



Research report

Is food-related lifestyle (FRL) able to reveal food consumption patterns in non-Western cultural environments? Its adaptation and application in urban China[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Research related to food-related behaviour in China is still scarce, one reason being the fact that food consumption patterns in East Asia do not appear to be easily analyzed by models originating in Western cultures. The objective of the present work is to examine the ability of the food related lifestyle (FRL) instrument to reveal food consumption patterns in a Chinese context. Data were collected from 479 respondents in 6 major Chinese cities using a Chinese version of the FRL instrument. Analysis of reliability and dimensionality of the scales resulted in a revised version of the instrument, in which a number of dimensions of the original instrument had to be omitted. This revised instrument was tested for statistical robustness and used as a basis for the derivation of consumer segments. Construct validity of the instrument was then investigated by profiling the segments in terms of consumer values, attitudes and purchase behaviour, using frequency of consumption of pork products as an example. Three consumer segments were identified: concerned, uninvolved and traditional. This pattern replicates partly those identified in Western cultures. Moreover, all three segments showed consistent value-attitude-behaviour profiles. The results also suggest which dimensions may be missing in the instrument in a more comprehensive instrument adapted to Chinese conditions, most notably a broader treatment of eating out activities.

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Introduction

Lifestyle research has a longstanding history in consumer research. First introduced by Lazer (1964), lifestyle was mainly used as an umbrella term for using assortments of items measuring “activities, interests and opinions” as the basis of segmenting consumers. Later, the notion of domain-specific lifestyles was introduced (van Raaij & Verhallen, 1994), with the food-related

lifestyle (FRL) instrument, first introduced in the mid-1990s (Brunso & Grunert, 1995; Grunert, Brunso, & Bisp, 1997), being the major instrument used for segmentation in the food domain. The FRL attempts to characterize consumers by how they employ food and eating to obtain life values. Since its introduction, the FRL instrument has been tested in numerous European and other Western populations for its statistical and construct validity (see following section); nowadays, of special interest for food researchers and practitioners is its validity in non-Western food cultures, such as the Chinese.

The economic growth and transition towards a market economy in China can help explain the significant changes in its food consumption behaviour. With increased income and improved market accessibility, Chinese consumers, especially those in urban areas, are since the early 1990s progressively shifting their food consumption from grains to meat and other high value food products (Jing, 2000; Wang & Chern, 1992). The magnitude of the Chinese dietary changes and the resulting opportunities of getting easier access to a massive and fast growing consumer market have attracted the attention of

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an international business and academic audience. However, research related especially to food purchase behaviour in China is scarce. One reason for this paucity could be the fact that food purchase patterns in East Asia do not appear to be easily analyzed by Western models. Thus, examining the adaptability of a Europe-originated instrument for analyzing food-related attitudes and behaviours, such as the FRL, to a Chinese context might be a useful step towards a better understanding of food consumers in China.

The objective of the present work is to examine FRL's ability to reveal food consumption patterns in other than the Western populations it was developed from, using Chinese consumers as an example. To this end, the paper has a two-fold aim: first, to develop an adapted FRL version that is usable in China and test its statistical robustness in terms of reliability and validity; and second, to test the adapted FRL instrument's construct validity. Construct validity will be analyzed by testing for segment-specific differences on variables that, according to FRL theory, should differ between segments. FRL is based on a means-end approach to lifestyle (Brunsø, Scholderer, & Grunert, 2004), meaning that lifestyle is assumed to mediate between values and general socio-political attitudes on the one side, and concrete product-specific perceptions and behaviours on the other side. We therefore will test construct validity by profiling the segments found in terms of consumers' personal values, attitudes towards environment and food-related issues, and consumption frequencies, using pork-based products as an example.

The paper is organised as follows: the next section reviews FRL's history and applications, followed by an introduction to developments in Chinese food consumption patterns. Then, the research design, the data collection process, the sample and the statistical analyses are described in detail, together with the main findings. The paper closes with a discussion of the research findings in relation to the aims of the work.

Literature review

The FRL construct and its applications

In the FRL approach, lifestyle is defined as a set of cognitive categories that mediate between the most abstract cognitive categories, like values, and perceptions of concrete objects and behaviours, thus adopting the idea of a hierarchy of cognitive categories. It is assumed that lifestyle is connected to personal values and the process by which people seek to achieve their values through various modes of expression, including food purchasing and consumption. The FRL approach regards lifestyle as a mental construct that explains, but is not identical with, actual food-related behaviour.

