

The impact of personality traits on intention to try new tastes: Food related behaviours of Generation X and Y due to personality traits

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of generation X and Y consumers' personal traits on their intention to try new tastes (e.g. local food). In order to ascertain the role of personality traits in consumer's behavioral process of decision towards new tastes, personality traits variables - (Extraversion, Openness, Emotional Stability and Agreeableness) were introduced. Results were compared over two different generations (Generation X and Generation Y) to determine any difference of intention to try new tastes due to same personality traits.

Keywords: Food related behavior, Personality, Food Liking

1. Introduction

Although a variety of social, cultural and economic factors contribute to the consumption and the choice of food, personality traits also play an important role in the matter. Food is a central part of human life as we need it to survive. Although the famous chef Anthelme Brillat-Savarin said "Tell me what you eat: I will tell you who you are." actually, who we are determines what we eat, or more precisely, how we eat and choice of food because the way we do things is part of our personality – and that includes our eating habits and trying and experiencing new tastes. It is stated that an individual's personality traits is the sum of his/her behavioural and emotional characteristics. A person's moods, attitudes, opinions, motivations, and style of thinking, perceiving, speaking, and acting is defined as his/her personality which makes each individual distinct (Jordan, 2011).

Personality refers to a person's tendency to behave, think, and feel in a certain consistent manner (Shiner & Caspi, 2003). In this sense how an individual behave towards food varieties and new tastes depend on their personality traits and it is stated that personality traits are interconnected with eating styles (Heaven, et.al., 2001) and personality factors influence an individual's food choices (Keller and Siegrist, 2015). It should also be added that besides the personality traits, food involvement which is defined as the importance level of food in an individual's life (Bell and Marshall, 2004) also affect the tendency to try new tastes

As the personality traits influence food choices, it is a challenge to find out which personality traits are more open to try and experience different and new foods comparing different generations. Since every generation is not alike, it can be assumed that personality traits in different generations display different reactions towards new tastes and it can be assumed that the differences in generations' lifestyles and attitudes reveal diverse needs, preferences and expectations in food and foodservice. The purpose of this paper is to describe briefly Generation X and Y and the related personality traits and their reaction towards new tastes due to these personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience).

2. Personality traits – The Big Five

Trait theories of personality have long been tried to find precisely how many different personality traits exist. Today many contemporary personality psychologists believe that there are five basic dimensions of personality, known as the "Big Five" personality traits which is credited as "achieving the greatest degree of consensus of all traits taxonomy" (Larsen and Buss, 2010). After a research done among people from more than 50 different cultures by McCrae and his colleagues, it has been found that the big five traits are also remarkably universal. Personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience) reveals a natural language in which people use to label and explain themselves and the others (John and Srivastav, 1999) and they are different from attitudes and intentions personality states wide characters and helps us to understand why certain individuals behave in a healthier manner than others (Miller et al., 2004).

In recent personality related researches most of them have been mainly based on the Big Five dimensions (Costa

and McCrae, 1985), which are named as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness to Experience. Vulnerability, self-consciousness, anxiety, aggression, impulsiveness and depression are the facets of emotional stability and people having this trait can adjust their behaviour according to the new culture they are experiencing easily than the others (Bhatti, et.al. 2013). Aspects of extraversion includes sociability, confidence, warmth, excitement and adventure seeking, activity, talkativeness, energy and positive emotions. Moreover, people having this personality trait can adjust and accept other cultures faster than others (Black, 1990). Extroverts like being social and are very good at networking and this personality type is more likely to eat when external food cues are present in the environment (Keller and Siegrist, 2015). While the facets of agreeableness include straightforwardness, trust, modesty, compliance, cooperative, unselfishness and tender-mindedness, openness to experience is characterized by values, aesthetics, imagination, feelings, ideas, sensitive and actions. Aspects of conscientiousness are self-discipline, determination, success, deliberation, order, plan and dutifulness (Costa and McCrae, 1992).

3. Generation Y

Generation Y, also known as Millennials, whose birth years are between 1981 and 2000 (Strauss and Howe, 1991), is deeply influenced by the internet and technology and is an interesting consumer group to target (Lester et al., 2005). The literature states that the size of Generation Y is three times the size of Generation X (Ma and Niehm, 2006). Generation Y is a regular user of social media to express their feelings, their likes and dislikes, their interests and they are attracted to different types of media and to blogs (Hershatter and Epstein, 2010). Moreover, generation Y is very adventurous and courageous in trying and experiencing new food and restaurants (Gale, 2007). Generation Y give more importance to sensory appeal and familiarity is the least important factor in influencing food preference and they are neophilic -seeking for new food- (Kavitha, et.al. 2011) which can be interpreted as proneness to new tastes.

According to the report "Trouble in Aisle 5" June 2012 by S.A. Mushkin who is an equity analyst, it is clearly stated that as the other generations are getting older and generation Y (Millennials) is the one who is shaping the market. In the report it is stated that although they prefer cheap and convenient food, they are ready to pay more for fresh and healthy food and also ready to do whatever it is to achieve this. They enjoy organic farms, small batch jams, artisanal cheese and local tastes. They are ready to pay more for specific qualities in food, such as organic, natural, and ethnic and specialty foods as they are savvy consumer who have better spending power than other generation and are generally not so price sensitive (Kavitha, et.al. 2011).

