

A Compilation and Review of Values Driving Food Choice

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Abstract: *The concept of value is central to consumer decision making. This literature review reports the results of published researches performed to determine the influences of value patterns on the food related behaviour. It addresses which specific values play a role in predicting consumer's behaviour toward food preferences. The central question is whether this behaviour is influenced by specific values. We identify several themes that reflect the various rationales used by consumers when deciding to purchase food. These data provide strong support for the fact that value orientations are important factors in influencing food consumption behaviour. They imply a meaningful relationship between specific values and food-related choices, and suggest that values might play a role in explaining consumption toward food products. The food industries must better understand the variety of values consumers hold regarding food. We conclude with suggestions for further research.*

Keywords: *values, consumer behavior, food preferences, attitudes, organic food*

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer choices are a common yet complex research phenomenon. Especially, in the case of food, consumers encounter multiple choices on the daily basis. In itself, food and eating are by their nature dynamic phenomena full of changing psychological, social, cultural and economic meanings. Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, and Devine (2001) have illustrated this complexity in food choices and eating.

“The abundance and variety of foods from which to choose is extensive. Social changes such as the increased participation of women in the work force lead to reduced time available for food selection and meal preparation, which further complicates food choice. Contemporary consumers have fears and conflicts involving food and health, and social norms about food and meal composition that guided previous generations appear to be eroding, leaving people with a lack of structure related to food and eating behavior.”

In this paper addressed the value conflicts that consumers may experience while making food choices. Our goal is to review the existing literature concerning food choices in order to identify the nature of potential value conflicts. Steenkamp (1996) stated that “consumer behavior with respect to foods has not attracted much systematic attention by consumer behavior researchers.”

2. VALUES

An attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995). Values and beliefs are thought to be the building blocks of attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Values can be seen as the most abstract cognitions or extreme global attitudes, as goals to provide general orientation and organization for life (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), and they serve, as Rokeach (1968) puts it, as ‘standards’ or models for attitudes, beliefs and behavior. Values, attitudes, and beliefs form a hierarchical structure with values higher in the hierarchy (general level) and beliefs and attitudes at the base (specific level). The entire set of cognitive, affective and behavioral responses, together with values and beliefs within an attitude, constitutes the intra-attitudinal structure

Values guide the selection of human behaviour (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990). They are used to choose and justify actions and to evaluate people, self and events, and connect the individual and society (Grunert and Juhl, 1995). They can be used to find out why people act in certain ways. Generally, values can be described as beliefs about some desirable end-state. Grunert and Juhl (1995) defined values as cognitive patterns by which individuals orientate themselves in their environment. They help to know and understand the interpersonal world. Consumption activities are related to the set of values a person possesses in that people purchase products to achieve value-related goals (Solomon et al., 1999). Rokeach (1973) defined values as lasting beliefs that specific modes of conduct or end-states of existence are personally or socially preferable to others. This set of values forms a value system, an, “enduring organisation of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance”. According to Rokeach (1973) human values arise from culture, society and its institutions, and from personality.

This implies that consumers associate a variety of values with food. Values are often seen as synonymous with goals which are receiving more attention from consumer researchers. For example, Bagozzi and Dholakia (1999) stress that “we know little about what consumption goals are, how they are represented in memory, how they come about and change, or how they are pursued and achieved.” According to Martins and Pliner (1998), people seek enjoyment, economy, health, convenience, emotional experiences, familiarity, novelty, and ways of impressing others from their food choices. A natural consequence of this multitude of food-related values is that sometimes value conflicts arise. The conflicts happen when “values are contrasted with each other and juggled according to their significance for a particular food choice” (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, and Winter-Falk, 1996).

Early instruments used to investigate values, such as the Rokeach Value Scale, identify specific values like sense of belonging, enjoyment in life and warm relationships with others (Rokeach, 1973).

