Food Literacy as a Path to Food Well-Being

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Food Literacy: How Do Communications and Marketing Impact Consumer Knowledge, Skills, and Behavior?

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Agenda

1) The Nature of the Challenge
2) The end goal: Food Well-being (FWB)
3) The Food Well-being model
   a) Origin
   b) Dimensions
4) A focus on Food literacy
5) The Interaction of Dimensions
6) Implications and Conclusions
A Complex Challenge

- Consumer Education
- Scientific Communication
- Health Communication and Health Promotion
- Social Marketing
- Commercial Marketing

- Consumer knowledge and behavior about food related issues
  - Nutrition, food safety, labelling
The Societal Food Paradox

• Peoples are increasingly food centered, yet spend less time on food preparation

• We have become increasingly obese whilst obsessing over fat, calories and body mass index

• The coexistence of increased obesity and related diseases amidst global hunger and food insecurity

Lack of a healthy relationship with food at both individual and societal levels
Transformative Consumer Research (TCR)

“Food and Healthier Lives” Track Goal:

To support intellectual exchange and research collaborations aimed at social change via transformative consumer research in the area of food and health.

- Diverse group of 12 international consumer researchers with varied approaches and one “out of field” researcher
  - Experimentalists, cultural theorists, qualitative, behavioral decision theorists, information processing, modelers
  - Epidemiologist

- Process: discussion and joint brainstorming (2-days)
  - Assess the current state of knowledge in the area
  - Highlight relevant theories and methods
  - Identify research gaps
  - Collaborative research and writing
Food ≠ Health

“No one sits down to eat a plate of nutrients”
Food is also:

- Love
- Nurturing
- Comfort
- A gift
- Pleasure & enjoyment
- Community

Food Is Well-Being

*Physical, emotional and psychological nourishment*
The Paradigm Shift

Old: Food = Health
- Functional & Medicinal
- Paternalistic & Normative
- Restraint & Restriction
- Body Mass Index

New: Food = Well-being
- Holistic & Integrative
- Consumer-oriented
- Positive Approach
- Attitudinal & Behavioral

Requires shifting from an emphasis on restraint and restrictions towards a more positive, holistic understanding of the role of food in a person’s overall well-being.
The End Goal: Well-being

From Nutrients to Nurture: A Conceptual Introduction to Food Well-Being

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The overall purpose of this paper is to reframe the relationship between food and well-being. This purpose builds from an understanding of the role of food in personal well-being. The authors propose a concept of food well-being (FWB) defined in terms of psychological, physiological, sensory, and social constraints within food at both individual and societal levels. The authors, therefore, explore the key concepts of FWB, food addiction, food literacy, food marketing, food availability, and food policy. The FWB framework provides a richer definition of food and highlights the need for research that bridges other disciplines and paradigms around food and nutrition. Further research should develop and refine the understanding of each domain and the ultimate goal of moving food toward a true embodiment of food well-being.

Keywords: food, well-being, nutrition, food literacy, food addiction, policy

Consumer relationship to food is key
• a positive relationship is essential to well-being.

Implies a richer definition of food
• Connects multiple academic fields to societal trends and food practices

An opportunity to expand the conceptual framework
A positive psychological, physical, emotional and social relationship with food at both the individual and societal levels.
The processes by which people learn about food and its cultural linkages

➢ **Individual**
  - Food consumption has a significant cultural component.
    - Others provide information, support and normative pressure
  - Occurs via explicit and implicit means.

➢ **Societal**
  - Ethnicity, social class and other subcultures serve as key influences
  - Media and marketing also important socialization agents
The strategic use of product, promotion, and price to influence consumer attitudes and behaviors towards food

- **Individual**
  - Influences consumption decisions
    - Often with limited cognitive effort or awareness.
    - Understanding affect and people’s pleasure from food also crucial.

- **Societal**
  - Informs and influences consumer behavior at an aggregate level
    - Products marketed
    - Information provided
    - Prices charged
  - Contributes to both problems and solutions
The food distributed and accessible to consumers for consumption

➢ Individual
  • Consumers are challenged with multiple decisions
    • which sources to patronize that vary in price and convenience
    • which foods to select among available choices that vary in degree of processing, taste and healthfulness.

➢ Societal
  • Built environments determine accessibility to healthy food for entire neighborhoods.
  • The economic environment shapes the relationship of marketing channels to Food Well-being.
Policies related to food systems including food production, pricing, safety, and labeling

- **Individual**
  - Impact FWB by allowing consumers to make informed decisions and giving them peace of mind in their choices.

- **Societal**
  - Policies at international, national, state and local levels to better align food production and distribution with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability.
A Focus on Food Literacy

- Knowledge about food and nutrition can improve the quality of food consumption choices
  - However, knowledge alone is not sufficient to nourish a person’s pursuit of food well-being

- Food knowledge also involves the motivation, ability and opportunity to apply the information to food choices.