It is stated that generation Y doesn't have much brand loyalty (Wolfe, 2004) and it is also stated in the report "Trouble in Aisle 5" they are willing to use different distribution styles to find good food. This generation is not afraid to purchase food online and for them traditional grocery store is not the only place to find what they want. Generation Y, also called Millennials, prefer dining as part of their shopping trips and they prefer to dine out considering it as a social event (Hudson, 2013). As a result, for generation Y eating tasty food is staying in tune with up-to-date food trends and experiencing new locations with unique flavors.

4. Generation X

Generation X whose birth years are between 1965 and 1980 (Eisner, 2005) are typically defined as sceptical, pessimistic and individualist (Smola and Sutton, 2002).

According to a report by Longitudinal Study of American Youth (2012) preparing and sharing food and having conversations related to food is a major social activity among generation X. They don't trust food related commercials, cooking shows and the opinions of family and friends as well as they trust FDA. They don't have much knowledge about GM foods (genetically modified food) unless their major was in science as this term GM food came out after this generation finished high school and college. The LSAY report also states that Generation X men are more involved and conscious about food than the men in previous generations. They spend time shopping and enjoy cooking and the cooking shows on TV. Moreover, this generation is not keen on organic foods says the report.

Another report, Top 10 Characteristics of the Four Generations in 2012, states that the Generation X is lacking a "defining moment" that they could share and this lack of a defining event turned them self-reliant, sceptical, risk takers, seek balance and a sense of family. All they could witness was long gas lines, Gulf war, AIDS, riots and downsizing of companies. Therefore, the report reveals that they are influenced by the pessimism of the 1970's,

the distrust of the 1980's and scepticism of the 1990's.

Although generation X works hard and they love what they do, they seek of a balance between work and family and have a work to live mentality (Brackett, 2000). In food choices quality and value are important factors and this generation's spending on groceries monthly is more than the previous generations and they prefer making food with minimal preparations and simple ingredients. This generation considers food to maintain energy and release stress and they want clean, easy-to-understand food labels (LSAY, 2012).

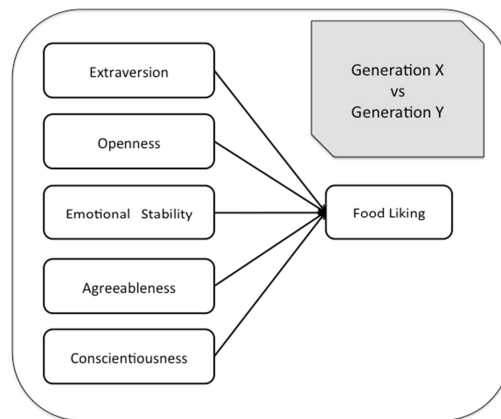


Figure 1. Research Model

H_1 = Generation X personality types has an impact on Food Liking

H_2 = Generation Y personality types has an impact on Food Liking

In the light of literature presented above, the research model was prepared.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research Instrument

Researchers have conceptualized personality in a variety of traits and multi-level of abstraction (McAdams, 1995) and each level develops better understanding in terms of different human behavior and experiences (John and Srivastav, 1999). Researchers have highlighted many personality characteristics and argued that these characteristics played an important role. Among all personality characteristics, five factors are widely acceptable and most commonly used by researchers and practitioners to evaluate individual personality. These five factors are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience (Gosling et. al., 2003). Researchers labeled these five factors as the big five.

The purpose of this study is examining the effects of the dimensions of personality on intention to try new tastes. Data for this research was collected through a questionnaire survey. In order to measure the personality trait, which is the independent variable in the above proposed model, Goldberg's (1992) Big Five Personality Inventory was used. Authors developed food liking questions with three questions. In the questionnaire, 5 point Likert scale "1=Strongly Disagree" to "5=Strongly Agree" was used.

5.2. Sampling and data collection

Data for the study was collected from Facebook users in Turkey. During a two-week period, 258 respondents completed the survey. After sorting and removing duplicate submissions, a net sample of 200 usable questionnaires remained. A total of 107 (53.5%) of the participants were female and 93 (46.5%) were male. The average age was 27.17 years (with a 6.56 standard deviation), ranging from 17 to 56 years. Data obtained from questionnaires will be analyzed through the IBM SPSS 20.0 statistical program.

6. Analysis

6.1. Factor Analysis

To identify and test the underlying structure of the scales, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were employed to personality and food liking measurements as the initial step.

6.1.1. Personality

To determine the dimensions of personality characteristics an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principle Component Factoring and Varimax Rotations was conducted. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity tests were performed to test the appropriateness of data for conducting factor analysis (Sharma, 1996). Result of the tests (KMO=0.883, χ^2 Bartlett test (300)=4600.260, $p=0.000$) were satisfactory.

The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.50, supporting the inclusion of each item in the factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues over one were retained and items with factor loadings below 0.50 and items with high cross loadings were excluded (Hair et. al., 1998). As a result of the analysis five dimensions were found.

