



Research report

Regulatory focus and food choice motives. Prevention orientation associated with mood, convenience, and familiarity ☆

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ABSTRACT

The authors tested the robustness of the Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ) with a U.S. sample and examined the relationship between individual differences in regulatory focus and everyday food choice motives. Although a popular measure in cross-culture research, the FCQ has seen limited use with U.S. samples, and its psychometric properties have not been tested in this population. American participants ($n = 408$) completed the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire and a measure of food choice motives. The data did not support the nine-factor FCQ structure. An *ad hoc* revised measure of food choice motives showed complete measurement invariance (loadings, intercepts, and residuals) across regulatory focus. Regarding everyday food choices, participants with a prevention focus placed greater importance on mood, convenience, and familiarity than participants with a promotion focus. There were no significant differences regarding the importance of health, environmental protection, impression management, natural content, price, and sensory appeal. Several food choice motives were positively correlated. Compared with the promotion-focused participants, the prevention-focused participants more strongly associated the importance of sensory appeal with the importance of natural content and the importance of price.

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Introduction

A wide variety of psychological motives underlie everyday food choices. These include sensory appeal, healthiness, convenience, price, and ethical motives. Identification of such motives and how they relate to specific dietary behaviors facilitates our understanding of consumer choices, with important implications for marketing strategies and efforts to improve human and environmental health with dietary modifications. Numerous studies have demonstrated the relationship between food choice motives and specific food products including purchasing of products with front-of-pack nutrition labels (Vyth, Steenhuis, Vlot, Wulp, & Hogenes, 2010), fruit and vegetable intake (Pollard, Greenwood, Kirk, & Cade, 2002), willingness to try functional foods (Ares & Gámbaro, 2007), vegetarianism (Haverstock & Forgays, 2012; Lindeman & Väänänen, 2000), beliefs and behaviors regarding environmentally

friendly food consumption (Tobler, Visschers, & Siegrist, 2011), attitudes toward genetically modified food (Chen, 2011), and attitudes toward and consumption of organic food (Chen, 2007b; Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Grice, 2004).

Health, sensory appeal, and price are typically rated as the most important motives, but ethical motives, such as political values, religion, animal welfare, and environmental protection, are important motives in some contexts and among particular groups of consumers (Lindeman & Väänänen, 2000). In one study of pescatarians, vegetarians, and vegans, such ethical food choice motives and health motives were more important among those who were currently (compared with formerly) limiting animal products in their diets (Haverstock & Forgays, 2012). In an examination of Swiss consumers' beliefs and behaviors regarding environmentally friendly food consumption, Tobler et al. (2011) found that taste and environmental motives influenced willingness to consume seasonal fruits and vegetables while health and animal welfare motives influenced willingness to reduce meat consumption.

In addition to understanding the relationship between specific food choice motives and dietary patterns, it is also important to consider the ways in which context, culture, and individual differences influence food choice motives. For example, although sensory appeal, health, convenience, and price are typically among the most important motives, the order or magnitude of importance can vary across countries (Prescott, Young, O'Neill, Yau, & Stevens,

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2002). The current study aimed to link food choice motives with individual differences in motivation, namely, regulatory focus.

Regulatory focus

Regulatory Focus Theory (Higgins, 1997) maintains that goal-directed behavior can have a promotion focus or a prevention focus. A promotion focus is associated with nurturance needs, self-regulation in relation to the ideal self, and desired end-states characterized by aspirations and accomplishments. A prevention focus is associated with security needs, self-regulation in relation to the ought self, and desired end-states characterized by responsibilities and safety. Regulatory focus can be influenced by situational factors including experimental manipulations, but individuals have a dispositional motivational orientation. Promotion-oriented individuals are particularly attuned to the presence and absence of positive outcomes and tend to adopt approach strategies to ensure outcomes that match their desired end-states. Prevention-oriented individuals are particularly attuned to the presence and absence of negative outcomes and tend to adopt avoidance strategies to steer clear of outcomes that mismatch their desired end-states.

The same desired end-state might be reached by different means depending on motivational orientation. For example, if a healthy diet is important, a promotion-focused individual may emphasize matches and aim to consume nutritious food while a prevention-focused individual may emphasize mismatches and aim to avoid sweets and fatty foods. Furthermore, promotion- and prevention-focused individuals may be motivated to engage in the same behavior but for different reasons. For example, promotion-focused individuals may be motivated to consume fruits and vegetables because of the benefits associated with these foods while prevention-focused individuals may be motivated to consume fruits and vegetables because of the costs associated with not consuming these foods (Spiegel, Grant-Pillow, & Higgins, 2004).