The FRL consists of 69 Likert-type attitudinal items each rated on a 7-point scale from 1 = "completely disagree" to 7 = "completely agree". The 69 items are collapsed into 23 dimensions belonging to five different domains of food-related lifestyle, which are:

1. Ways of Shopping (WS): importance of product information, attitudes towards advertising, joy of shopping, use of specialty shops, price criterion, use of shopping list.
2. Cooking Methods (CM): involvement with cooking, looking for new ways, convenience, family involvement, spontaneity, woman's task.
3. Quality Aspects (QA): health, price-quality relationship, novelty, organic products, tastiness, freshness.
4. Consumption Situations (CS): snacks versus meals, social event.
5. Purchasing Motives (PM): self-fulfilment, security, social relationships.

The WS, CM, and CS domains measure individual differences in the habitual use of scripts and skills with regard to food purchasing, preparation and consumptions. The QA domain measures a generalized schema for the evaluation of product attributes. And the PM domain measures individual differences in the importance attached to food-specific instantiations of personal values.

Initial analyses of FRL's cross-cultural validity (Grunert et al., 1997) as well as its intra-cultural stability (Bredahl & Grunert, 1997) came to a positive conclusion, and the instrument has been successfully applied over the years to various European and other Western food cultures (Askegaard & Brunsø, 1999; Brunsø & Grunert, 1995; De Boer, McCarthy, & Cowan, 2004; Grunert, Brunsø, & Bredahl, 1998; Hoek, Luning, Stafleu, & De Graaf, 2004; Kesic & Piri-Rajh, 2003; O'Sullivan, Scholderer, & Cowan, 2005; Ryan, Cowan, McCarthy, & O'Sullivan, 2004; Wycherley, McCarthy, & Cowan, 2008). Extensive cross-national analyses of the psychometric properties of the FRL (Grunert et al., 1997; Scholderer, Brunsø, Bredahl, & Grunert, 2004) indicated that its factorial structure is practically universal to Western food cultures and remarkably stable over time.

Compared to the rich body of lifestyle research in Western countries, studies of East Asian or Chinese food-related lifestyle have just started to appear in the literature. The change of Chinese consumers' lifestyle has begun to attract some attention since the early 1990s, with the major contributors in the literature of that era being scholars from Taiwan and Hong Kong. For example, Tai and Tam (1996) conducted a general comparative study on consumers' lifestyles between Hong Kong and Singapore. At the same time, scholars from the Chinese mainland approached the issue from a theoretical perspective. Their publications were mostly literature reviews, while papers with empirical evidence have been rare.

During recent years, however, the number of empirical applications of FRL on East Asian populations increased. For instance, Fang and Lee (2009) applied the FRL instrument for market segmentation in the Taiwan food sector. After being adjusted to fit the Chinese food culture, four segments were identified based on their attitudes and behaviours towards food consumption: the traditional, the adventurous, the uninvolved, and the astute consumers. Moreover, Shim, Gehrt, and Lotz (2001) provided guidance for fruit exporters to Japan by identifying three segments based on fruit-specific lifestyle factors, as identified through an adapted FRL instrument: the creative/highly involved; the practical/moderately involved, and the aesthetic/uninvolved consumers. It is worth mentioning that in the study by Fang and Lee (2009) the FRL was slightly amended, since some of its items were found not to be applicable to the Chinese food culture. Moreover, in an earlier comparative study between the UK, France, Denmark and Singapore (Askegaard & Brunsø, 1999), FRL's cross-cultural validity between Singapore and the three European countries was not established. The lack of cross-cultural validity between Western and Asian populations and the need to modify or abandon certain FRL items or dimensions point towards the fundamental need for FRL's further amendment when applied to East Asian food cultures.

The evolving Chinese eating culture

There are various major socio-linguistic subcultures in China with distinctive food preferences, coupled with a tradition of food symbols that interweave Chinese subcultures. Contrary to popular belief among foreign people, there is no "China market"; rather, there are many diverse markets within China (Swanson, 1996). Note that there are different languages and, hence, cultures in the country, and the people do not all eat the same foods; at the same

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