



# Time perspectives and convenience food consumption among teenagers in Vietnam: The dual role of hedonic and healthy eating values



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## ABSTRACT

This study uses the subscales of Consideration of Future Consequences (CFC) to explore the effects of future (CFC-future) and immediate (CFC-immediate) on convenience food consumption among teenagers in Vietnam. Furthermore, we investigate the mediating and dual role of hedonic and healthy eating values in the relationships between CFCs and convenience food consumption. Survey data from 451 teenagers in Central Vietnam and structural equation modelling were used to test the relationships in a proposed theoretical model. The results indicate that while CFC-immediate and hedonic eating value has a positive direct effect, CFC-future and healthy eating value has a negative direct effect on convenience food consumption. The findings also reveal that both CFC-immediate and CFC-future have positive effects on hedonic and healthy eating values. However, this study argues and tests the relative importance of the direct (asymmetric) effects of time perspectives on eating values, and finds that while CFC-future dominate in explaining healthy eating values, CFC-immediate dominate in explaining hedonic eating values.

## 1. Introduction

Convenience food and fast food have become a prominent feature of the diet of children in Western countries and increasingly throughout the world (Olsen, Menichelli, Sørheim, & Næs, 2012). Convenience food is defined as food that enables consumers to save time and effort in food activities related to achieving, planning, preparation, consumption, and post-meal activities in order to save time, physical energy, and mental effort (Buckley, Cowan, & McCarthy, 2007). For example, De Boer, McCarthy, Cowan, and Ryan (2004) define ready meals, take-away meals, and restaurant meals as different categories of convenience food. According to Costa, Dekker, Beumer, Rombouts, and Jongen (2001), convenience food reflects various degrees of readiness for consumption from ready-to-eat or -heat, and ready-to-end-cook or -cook. Thus, this study includes different kinds of fast food or ready-to-eat foods (e.g., hamburgers, pizza, snacks, instant noodles) that are consumed at home, at restaurants, or outlets as convenient meals, and uses the broad categorical term ‘convenience food’ throughout this paper.

Convenience food typically contains a higher amount of salt, fats, and sugar, and is thus considered to be unhealthy (Dunn, Mohr,

Wilson, & Wittert, 2011). Tastiness is an important determinant of teenagers' preference for and consumption of convenience foods (Fitzgerald, Kelly, Heary, & Nixon, 2010). In developing countries such as Vietnam, the convenience food market has boomed in recent years with a much higher growth rate (15–20%) than the average rate of the world (5–7%) over the past 10 years.<sup>2</sup> Health issues are seriously problematic with about 25% of the population being overweight or obese; in particular, this ratio is quite high for teenagers (approximately 30%) and is even higher in big cities like Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi.<sup>3</sup> Vietnamese teenagers comprise about one-third of the population.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the public authorities are concerned about the social/health and socio-economic consequences of a high percentage of overweight children and teenagers (Huong et al., 2015).

Regardless of the variety of factors that may impact food decisions (Steptoe, Pollard, & Wardle, 1995), including convenience food consumption (Bublitz, Peracchio, & Block, 2010; Dunn et al., 2011), only a few studies discuss the dual roles of both healthy eating values (as utilitarian values such as weight control or keeping a good health status) and pleasure eating values (as hedonic values such as getting pleasure from eating) as important factors influencing convenience

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<sup>4</sup> Vietnamese General Directorate of Statistics 2014.

food consumption (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). While hedonic eating values (e.g., tastiness) tend to lead to overeating, healthy eating values (e.g., weight control or good health) unhealthy food choices or increased decisions to eat convenience food (Bublitz et al., 2010; Dunn et al., 2011). Thus, the inclusion of both healthy eating values and hedonic eating values as trade-off values (dual roles) between time perspectives (personality traits) and food choice may give new theoretical and empirical insight about what drives or motivates Vietnamese teenagers' convenience food consumption.

Eating behaviours are often determined by individual's consideration of future consequences (CFCs) as trade-offs between immediate outcomes (e.g., pleasure, time, or convenience) and future outcomes (e.g., adverse health effects, low body mass, or longevity; Joireman, Shaffer, Balliet, & Strathman, 2012). An individual's CFC is defined by Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, and Edwards (1994) as the extent to which people consider the potential distant outcomes of their current behaviours and are influenced by those potential outcomes. Although there is a discussion about the structure of CFC (e.g., Ryack, 2012), this study follows some recent studies and makes a distinction between CFC-future and CFC-immediate (Dassen, Houben, & Jansen, 2015; Joireman, Balliet, Sprott, Spangenberg, & Schultz, 2008; Joireman et al., 2012; van Beek, Antonides, & Handgraaf, 2013). Individuals with high CFC-future believe certain behaviours are worthwhile because of future benefits and are willing to sacrifice immediate benefits like pleasure or convenience to achieve more desirable future states. In contrast, individuals with high CFC-immediate are more concerned with maximising immediate benefits at the expense of costs or benefits that will not occur for some time.

