

## What is the ExposUM Doctoral Nexus?

PhD funding opportunities in Montpellier, France : ExposUM Doctoral Nexus

A Doctoral Nexus, as proposed by the [ExposUM Institute](#), brings together networks of three to four PhD students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, affiliated with at least two distinct research units.

Unlike traditional PhD programmes, a Doctoral Nexus is designed to enhance collaborative skills and the ability to develop transdisciplinary projects, while allowing students to deepen their own field of expertise.

Nexus doctoral students will benefit from a dedicated training programme and will have the opportunity to organise seminars within their Nexus network.

The ExposUM Institute provides full funding for four years, covering both the PhD students' salaries and an environmental allowance.

### The context of the Nexus:

Food choices play a decisive role in human health and lie at the intersection of nutritional, environmental, psychological, and social issues. Despite the frequent dissemination of recommendations aimed at promoting healthy and environmentally friendly eating practices, a gap persists between intentions and actual eating behaviors, particularly among young adults. This gap highlights the limits of approaches based on a strictly rational view of decision-making, as emotions, cognitive biases, and psychological states strongly influence food behaviors.

In this context, the Nexus SENS-ALIM project pursues three complementary objectives:

1. **Understand the influence of emotions, particularly negative emotions, on food behaviors.**
2. **Identify levers for modulation and prevention by analyzing educational, psychosocial, and communication tools capable of limiting the negative effects of these emotions on food choices.**
3. **Analyze the effects of food choices on other decision-making processes that are crucial for health and well-being, in order to better understand medium- and long-term health trajectories.**

To address these objectives, the project relies on four complementary doctoral theses, developed through an integrated approach that fosters dialogue between disciplines. Thesis number 1 presented here, deals principally with points 1 and 2.

## The context of the doctoral thesis:

Thesis No. 1 focuses on the role of eco-emotions—particularly eco-anxiety—and associated emotions (fear, guilt, worry) in responsible food behaviors. The doctoral student will work in close collaboration with the other theses in the Nexus project.

Faced with ecological crises, emotions play a central role in environmental behaviors. Eco-anxiety, defined as emotional distress (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020) or a rational response to climate threats (Hogg et al., 2021), is a major psychological issue (Mento, 2023), especially among young people (Parmentier et al., 2024). Linked to other emotions such as fear or worry (Pihkala, 2020), eco-anxiety can encourage action (Pavani et al., 2023) or, conversely, lead to avoidance (Hogg et al., 2024). In the food domain—which accounts for nearly a quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions (Poore & Nemecek, 2018)—the effects of emotions remain understudied, despite the well-known “intention–behavior gap” (Sheeran & Webb, 2016).

Nudges (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), which modify choice architecture without restricting individual freedom, have shown effectiveness in influencing food behaviors (Cadario & Chandon, 2020). However, their effectiveness depends on the emotional context (Bonan et al., 2023).

At the same time, social marketing “seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence the behaviors of individuals and communities in order to improve their well-being as well as that of society” (Gurviez & Raffin, 2019). Applied to environmental issues, it allows the integration of target audiences’ emotions into communication strategies. The literature shows that social marketing actions are effective in improving diet, increasing physical activity, and combating substance abuse (Gordon et al., 2006). In the food domain, their effectiveness requires alignment between nutritional communication, cultural preferences, and public health objectives (Chandon & Cadario, 2022).

This literature highlights a theoretical gap: although the role of emotions in environmental behaviors is well established (Vandenbroele et al., 2019), their interactions with Nudges and social marketing strategies remain underexplored, particularly in the food domain. This multidisciplinary thesis will address this gap by adopting an approach that articulates emotions, Nudges, and social marketing, in order to identify change levers adapted to consumers’ emotional profiles—particularly by analyzing the moderating role of eco-anxiety and the differentiated influence of positive emotions (pride, hope...) and negative emotions (fear, guilt, disgust...) on the effectiveness of social marketing actions.