A taxonomy of values that proved to be relatively stable across cultures was developed by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). According to this taxonomy, there are ten motivational value types that can be found in every culture. These motivational value types range from security to hedonism and from achievement to conformity. In the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz, 1992), that was designed to measure the importance attached to values, each of the ten motivational values types consists of a number of subdivisions or more specific values. In Table 1, the ten motivational value types and their underlying specific values are presented.

Table 1: Motivational value types

Value type	Underlying specific values
Self direction	Independent thought and action, choosing, creating, exploring (freedom, creativity, independent, choosing own goals, curious, self-respect)
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty and challenge in life (an exciting life, a varied life, daring)
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself (pleasure, enjoying life)
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (ambitious, influential, capable, successful, intelligent, self-respect)
Power	Social status and prestige, control and dominance over people and resources (social power, wealth, authority, preserving my public image, social recognition)
Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships and of self (national security, reciprocation of favors, family security, sense of belonging, social order, healthy, clean)
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (obedient, self-discipline, politeness, honoring of parents and elders)
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self (respect for tradition, devout, accepting my portion in life, humble, moderate)
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (helpful, responsible, forgiving, honest, loyal, mature love, true friendship)
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for all people and for nature (equality, unity with nature, wisdom, a world of beauty, social justice, broad-minded, protecting the environment, a world at peace)

Source: Adapted from the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz & Sagie, 2000)

Several theories suggest that an individual's values are organised in a cognitive belief hierarchy consisting of global values, domain-specific values and attitudes (Rokeach, 1973; Vinson et al., 1977). The first level corresponds to the type of values defined by Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1992), who considered values as trans-situational, beliefs concerning desired states of existence or modes of behaviour. Global values are the most central belief category. Values are not directed towards any specific object or idea. Rather, they provide standards relating to modes of conduct, goals and evaluations (Lessig, 1975). Some values may be centrally located within a person's belief system, and may therefore be closely related to the self (Verplanken and Holland, 2002). These values can be considered to guide our behaviour, but are very abstract and it can be difficult to find direct relations between these values and specific attitudes (Vaske and Donnelly, 1999). The second level concerns Vinson's domain specific values, which are beliefs relevant to economic, social, religious and other activities through which personal values influence attitudes. Other authors refer to beliefs at this level as value orientations (Fulton et al., 1996) or food-related lifestyles (Brunso et al., 2004). These beliefs are more numerous than basic values, more specific than personal values, but more abstract than attitudes

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The interest for food-related issues seems to be growing. Shanahan, Scheufele, and Lee (2001) for example, report an increase in media coverage of food related topics.

Moreover, in reaction to recent hormone scandals, people have become more aware of the food they are eating (Kirk, Greenwood, Cade, & Pearman, 2002; Kubberød, Ueland, Tronstad, & Risvik, 2002). Dieting styles like vegetarianism and organically grown foods have become more common. Recent studies have shown that the number of vegetarians has grown in several countries over the last few years (Allen & Baines, 2002; Kirk et al.; Kubberød et al.; Lea & Worsley, 2001; Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001). Povey et al. (2001) found that norms and values play an important role in the decision to adopt a certain diet.

Previous research has shown some relations between specific values and food-related attitudes. Povey et al. (2001) found that environmental and humanitarian values play an important role in the decision to adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet. Thøgersen and Ølander (2002) have shown that there is a predominant causal influence between values like universalism (welfare for all people and protection of nature) and benevolence (welfare of close others) and environment-friendly attitudes and behavior. Homer and Kahle (1988) showed that values like hedonism (pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself) and stimulation (need for variety and stimulation) had an effect on attitudes towards nutrition. Other researchers (Grankvist & Biel, 2001; Grobe, Douthitt, & Zepeda, 1999; Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998) have also shown that values like spirituality, benevolence and universalism have a positive relation to food behavior attitudes.

On the basis of a literature review, there may exist several food-related values including novelty, tradition, health, indulgence, economy, extravagancy, convenience, care, technology, nature, others and self.

