unlike past work that mostly considered how a *single* past choice affects subsequent virtuous behavior (De Witt Huberts et al., 2012; Fishbach & Dhar, 2005). Building on past work on shopping trip dynamics (Gilbride et al., 2015; Sheehan & Van Ittersum, 2018), this chapter investigates *healthy shopping dynamics*—interdependencies between the relative (i.e., within-category) healthiness of sequential product choices within a major shopping trip. By exploring these dynamics, Chapter 2 answers calls for a more holistic view of shoppers' nutritional intake (Nikolova & Inman, 2015) and investigates the potential caveat that after a healthier, low-calorie choice in one category, “consumers may substitute calories to other nontargeted categories” (Khan et al., 2015, p. 24).

An additional contribution of Chapter 2 is that it deviates from previous research by particularly focusing on the relative, or *within-category*, healthiness of

choices. This perspective is highly relevant, as even subtle nutrition shifts can have a critical impact on weight management (Hill et al., 2003). These subtle shifts may also be more feasibly realized by consumers. That is, it may be easier for them to consistently replace higher-calorie products with relatively healthier, lower-calorie alternatives within the same food category (e.g., regular cola with diet cola) than to change the type of foods they are accustomed to purchase and consume (De Boer et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2003; Ross & Murphy, 1999).

Although the main focus is on within-category effects, notions on cross-category effects (Hui et al., 2009) are incorporated as well. Specifically, past academic work has classified products as relative virtue products (“should” products)—products that are less gratifying and appealing in the short term but have positive long-term consequences—or as relative vice products (“want” products)—products that provide immediate pleasurable experience, but contribute to negative long-term outcomes (Milkman et al., 2008; Okada, 2005; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011; Wertenbroch, 1998). Chapter 2 extends this work by testing whether the category type (vice vs. virtue) moderates the dynamic, within-category effects of past relative healthiness.

The findings suggest that the consumption dilemma between relatively virtuous (healthier) food choices and indulgent food choices indeed creates dynamic effects throughout the shopping trip. Specifically, the relative healthiness of subsequent choices is characterized by a balancing pattern: when shoppers initially select a healthier option, this choice is typically balanced by an *unhealthier* subsequent choice, whereas *unhealthier* choices in turn promote *healthier* subsequent choices. This balancing pattern seems less pronounced when the subsequent choice is made within a vice category (e.g., cookies). Both the balancing pattern and the interplay with category type in turn become less pronounced as the (physical) shopping trip progresses. These findings add to the scarce but growing knowledge on within-trip

dynamics (Sheehan & Van Ittersum, 2018) and offer important practical implications regarding the effectiveness of in-store health interventions (Cadario & Chandon, 2020; Cleeren et al., 2016).

### 1.3.2 Contributions to research on prosocial behavior (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3 investigates whether consumers high in psychological entitlement can be motivated to engage in prosocial behavior. Prior work has established that entitled consumers are more focused on their own benefits than others', and consequently typically handle virtuous behavior dilemmas more selfishly, for example by donating less time and money (Brunell et al., 2014; Strong & Martin, 2014). However, as the willingness to help or donate highly depends on how the prosocial opportunity is framed (Fennis et al., 2009; Schlosser & Levy, 2016), specific appeals that match entitled consumers' orientation may make them donate more time and money. Chapter 3 tests this notion by merging work on entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004), selectivity (Homburg et al., 2008), and prosocial behavior (Brunell et al., 2014).

Selectivity involves granting exclusive benefits or preferential treatment to a selection of consumers, which are explicitly denied to other consumers (Chan & Sengupta, 2010; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995; Wagner et al., 2009). Hence, selectivity may validate consumers' perceived distinctiveness. Literature suggests that entitled consumers are especially motivated to differentiate themselves from others (Zitek & Vincent, 2015). Thus, Chapter 3 posits that framing an opportunity as selective promotes prosocial behavior among consumers high (but not those low) in entitlement because they respond more positively to the consequent distinctiveness validation (through increased prosocial behavior). Hence, the main contribution of Chapter 3 is that it tests how and why a subtle change in the framing of prosocial opportunities can boost prosocial behavior among consumers that are naturally less prone to seize such

opportunities.

Additional aims of the research in Chapter 3 are to investigate whether the effects of selectivity on entitled consumers' prosocial behavior are specific to high *vulnerable-based*, high *grandiose-based* entitlement, or both of these recently identified facets of entitlement (Hart, Tortoriello, & Richardson, 2020), whether the effects are robust across trait and state entitlement, and whether they generalize to other, broader forms of high self-regard, particularly high self-esteem and narcissism.

