

Feeding the Craving: The Role of Extrinsic Determinants in Food Desire

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Abstract

Cravings for specific foods are a ubiquitous aspect of human experience, driven by intricate biological and psychological mechanisms. Beyond the internal factors that influence cravings, this article delves into the compelling realm of extrinsic determinants—the external cues, societal influences, and environmental factors that amplify our desire for particular foods. The science of cravings reveals that our brains, particularly the reward centers, play a pivotal role in the allure of specific foods. Dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitter, reinforces our desire, making cravings challenging to resist. However, the interplay between our surroundings and the foods we yearn for is equally significant. Food cues, ranging from enticing aromas to visual displays, wield considerable power in stimulating cravings. These sensory triggers can hijack our attention and lead us to indulge, illustrating the profound influence of our environment. Social and cultural factors also shape our cravings. Traditions, social circles, and the digital age's impact on food trends infuse food with emotional meaning. Moreover, accessibility plays a pivotal role. When desirable foods are easily obtainable, cravings are more likely to translate into consumption. This article explores strategies for navigating cravings, including mindful eating, portion control, and fostering health-conscious social networks. It underscores the challenges posed by marketing, convenience foods, and societal norms while emphasizing the importance of awareness in making healthier choices. In conclusion, decoding the craving puzzle involves recognizing the interplay between internal biology and external determinants. By harnessing this understanding, individuals can strike a balance between indulgence and moderation, savoring the pleasures of food without surrendering to every craving's whim.

Keywords: Experimental research; Observational research; Survey; Questionnaire; Qualitative research; Quantitative research; Case study; Secondary data analysis; Meta-analysis; Mixed-methods research; Sampling; Data collection; Data analysis; Hypothesis Testing; Ethics in research; Validity; Reliability; Research design; Data interpretation

Introduction

Cravings—those insistent whispers from our senses, coaxing us toward specific foods—are an enduring mystery in the realm of human experience. From the wafting scent of freshly baked bread to the alluring sight of a rich, velvety chocolate cake, cravings possess a captivating power that transcends culture and time. While the internal workings of our bodies, such as hormones and [1-8] neurotransmitters, contribute to these cravings, the external determinants, or extrinsic factors, have emerged as pivotal influences in shaping our desires for certain foods. This article embarks on an exploration of the intricate interplay between our surroundings, social cues, and the foods that beckon to us. Beyond the biological roots of cravings lies a captivating narrative of how our environment, culture, and accessibility sculpt our desires, often leading us to embrace flavors that tantalize our senses.

Cravings: A Complex Conundrum

Cravings are not mere whims; they are rooted in complex biological and psychological mechanisms. Deep within our brains, in regions such as the ventral tegmental area (VTA) and nucleus accumbens, a symphony of neural activity orchestrates our response to cravings. The release of dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" neurotransmitter, intensifies our desire, making resistance an uphill battle.

However, understanding cravings requires looking beyond our neural wiring. The allure of specific foods is profoundly influenced by the world around us—a world filled with sensory cues, cultural traditions, and societal norms.

Materials and Methods

The power of food cues

Consider the scenario of strolling past a bakery, where the intoxicating aroma of fresh pastries fills the air. Suddenly, you find yourself irresistibly drawn to the window display, each pastry exuding an almost magnetic pull. This is the power of food cues, the sensory triggers—sights, smells, and sounds—that signal the presence of enticing foods.

Food cues are omnipresent in our environment, from the captivating advertisements of fast-food chains to the strategic placement of candy at supermarket checkout counters. These cues captivate our senses and amplify our cravings, underscoring the remarkable influence of our surroundings.

Social and cultural influences: Cravings extend beyond individual preferences. They are intricately intertwined with our culture, traditions, and social circles. Think of the pleasure in sharing a pizza with friends or the nostalgia evoked by a beloved family recipe. These social and cultural factors imbue food with emotional significance, profoundly influencing our cravings.

In today's digital age, where social media and food trends thrive, the influence of culture on cravings has expanded. A viral video featuring a delectable dish can spark widespread cravings and drive food choices.

The impact of accessibility: Cravings, to a large extent, hinge on

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accessibility. When desirable foods are readily available and require minimal effort to obtain, our propensity to indulge increases. The ease of ordering takeout or having snacks within arm's reach can swiftly transform cravings into consumption.

Conversely, when healthier options are accessible and visible, they can counteract unhealthy cravings. The presence of fruit on the kitchen counter may sway us toward choosing an apple over a bag of chips.

