

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EATING HABITS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Individual eating habits are influenced by a number of factors, including both internal variables such as physiology and emotion, as well as environmental factors such as food availability and cultural norms. Given the public health impact of dietary habits (choice, quality, amount, frequency) on health outcomes, it is important to understand what factors influence eating habits on a societal level. The aim of this research was to determine factors that influence eating habits and compare these factors between four different countries – Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and the USA.

An eating motivation questionnaire was used to measure eating habits in 3,348 respondents from different regions and countries. There were ten parts - demographical information, anthropometric data and behavioral and health related elements, sources of information about healthy eating, factors related to food choices according to motivations (health, emotional, economic, availability, social, cultural, environmental, political, marketing and commercials). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and self-reported motivation was compared across countries.

Health was the primary motivator of food selection in this sample (71% of respondents), whereas 34% reported that emotional factors impact their dietary habits and 35% reported that economic factors determine their food selection. A large number of respondents (44%) disagreed or strongly disagree or disagreed with the idea that marketing impacts their dietary habits. Portugal had the highest number of participants (86%), reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed with having health-related motivations for food selection, with Latvia (65%) and Lithuania (76%) showing more moderate levels of endorsement of healthy eating motivations, and the USA having the fewest respondents (52%) endorsing health-related motivations. Respondents from Portugal were more likely than respondents from the other countries to deny having emotional, economic and marketing motivations in food selection.

From results can conclude that consumers are motivated by healthiness factors when making food choices (71% of respondents), but marketing, economic and emotional factors positively impact only 30% of consumers, other respondents completely disagreed or was indifferent to these types of motivations. Baltic countries (Latvia and Lithuania) were similar to each other, but Portugal and USA were completely different. Portugal strongly agreed with healthy motivations and disagreed with all other motivations, whereas USA and also Baltic countries had more equal division of opinions regarding impact of different motivations.

Key words: *Eating habits, Eating motivations, Consumer behaviour, Food choice.*