



Consumers' view on determinants to food satisfaction. A qualitative approach



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to gain a better understanding of the multiple determinants to food satisfaction from a consumer perspective. The study includes two focus groups with a total of 20 consumers varying in gender, age, employment and food interest. The results were divided into sections based on the main themes that arose from analysing the focus groups; i) sensory properties, ii) physical wellbeing, iii) expectations and desires, iv) the food context and v) comparison of the importance of the various determinants to satisfaction. Factors important for food satisfaction appear before as well as during and after intake. Before intake, the important factors are; expectations and desires based on memories about previous food experiences and the context in which the food is perceived. Physical wellbeing was mentioned important for the feeling of satisfaction, included in physical wellbeing is the experience of an appropriate energy level after intake. In general the sensory experience seems to be the primary determinant to satisfaction. The hedonic experience of eating could be enhanced by the social company and knowledge about the food inclusive health value and origin. Findings from the study will prospectively be used to develop a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be applied in case studies to measure factors influential in food satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

The value of consumer food acceptance has long been recognized by the industry. In the aim of gaining product success, food scientists and product developers work on optimizing food appreciation by developing products that meet (or even surpass) consumers need and wishes.

Appreciation of foods has been found to be affected by a broad range of factors. Among these are: palatability, postprandial wellness and the context in which the food is eaten. Palatability is related to the foods sensory characteristics, how these are perceived through the sense of vision, taste, hearing, sound and touch (e.g. Sørensen, Møller, Flint, Martens, & Raben, 2003) and the hedonic dimension which is elicited (AV Cardello, 1997). Previous research recognises that the hedonic dimension can be altered by manipulating sensory characteristics e.g. perceived variety (e.g. MM Hetherington, 1996; B J Rolls, Van Duijvenvoorde, & Rolls, 1984; B. Rolls, 1981). Postprandial wellness covers both

psychological and physical sensations. Food appreciation is believed to be affected by consumption through effects on psychological well-being sensations, such as changes in mood and relaxation (e.g. Patel, 2001; Rogers, Green, & Edwards, 1994). Among the physical factors satiation, satiety, energy level and sleepiness have been associated to food appreciation (Boelsma, Brink, Stafleu, & Hendriks, 2010; Kringelbach, Stein, & van Hartevelt, 2012). Further, other studies have investigated the context surrounding consumption and found that intake and hedonic appreciation of food depend on the context in which the food was presented (Meiselman, Johnson, Reeve, & Crouch, 2000a, b).

However, common for many studies are, that they only approach one of these dimensions when studying food appreciation. This strategy is beneficial when focusing on the effect of the single variable, but the complexity that embrace food appreciation in real life is lacking. Several researchers have implied a need to study food appreciation using an approach which acknowledges that multiple determinants exist (e.g. Boelsma et al., 2010; A. V Cardello, Schutz, Snow, & Leshner, 2000; H. Meiselman, 1992; Sørensen et al., 2003). As a consequence Cardello et al. (2000) stressed that the measures we traditionally use must be expanded and suggested “satisfaction”, a measure normally used

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within marketing, as a relevant alternative. Cardello and colleagues hypothesised that satisfaction represented a general appreciation of the food within a broader context, and it could be used to imply the food's value, its utility or its adequacy for the situation (Armand V Cardello et al., 2000). Within marketing "satisfaction" has been used to describe product performance, but also to describe consumers contentment with purchase-related aspects like evaluation of sales persons and stores (Giese & Cote, 2000). Based on a review of 20 satisfaction definitions used within marketing, it was concluded that satisfaction could be regarded a summary affective response to a broad range of consumption issues (Giese & Cote, 2000).

These findings suggest "satisfaction" as a multidimensional concept that holds potential for use within sensory science. However, in order to be able to use "satisfaction" as a holistic response variable within sensory science, there is a need for a better understanding of the term and the factors potentially affecting satisfaction. The present qualitative study was undertaken to study the complexity of "food satisfaction", by investigating determinants to satisfaction from a consumer perspective using focus group interviews. New topics like "food satisfaction" can be explored qualitatively to provide advantages in exploration and discovery, context and depth and interpretation, compared to quantitative methods (Morgan, 1998). Determinants identified by the consumers participating in the focus group interviews will prospectively be used as response variables in a quantitative study comparing the importance of the various determinants to food satisfaction. In this regard, the consumer perspective in the present study is important, as it is ultimately the consumers who will rate food satisfaction in sensory case studies and response variables should harmonise with consumers' understanding of the satisfaction term.