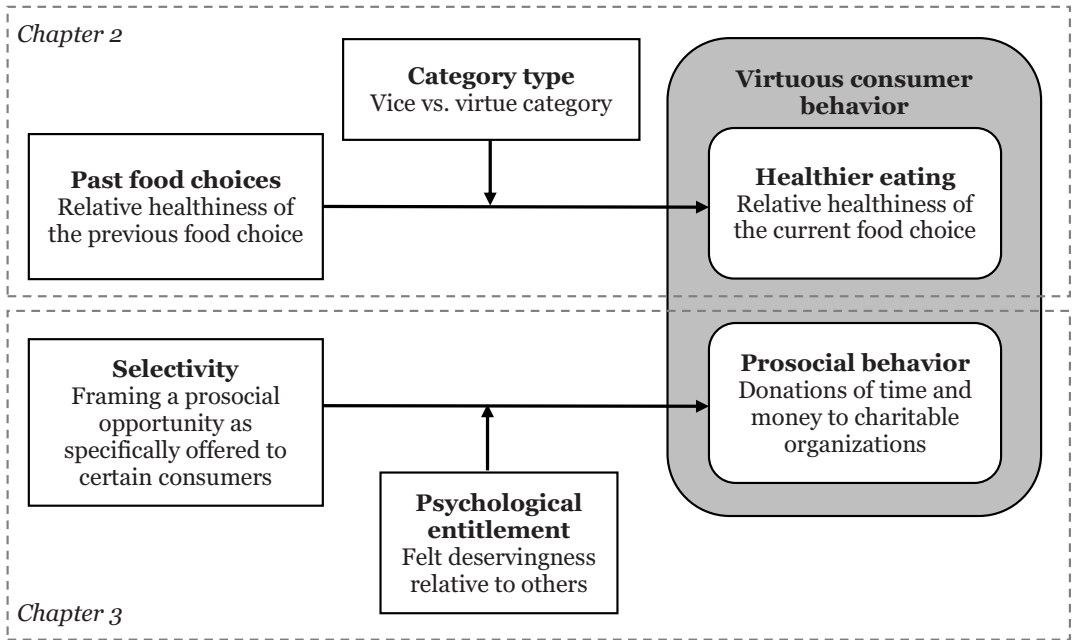
Overall, the main finding is that selectivity indeed boosts prosocial behavior among entitled consumers. Whereas entitled consumers are typically mostly inclined to benefit themselves instead of others and behave less virtuously, selectivity appeals promote increased prosocial behavior. Across four experiments, and across state and trait entitlement, consumers with a high sense of psychological entitlement donate significantly more time and money when the opportunity is framed as selective. This effect is unique to entitlement (rather than generalizing to high self-esteem or narcissism). The findings also suggest that the interplay with selectivity is particularly associated with the more deprived, vulnerable facet (rather than the grandiose facet) of entitlement. Finally, these effects indeed seem driven by *distinctiveness validation*. The findings add important nuances to the current theoretical understanding of the workings of entitlement and selectivity. A practical implication is that charitable organizations could successfully apply selectivity practices in order to promote prosocial behavior among entitled consumers.

#### **1.4 Outline of the Dissertation**

In sum, the next two chapters study the impact of past food choices and category type on the relative healthiness of current food choices (Chapter 2), and the impact of psychological entitlement and selectivity on prosocial behavior (Chapter 3),

respectively, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Chapters 2 and 3 each include various studies—the aim was to demonstrate the effects by measuring actual consumer behavior across lab studies, online studies, and secondary (purchase) data, and by applying various analytical methods, as summarized in Table 1.2.

The dissertation ends with a general discussion (Chapter 4), where theoretical and practical implications regarding the role of dynamic effects and psychological entitlement in navigating the dilemmas characterizing both forms of virtuous consumer behavior are discussed. This final chapter summarizes that relatively healthy past food choices may promote a subsequent healthier food choice (and vice versa), and that consumers high in psychological entitlement behave more prosocially in response to a selectivity appeal (whereas those low in entitlement do not). Thus, whereas no consumer will always behave solely virtuously or viciously given the inherent tension between (delayed) benefits to the self, benefits to others, and (short-term) costs to the self, the overall proposition of this dissertation is that virtuous behavior does not occur in isolation, and that promoting virtuous behavior needs to be tailored to the individual and the situation. Both of these propositions have important implications, formulated in Chapter 4, that can inform practitioners, policy-makers, and consumers who aim to understand and promote healthier eating and prosocial behavior. Hence, the findings described in this dissertation offer novel insights needed to shape marketing actions such that they positively contribute to today's societal challenges.

**Figure 1.1:** Covered drivers and forms of virtuous consumer behavior



**Table 1.2:** Overview of the dissertation

Chapter	Research aims	Applied Methods	Data Sources
Chapter 2   Healthy Shopping Dynamics: the Healthiness of Sequential Grocery Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate healthy shopping dynamics across a longer sequence of food choices</li> <li>Offer important nuance by focusing on relative (within-category) healthiness rather than merely category-level healthiness</li> <li>Investigate whether the dynamic (i.e., reinforcement or balancing) effects differ across vice and virtue categories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Random-effects regression (Mundlak approach)</li> <li>Fixed-effects regression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lab study (N = 320 University of Groningen students)</li> <li>Online study (N = 243 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers)</li> <li>Supermarket data collected via handheld scanning (N = 5,041 major shopping trips)</li> </ul>
Chapter 3   You Deserve to Donate: Selectivity Promotes Prosocial Behavior Among Entitled Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate whether selective prosocial opportunities boost prosocial behavior among entitled consumers</li> <li>Investigate whether the effects are specific to entitlement (vs. self-esteem or narcissism) and whether they generalize across vulnerable-based and grandiose-based entitlement</li> <li>Investigate whether the effects are mediated by distinctiveness validation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ordinary least squares regression</li> <li>AN(C)OVA</li> <li>Mediation analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online study 1 (N = 215 Qualtrics panel participants)</li> <li>Online study 2 (N = 249 Amazon Mechanical Turk workers)</li> <li>Lab study (N = 291 University of Groningen students)</li> <li>Online study 3 (N = 501 Prolific panel participants)</li> </ul>