

FROM LIFESTYLE TO FOOD SAFETY PERCEPTION. INSIGHTS INTO MODERN CONSUMER ATTITUDES

Cezar Ionuț BICHESCU, Dimitrie STOICA*, Maricica STOICA

“Dunarea de Jos” University of Galati (Romania)

cezar.bichescu@ugal.ro

dimitrie.stoica@ugal.ro

maricica.stoica@ugal.ro

Abstract

Lifestyle is a multidimensional construct reflecting the interaction between personal identity, social and cultural values. It plays a decisive role in shaping individual attitudes and perceptions toward food consumption. This paper explores the relationship between lifestyle patterns, personal values, and beliefs, emphasizing how these elements influence consumer attitudes toward food safety. Drawing on previous theoretical and empirical research, the study outlines how lifestyle mediates between values and behavior, transforming social and psychological needs into concrete purchasing decisions. It also examines the distinction between health-promoting and risk-inducing behavioral patterns, revealing how consumers perceive responsibility and control over their own well-being. Furthermore, the paper analyzes food safety as a persuasion attribute, often rooted in subjective perceptions rather than scientific evaluation. By integrating perspectives from consumer psychology, sociology, and food science, this work provides a cross-disciplinary understanding of modern consumer behavior. The findings highlight the importance of values-based communication and awareness strategies in promoting healthier and safer food choices.

Keywords: lifestyle, personal values, consumer attitudes, food safety perception, behavior.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary context of globalization, technological progress, and rapid cultural change, consumer behavior has become increasingly complex and difficult to predict. The way individuals make choices about what they eat, how they live, and what they value reflects not only their socio-economic status but also their cultural background, personal identity, and worldview (Grunert, 2006). Among the many factors shaping consumption patterns, lifestyle has emerged as one of the most powerful determinants of food-related attitudes and decisions. It represents the dynamic interaction between the individual's inner world (values, beliefs, motivations) and the external environment, including social norms, cultural expectations, and market structures (Szakály *et al.*, 2012). Lifestyle is not merely a reflection of material well-being or demographic parameters such as age, gender, or income; rather, it embodies the broader context of personal expression, social and cultural differentiation (Walseth *et al.*, 2012). Modern consumers use lifestyle choices to define themselves, to connect with others, or to stand apart from the crowd. For instance, food preferences, whether oriented toward traditional home-cooked meals or experimental cuisines, often serve as markers of social identity and self-image (Wycherley *et al.*, 2008). This personalization of food choices has led researchers to explore lifestyle as a mediating variable between personal values and consumer behavior. In this sense, lifestyle acts as a behavioral bridge that transforms abstract personal values into concrete patterns of consumption and purchasing habits (Grunert, 2006; Szakály *et al.*, 2012). Personal

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values, in turn, are fundamental motivational constructs guiding human decision-making. They are relatively stable belief systems that define what is important, desirable, and appropriate in one's life (Kitsawad & Guinard, 2014). Values such as self-respect, belonging, hedonism, or security not only influence ethical or social behavior but also play a major role in consumption-related decisions. When individuals buy food products, they often do so not merely to satisfy physiological needs, but to affirm symbolic meanings related to well-being, identity, or moral orientation (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Research has shown that these personal values vary significantly across cultures. For example, Australian students tend to prioritize happiness, family security, and inner harmony, while Chinese students emphasize ambition, self-control, and social recognition (Lee *et al.*, 2014). This cross-cultural diversity highlights that food-related behavior cannot be universally understood without considering the system of values underpinning it. In the field of consumer research, beliefs and attitudes represent the cognitive and affective dimensions that mediate between values and behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Beliefs constitute the informational foundation, what individuals know or think they know about products, health, or risks, while attitudes embody emotional evaluations such as liking or disliking a product (Phillips *et al.*, 2013). Together, they determine the behavioral intention, i.e., the probability of performing an action, such as purchasing a food item or avoiding it due to perceived risk (Ajzen *et al.*, 2011). This theoretical connection is especially relevant when examining food safety, an area where perceptions frequently diverge from objective reality. Although scientific assessments define food safety in measurable terms, consumer perceptions are often subjective, shaped by trust, past experiences, and communication from media (Furnols & Guerrero, 2014). Food safety perception has increasingly become a persuasion attribute, one that consumers cannot verify directly and must rely on institutional assurances or labeling (Chalak & Abiad, 2012). While intrinsic product attributes like taste or texture can be experienced, and extrinsic ones such as price or packaging can be observed, persuasion attributes depend on trust and credibility. As a result, individuals form beliefs and attitudes about food safety that may not align with scientific evidence (Panzone, 2014). This discrepancy between perceived and actual safety poses challenges for both policymakers and marketers, as consumer behavior often resists change even in the face of reliable information. Many consumers express concern about foodborne risks yet continue to purchase products or engage in habits inconsistent with these concerns (Chalak & Abiad, 2012). The interplay among lifestyle, personal values, beliefs, and attitudes thus represents a multidimensional system in which cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements continuously interact. Lifestyle provides the social and psychological context; values offer the motivational foundation; beliefs and attitudes mediate the interpretation of information; and perceptions such as food safety influence concrete purchasing behavior. Understanding this network is crucial not only for academics but also for practitioners in marketing, public health, and education, who seek to promote safer and healthier food choices. As Lucivero and Prainsack (2015) argue, health-related lifestyles are increasingly shaped by personal responsibility and moral expectations within society, making the individual both the object and the subject of health governance. In this sense, food safety perception extends beyond a technical issue and becomes a moral and cultural phenomenon. Moreover, modern lifestyles are characterized by contradictions: while people are more aware than ever of nutrition and sustainability, time pressure, convenience, and social influence often lead to inconsistent or irrational choices (Wycherley *et al.*, 2008). This ambivalence reflects the tension between *behavioral immunogens* (habits promoting health) and *behavioral pathogens* (habits detrimental to it) (Szakály *et al.*, 2012). Consumers constantly

