

## Special issue on food, pleasure, and consumer well-being: contributions to marketing and theory

This special issue seeks to expand on the research conducted to date, and approach the relationship between food pleasure and well-being through a broad lens focusing on experiential and hedonic food and drink consumption (Batat *et al.*, 2019). This experiential and hedonic food consumption may come from socio-cultural, economic, ideological and symbolic sources, along with others sources that influence the experiential pleasure of food and its contribution to consumer health, food and drink education, and individual or societal well-being. This special issue originates from a simple but hard-to-tackle question:

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- Q1. How, and to what extent, does the focus on the experiential pleasure of food and drink modify the research agenda of scholars investigating the role of healthy eating in promoting well-being? In this special issue, we present articles drawn from a wide range of disciplines, all of which focus on experiential and hedonic food and drink consumption, including consumer culture research, transformative consumer research (TCR) and social marketing, among others.

A preliminary answer is found in the role of pleasure in terms of the experiential pleasure of food or the experiential pleasure of food concept (Batat *et al.*, 2019), which refers to a journey that involves the enduring cognitive and emotional pleasures consumers gain from savoring the multisensory, communal and cultural meanings of food experiences; hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982); and epicurean eating defined as “the enduring pleasure derived from the aesthetic appreciation of the sensory and symbolic value of the food” (Cornil and Chandon, 2016, p. 52). We believe that experiential pleasure plays an important, but often neglected, role in the making of personal and social well-being. Pleasure, as applied to a TCR agenda, calls for synergistic theoretical and methodological approaches that we are confident will lead to interesting and novel ideas relating to food and drink well-being. The notion of pleasure depends on the socio-cultural context, and on the food and drink culture where it has been shaped. For example, in the North American food culture, the notion of pleasure (Alba and Williams, 2013) is separated from an individual’s daily life and is limited to special times when guilty pleasures (e.g. indulging in chocolate) are a moral failing. In the European food culture, especially in the French context, food education is based on everyday pleasurable food experiences. Pleasure in the French culture refers to a moral value because it serves as a compass guiding people in their actions (Stearns, 1997). French parents begin teaching their children about this moral value from early childhood in a process called “the education of taste” (Reverdy, 2009). This idea has much in common with the notion of mindfulness that refers to giving one’s self over to the moment and living it fully. Experiential aspects related to food and drink such as discovering novelty, epicurean eating, tasting, experimenting, hedonism, estheticism and symbolism are all part of food and drink pleasure and education to facilitate the adoption of healthy diet and achieve well-being.

This special issue explores hedonic consumption and the Epicurean perspective, which suggests that experiential food and drink pleasure may in fact facilitate moderation and well-being. In line with the prior research in marketing on the experiential pleasure of food concept to enhance well-being (Batat *et al.*, 2019), the role of design on overeating (Wansink and Chandon, 2014), the French paradox of meal cessation and wine and sensory



expectation in North America (Wansink *et al.*, 2007), as well as comfort food preferences across age and gender (Wansink *et al.*, 2003), this special issue takes a holistic and socio-cultural perspective to explore the role of pleasure in food and drink consumption. In doing so, we aim to understand how the experiential side of food and drink pleasure may drive healthy eating habits in different food and drink cultures or otherwise. The idea of the experiential consumption of food and drink, and its contribution to improve healthy living, has recently been highlighted in research conducted by Batat *et al.* (2019), who explored the impact of pleasure derived from food experiences on adopting healthy eating behaviors and improved consumer well-being. In their research, Batat *et al.* (2019) showed that, in part, the experiential pleasure philology of a savoring journey to food well-being (FWB) (Block *et al.*, 2011) has three stages: contemplation (which culminates in anticipation), connection (which culminates in degustation) and creation (which culminates in remembrance). Within these stages reside five principles (sensory, sharing, sociocultural meaning, symbolism and storytelling) that influence consumers by producing enduring satisfaction and delight. The results of their research showed that, unlike healthy eating that focuses on restraints and control, eating for pleasure tendencies are associated with a less preference for food qualities and higher food well-being (Block *et al.*, 2011).