## References

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**Planned start date:** 01/10/2026

**The title of the doctoral student's position:** Understanding the effects of eco-emotions experienced by consumers on responsible behaviors: an application to food choices

**Main mission:** This thesis aims to better understand the effects of eco-anxiety and eco-emotions on responsible food behaviors, and to assess the effectiveness of certain action levers: Nudges and social marketing techniques. To do so, it will mobilize behavioral methods through qualitative and quantitative surveys, as well as experimental methods to explore the effects of Nudges in various emotional contexts.

**Activities:** This work will aim to:

- Identify whether different consumer profiles exist based on their level of eco-anxiety.
- Analyze the effectiveness of different Nudges on food behaviors and determine how eco-anxiety and experienced emotions may moderate their effects.
- Define emotional strategies (manipulating positive and/or negative emotions) to encourage more responsible food consumption.

The research will include several phases:

- **Two qualitative phases:**
  - Semi-structured interviews with experts in social marketing, emotion psychology, and environmental behavior to gather insights on the potential impact of eco-anxiety on Nudge effectiveness.
  - A second qualitative phase with individuals to select the most effective Nudges (social and emotional) for influencing food behaviors.
- **Two quantitative phases:**
  - A quantitative survey on emotions and changes in food behaviors.
  - Laboratory experiments built upon the previous phases. The effects of different types of Nudges and advertisements using positive or negative emotions will be specifically examined.

**Associated tasks:**

- Designing interview guides
- Designing quantitative questionnaires
- Administering surveys, processing and analyzing data
- Analyzing and disseminating research results

**Expected skills and qualifications:** The candidate must demonstrate:

- Interest in multidisciplinary research and in the impact of psychological determinants—particularly emotions—on choices and sensitivity to social marketing messages.
- Knowledge in the following fields: social marketing, psychology and emotion theory, Nudges, and environmental issues.
- Methodological skills: qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, and data analysis.
- Organizational skills, autonomy, and scientific rigor.
- Ability to work in an interdisciplinary environment and intellectual curiosity.
- Proficiency in online survey tools and data analysis software.

**Diploma/field required:** Master's degree (or equivalent) in management (marketing), behavioral and cognitive sciences (psychology), or environmental studies.

**Key words:** Marketing, psychology, behavioral and cognitive sciences, experimental economics.

**CNU section to which the applicant belongs:** 06

## Application procedure

The application must include the following

- A CV
- A letter of motivation
- A copy of the required degree for enrollment and transcripts up to the Master 2 level (semester 1 and/or semester 2)
- Any additional documents required by the EDEG Doctoral School

Please send your application to the thesis supervisor's email address (Marie-Christine LICHTLE, MRM, [marie-christine.lichtle@umontpellier.fr](mailto:marie-christine.lichtle@umontpellier.fr)) and to any co-supervisors (Cécile BAZART, CEE-M, [cecile.bazart@umontpellier.fr](mailto:cecile.bazart@umontpellier.fr)), copying the Nexus coordinator (Marie-Christine LICHTLE, MRM, [marie-christine.lichtle@umontpellier.fr](mailto:marie-christine.lichtle@umontpellier.fr)) and [exposum-aap@umontpellier.fr](mailto:exposum-aap@umontpellier.fr).

**Application deadline :** Before 20 MAY 2026 CET



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# The University of Montpellier

## KEY FIGURES



## RESEARCH CENTERS

From space exploration and robotics to ecological engineering and chronic diseases, UM researchers are inventing tomorrow's solutions for mankind and the environment. Dynamic research, conducted in close collaboration with research organizations and benefiting from high-level technological platforms to meet the needs of 21st century society.

The UM is committed to promoting its cutting-edge research by forging close links with local industry, particularly in the biomedical and new technologies sectors.

**More Information:** <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/recherche/unites-de-recherche>

## SCIENTIFIC APPEAL

Open to the world, the University of Montpellier contributes to the structuring of the European higher education area, and strengthens its international positioning and attractiveness, in close collaboration with its partners in the I-SITE Program of Excellence, through programs adapted to the major scientific challenges it faces.

**More Information:** <https://www.umontpellier.fr/en/international/attractivite-scientifique>



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