Qualitative Research

on Chocolate Consumption

among Cornell Students

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Academic Integrity Statement

The proposal I submit represents my own work with the following allowable exceptions: ideas I have acquired from the teaching team, scripts for recruiting and administering oral informed consent available in the handout, and interview questions that I may be using from the Food Choice Discussion Guide posted on the Blackboard website. The sources of any other materials I have used in preparing the proposal are named in the proposal. I understand that using other students' work or failure to attribute the sources of my work are violations of the Code of Academic Integrity and will be addressed through the formal Cornell University procedures for violating the Code.

Signature: _____Date: _____

1. Research Question

How Does Chocolate Fit into Students' Food Choices at Cornell?

METHODS

2. Sampling Criteria and Purposive Sampling Procedures

The minimum criteria include Cornell Undergraduate Students who are age 18 or older, not NS 2450 student. Purposive sampling intentionally selects students who eat chocolate sometimes or regularly at school. I chose participants at *Cornell Dairy Bar* and *U Tea at College Town*, where people were more likely to have chocolate consumption experience. I talked with people using Recruiting Script and Screening Questions. Firstly, I made sure that they were undergraduate students at Cornell. And then I confirmed that they ate chocolate regularly or sometimes. Some participants said that they rarely took chocolate, so I excluded them and found another.

3. Characteristics of Participants

(1) Charlie (pseudonym), the first participant. He is Junior, Entomology major, lives off-campus, from Singapore, not an athlete, sometimes eats chocolate. Not previously acquainted with him.

(2) Jessica (pseudonym), the second participant. She is Sophomore, Biology major, lives in College Town, from China, not an athlete, regularly eat chocolate. Not previously acquainted with her.

4. Data Analysis Description

(1) Identify Concepts and Develop Themes (Individual analysis)

(a) I read and re-read my fieldnotes carefully. (b) I made an initial list of concepts related to the topic that participants had discussed. (c) I created preliminary working definitions for these concepts. (d) I edge-coded interview guides and fieldnotes: highlighted portions of text and

labelled with codes. (e) I added new concepts to my list as I noticed them. I went back to previous participants and coded their fieldnotes for these new concepts. (f) I revised my concept list as I proceeded, adding sub-concepts within major concepts. (g) I grouped concepts and sub-concepts into meaningful Themes. I applied existing Themes from theories or models or created my own Themes that I defined and explained. (h) I made a diagram for each person summarizing the different concepts and meanings important to that person. I got an overall impression of that person based on the concepts. (i) I wrote down notes about what aspects of the interview made me think that way about the overall person.

(2) Compare and Contrast Informants (Comparative analysis)

(a) I compared and contrasted people for each theme in terms of their use and meaning of that concept and theme. (b) I examined my summaries across the participants. I identified and explained similarities and differences. (c) I described the relationships among concepts that the data supported. (d) I checked and rechecked the data to identify support for my comparative findings. I also searched for data that do not support my comparative interpretations. (e) I revised my description of relationships until my relational summary was supported by all the data. I ended up with a few different relationships among participants or the same relationship evident among all participants.

RESULTS

5. Individual Analysis Findings

(1) Descriptive findings

(a) Participant 1 (Charlie)

For the first participant, the themes can be divided into three levels: *Influences, Values*, and *Rules and Routines*.

(I) Influences

The Influences which contribute to Charlie's chocolate consumption include his ideals about chocolate, his personal factors, the context he has experienced, and his identity about chocolate. Regarding his ideals about chocolate, Charlie thinks chocolate is mainly for tasting, not for eating. He doesn't care much about the chocolate brands as long as it is not awful. For him, chocolate is "sensual" while coffee is "rational". He would eat some chocolate foods to make him feel happy. However, he regards eating chocolate for energy supply as "unreal", because he won't feel energetic until his stomach is filled. Regarding his personal factors, Charlie usually takes chocolate when he is sick and has no appetite, or in a depressed mood. Regarding the context he has experienced, in cold winter, drinking a cup of hot chocolate makes Charlie feel good. Regarding his identity about chocolate, Charlie is a "normal taster". He "likes" chocolate, but not a chocolate "lover".

(II) Values

The Values which determine Charlie's chocolate consumption include his value on taste and health. Regarding his value on taste, Milk chocolate makes him feel sweet and sticky. He is able to try a variety of chocolate food, and it is not a trouble if the flavor is intense. Regarding his value on health, he thinks that chocolate can provide much energy but can't offer a sense of satiety.

(III) Rules and Routines

The Rules and Routines which reflect Charlie's chocolate consumption include the types of chocolate he takes, his frequency of chocolate consumed, his pattern of chocolate with meals, his food combinations, and his accessibility to chocolate. Regarding the types of chocolate that he prefers, He likes chocolate in Matcha flavor. Regarding his frequency of chocolate consumed, he sometimes takes chocolate. Regarding his pattern of chocolate with meals, he won't solely eat chocolate without any bread, biscuits or drinks if he needs energy supply. Regarding his food combinations, he likes chocolate cakes, chocolate ice-creams, etc.

Regarding his accessibility to chocolate, he has been to Starbucks for a hot chocolate in cold winter.