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negotiate between these two poles, balancing pleasure and discipline, taste and safety, individual preference and social norms. Their ability to make consistent choices depends not only on information but also on perceived control, the sense of being capable of managing one's own health behavior (Ajzen *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, analyzing the path *from lifestyle to food safety perception* allows for a comprehensive understanding of the modern consumer. It captures the dynamic interaction between self-expression, social belonging, and the moralization of health. The consumer is no longer a passive recipient of products and messages but an active agent navigating a complex informational ecosystem. By integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and food science, this paper contributes to a cross-disciplinary perspective on how values and lifestyle factors shape attitudes toward food safety. Such understanding can guide communication strategies, educational programs, and policy interventions aimed at bridging the gap between concern and action, transforming awareness into sustainable consumer behavior.

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design based on secondary data analysis. The primary aim was to consult a broad range of academic and professional sources to identify and synthesize relevant information on the relationship between lifestyle, personal values, beliefs, attitudes, and food safety perception. Data were collected from multiple internationally recognized scientific databases, mainly Web of Science and Scopus. Complementary materials were retrieved from other academic repositories, such as books. These databases were selected due to their coverage of multidisciplinary research fields, including food science, psychology, sociology, and marketing disciplines directly relevant to the scope of this study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Lifestyle as a determinant of consumer behavior

The lifestyle is one of the most influential determinants of consumer behavior. It represents a composite construct integrating psychological, cultural, and socio-economic dimensions that define how individuals live, what they value, and how they make decisions (Szakály *et al.*, 2012). Studies by Wycherley, McCarthy, and Cowan (2008) identified six lifestyle-based consumer segments: negligent, non-involved, rational, conservative, adventurous, and snacking-oriented consumers, each with specific behavioral patterns and motivational drivers. Negligent consumers display low involvement in shopping and cooking activities, often constrained by time and convenience, while adventurous consumers exhibit high curiosity toward food quality, origin, and social experience. Conservative consumers rely on tradition, price sensitivity, and familiarity, while rational consumers integrate planning, information search, and price-quality evaluation into their behavior. Snacking consumers prioritize convenience and health perception over sensory pleasure, preferring quick, ready-to-eat options. These typologies highlight the multidimensionality of lifestyle, which encompasses both hedonic and utilitarian orientations (Wycherley *et al.*, 2008). Lifestyle therefore mediates the connection between external social factors and internal psychological motivations. It transforms abstract personal values, such as self-fulfillment, belonging, or responsibility into concrete actions like meal preparation, product selection, and brand loyalty (Grunert, 2006). In this sense, lifestyle acts as a behavioral translator between the individual and society, shaping

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food-related preferences through the interplay of personal freedom, cultural identity, and environmental adaptation (Walseth *et al.*, 2012).

3.2. Personal values and motivational structures

The review also underlines that personal values serve as the motivational foundation underlying lifestyle and consumption choices. Values are culturally embedded yet individually experienced systems of meaning that guide evaluation, decision-making, and long-term behavior (Kitsawad & Guinard, 2014). They influence not only *what* people buy but *why* they buy it. For example, consumers guided by hedonistic values associate food consumption with pleasure, joy, and emotional satisfaction, while those motivated by self-direction or security focus on health, safety, and trustworthiness (Lee *et al.*, 2014). The cross-cultural variation of value systems further demonstrates that food consumption is deeply tied to collective norms. Lee *et al.* (2014) found that Western consumers often emphasize personal happiness, family security, and entertainment, whereas Eastern consumers prioritize harmony, self-control, and respect for authority. Such differences shape the symbolic meaning of food and define how healthy or safe eating is understood in various societies. In the context of new food development, understanding these value systems becomes essential. Values shape acceptance or resistance toward food innovations such as functional foods, organic products, or novel protein sources. Consumers who value environmental protection and authenticity are more likely to adopt sustainable products, whereas those oriented toward convenience and pleasure may resist changes requiring behavioral adjustment (Cai & Shannon, 2012). Thus, marketing and public health strategies must align product positioning with consumers' underlying value hierarchies to foster trust and adoption.