Before conducting the focus group interviews, it was hypothesised that a) satisfaction could be used as a holistic response variable of consumers' hedonic food experience, b) determinants to food satisfaction were related to the sensory food experience, the context in which the food was eaten and the feeling of well-being after intake, and c) individual differences existed in the importance of each determinant.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Two focus groups were conducted at the National Food Institute, The Danish Technical University, involving 20 Danish consumers in total. A recruitment procedure was used to screen participants. Inclusion criteria were: age range 18–69 years, normal food habits and not suffering from food allergies. During the recruitment it was emphasised to recruit consumers with different employment status and different food interests. Participant characteristics can be seen in Table 1. Food interest was evaluated by initially asking participants to state their interests in food and by analysing participants way of talking about food during the interviews. Participants were classified to have a "low food interest" when they expressed; no or low participation/interest in food related household activities, and expressed food as a source to survive without pronounced pleasure related to food beside expressing likes and dislikes. Classification of "medium food interest" included participants who expressed; interest/participation in food related household activities, and who considered food as a source to pleasure. And finally classification of "high food interest" included participants who; were primarily responsible for food related household activities, expressed to experiment with different ingredients and cooking techniques, and expressed that food and food enjoyment composed a considerable

Table 1
Characteristics for participants in focus groups.

Characteristic	
N _{total}	20
Gender; males, females	9 males, 11 females
Age; mean (min, max)	46 (18, 69)
BMI; mean (min, max)	25 (17, 34)
Food interest ^a	5, 8, 7

^a Number of participant with "low-," medium-" and "high food interests", respectively.

impact on the everyday life. After the interview participants received gifts consisting of wine or chocolate in return for their contribution.

2.2. Pre-test

Before conducting the focus groups, a pre-test was conducted among employees not working with sensory and consumer research. A pre-test is a generally recommended procedure (Wilkinson, 2008). The pre-test aimed; to test the procedure, to test the flow of the questions, to test that the procedure provided the opportunity for a variety of viewpoints to be expressed and that it allowed participants to raise points which may not have occurred to the researcher. All materials were tried in the pre-test to ensure they were intelligible and applicable. On the basis of the pre-test, the interview themes were refined.

2.3. Interview protocol

In the 90 min focus group sessions, participants were asked questions related to their experience of food satisfaction while eating and which factors they would identify as important for the feeling of satisfaction. Project goals were explained prior to start, and assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were given. The focus group discussions followed a protocol based on a semi-structured interview guide. This structure ensured that all intended themes were addressed, but further allowed the moderator to follow points raised by the participants which were considered in advance. The interview guide consisted of an introduction and a list of topics that had to be discussed. An outline of the interview guide can be seen in Table 2.

To encourage participants to express their views and discuss contradicting views, the focus groups were organized around tasks and themes evolving from a concrete to a more abstract level. Consumers are used to talk about likes and dislikes of foods, but talking about satisfaction and determinants to satisfaction can be unfamiliar and a difficult task to accomplish. To ease the dialogue and abstract thinking, pictures of eight lunch meals were provided. The meals were prepared at the institute and the composition were chosen based on their differences and ability to represent the "novel vs. tradition-bound", "Danish vs. foreign", "sensory complex vs. sensory uniform", "light vs. heavy meal". The pictures of the eight meals can be seen in Fig. 1.

The interviews started by asking participant to select and deselect their most/least desired meal and reflect on their choices. The actual selection/deselection was not of direct interest, but was used as a strategy to make the consumers reflect upon why certain foods satisfy and others don't. As the interview progressed, the dialogue became more based on associations instead of the pictures allowing more generalized but also more abstract thinking. By the end of a focus group interview, a questionnaire was handed out with questions about demographics.

Each focus group was moderated by the same interviewer to ensure consistency in interviewing style. Additional assistance was

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