In line with the food experiential pleasure and the focus of this special issue on food pleasure as linked to FWB, the papers selected for this special issue address aspects of food experiences and meanings that generate pleasure and, thus enhance FWB in different contexts. However, all six papers take a conceptual or a qualitative methodological perspective in line with the scope of the journal. The first research in this special issue by Batat relies on multidisciplinary food literature such as articles on the sociology of food, food anthropology, food and nutrition studies, food sustainability and food marketing. It also pulls from articles about the experiential perspective of food as a means to introduce a new “healthy food experience pyramid” that replaces the well-established “healthy eating pyramid”, building upon the experiential pleasure of food paradigm. Batat outlines two major contributions. First, he argues that the introduction of the healthy food experience pyramid will lead researchers, food industry officials and policymakers to shift the focus of their research towards a new experiential perspective of food based on the key idea of eating for pleasure. This can be achieved by identifying the main hierarchical needs that individuals must satisfy in order to improve food well-being for healthy and pleasurable experiences. Second, this new paradigm extends many areas of food marketing research, with widespread applicability in the promotion of a new healthy eating system based on the pleasure derived from food experiences throughout the five hierarchical human needs.

A social food pleasure theme follows in the second paper by Mendini, Pizzetti and Peter, in which attention turns to *sharing* and its impact on food well-being. By reviewing literature on food well-being and pleasure, as well as by analyzing current trends appealing to food consumers and food enjoyers, the authors introduce and define social food pleasure as a new holistic framework that can promote a pleasurable and healthy food experience. The authors extend present works on food sharing and food socialization by defining social food pleasure as:

[...] the enjoyment derived from the acts of sharing food experiences offline, online, and for society at large, that positively contributes to consumers' overall pleasure and satisfaction with consumer's food consumption.

Moreover, they identify three key contexts of applications of social food pleasure. Sharing offline relates to the social activities that can help achieve pleasure with food. Sharing online concerns new media tools which allow for the connection between consumers and food to

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enhance food pleasure. Sharing for society considers the current pleasure of consumers as being derived from having a positive social experience based on food consumption.

The issue of food socialization also features in the third paper, by Bradford and Grier. In their paper, the authors identify how food socialization and food literacy enable individuals to transform their relationship with food and enhance their FWB. Unlike prior research that focuses on food as the source of pleasure, this study finds that food is deployed as fuel, and this transition results in pleasure. This paper explores the relationship between dietary restriction and food well-being by analyzing an under-researched population of African-American participants in a food detoxification program. The program employs a novel but growing approach to transitioning to healthier eating patterns, which is a specific form of food restriction used to transition to healthier eating. The authors explain how a voluntary transition to healthier eating enables people to pursue food well-being and extends its understanding. In addition, this research contributes novel insights related to TCR efforts to motivate change. Findings have implications for marketing theory and practice, including the development of social marketing campaigns to support healthy eating patterns, especially for at-risk populations.

Leveraging the coffee experience is a continuing theme in the fourth paper, by Eiseman and Jonsson. In their study, they focus on how the coffee drinking experience can be considered an engagement tool for climate change and eco-friendly behaviors. This paper is an exploratory study using a case study method to analyze a small number of existing research on the coffee drinking experience. This method is used to define the coffee drinking experience and identify examples in which it could be leveraged to educate consumers on climate change. In this paper, an argument for the coffee drinking experience as a method for public engagement on climate change is presented. The authors show that the emotive and multi-sensory aspects of the coffee drinking experience, combined with the informal atmosphere of coffee shops, provide a non-threatening environment for discussing complex ideas. This study finds there is scope for further exploration and research on the coffee drinking experience as a tool for public engagement with climate change.

In the fifth paper, Moscato and Ozanne introduce a new concept of rebellious eating. The authors conducted ethnography research for which data were collected, across 27 months, using in-depth interviews and participant observations of members of the Red Hat Society to explore food rituals that have practical implications for well-being. This article explores how food and its relationship to pleasure evolve as women navigate social norms around gender and aging. This research provides a nuanced perspective on how food experiences shape consumption rituals and communal ties over time. This study shows how older women challenge social expectations around age and gender through food pleasure rituals. The concept of rebellious eating is introduced to conceptualize how these older women rethink aging and indulgence within a supportive community of consumption and integrate the concepts into their personal narratives.