This study seeks to answer some unexplored questions, such as 'Do hedonic and healthy eating values have simultaneously combined impacts on convenience food consumption? Do CFC-immediate and CFC-future influence convenience food consumption directly and indirectly through hedonic and healthy eating values? If such combined effects exist, how does their relative importance differ?' To answer our research questions, first a conceptual framework and research hypotheses on the relationships between the constructs of CFC, eating values and convenience food consumption are developed. Then the study uses structural equation modelling approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) to test the proposed model and research hypotheses. Therefore, by answering these questions that focus on convenience foods in the context of a developing country like Vietnam, this study contributes to the literature by proposing that CFC-immediate and CFC-future (Sweeney & Culcea, 2017) would have different relative (asymmetric) effects on hedonic and healthy eating values. A deeper understanding of how to shift the temporal focus away from these immediate benefits towards future outcomes in order to make healthy choices (Dassen et al., 2015) is important for developing more effective communication and intervention programmes addressing (un)healthy eating behaviour (Anderson & Miroso, 2014; Bublitz et al., 2010).

## 2. Literature background

### 2.1. Dual eating motivation: healthy versus hedonic eating value

Extant consumer research has established that consumption can take place for hedonic or utilitarian reasons, values, or attitudes (Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003). Hedonic and utilitarian values are not essentially two ends of a one-dimensional scale: 'Different products can be high or low in both hedonic and utilitarian attributes' (Okada, 2005, p. 43). In this article, we examine teenagers' consumption of convenience food based on a dichotomisation of those two fundamental motivational value systems. Healthy eating values are conceptually defined as utilitarian values as consumers' seeking of aesthetic benefits acquired from a food's capacity to present a sense of nutritious value, good health, body beauty, weight control, or to enhance personal expression (Okada, 2005). In contrast, hedonic eating values are

conceptually defined as the seeking of hedonics through eating and is perceived through taste, pleasure, freedom, fun, escape from reality, fantasy, and other emotions as opposed to goal achievement (i.e., good health; Voss et al., 2003; Zurawicki, 2015).

Previous studies also state that consumers can obtain both hedonic and utilitarian values during the consumption experience (Hofmann, Friese, & Strack, 2009; Okada, 2005; Zurawicki, 2015). By nature, people are motivated to enjoy themselves; however, having fun also raises such issues as guilt and a need for justification. Therefore, consumers may consume convenience foods for hedonic eating values if at the same time they are allowed to justify healthy eating values (Okada, 2005). In addition, though human beings embody a unique ability for planned behaviour, they also often act impulsively; thus, consumers are conflicted between their long-term health values to restrain from convenience food consumption and their immediate impulses that promise hedonic fulfilment during eating convenience food (Hofmann et al., 2009). Consequently, these two conflicting values may be salient when consumers make convenience food consumption decisions. While hedonic eating values may increase the intensity of desire for convenience food and lead consumers to choose this better-tasting but less healthy option over a less-tasty but healthier option (e.g., Wilcox, Vallen, Block, & Fitzsimons, 2009), healthy eating values can influence guilt and self-presentation goals that lead consumers to justify their activated hedonic eating values (Okada, 2005).

The relationship between healthy eating values and food choice is widely discussed in the literature (Stepoe et al., 1995). Consumers who are concerned with their health often attempt to avoid eating convenience foods and limit meals eaten outside of the home, particularly at fast food restaurants (Bublitz et al., 2010). In contrast, the relationship between hedonic eating values and convenience food consumption is not fully explored except for a small amount of empirical evidence on the links between some aspects of hedonic eating values such as taste, appearance, and hedonic preferences and convenience food consumption (Tuorila & Pangborn, 1988). While aspects of hedonic value seem to be the most important factors underlying food choice for the majority of consumers, healthy eating values are often followed (Dassen et al., 2015). Thus, the first two hypotheses of this study are as follows:

**H1.** Hedonic eating values have a positive effect on convenience food consumption.

**H2.** Healthy eating values have a negative effect on convenience food consumption.

### 2.2. Consideration of future consequences

Regarding both the concept and operationalisation of CFC, different perspectives exist about the construct consisting of one, two, or multiple factors (Ryack, 2012; Zhang, Kong, Zhang, & Li, 2012). This study uses a dual system of personality and value (Hofmann et al., 2009) and accepts the perspective of a two-factor structure of individual time perspective (Joireman et al., 2008). This perspective implies that individuals may dominate in a time orientation, but the consideration of future and immediate consequences are not polar opposites. It means that individuals may consider their eating behaviour in relation to future or immediate consequences in a separate or simultaneous manner (Dassen et al., 2015; Joireman et al., 2012; van Beek et al., 2013).

Following this approach, we investigate whether 'unhealthy' convenience food consumption behaviour is differentially predicted by CFC-future and CFC-immediate. Furthermore, this study responds to a call for research on the unique contributions of CFC-future and CFC-immediate (Joireman et al., 2008). The research also explores their role in a specific domain: eating values and convenience food consumption (van Beek et al., 2013). Previous studies in the health domain reveal mixed and inconsistent results about the role of CFC-future and CFC-

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