Table 1. Factor Analysis result of Personality

| Factor Name | Factor Items | Factor Loading | Reliability |
|--|------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Extraversion | Sociable | 0.809 | 0.848 |
| | Extraverted | 0.799 | |
| | Assertive | 0.752 | |
| | Energetic | 0.720 | |
| | Self-assured | 0.630 | |
| Agreeableness | Adaptable | 0.823 | 0.835 |
| | Sensitive | 0.736 | |
| | Acquiescent | 0.719 | |
| | Understanding | 0.714 | |
| | Respectful | 0.627 | |
| Conscientiousness | Self-disciplined | 0.809 | 0.851 |
| | Principled | 0.763 | |
| | Responsibility | 0.737 | |
| | Hard-working | 0.639 | |
| | Controlled | 0.649 | |
| Emotional Instability (Neuroticism) | Unworried | 0.854 | 0.838 |
| | Unagitated | 0.851 | |
| | Easy | 0.842 | |
| | Relaxed | 0.636 | |
| | Cool-headed | 0.504 | |
| Openness to experience | Progressive | 0.772 | 0.814 |
| | Prefers variety | 0.737 | |
| | Analytical | 0.701 | |
| | Creative | 0.678 | |
| | Open-minded | 0.638 | |

By conducting exploratory factor analysis, we found that personality is measured on five dimensions; Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Instability and Openness to experience (See Table 1).

6.1.2. Food Liking

To determine the dimensions of food liking, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principle Component Factoring and Varimax Rotations was conducted. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity tests were performed to test the appropriateness of data for conducting factor analysis (Sharma, 1996).

Table 2. Factor Analysis result of Food Liking

| Factor Name | Factor Items | Factor Loading | Reliability |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Food Liking | I enjoy trying new tastes. | 0.897 | 0.822 |
| | Local food interests me. | 0.879 | |
| | Eating food is an enjoyable event. | 0.798 | |

Result of the tests (KMO=0.686, χ^2 Bartlett test (3)=416.419, $p=0.000$) were satisfactory. The diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix were all over 0.50, supporting the inclusion of each item in the factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues over one were retained and items with factor loadings below 0.50 and items with high cross loadings were excluded (Hair et. al., 1998). As a result of the analysis unidimension were found. (See Table 2).

6.2. Multiple Regression Analyses for Generation X and Y

When we conducted multiple regression analyses to understand the relationship between personality and food liking, we found out that Openness to experience and Agreeableness explain e-loyalty at 99% confidence interval (F=16.461, $p=0.000$ respectively, $R=0.577$; $R^2= 0.333$).

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis result for Generation X

| Dependent variable: Food Liking | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| Independent variables: | Beta | t-value | p value |
| Openness to experience | 0.396 | 3.420 | 0.001 |
| Agreeableness | 0.267 | 2.308 | 0.024 |

As reflected in Table 4 Openness to experience and agreeableness had almost equal contributions ($\beta_{\text{Openness}}=0.396$ and $\beta_{\text{Agreeableness}} = 0.267$) respectively. When we conducted multiple regression analyses to understand the relationship between personality and food liking for generation Y, we found out that extraversion and agreeableness explain food liking at 99% confidence interval (F=8.377, $p=0.000$ respectively, $R=0.292$; $R^2= 0.085$). H_1 is partially accepted.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis result for Generation Y

| Dependent variable: Food Liking | | | |
|--|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Independent variables: | Beta | t-value | p-value |
| Extraversion | 0.197 | 2.628 | 0.009 |
| Agreeableness | 0.164 | 2.190 | 0.030 |

As reflected in Table 4 Extraversion and agreeableness had almost equal contributions ($\beta_{\text{Extraversion}}=0.197$ and $\beta_{\text{Agreeableness}} = 0.164$) respectively. H_2 is partially accepted.

7. Conclusion and discussion

The main objective of this study was to determine the relationship between personality variables and liking of food. It is stated that among lots of variables like cultural and biological factors, personality may also play an important role in liking and preferring different food types (Steven, 1996). We examined differences in the relationships of personality traits with liking foods between Generation X and Generation Y. In Generation X, Openness to experience and Agreeableness tended to show stronger effects than the other personality measures. These results suggest that in Generation X the liking of foods may be more strongly motivated by creative, different yet understandable and logical (familiar) tastes.

In Generation Y, the personality traits Extraversion and Agreeableness explain food liking more than the other personality traits. According to these results it can be suggested that, Generation Y is more motivated in the liking of foods when it is in a social environment, when they are assured most probably by friends and family that the food is good but yet again like Generation X understandable and logical (familiar) tastes play also an important role in the liking of foods.

This present study reveals that for both Generation X and Y being logical, understanding and agreeable personality traits play a significant role in liking of foods. Moreover, being open and broad minded, creative, preferring variety yet analytical- Openness to experience- personality trait also motivates the food liking in Generation X. On the other hand, for Generation Y, personality trait Extraversion, being sociable, extraverted, assertive, energetic and self-assured motivates the food liking more than the other personality traits.

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