(b) Participant 2 (Jessica)

For the second participant, the themes can also be divided into three levels: *Influences, Values*, and *Rules and Routines*.

(I) Influences

The Influences which contribute to Jessica's chocolate consumption include her ideals about chocolate, her personal factors, the context she has experienced, and her identity about chocolate. Regarding her ideals about chocolate, Jessica regards dark chocolate as a good food product. She is not particular on chocolate brands. She thinks it's decent when eating chocolate either at classroom or walking on the street. Chocolate makes her feel satisfied, and it can refresh herself, and keep herself calm and rational. Regarding her personal factors, when she feels stressed by the exam, eating chocolate can reduce her anxiety. She may also eat chocolate when she is hungry. Regarding the context she has experienced, when she is crowded with a tight class schedule, solving academic problems, or faced with some dilemma, chocolate is helpful to her. Regarding her identity about chocolate, Jessica regards herself as a chocoholic person. She is fascinated by dark chocolate.

 (II) Values

The Values which determine Jessica's chocolate consumption include her value on taste, health, cost, and convenience. Regarding her value on taste, she thinks the bitter flavor combined with a little bit sweet is very nice. Milk chocolate is too sweet, and its taste lasts for a long time in her mouth. Regarding her value on health, she knows that the cocoa in dark chocolate can burn fat in body. Sugar in dark chocolate is low, so it doesn't contain much energy. Regarding her value on cost, Jessica will buy much chocolate each time to get a

discount. Regarding her value on convenience, Jessica appreciates chocolate on its portability, with no greasy, no smell.

(III) Rules and Routines

The Rules and Routines which reflect Jessica's chocolate consumption include the types of chocolate she takes, her frequency of chocolate consumed, and her accessibility to chocolate. Regarding the types of chocolate that she prefers, she likes dark chocolate. Regarding her frequency of chocolate consumed, she eats chocolate regularly, and has formed a habit. Regarding her accessibility to chocolate, she buys chocolate from Target or Wegmans, and eats chocolate in classroom or on the street.

(2) Relational findings

(a) Participant 1 (Charlie)

Ideals, Health, and Pattern of chocolate with meals

Regarding chocolate consumption as energy supply, Charlie regards it as "unrealistic", which can be classified as his ideal. And then he uses "satiety" as his value on health, which leads to his pattern of chocolate with meals. Therefore, Charlie's ideal on chocolate energy supply reflects his value on health, thus determining his pattern of chocolate with meals.

(b) Participant 2 (Jessica)

Context, Convenience and Accessibility

According to Jessica, when she is crowded with a tight class schedule and has no time to eat lunch, she would eat some chocolate previously bought from shopping stores. Chocolate is "convenient and easy to carry" and it "is not greasy and has no smell". Therefore, the tight schedule context influences her, combined with her value on convenience, thus resulting in her accessibility to chocolate buying and eating.

6. Comparative Analysis Findings

Themes & Concepts		Participant 1	Participant 2
Influences	**Ideals**	*for tasting* *less care about brands* *sensual* *make happy* *unrealistic*	*good food product* *less care about brands* *for tasting and eating* decent *feel satisfied* *refresh oneself* *keep calm and rational*
	Personal factors	*sick* *no appetite* *depressed mood*	*stressed* *anxiety* *hungry*
	Context	*cold winter*	*tight class schedule* *problem solving* *dilemma*
	Identity	*Normal taster* *like chocolate*	*fascinated* *love chocolate* *chocoholic*
Values	**Taste**	*sweet and sticky* *mild taste* *chocolate vanilla flavor*	*too sweet* *long-lasting* *bitter & sweet*
	Health issues	*satiety* *high energy*	*burning fat* *low energy* *type variation*
	Cost	*N/A*	*discount*
	Convenience	*N/A*	*portable* *no greasy* *no smell*
Rules and Routines	**Types**	*Matcha flavor* *fruit and wine* *hot chocolate* *high sugar content*	*dark chocolate*
	Frequency	*sometimes*	*regularly* *almost everyday* *habit*
	Pattern	*with bread, biscuits, drink*	*N/A*
	Food combinations	*with cakes, drinks, etc.*	*N/A*
	Accessibility	*Starbucks*	*Buy: Target, Wegmans* *Eat: classroom, street*

The diagram illustrates the similarities and differences between Participant 1 (Charlie) and Participant 2 (Jessica) from 3 themes and 13 concepts.

