

## Research report

## Exploring the relationship between convenience and fish consumption: A cross-cultural study

Svein Ottar Olsen<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Joachim Scholderer<sup>c</sup>, Karen Brunsø<sup>c</sup>, Wim Verbeke<sup>d</sup><sup>a</sup>*Department of Social Science and Marketing, Norwegian College of Fishery Science, University of Tromsø, N-9037 Tromsø, Norway*<sup>b</sup>*Norwegian Institute of Fishery and Aquaculture Research, P.O. Box 6122, N-9291 Tromsø, Norway*<sup>c</sup>*MAPP Centre, Aarhus School of Business, University of Aarhus, Haslegaardsvej 10, DK-8210 Aarhus, Denmark*<sup>d</sup>*Department of Agricultural Economics, Ghent University, Coupure links 653, B-9000 Gent, Belgium*

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore cultural differences in the meaning of convenience and the relationships between convenience, attitudes and fish consumption in five European countries. The results suggest that the meaning of meal convenience is not culture specific, whilst the absolute levels of convenience orientation and the perceived inconvenience of fish differ between cultures. Convenience orientation was highest in Poland, followed by Spain, and was lowest in the Netherlands. The relationships between convenience orientation and attitudes towards fish, and convenience orientation and fish consumption, were insignificant in most countries. However, convenience orientation was positively related to the perceived inconvenience of fish. Perceived inconvenience of fish was negatively related to both attitudes towards fish and to fish consumption. Together, these results confirm some earlier findings that fish is generally perceived as a relatively inconvenient type of food. This study suggests that convenience orientation can be crucial to understanding food choice or behaviour only when critical mediating constructs are explored.

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## Introduction

A general lack of time, knowledge, skills and abilities to prepare home meals (Gofton, 1995) influences our global food attitudes and choices in the direction of more convenience food. The role of convenience in explaining food attitudes, food choices and consumption has been explored in several recent studies (Candel, 2001; Jaeger & Meiselman, 2004; Mahon, Cowan, & McCarthy, 2006; Scholderer & Grunert, 2005). Meal convenience seems to be related to eating situations and reference groups (Verlegh & Candel, 1999). De Boer, McCarthy, Cowan, and Ryan (2004) found that convenience-related attitudes or lifestyles differ between food categories. They found that

the consumption of ready meals and take-away meals was more associated with convenience-related dimensions than restaurant and pub meals.

Investigating food consumption habits in the UK, Gofton and Marshall (1992) found that consumers regarded fish as inconvenient because of a perceived need to invest large amounts of time and effort at different stages of the provisioning process, and because fish meals were perceived to require unusual vegetable side-dishes. However, they also found that some aspects of the “inconvenience” of fish were related to taste preferences and habits. Olsen (2003) found that the perceived convenience of fish was related to age, but not to the consumption of fish in Norway.

How convenience orientation is related to food consumption and choice is another issue of certain interests. Scholderer and Grunert (2005) found that the relationship between perceived time budget and convenience product use was fully mediated by attitudes towards convenience

\*Corresponding author. Department of Social Science and Marketing, Norwegian College of Fishery Science, University of Tromsø, N-9037 Tromsø, Norway. Tel.: +47 77 64 60 00; fax: +47 77 64 60 20.

E-mail address: [sveinoo@nfh.uit.no](mailto:sveinoo@nfh.uit.no) (S.O. Olsen).

products. The same structure was found concerning the relationships amongst perceived monetary resources, attitudes towards convenience shopping and convenience shopping behaviour, and was stable in two different countries (the UK and France). Their study was based on data from the food-related lifestyle instrument and food-related behaviour list (Brunsø, Scholderer, & Grunert, 2004), and not on convenience orientation measures such as the degree to which a consumer is inclined to save time and energy as regards meal preparation (Candel, 2001).

A general lack of research exists concerning food-related convenience in general (Jaeger & Meiselman, 2004), and cross-sectional studies in particular. Candel (2001) questions whether convenience might be culture-specific and argues for future research on this issue. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, this paper intends to test for cross-cultural differences and validity of convenience orientation and perceived convenience of fish. Second, it explores the relationships between convenience orientation, attitudes and fish consumption in five European countries: Denmark, Poland, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands.

