

“I feel good when I live experiences in line with my values”: The role of personal values in access to food well-being

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The role of personal values in access to food well-being

Abstract: This qualitative research explores the manifestation of food well-being using consumers' memories of lived experiences. In a naturalistic (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and interpretive approach, we combine three types of data: the photo-elicitation, the elicitation interviews and the personal diary. By following a grounded analysis process theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), our findings highlight the role of the expression of personal values (Schwartz, 1992) in the experience of food well-being. We expose a taxonomy of food well-being according to four categories: Conservation, Self-transcendence, Openness to change and Self-enhancement. Our research extends the concept of FWB given by Block et al. (2011) and Mugel, Gurviez and Decrop (2019) and expose the concept of food eudaimonia. We suggest implications for policies as well as all for food and tourism actors invested and/or concerned by consumer well-being issues.

Keywords: food well-being; personal values; grounded theory.

Track: Consumer Behavior

“No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me (...) this new sensation having had on me the effect which love has of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me” (Proust, 1923). If the Proust Madeleine became such a popular example, it is undoubtedly because this intimate experience carries universal dimensions of food-related memories. Which of us does not bear in his memory his own singular madeleine? Each of our intimacies feeds on the memory of a remarkable food experience that accompanies us throughout our lives and becomes a part of our personality, linked to our well-being.

Our research aims to analyze how food well-being (FWB) manifests itself in consumers’ lived experiences. The first section summarizes the concept of FWB in the literature, followed by our methodological approach and the emergent finding (the four perspectives of FWB and the taxonomy of FWB). This will enable us to clarify the concepts of FWB and food eudaimonia. We conclude by pointing up implications for food and tourism actors as well as public policies in order to enhance consumers’ FWB.

1. Food and well-being

Interest in well-being in the field of marketing is still recent, and has been heightened by studies conducted in Transformative Consumer Research (TCR), an area that encourages and promotes various research topics designed to improve consumers’ well-being (Mick, Pettigrew, Pechmann and Ozanne, 2012). These include food, which accounts for the role of diet in improving well-being and led to the proposal of the concept of food well-being through a paradigm shift in consumer behaviour research. Block et al. (2011) recommend a shift from “food as health”, based on a normative vision of food, to “food as well-being”, based on a holistic vision that includes the dietary expectations and behaviour of consumers. This paradigm offers an alternative to the automatic link between the worlds of diet and medicine in a context in which nutritional imperatives can be seen to play a preponderant role. Block and al. (2011, p.6) define FWB as *“a positive psychological, physical, emotional, and social relationship with food at both the individual and societal levels”*. But this definition has not yet explored the experiential dimension of food consumption from the consumer’s perspective. Mugel, Gurviez and Decrop (2019) define FWB as a eudaimonic experience that includes various processes, meanings, contextual conditions, and resulting moods and emotions. Our objective is to deepen our understanding about this eudaimonic approach to consumer FWB,

drawing on psychology research into well-being.

2. Methods

We adopt a naturalistic and interpretive inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) based on Grounded Theory which allows an understanding of FWB to emerge through data analysis and a literature search that is performed mainly after data have been collected (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). We use three methods of data collection that focus on the narrator's impressions of his/her personal experiences of well-being in food consumption: the photo elicitation, the elicitation interviews and the personal diaries.

2.1. The photo-elicitation

Photo elicitation is a technique used in marketing to develop the abstract feelings of consumers. through photographs, the testimony and the description of the identity of the informant are drawn, depicting various elements such as his experiences, his life and his orientations. Photo-elicitation can help consumers to reify well-being associated with food. Participants were asked to send by email a photograph they had taken that matched the following description: "*I feel good when I eat...*" with two or more sentences explaining their choice. We received 61 answers with one or more photographs along with their free comments.

2.2. A series of elicitation interviews

29 in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with consumers in order to record their perceptions of well-being and the characteristics of the emergence of the feeling. Interviewees were first asked to evoke one memory of an experience associated with food during which they felt good. Adopting an ethnographic posture, we interpreted signals that can generate enthusiasm for consumers, in the choice of words used to talk about their food experiences (vocabulary, use of superlatives).

2.3. The personal diaries

The personal diary is considered as a self-report instrument used repeatedly to examine ongoing experiences (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2003). It provides the possibility of an in-depth exploration of FWB experiences in real and daily situations and to observe the coherence and maintenance of practices et thoughts over several days. Over a period of seven days, we asked by SMS each evening 12 participants if there was any representations or practices related to food that allowed them to feel good, and if they could describe it.

Combining these methods provides a particularly rich methodological approach because it affords access both to extraordinary lived experiences consigned to long-term memory and to everyday experiences consigned to short-term memory. We use three heterogeneous samples (in terms of place of residence, family status, socio-economic profile and age): a transverse sample of 12 consumers which has participated to the three collections and two distinct samples comprising 17 and 49 individuals.