Regarding the similarities. In Ideals, both Charlie and Jessica care less about the chocolate brand, and they regard chocolate as a product for tasting. In Personal factors, both of them may eat chocolate when they are in a depressed mood or feel stressed. In their value on Taste, both Charlie and Jessica think milk chocolate is too sweet.
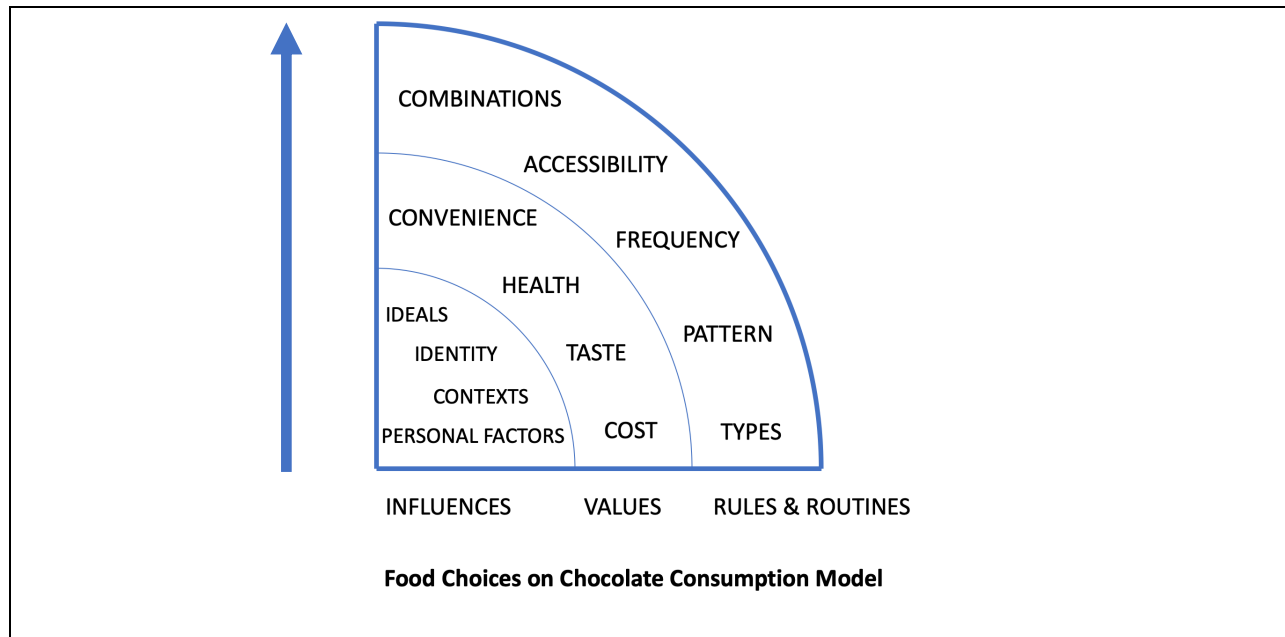
Regarding the differences. In Ideals, Charlie feels that chocolate is sensual and it's unrealistic for energy supply due to a lack of satiety, while Jessica feels that chocolate can keep her clam and rational, which can also refresh herself. In the Context they have experienced, Charlie focuses on objective situations, like the cold winter, while Jessica emphasizes more subjective situations, such as tight class schedule, problem solving and dilemma. In their Identity on chocolate, Charlie identifies himself as a person who likes chocolate but doesn't love it, while Jessica regards herself as a chocoholic person. Therefore, the frequency, types and accessibility of their chocolate consumptions are also different. Charlie eats chocolate sometimes, with a variety of chocolate types or flavors, normally at a café, whereas Jessica loves dark chocolate, forms a habit of chocolate consumption and has a detailed accessibility.

DISCUSSION

7. What the Findings Revealed

The findings reveal how chocolate fits into students' food choices at Cornell. Basically, students construct food choices on chocolate with three main themes: Firstly, Factors that influence their perspective on chocolate; Secondly, Values on chocolate that determine their chocolate choice; Thirdly, Rules and Routines that reflect their chocolate consumption.

Food Choices on Chocolate Consumption Model

The diagram shows nested quarter-circle arcs with labels arranged from inner to outer: COMBINATIONS, ACCESSIBILITY, CONVENIENCE, FREQUENCY, HEALTH, IDEALS, IDENTITY, TASTE, PATTERN, CONTEXTS, PERSONAL FACTORS, COST, TYPES. The bottom axis labels read: INFLUENCES, VALUES, RULES & ROUTINES.

8. Strengths and Limitations of the Study

By using Individual Analysis and Comparative Analysis, I am able to formulate a structure that demonstrates food choice related to my topic. This method provides insightful understandings about diverse thoughts and activities. However, the model could be more complete if participants offer more detailed information on their experience and factors that fit into their food choices. Besides, this qualitative method is subjective, because I interpret the fieldnotes from my own perspective, while others may interpret it differently.

9. Main Points in the Findings

(1) Regarding Cost Value.

In my finding, cost value is reflected on the discount price of chocolate that stimulates consumptions. For example, Jessica always buys much chocolate at each time for a discount. And discount is a way of price reduction, which supports the *Own-price elasticity of demand theory* in a qualitative way.

(2) Regarding Taste Value.

In my finding, Charlie regards himself as a "Normal taster", and "he is willing to try different types of chocolate, such as some chocolates flavored with a combination of fruit and wine.". These characteristics support the trait of "Normal tasters", who like a variety of foods, and care about how food is prepared.

(3) Regarding Health Value.

In my finding, Health value can be defined as satiety. For example, even though chocolate has provided Charlie with enough energy, he still feels less energetic because chocolate can't offer a sense of satiety. In this way, satiety can be fit into the concepts related to health.