Within the context of dietary behaviors, much of the research examining regulatory focus has emphasized Regulatory Fit Theory (Higgins, 2000), which addresses the match (or mismatch) between motivational orientation and strategies for pursuing goals or the framing of a persuasive message (Fransen, Reinders, Bartels, & Maassen, 2010). Relatively, few studies have examined the relationship between regulatory focus and specific food choices or dietary patterns. van Kleef, van Trijp, and Luning (2005) found no support for their prediction that functional foods would be evaluated more favorably when their health claims matched participants' regulatory focus (i.e. enhanced-function claim for promotion focus and reduced-disease-risk claim for prevention focus). Leikas, Lindeman, Roininen, and Lähteenmäki (2006) investigated the effect of manipulated regulatory focus on perceptions of the likelihood and seriousness of food risks. Prevention-focused individuals (compared with promotion-focused) perceived risks to be more likely, but perceptions of risk seriousness were not impacted by regulatory focus. It has also been argued that motivational orientation mediates the relationship between some individual differences and diet. de Boer, Hoogland, and Boersema (2007) found that prevention-oriented food choice motives mediated the relationship between valuing universalism and consuming less meat or free-range meat. Joireman, Shaffer, Balliet, and Strathman (2012) found that promotion orientation mediated the relationship between concern with future consequences and healthy eating attitudes and intentions. The current study tested the hypothesis that one's regulatory focus (promotion or prevention orientation) relates to the weighing of various food choice motives in everyday dietary decisions.

Measurement of food choice motives

One popular instrument among researchers interested in food selection determinants is the Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ; Steptoe, Pollard, & Wardle, 1995). The FCQ consists of 36 items assessing nine food choice motives: convenience, price, health, sensory appeal, weight control, natural content, mood, familiarity, and ethical concerns. Lindeman and Väänänen (2000) developed complementary scales that assess distinct ethical motives: ecological welfare (including animal welfare and environmental protection), political values, and religion. The FCQ has been used to explore a variety of dietary behaviors in many different countries. For example, researchers have used this instrument to examine general food choice motives in Britain (Steptoe et al., 1995); Finland (Lindeman & Väänänen, 2000); Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, and New Zealand (Prescott et al., 2002); Canada, Belgium, and Italy (Eertmans, Victoir, Notelaers, Vansant, & Van den Berg, 2006); and Hungary, Romania, Belgium, and the Philippines (Januszewska, Pieniak, & Verbeke, 2011). It has also been used in studying consumption of functional foods in Uruguay (Ares & Gambaro, 2007); traditional foods in Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Poland (Pieniak, Verbeke, Vanhonor, Guerrero, & Hersleth, 2009); genetically modified foods in Taiwan (Chen, 2011); and organic foods in Taiwan (Chen, 2007b) and Australia (Lockie et al., 2004).

Clearly, there is much interest in using the FCQ as a cross-cultural instrument. Pieniak et al. (2009) demonstrated measurement invariance across six countries: Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Spain, and Poland. Importantly, they used a revised measure, which focused only on the factors and items most relevant for their particular research focus (i.e. traditional food consumption). The revised measure did not include a "mood" factor and was limited to three items per factor with some adaptations. Using the original FCQ scale in its entirety, Januszewska et al. (2011) demonstrated measurement invariance across Hungary, Romania, Belgium, and the Philippines. In contrast to the above findings, others have noted psychometric problems with the FCQ. Eertmans et al. (2006) found that the original nine-factor structure of the FCQ provided a poor fit across three different samples (Canada, Belgium, and Italy). Among their samples, several items showed strong cross-loadings, and the data suggested a potential need for higher-order factors and/or reinterpretation of some first-order factors. Fotopoulos, Krystallis, Vassallo, and Pagiaslis (2009) highlight discriminant validity problems and argue that a higher-order factor structure may provide a more robust measure of food choice motives. These issues and inconsistencies aside, in general, there seems to be an agreement that the basic features and overall approach of the FCQ are valuable.

Despite the number of researchers employing the FCQ in cross-cultural research, this instrument has seen limited use with U.S. samples. When it has been used, analyses were limited to mean comparisons of subscale summary scores (Dellava, Hamer, Kanodia, Reyes-Rodríguez, & Bulik, 2011; Haverstock & Forgays, 2012; Miller & Branscum, 2006; Wells & Cruess, 2006) or a small portion of the scale (e.g. the familiarity subscale; Chang, Brown, Nitzke, & Baumann, 2004). As such, one aim of the current research is to investigate the psychometric properties of the FCQ when applied to a U.S. sample.

Specific aims

This project, then, has two goals: (1) to assess the applicability of the FCQ to an American sample and (2) to link food choice motives to individual differences in motivation, evaluating the measurement invariance of the FCQ across regulatory focus (promotion versus prevention orientation) and testing whether one's

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