3. Emergent findings

The triangulation of methods (Denzin, 1978) allows us to present a typology of four perspectives of FWB (3.1) according to the definitions of well-being and the food experiences in which it manifests itself given by four informants who participated to the three collects of data (Geraldine, Leo, Aurélien and Victoria). These four perspectives of FWB will allow us to expose a taxonomy of the FWB (3.2)

3.1. Typology of four perspectives of FWB

3.1.1. When FWB is synonym of comfort and shelter: Geraldine's perspective

Geraldine defines well-being as a plenitude sensation, associated with calm and a holiday feel. Her food consumption is like a shelter of safe haven which she do not hesitate to visit when she feels hard life experiences:

« When I was a little girl, my mother used to cook mini-macaroni with ham, it was my childhood meal. Whenever I feel a bit down, I go back to it and it reminds me of good times. It's what I call comfort food » (Elicitation Interview).

FWB implies for her reminiscence of nostalgic food memories:

“On Saturday a friend and I were talking about childhood memories and I was telling her about my maternal grandmother who always used to buy a dairy-based dessert, whose name I can't remember, when we used to visit her. As I described its texture and packaging, straight away she was able to tell me the name: Danino. That evening I went online, and seeing the images was like sharing a moment with my grandmother who has been dead for 27 years. A moment of tenderness combined with sadness. Everyone has their own madeleine episode like Proust! Pity that the Danino aren't around anymore!” (Personal Diary).



During interview and personal diary, Geraldine speaks a lot about her cultural origins and her family missing her. Her regional attachment is clearly present in some experiences of FWB:

“I opened mum’s terrine today. For one moment, I’m back in Aveyron, it makes me feel good” (Personal Diary).

This affective memory invite Geraldine in nostalgic feelings, associated with family and her regional attachment.

3.1.2. *When FWB is synonym of local food purchases and sharing meal: Leo’s perspective*

Léo associates well-being with the concepts of serenity and warmth; he defines well-being as *« being in adequation with our environment, with how to see the future »* (Elicitation interview).

To improve his well-being, he practices meditation and turns to alternative consumption ways. He belongs to an AMAP (French association for the maintenance of a farming agriculture) and likes his commitment in a food community. The consumption of local foods seems to strongly contribute to his FWB:

“At lunch, I ate eggs which came from a friend of mine. With bread and butter, it’s excellent!” (Personal diary).



His FWB manifests itself in the tight relationship he builds with his food, considering it as *“food-friend”*. It seems thus necessary for him to access to food knowledges. Moreover, the experience of FWB presented in photo-elicitation methods underlines the importance of meal sharing:

« Here’s my photo, taken during lunch at home, we’re eating vegetable stew with butternut squash, pumpkin, potatoes, turnips and artichokes! » (Photo-elicitation).



3.1.3. *When FWB is synonym of culinary challenge: Aurelien's perspective*

Aurélien defines well-being as « relaxation », « happiness ». His FWB is linked with the pleasure of tasting and home cooking for friends and family :

« A photo of salad cesar, made with the Sunday food purchases. This is the insurance of eating well because it's homemade, with organic and local products. I often cook this salad because I know that it will be tasty and my family will like it » (Personal Diary).



One of his FWB memory is associated with the pride of cooking a familial dish and to reproduce a child memory:

“This is the fact I have once cooked a special dish. I was with family, on holiday. When we were young, with my brother and sister, there was a traditional dish that my grandmother used to cook and that we were found of, we always fought to finish it. It was Ham with Madeira sauce. And I cooked the dish myself, and without realizing it, my brother and my sister were fighting for finish the dish (...) I was so proud of my achievement and to be able to reproduce this child memory” (Elicitation Interview).

3.1.4. *When FWB is synonym of independence and social emancipation: Victoria's perspective*

Victoria defines well-being as “a sense of accomplishment”. The in-depth interview allowed us to better understand how FWB manifest itself in her life; Victoria links FWB with financial freedom, familial independence and social emancipation:

“By working and disposing of my money, and not the one given by my parents, it is synonym of having fun by consuming foods that I really want. Sometimes choosing things may be in smaller

portions but foods that are a bit like gifts! Yes, [well-being] really came with financial freedom and making choices of what I really want to eat. If I want to eat sushi every day, I will ... products that are maybe less in line my family traditions” (Elicitation interview).

Food becomes a gift that we give to ourselves. During in-depth interview, she talked about a memory of the rediscovery of a product she didn’t like. This episode shows the informant's pride in surpassing her tastes:

“I hate beetroot! I thought to myself: I’m going to have to say that I don’t like it, that she (his mother-in-law) will have to serve it separately. But the plate was so beautiful, the dishware was magnificent (...). I didn’t feel like saying no to a dish where even the receptacle had a history. So I sat down and ate it and it was really good” (Elicitation interview).

4. Discussion

The emergent findings highlight the manifestation of personal values in experiences of FWB and echo eudaimonic theory that views well-being as occurring when a person’s life activities are congruent with his or her values and when the individual is holistically or fully engaged (Raibley, 2012 ; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

4.1. Proposition of a taxonomy of FWB

The experiences of FWB are also echo the theory of basic human values (Schwartz, 1992) that identifies four major categories of values: Conservation, Self-transcendence, Openness to change and Self-enhancement. The table 1 highlights the link between experiences of FWB, definitions attributed to well-being and their links with categories of values.

