



# Eating out in Spain: Motivations, sociability and consumer contexts



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## ABSTRACT

Eating out is a consumer practice which is difficult to define. The study of this practice has traditionally been based on the work/leisure dichotomy. However, in Spain this is not so clear. If we analyse profiles, motivations, places and relationships, we discover an eating-out food model which is specific to Spain and in which food is not limited by this dual link with work and leisure. Eating linked to work does not respond only to instrumental needs. Leisure eating is not always a choice based on preference. Both contain a strong element of sociability which acts as a motivator and are linked to the familism of Spanish society, whilst at the same time de-routinizing daily life, both at home and at work. This study is based on a national survey carried out in 2014 and helps to understand this consumer practice and those elements which are specific to Spain.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the nineteen eighties, social studies of food have had a prominent place in European academic literature in response to new problems arising as a result of changes in eating habits in developed societies (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Fischler, 1995; Murcott, 1983; Mennell, Murcott & Van Otterloo, 1992). These studies, pioneers in the field of Food Sociology, have stressed the importance of being aware of trends and factors of change in eating habits, although most deal with eating at home and pay far less attention to meals eaten outside the home.

Research into eating out has increased in importance since the beginning of this century with the appearance of practices linked to modernity, in particular those related to an increase in convenience food or to the increase in food expenditure in commercial establishments. Both cases show behaviours which move eating away from the traditional domestic setting and link daily meals to the food industry and commercial catering establishments.

This increase in academic literature regarding eating outside the home has made it possible to understand the origins of the phenomenon and also confirm its heterogeneous nature (Díaz-Méndez & García-Espejo, 2014; Schollier, 2015). Although the majority of studies are of an empirical character, as will be seen below, there

have also been theoretical analyses of contemporary eating habit changes which facilitate an understanding of an eating conduct which is of ever greater value in analysing social change in general and changes in eating habits in particular.

The research on eating out has analysed its expansion over the past decades and the factors that have determined it. Frequently, we find dual explanations that treat eating out as an instrumental practice that helps people to overcome certain mismatches in their working life, or as a leisure practice that satisfies those who engage in it. This chapter provides an analysis of eating out in Spain. We maintain that the dual perspective of leisure versus work does not suffice to explain this food habit in Spanish society. The data confirm the importance of doing context-related analysis to study food consumption, if we want to understand both its meaning and its evolution.

The structure of this article is as follows: the first section discusses the different theoretical and empirical perspectives employed in studies of eating outside the home. The source of data and the peculiarities of that source are discussed in the second section. The frequency of consumption outside the home in Spain and the profile of this type of consumer are analysed in the third and fourth sections. The objective of the fifth section is to analyse what motivates Spanish people to eat out. The sociability which this practice implies and the places where food is consumed appear in the sixth and seventh sections. The article ends with the conclusions of this study.

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## 2. Theoretical approaches

Studies into eating outside the home seek explanations for the growth of this phenomenon in recent decades and the factors which have determined that growth. Despite the heterogeneity of these studies in general terms, they could be said to approach the subject from four different perspectives.

The first perspective studies the relationship between the increase in spending outside the home detected at the end of the nineteen eighties and changes in the family. These studies are within the framework of the *New Family Economy* (Becker, 1981) and confirm a direct relationship between the increase in food spending outside the home, an increase in income and the participation of women in the work market. The growth in eating outside the home is concluded to be the result of the cost-benefit relationship, whereby women in particular value the advantages of eating out as opposed to doing so at home (Angulo, Gil, & Mur, 2007; Jensen & Yen, 1996; Kinsey, 1983; McIntosh et al., 2011; Martín Cerdeño, 2003; Rama, 1997; Stewart & Yen, 2004; Mutlu & Gracia, 2006).

Other studies consider the increase in eating out to be related to the difficulty in adapting work routines to those of the home, a problem which falls principally on the shoulders of women due to their greater involvement in household tasks (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton, & Warde, 2007; Cullen, 1994; Daniels & Glorieux, 2015; Gofton, 1995; Manrique & Jensen, 1998; Stewart & Yen, 2004; Warde, 1999). It has also been said that this timetable reorganization is the result of women's rejection of their traditional domestic role (Gofton, 1995).

In certain societies, for example in the USA, there is a long tradition of eating outside the home to which a loss of cooking skills has now been added. The need to choose between spending time cooking at home and using convenience food reinforces the habit of eating outside the home (Smith, Ng, & Popkin, 2014; Wolfson, Bleich, Smith, & Frattaroli, 2016). Finally, data continues to be published which points to the utilitarianism of eating outside the home, either to save time or money or to offer a solution to the desynchronization of a society focused on remunerated work outside the home.