The final paper, by Bordunrin and Stone, moves to the topic of “Epicurean happiness” and its impact on FWB. This paper then takes a different approach to the usual qualitative methodologies by utilizing the introspective analysis of the film *Eat, Pray, Love*, in which the consumption of food for pleasure was heavily practiced. The authors explore the idea of eating for pleasure and its effect on consumer well-being. It begins by introducing the concept of FWB under the TCR agenda. Subsequently, it provides detailed discussions on the concept of pleasure, under which food practices involving epicurean pleasure, and hedonic and “eudaimonic” consumption, are discussed. This paper is novel in its approach to utilize film introspection to probe the concept of FWB within TCR. Additionally, it reveals the transitioning moment of alternative food consumption that leads to pleasurable

experience. It also reveals that a personal investment in cooking for self, restores taste and improves subjective well-being. Overall, it showcases how the appreciation of the sensations of food from its taste, as it was ingested gradually leads to the total experiential feeling embedded in food consumption.

Through these papers, and their theoretical (e.g. practice theory, sociological of food theory, anthropology of food, among others) and qualitative methodological perspectives, we were able to investigate this special issue, and hope our study will stimulate future research in the following three key areas. First, shedding light on new perspectives of the experiential pleasure of food and drink, food and drink well-being and the challenges and opportunities associated with identifying Epicurean eating behaviors, and their impact on promoting healthy eating and drinking. Second, examining constraints and obstacles related to the adoption of experiential and pleasurable eating and drinking among consumers, and its promotion by the food and drink industry and policymakers. Finally, this special issue will hopefully lead to new concepts that will challenge our understanding of the experiential pleasure of food and drinking, and its contribution to food health, and to individual and social well-being.

#### *Avenues for future research*

According to the articles presented in this special issue, various avenues exist for future studies at the marketing, food pleasure/well-being and policy interface. These new avenues must take into consideration current trends emerging in our society and economy. From the sharing economy enabled by technology, to new segments (e.g. minorities) and trends (e.g. globalization), they all deserve our attention. Especially the *uberization* of food, as the technology-enabled sharing model, which leverages the supply chain of food, calls for a better understanding of what food experiences and food pleasures entail. The consumption of food at home vs the restaurant underlines the need for intimacy and privacy and provides a new perspective on the experiential side of food consumption. The call for authenticity and intimacy of food consumed at home meets the human need to save time by ordering online through restaurants without seats or commercial kitchens dedicated solely to home delivery. This opens up new and promising opportunities for food product startups, which, in the past, have solely focused on food itself (e.g. vegan restaurants). New food-related businesses (e.g. MealSufers and Eatwith) and business models (e.g. Merci Voisin by Carrefour) are emerging across the world with the goal to provide an experience focused on tangible benefits (e.g. convenience) as well as pleasure (e.g. quality, taste, commensality and novelty). New research needs to shed a light on the concept of pleasure related to food as the sharing economy slowly (but surely) shapes the landscape for how food is produced (e.g. commercial kitchens and home cooking entrepreneurs), distributed (e.g. logistic sharing platforms and collaborative shoppers) and consumed. Research needs to be done on changing buying behaviors and preferences in this new landscape to provide food supply design solutions which best meet these emerging priorities and trends.

Looking for pleasure and avoiding pain are at the core of the human experience, and a focus on taste and pleasure as a complementary component to nutrition is necessary in order to promote consumer food well-being and a better society. Specifically, when we eat, we are seeking the pleasure of food and we are avoiding the pain of hunger. However, the conscious experience of pleasure might require awareness. If one does not get the pleasure that they seek, the brain might interpret that missed experience of pleasure as hunger. Experiential marketing offline and online, as related to food and its consumption, needs to be further explored in the fruitful context of food pleasure and needs to take into consideration new

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target markets (e.g. minorities) and trends (e.g. globalization, uberization of food), which are emerging as powerful forces.

Guest editorial

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