There exist consumers who consistently want to try out new products, brands and services. This kind of food consumers can be called novelty seekers. However, there are persons who can be classified as food neophobics (Lahtenmaki and Arvola 2001). They are afraid of new elements in food. In many societies, being open to new thoughts and ideas is valued. On the other hand, tradition has become appreciated again. One of the millennium trends identified by Shore and Cooper (1999) was labelled as “origins.” Sometimes traditional food dishes conjure up nostalgia, which has received attention in consumer research lately (Summers, Johnson, and McColl-Kennedy, 2001). Tradition in food choices may be preferred because it creates a sense of security and continuity.

On the level of values, people in many countries state that health is one of the most important things for them. Especially in western societies increasing preoccupation with the health effects of modern food can be seen (Caplan, 1997). Food manufacturers and marketers try to capitalize on this trend by offering new foodstuffs and drinks that are supposed to have positive impact on health. Ironically, the increased health-consciousness has generated anxiety in consumers too. People have started to ask questions such as “what can be safely eaten” and “who should I listen to” (Ekstrom and Askegaard, 2000). However, food is one of the most fundamental sources of hedonic experiences in human life. It is not uncommon for people to give themselves permission to indulge in delicious food every now and then. Mood experiences have been shown to heighten gourmandizing and excessive drinking (Luomala and Laaksonen, 1999).

In every country there is a group of consumers who are very price-conscious. Economical emphasis manifests itself in many ways in food choices (Warde, 1997). Many consumers seek low prices. The “conservative” lifestyle segment found in Brunso et al.’s (1996) study is likely to behave like this. In Greece, as an echo of the wartime, children are still often asked to “empty their plates.” Although the monetary resources of households have a direct bearing on how much and what food is consumed (Ritson and Petrovici, 2001), even households with low income are on certain festive occasions extravagant. Extravagancy may mean that there is plenty of something, or that food is basically the same as usual but is done using higher quality ingredients, or that food is a rarity. For example, many consumers often want to impress others by offering exceptional wines and exotic dishes (Martins and Pliner, 1998). On these occasions extravagancy becomes a statement of social status, and appreciation of the generous sophistication might be expected.

It is a general belief that life has become more and more complex. For some consumers time is a more valuable resource than money. This has created a natural demand for convenience foods. According to Candel (2001), a person who seeks convenience in meal preparation is not involved with food products, is not a variety seeker, does not enjoy cooking, and has a heavy daily program. Food provision is still very much of women’s responsibility (Ekstrom, 1991). Caring that the husband and the children get enough good and healthy food is a part of the stereotypical picture of a “proper housewife”. Care materializes when a woman puts a lot of effort and time into preparation and aesthetic serving of food to please her spouse and children.

One of the millennium trends uncovered by Shore and Cooper (1999) was transformism. They state that: “Advances in science and genetics have created the biological foundation for the belief in ‘new self’. ... Scientifically-based pharmaceutical, health and beauty products, new fabrics and leading edge products are among the categories likely to respond to this trend.” While many American consumers believe that genetic modification of food will result in more

healthy and higher quality food, the public reaction in Europe has been much more negative (Nelson, 2001). For instance, Danish and Swedish consumers in Ekstrom and Askegaard's (2000) study used words such as artificial, synthetic, and unnatural to describe genetically modified food. It seems that for some consumers the naturalness of food has become an important choice criterion (the case of organic food products) (Kantanen, 2002).

