

DISCOVERING FOOD CHOICE MOTIVATIONS OF TEXAS COLLEGE STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

As college students embrace their independence, food choices can impact their health and academic success (Abraham et al., 2018). The college lifestyle introduces experiences that uniquely impact students' food choices, including living independently and choosing how and where to access food (e.g., meal plans, dining halls, grocery stores; Vilaro et al., 2017).

The purpose of our study was to identify Texas college students' primary food choice motivations and determine the relationships between these motivations.

THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOR (AJZEN, 1991)

Personal traits, values, environmental conditions, and attitudes can predict an individual's behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Shepard et al., 1995). Ajzen (2015) identified attitudes as the strongest predictor of people's food choice motivations.

METHODS

We used a survey research design and included the study as part of an undergraduate research methods course. The instrument included Steptoe et al.'s (1995) Food Choice Questionnaire and students used their social media to collect data. We received 317 usable responses from Texas college students and conducted descriptive and correlational statistics.

RESULTS

Food choices were motivated by:

- Price ($M = 3.28$; $SD = .65$)
- Convenience ($M = 3.11$; $SD = .59$)
- Sensory appeal ($M = 3.03$; $SD = .60$)
- Health ($M = 2.79$; $SD = .67$)
- Mood ($M = 2.73$; $SD = .69$)
- Weight ($M = 2.42$; $SD = .78$)
- Familiarity ($M = 2.41$; $SD = .75$)
- Natural content ($M = 2.06$; $SD = .78$)
- Ethical concern ($M = 1.74$; $SD = .74$)

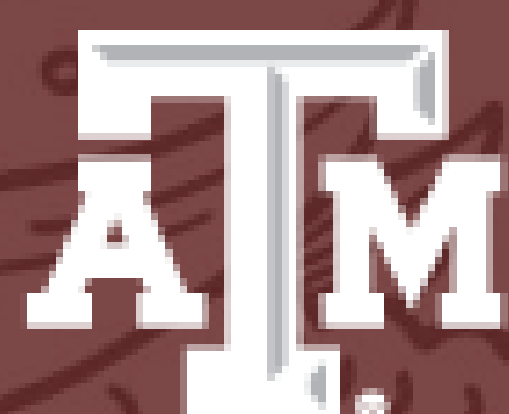
Statistically significant moderate/substantial correlations existed between:

- Health and natural content ($r = .62$)
- Weight and health ($r = .53$)
- Price and convenience ($r = .51$)
- Mood and sensory appeal ($r = .51$)
- Familiarity and convenience ($r = .48$)
- Familiarity and sensory appeal ($r = .47$)
- Familiarity and mood ($r = .41$)
- Natural content and ethics ($r = .41$)

Note. 4-point scale (4 = very important to 1 = not important at all)

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMENDATIONS

Price, convenience, and sensory appeal are the most important motivators to consider when marketing food to Texas college students. The relationships between motivators should be considered and addressed when developing Extension nutrition education programming. Further research is needed to determine relationships between demographic, geographic, and psychographic characteristics, and college students' food choice motivations.



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