Table 1. The manifestation of personal values in experiences of FWB

| Informants | Definition of well-being, words associated to well-being | Experiences of FWB | Basics Human Values (Shwartz, 1992) | Types of FWB |
|-------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Géraldine | Calm, Serenity, Take shelter, Safe haven | Reminiscence about childhood memories | Security and Tradition | FWB of Conservation |
| Léo | Adequacy with environment, Nature, Thinking about future | Local food purchases Sharing meal | Benevolence and Universalism | FWB of Self- transcendence |
| Aurélien | Relaxation Happiness | Cooking for others Reproduce a child memory cooking familial dish | Hedonism and Achievement | FWB of Openness to change |
| Victoria | A sense of accomplishment, freedom, independence | Economic independence Self-enhancement of her taste | Hedonism and power | FWB of Self- enhancement |

These findings allow us to define a taxonomy of FWB according these four categories :

- The ***FWB of Conservation*** manifests itself when consumers reinforce a need for reinsurance and safety, orienting their choices towards culinary traditions or respecting nutritional standards, medical or religious prescriptions.
- The ***FWB of Self-transcendence*** manifests itself when consumers express values of benevolence, honesty and ethics not only in the choice of products and dishes but also in food experiences that promote sharing and commensality
- The ***FWB of Openness to change*** is expressed itself through food and culinary discoveries, culinary curiosity and the development of consumers' creativity (particularly when they are fully engaged in challenges):
- The ***FWB of Self-enhancement*** characterizes experiences related to sensory pleasure and as a feeling of social emancipation, which emanates from the quality and value of both the products consumed and the place where it is consumed:

4.2. The concept of food Eudaimonia to better understanding FWB

Our findings help to define the concept of **food eudaimonia**: an alignment between the values of the person, meanings of well-being and food experiences. This concept proposal is consistent with the literature in psychology that emphasizes that well-being is manifested by living a virtuous and committed life and when the activities of the person are consistent with its values. Positive emotions are playing a feedback role by corroborating the manifestation of well-being (Raibley, 2012).

Our findings also enrich the definition of FWB developed by Mugel and al. (2019) considering as a eudaimonic experience that includes various processes, meanings, contextual conditions, and resulting moods and emotions. FWB includes food eudaimonia, i.e. an alignment between the values of the person, meanings of well-being and food experiences. This new conception of FWB thus proposes to go beyond the Omnivor's dilemma (Rozin, 1976) defined as the tension between conservation (neophobia) and the openness to change (neophilia) for human to survive. The others two categories of values (Self-transcendence and Self-enhancement) seems also essential to feel good.

5. Managerial implications

Based on these finding and this discussion, we invite food and tourism actors to integrate the taxonomy of FWB into their marketing strategies (the taxonomy as a new segmentation tool) in

order to enhance consumers' FWB. This taxonomy can be used not only to fit the marketed products accordingly to the consumers' personal values (food products, food experiences such as cooking class) but also to reflect on the holistic culinary experience including the context and the role of consumer in his own food experience. Using the taxonomy of FWB as a segmentation tool will better guide customer experiences and enhance its well-being, in line with it. It can thus go through the choice of dishes, recipes and ingredients but also the type of cooking, the choice concerning the experiential context (decoration, choice of materials, platerie, etc.) We also encourage public authorities and consumer activism to better assist consumer regarding their access to well-being. This involves proposing tools to gain a better understanding of oneself and the values that matter for the consumer, to orient individual towards experiences which can lead to the solicitation of these values. These tools are similar to mindfulness guides that may help the consumer to act with awareness, describe the elements that form the context of the experience, observe the feelings and affects experienced, not react to elements that could impede well-being, and, finally, let go and not judging those experiences (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Kreitemeyer and Topey, 2006). We also suggest governments to help consumers to engage in food experiences, helping them to focus on the holistic eating experiences they are living. This can be achieved through the awareness of tech disconnection in the catering spaces but also by a better support of the consumer, by proposing more points of contact between the consumer, the producer and retailers, the promulgation of oral advices and the participation the consumer in the development of his diet by proposing different forms of co-construction in the food supply.

Conclusion

This research extends the concept of FWB, adopting a consumer centric perspective. Our findings show that, from the consumer's perspective, experience of FWB is a eudaimonic experience in line with motivational types of values. This study allows us to define a taxonomy of FWB. Our research has limitations that suggest further perspectives. The major limitation concerns the lack of an external validity tool identifying the motivational types of values. We rely solely on the values and definitions reported by informants in interviews. The next research step that we want to implement will consist in the administration of the Personal Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2003) to our samples, for a better control of consumers' motivational values. We would like to deepen our understanding of each type of FWB, by identifying the different levers that allow access to well-being and offer more recommendations.

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