

Food usage and food perceptions among undergraduate hospitality students

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Given the increasing prevalence of food consumption away from the home in Australia, the hospitality industry is having an increasing influence on our dietary pattern. It is therefore relevant to ask what hospitality providers think about foods. We report here a study of undergraduate students who were preparing for a career in the hospitality industry.

The subjects were 188 students, drawn from all four years of the Bachelor of Business in Hotel and Catering Management at Victoria University. They completed an 80-item questionnaire about their frequency of consumption of, and their perceptions of, 10 food items: full-cream milk, low-fat skim milk, cream, yogurt, chocolate, apple, fried rice, steamed rice, hot chips and boiled/mashed potato. Questions reflected the Ajzen-Fishbein theory of reasoned action, and were based on a recent teenage study (1), although a different food list was used.

All 10 foods were consumed fairly frequently, ranging from a mean of 0.7 days per week for cream to 3.2 days per week for low-fat/skim milk. Their liking for the foods (on a five-point scale from 1 "hate it" to 5 "love it") ranged from a mean of 2.7 for cream to 4.1 for chocolate. The healthfulness of the foods, as judged by our subjects on a five-point scale (1 "very unhealthy" to 5 "very healthy"), ranged from a mean of 1.5 for hot chips to 4.8 for apple: the higher the fat content of the food, the lower its healthfulness rating was. Social norms for foods were assessed by asking subjects how often they thought their parents, or their friends, would eat each food: the mean perceived frequency of usage (five-point scale from 1 "very rarely" to 5 "very often") ranged from 1.7 for hot chips to 3.6 for apple and steamed rice, among parents; and from 2.6 for cream to 3.9 for chocolate, among friends.

In multiple linear regression analysis, liking was a significant ($P < 0.01$) predictor of personal usage frequency for nine foods, parental usage for five, and healthfulness for one; friends' usage was not a significant predictor for any food. Multiple R^2 values ranged from 0.33 for cream to 0.74 for low-fat/skim milk; all were significant at the $P < 0.01$ level.

As with the Tasmanian high school students reported previously (1), hedonic and family influences seem more important than health considerations or peer influences in determining food usage frequency among the hospitality students. However, parental influence affected a smaller proportion of foods than it did among teenagers. Given the current public health emphasis on reduction of fat intakes, it is encouraging to note that the hospitality students' healthfulness ratings for foods were negatively correlated with their fat content.

1. Woodward DR, Ball PJ, Cumming FJ, Williams HM, Hornsby H, Boon JA. Adolescent usage of selected foods in relation to their perceptions and social norms for those foods. *Appetite* 1996; (in press).