### Conceptual and theoretical foundations

Numerous attempts have been made to define convenience (e.g., Berry, Seiders, & Grewal, 2002; Candel, 2001; Yale & Venkatesh, 1986). Consumer attitudes towards the saving of time and effort in the planning, buying or use of products or services are considered the main elements in convenience orientation (Berry et al., 2002). Also, conceptual aspects of food convenience have been discussed over recent years. Gofton (1995) suggests that convenience is not merely a set of properties of a given meal solution, but also a matter of social context. In his perspective, convenience is not simply an issue of saving time (p. 170) or labour (p. 177), but also of “how foods fit into provisioning practices, which were themselves part of a set of household arrangements to provide various sorts of services to household members” (p. 158). In this respect, convenience is not an attribute of products as such, but an outcome of the ways in which these are used in household provision and production processes. Thus, higher levels of convenience of some foods are dependent on the use of household resources (e.g., microwave ovens), special skills and experience (e.g., cooking), or their combination with other ingredients (e.g., seafood and potatoes).

In the same way as discussed by Berry et al. (2002), meal convenience is also suggested to be related to different stages in the consumption process (Candel, 2001; Gofton, 1995; Scholderer & Grunert, 2005): planning, acquisition/purchasing, preparation, cooking, consumption/eating, and disposal. At each stage, convenience can play a role, and may differ in its importance between different situational contexts. Planning a dinner for a family event is often more time-consuming than planning an ordinary meal on a traditional weekday. Based on the discussion of saving time and effort at different stages of the food

consumption process, Candel (2001, p. 17) suggests a domain-specific definition of food convenience orientation as “the degree to which a consumer is inclined to save time and money in regard to meal preparation”. He argues that the preparation stage seems to be the most time- and energy-consuming process, but also that future research should test possible differences in convenience orientation and the meaning of convenience.

In the following, we want to make a distinction between convenience orientation (Candel, 2001) and perceived product convenience (Darian & Cohen, 1995; Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Mummery, 2002; Steptoe, Pollard, & Wardle, 1995). Whilst the former refers to an aspect of the consumer, the latter refers to a property of the food, i.e. how consumers evaluate convenience attributes associated with a specific product, product category, or meal solution.

Food-related attitudes of consumers are important factors in explaining variations in food consumption behaviour (Shepherd & Raats, 1996), including intention to consume and, to a lesser degree, actual consumption of fish (Olsen, 2003; Verbeke & Vackier, 2005). In most studies, such attitudes are defined and measured as psychological tendencies that are expressed by evaluating a given food product or category with some degree of favour or disfavour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Scholderer and Grunert (2005) found that attitudes towards convenience products were a mediator between perceived time budget and convenience product use. This structural relationship is in accordance with their theoretical approach, suggesting that more general or domain-specific values and lifestyles influence more specific attitudes towards products or actions (Brunsø et al., 2004; Dreezens, Martinjn, Tenbült, Kok, & De Vries, 2005; Homer & Kahle, 1988; Shim & Eastlick, 1998).

Given the discussion of various aspects of convenience, attitudes, and behaviour in the domain of food consumption, we suggest a conceptual model (see Fig. 1) of the relationship between general meal convenience orientation (Candel, 2001) and fish consumption. We distinguish between two attitudinal constructs: perceived product convenience and general attitude toward the product. To the extent that evaluations of the convenience aspects of a product (perceived product convenience) are generalised into global evaluations of the same product (attitude toward the product), a consumer's attitude toward the product should mediate the relationship between perceived product convenience and consumption frequency (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). However, recent studies in the area of food choice might indicate that this is not always the case (e.g., Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Falk, 1996), indicating a direct relationship between product convenience and fish consumption.

### Method

#### *Participants and procedure*

Representative household samples from Denmark ( $N = 1110$ ), Poland ( $N = 1015$ ), Belgium ( $N = 852$ ), Spain

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