A second approach analyses eating outside the home as a consumer practice linked to leisure. It is confirmed that greater expenditure on eating outside the home is related to level of studies and also increases or decreases according to the economic status of the household. In some cases, these same studies underline the relevance of work as an explicative variable of eating-out expenditure, since increased income is associated with increased leisure expenditure. According to Bourdieu (1991), the practice of eating out can be considered a distinctive trait of certain social groups, who express their tastes and cultural capital through their choice of restaurants (Bojanic & Xu, 2006; Cheng et al., 2007; Díaz-Méndez & García-Espejo, 2012; McCracken & Brandt, 1987; Olsen, Warde, & Martens, 2000; Riley, 1994; Warde & Martens, 2000).

It is confirmed that this consumer practice is very highly valued and considered to be a gratifying experience by those who participate in it (Warde & Martens, 1998). This satisfaction is not, however, only associated with eating in ethnic restaurants, nor is it always linked to level of studies, since the satisfaction and pleasure produced by eating out is also associated, in some contexts, with fast food, as in the case of the Korean adolescents studied by Park (2004).

A third approach sees eating outside the home as confirming the destructuring of domestic eating habits. The increase in this eating practice is believed to be a reflection of the distancing of the eater from the home and a type of commodification of food. The value attributed to food eaten at home and its symbolic significance as

food related to love, caring and hospitality is contrasted with the practice of eating outside the home. Thus, from this perspective, the practice of eating out will be more or less prevalent depending on the importance given to family meals in a particular society (Daniels & Glorieux, 2015; DeVault, 1991; McIntosh et al., 2011; Warde, 1997).

Those authors who make reference to the progressive decrease in family meals in developed societies suggest that the home as an eating space has lost importance in relation to spaces where food is consumed outside the home and which have become distanced from domestic eating norms (Charles & Kerr, 1988; DeVault, 1991; Murcott, 1997). The growth in eating outside the home is, therefore, a reflection of new postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1997), which lead to a more individualized way of eating, oriented towards the market and distant from family cultures (Stewart & Yen, 2004).

A fourth analysis perspective explains the act of eating outside the home as being directly related to the consumption context in which it takes place. This approach suggests that it is the specific characteristics of the environment that determine whether eating outside the home takes place in one way or another, is valued in one way or another or, in general, whether it is possible for daily meals to be organized in a particular way depending on the existing food supply in a particular environment (Block, Scribner, & De Salvo, 2004; Harrison, Burgoine, Corder, van Sluijs, & Jones, 2014; Maguire, Burgoine, & Monsivais, 2015; Park, 2004; Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, van den Berg, & Hannan, 2011).

A novel approach is provided when eating out is analysed in areas other than those most frequently studied (principally Europe and the U.S.A), opening up new ways of interpreting this conduct (Chang & Hsieh, 2006; Lachat et al., 2011). For example, reference is made to how highly Korean adolescents value fast food and it is surprising to see how they regard a practice traditionally seen, in the context of the USA, as a purely instrumental way of eating as a form of leisure (Park, 2004). Other studies carried out in China have suggested that spending on eating out is a better indication of well-being than income, in societies where incomes are irregular (Chan & Yen, 2009), a novel approach when compared to traditional western analyses of the relationship between increased income and eating out.

Clearly, within this broad overview of the different approaches to studying eating outside the home, some of the explanations offered are of a more economic nature (work, insertion, income) and others of a more cultural one (norms, relationships, socialization) according to which determining factors the authors focus on. The studies also differ with regard to the methodology employed to register eating habit changes, some analysing expenditure and time, others studying frequency of consumption, others places or motivations and some, the calories or products consumed.

Interestingly, none of these approaches to the study of eating outside the home are of an excluding nature, as demonstrated by the fact that each of the four approaches mentioned here have been used by authors who have also used at least one of the other approaches. It does, however, appear that beneath each of the four approaches lies a dual vision of eating outside the home as being linked, on the one hand, to employment and, on the other, to leisure, offering a view which presents two separate, apparently unconnected worlds: that of work and that of rest.

This article attempts to address both the work/leisure duality and the difficulty involved in clarifying the characteristics of eating outside the home. A series of methodological decisions were taken in order to facilitate a more detailed analysis of eating outside the home without the limitations imposed by this dual conception. Furthermore, the study relates this conduct to the motivations, social relationships and consumption context of Spain.

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