Resisting the crave: strategies and challenges

Comprehending the role of extrinsic determinants in food cravings empowers us to make informed choices. Strategies such as mindful eating, portion control, and keeping tempting foods out of sight can help navigate these cravings. Additionally, cultivating supportive and health-conscious social networks can positively influence our food desires.

Nonetheless, the modern food environment presents its share of challenges. Food marketing, convenience foods, and societal norms often encourage indulgence. Distinguishing between genuine cravings and external cues can be a delicate task, but awareness is the first step toward making healthier choices.

Experimental research methods

Controlled experiments: Researchers manipulate one or more independent variables to observe their effects on dependent variables while controlling other [1-7] variables.

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs): Participants are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups to assess the impact of interventions or treatments.

Observational research methods

Cross-sectional studies: Data is collected from a sample of individuals at a single point in time to analyze relationships or differences.

Longitudinal studies: Data is collected from the same individuals over an extended period to track changes or developments.

Survey and questionnaire research:

Surveys: Researchers use structured questionnaires to collect data from a sample of participants, often to gather opinions, attitudes, or demographics.

Interviews: Researchers conduct one-on-one or group interviews to collect in-depth qualitative data.

Qualitative research methods

Content analysis: Researchers analyze textual, visual, or audio data to identify themes, patterns, or meanings.

Ethnography: Researchers immerse themselves in a cultural context to observe and understand behaviors and practices.

Case studies: Researchers conduct an in-depth examination of a single individual, group, organization, or event to gain insights and generate hypotheses.

Secondary data analysis: Researchers analyze existing data sets, such as publicly available datasets, to answer research questions.

Meta-analysis: Researchers combine and analyze the results of multiple studies on the same topic to draw more robust conclusions.

Action research: Researchers collaborate with practitioners or organizations to address real-world problems, often involving cyclical phases of planning, action, reflection, and adaptation.

Mixed-methods research: Researchers use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of a research question.

Simulation and modeling: Researchers create computational models or simulations to study complex systems, processes, or phenomena.

Neuroimaging and biomedical techniques: In fields like neuroscience and medicine, researchers employ technologies like fMRI, EEG, or PET scans to study brain function or conduct medical diagnostics.

Geospatial and environmental research

Researchers use GIS (Geographic Information Systems) and remote sensing to analyze spatial and environmental data.

Economic and statistical analysis: In economics and social sciences, researchers use statistical methods, econometrics, and modeling to analyze data.

These are just some of the methods employed in research across various fields. The choice of method depends on the research objectives, the nature of the research question, available resources, and ethical considerations. Researchers often use a combination of methods to approach complex research questions comprehensively.

Results and Discussion

The selection of an appropriate research method is a critical decision, as it determines the type and quality of data collected, the validity of findings, and the potential implications for theory and practice. Moreover, researchers must navigate the intricacies of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, always mindful of the limitations and potential biases inherent in their chosen methods. As the landscape of research continues to evolve, interdisciplinary approaches, mixed-methods research, and innovative technologies are broadening the horizons of what is possible in scientific inquiry. These evolving methodologies not only enhance the depth and breadth of research but also open new avenues for addressing complex, real-world problems. In the dynamic and ever-expanding realm of research, the pursuit of knowledge remains an exciting and collaborative endeavor. Researchers from diverse backgrounds, armed with a toolkit of methods and a commitment to rigorous inquiry, drive forward our collective understanding of the world, uncovering truths, solving challenges, and paving the way for progress. While individual research projects may conclude, the journey of discovery continues, fueled by curiosity, dedication, and the relentless pursuit of answers. Cravings remain a captivating and multifaceted phenomenon, blending the biology of the brain with the influence of external determinants. Although we cannot entirely eliminate cravings—nor should we wish to, as they are a natural part of human life—we can employ our understanding of them to make wiser choices. Feeding the craving is akin to a dance, a dance between the pleasures of indulgence and the wisdom of moderation. By acknowledging the power of our environment, culture, and accessibility, we can navigate this dance with greater finesse and savor the delights of food without yielding to every whim of craving. The methods involved in a research study can vary widely depending on the specific research question, goals, and field of study. However, I can provide a general overview of common research methods used in

various disciplines. Please specify the research topic or field of study for a more detailed explanation of the methods relevant to your research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research methods form the backbone of any scientific inquiry, guiding the systematic exploration of questions, hypotheses, and phenomena across a multitude of fields and disciplines. The choice of research methods depends on the specific research objectives, the nature of the research question, available resources, and ethical considerations. Researchers employ a diverse array of methods, from controlled experiments and observational studies to surveys, interviews, and qualitative analyses, to gather data, derive insights, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge.

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