Food choices can be seen as moral and ethical aspects which make food also a societal and political issue. People have in addition to their personal welfare started to think about the welfare of other people, animals, and the globe (Makela, 2002). According to Shore and Cooper (1999), "attention will turn to family unity, bonds of love and sharing, and the importance of maintaining family ties". Planning, preparing, and enjoying food have always had a role in maintaining and developing social relationships. On the other hand, there is a discussion concerning the individualization of societies. For example, Valentine and Gordon (2000) assert that "the 21st century 'consumer' is a 'subject' that continually constructs identities for itself by entering into the process of consumption." An illustration of expressing one's individuality by very specific food choices is vegetarians (Ekstrom and Askegaard, 2000). The food related values, they mentioned above, summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of food-related values

Value	Key meaning
Novelty	Favouring the new and unknown in foods and eating.
Tradition	Favouring the known and "correct" in foods and eating.
Health	Favouring the healthy in foods and eating.
Indulgence	Favouring the pleasurable in foods and eating.
Economy	Favouring the economy in foods and eating.
Extravagancy	Favouring the luxurious in foods and eating.
Convenience	Favouring the ease and save of time in foods and eating
Care	Favouring the effort and use of time in foods and eating.
Technology	Favouring the advancement in foods and eating.
Nature	Favouring the naturalness in foods and eating.
Others	Favouring the other-centeredness in foods and eating.
Self	Favouring the self-centeredness in foods and eating.

4. VALUES AND PURCHASING OF ORGANIC FOOD

Many of the consumer studies on organic food have considered factors that facilitate or limit organic food consumption. They have dealt with values to purchase organic food, including health concern, environmental concern, food safety, sensory variables, ethical concerns or value structure (Tregear et al., 1994; Chinnici et al., 2002; Magnusson et al., 2003; Baker et al., 2004; Lockie et al., 2004). Health concern is often found to be the most important value motivating organic food purchase (Magnusson et al., 2003). It is, however, debatable whether marketers can use the health claim for marketing purposes because studies on possible health effects of organically grown food are ambiguous. Rather, most of the research concludes that there is no evidence that organic food is healthier or more nutritious than conventional food (e.g. Magkos et al., 2003). Another line of studies looks upon organic food purchase behaviour as a part of broader 'green' purchase behaviour or environmentally friendly behaviour (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Many of these studies have used the Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977), or a modified version thereof, as a model to explain environmentally friendly behaviour (Stern and Dietz, 1994; Garling et al., 2003; Thøgersen and O'lander, 2003). Central to this theory is the idea that altruistic behaviour is influenced by feelings of moral obligation to act on one's personal internalised norms. These norms become activated when a person is aware of harmful consequences to others caused by a state of the environment and when the person ascribes responsibility to him/herself for changing the condition. Later, Stern (2000) developed this model into a Value-Belief-Norm theory of environmentalism, which integrates the Schwartz (1992) value theory, the Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977) and New Environmental Paradigm (Dunlap and van Liere, 1978) perspectives in a causal chain leading to environmentally friendly behaviour. The model implies that different types of environmentally significant behaviour are predicted by different patterns of values. Importantly, many of the studies conclude that environmental attitudes are based on moral reasoning (Thøgersen, 1999).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of consumer values shows many signs of becoming a challenging area for research in the years ahead. The most encouraging single indication is that consumer values have already been shown to have significant correlations with consumer food behavior and attitudes. Given a solution to some of the present difficulties with the concept, values may prove to be one of the more powerful explanations of, and influences on, consumer food behavior. They can perhaps equal the contributions of other major constructs including attitudes, product attributes, degree of deliberation, product classifications, and life styles. However, certain obstacles and problems must be removed. Our review reveals four major problems:

First of all, the concept of consumer values has not yet been clearly defined. Second, no comprehensive list of values has been agreed upon by behavioral scientists, economists, or marketers. Third, no generally accepted model is as yet available specifying the structural variables of an individual value. Finally, no standard method of measuring values has been adopted.

Our review show that identifying relevant values helps to understand food-related attitudes and, moreover, knowledge about specific underlying patterns of values may serve as input for developing instruments to affect or maintain existing attitudes. Therefore, research aiming at understanding or influencing food related attitudes should not limit itself to categorizing attitudes and their relevant beliefs, but should also focus on the specific underlying values.

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