Food Literacy:

*Understanding nutrition information and acting on that knowledge in ways consistent with promoting nutrition goals and food well-being.*
- **Individual**
  - Three main components:
    - Conceptual knowledge
    - Acquisition and apprehension of food-related
    - Procedural knowledge
      - Food scripts, heuristics
  - The motivation, ability, and opportunity to apply that knowledge across various food-related contexts.
- **Societal**
  - Approaches to educating people about how to incorporate food into their daily lives in ways that nurture their food goals and support societal health and sustainability.
The Intersections

FOOD WELL-BEING (FWB)

- Education
  - Guidelines
  - Campaigns

- Tools
  - Heuristics
  - Procedures
  - Techniques

- Food Marketing
  - Positioning
  - Segmentation
  - Marketing Mix

- Food Availability
  - Accessibility
  - Variety
  - Availability

- Food Policy
  - Calorie Intake
  - Disease
  - Personal Beliefs

- Food Socialization
  - Agriculture Policy
  - Food Safety Policy
  - Nutrition Policy

- Food Literacy
  - Parenting
  - Family
  - Meals
  - Peers

- Societal
  - Culture
  - Sub-culture

- Individual
  - Cognitions
  - Emotions

- Roles
  - Individual
  - Societal
Fast food marketing to children is viewed as contributing to childhood obesity.

But fast food is also marketed to parents, and may influence how parents feed their children, and affect their child’s weight.

How might parents respond to fast food marketing in ways that promote the development or perpetuation of obesity?

Summary of Results

- Increased exposure to fast food promotion was associated with beliefs that eating fast food is normative, and more frequent child consumption.
  - Social norms toward fast food drove the relationship between parents exposure to promotions and their children’s fast food consumption.
- Black and Hispanic parents reported greater access and promotional exposure, and higher child consumption than White and Asian parents.
Analytic Framework

Parents Marketing Exposure
- Product*
- Price*
- Promotion
- Access

Parental Attitudes

Social Norms related to Fast Food Consumption

Child Consumes More Fast Food

Target Characteristics
- Race/Ethnicity

H3

H1

H2a

H2b

*=not assessed in present study
Method

- Cross-sectional study at 8 HRSA health centers in medically underserved communities
  - MD, NY (3), PR (2), WV, VA (urban and rural sites)
- 312 children aged 2 to 12 and their caregivers recruited using randomized process
- Height and weight measurements by trained staff
- Questionnaire administered to parent in child’s presence by a trained “study leader”
A Food Well-being Perspective

- Study examined *food marketing* and *food availability* and showed how it influenced social norms.

*But what if we knew:*
- Food literacy - what was parents' knowledge of fast food, as well as their skill level in food preparation:
- Food socialization - how permissive their parents were with their children
- Food policies related to zoning and fast food prevalence in the multiple communities we studied
Implications

• The Food Well-being model highlights the importance of understanding *what does food mean to consumers* and *how can that relationship be influenced to contribute to wellbeing?*
  • Incorporates a broad range of influences to better organize the complexity of food decisions and food’s ability to contribute to our social, psychological, and physical well-being.

• The FWB framework embeds Food Literacy within the broader context of people’s relationship with food.

• Highlights the need to consider the interrelationships of dimensions, and the connection between individual and societal factors
Conclusions

• The framework can stimulate new thinking about ways in which consumers’ relationship with food can be transformed --through their own choices, by marketers’ practices, and via policy initiatives.

• Will help us to move beyond educating consumers about nutritional aspects of foods to think more critically about the messages they receive in light of how it might influence their well-being.

Because it's not just a plate of nutrients
Questions or Comments?
Example: *Marine Stewardship Council*

Ecolabel and fishery certification program designed to contribute to the health of the world’s oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis.

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<th>Food Well-being</th>
<th>Food Socialization</th>
<th>Food Literacy</th>
<th>Food Marketing</th>
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<td>Social Marketing</td>
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<td>Behavior Change</td>
<td>Embed sustainable fish preferences in cultural, social, and family norms</td>
<td>Educate consumers on fish as a renewable source of fresh, healthy food</td>
<td>Consumers buy labelled seafood at an acceptable price</td>
<td>Promote sustainable, ecofriendly fish harvesting practices</td>
<td>Market-based solutions to protect global fish populations</td>
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Also: Research, Target segments, Exchange, Competition and The Marketing Mix

Some Research Questions

- What is the impact of lower versus higher food literacy on peoples relationship with food?
- What are bilingual, bicultural, and cross-cultural differences in food literacy, and how do they relate to food well-being?
- How can we use technological innovations to increase food literacy?
- What barriers need to be addressed in order to increase individual motivation, ability and opportunity to use the knowledge that they do have?
- How can we use external influences, such as changes in product descriptions or visual depictions in conjunction with people’s natural processing tendencies to increase food literacy?

How does food literacy interact with the other dimensions of the food well-being model?

- How do culture, ethnicity and income influence food literacy is practiced and how do they contribute to FWB?
- How does hunger or food insecurity influence peoples understanding of food preparation?
- What are the effects on food choices and the FWB of adults and children of policies that decrease access to high-energy dense foods in work settings, school or day care settings, and public venues?