3.3. Beliefs and attitudes

Beliefs and attitudes constitute the intermediate stage between values and observable behavior. According to Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory, beliefs provide the informational or cognitive basis of behavior, while attitudes represent affective evaluations, the like or dislike dimension. Consumers' beliefs about the safety, origin, or nutritional value of food products often determine their willingness to purchase and their loyalty toward brands (Ajzen *et al.*, 2011). Empirical research confirms that attitudes are not static but dynamically shaped by prior experiences, cultural framing, and external communication. Furnols and Guerrero (2014) demonstrated that affective responses (e.g., trust, disgust, satisfaction) often outweigh objective information in food choice decisions. For instance, consumers may reject a product due to perceived artificiality or contamination, even if scientific evidence demonstrates its safety. Furthermore, attitudes and beliefs tend to operate under limited rationality. Psychological heuristics, social influence, and media framing all contribute to the selective interpretation of information (Phillips *et al.*, 2013). As a result, the same message about food safety can generate divergent reactions depending on cultural context, trust in institutions, and previous experiences. This asymmetry explains why awareness campaigns alone rarely succeed in changing eating behavior unless they address both the emotional and cognitive layers of attitude formation.

3.4. Food safety as a persuasion attribute

Among the various dimensions of consumer perception, food safety occupies a particularly sensitive position. It functions as a persuasion attribute, which consumers cannot evaluate

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directly and must rely on external assurances such as branding, labeling, and institutional reputation (Chalak & Abiad, 2012). While search attributes (e.g., price, packaging) and experience attributes (e.g., taste, texture) can be verified through direct interaction, persuasion attributes depend on symbolic credibility. This reliance on trust introduces a psychological paradox: although consumers report strong concern for safety and health, these attitudes do not always translate into behavioral change. Chalak and Abiad (2012) observed that even highly concerned consumers often maintain habitual purchasing patterns, prioritizing convenience or price over risk avoidance. This cognitive dissonance reveals that subjective perception frequently overrides factual knowledge. In addition, food safety perceptions are shaped by the social amplification of risk. Media coverage, institutional transparency, and interpersonal communication can either strengthen or weaken trust in food systems (Panzone, 2014). For example, contamination scandals or conflicting expert opinions may erode consumer confidence, while clear labeling and third-party certifications can restore it. Thus, food safety perception is not merely a function of technical control but also a reflection of socio-cultural trust mechanisms. From a behavioral perspective, this perception influences willingness to pay for safer products. Studies suggest that consumers are ready to pay a premium for items labeled as organic, locally produced, or chemical-free, even when these labels serve as proxies for trust rather than verified safety (Chalak & Abiad, 2012). This highlights the role of marketing communication and value-based positioning in bridging the gap between objective safety standards and subjective reassurance.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that lifestyle, personal values, beliefs, attitudes, and food safety perception form an interconnected system that defines modern consumer behavior. Lifestyle provides the social and psychological context for decision-making, while personal values offer the motivational foundation guiding what individuals perceive as meaningful, desirable, or acceptable. Beliefs and attitudes act as interpretative filters through which consumers translate values into behavior, and food safety perception represents the outcome of these cognitive and emotional processes. The analysis confirms that lifestyle is a reflection of the dynamic balance between self-identity and social environment. It shapes the way individuals adapt to external expectations, express individuality, and maintain consistency between internal motivations and societal norms. Personal values add depth to this process by determining the symbolic and moral dimensions of consumption, influencing the extent to which individuals associate food with health, pleasure, or responsibility. Beliefs and attitudes serve as the link between thought and action, converting information and emotion into behavioral intention. They are influenced not only by rational assessment but also by trust, prior experience, and cultural context. This interdependence explains why consumers often act inconsistently with their expressed concerns about food safety: perception is subjective and rooted in emotional and symbolic interpretations rather than purely factual knowledge. Understanding this complex relationship has both theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretically, it highlights the need for a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates psychology, sociology, and food science to explain consumer decision-making in its full social and cultural complexity. Practically, it shows that improving food safety communication requires more than providing objective data. Effective strategies must appeal to consumers' emotions, values, and sense of trust, emphasizing authenticity, transparency, and shared responsibility between producers, regulators, and consumers.

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