

Treat Yourself: Food Delivery Apps and The Interplay Between Justification for Use and Food Well-being

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**Treat Yourself: Food Delivery Apps and The Interplay Between Justification for Use and
Food Well-being**

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Treat yourself: Food delivery apps and the interplay between justification for use and food well-being

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between justification for use and well-being in respect to mobile food delivery apps (FDA). Adopting an interpretivist qualitative approach, the study offers contributions to the FDA and food well-being literature by uncovering four groups of licensing effects that consumers use in justifying FDA use. Those licensing effects can have either positive or negative influence on consumers' well-being depending on the degree to which consumers engage in self-regulation, awareness, and conscious managing of their relationship with food. The study also unravels the importance of dealing with the tensions between FDA use and well-being by shedding light on feelings of guilt and financial anxiety related to FDA use.

KEYWORDS

food delivery apps, food well-being, justification, licensing effect

1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, there are over 704.7M food delivery app (FDA) users (Statista, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has further fueled FDAs' rise to prominence in the food delivery market. Several factors can explain this phenomenon, but primarily, FDAs use convenience as an umbrella term to describe the salient qualities of the app that add to the user experience. Extant literature has identified that consumers value the app design, trustworthiness, price, and food choice (Cho, Bonn, & Li, 2019). Another reason consumers adopt this technology is that attitude towards the app influences thoughts on ease and usefulness (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2012; Lee, Sung, & Jeon, 2019; Ray et al., 2019). The scant FDA literature results and recommendations have focused largely on how businesses can improve their technology to encourage continuous FDA use.

While this body of literature has provided examples of practical advice for businesses, it has largely neglected the consumers' point of view. First, the explanations towards FDA use have been mostly based on technology-related reasons via the use of, for example, the Technology Acceptance Model (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2012; Lee et al., 2019; O'Cass & Fenech, 2003; Ray et al., 2019), and second, the literature does not directly examine how these apps may affect the user. It is well-established that food is not just fuel, but a significant contributor to well-being, and there is a rich tradition in the field of marketing examining people's relationship with food (Scott & Vallen, 2019). Within this tradition, food is considered not just nourishment, but carries cultural and symbolic meanings that impact the way people feel about themselves and their social context (Block et al., 2011). From this perspective, food well-being considers not only the aspect of eating food, but includes shopping for ingredients, preparation, cooking (knowledge / food literacy), sharing / social context, and the resulting emotions and mood (Mugel, Gurviez, & Decrop, 2019), all of which impact consumers' well-being. Since ordering food via FDAs evidently skips some of those steps, it is unclear how consumers' relationship with food is altered as a result of FDA use. In using an FDA are consumers compromising food well-being by being less involved in the whole consumption process, which includes food shopping, preparation, and

socialization? Alternatively, if an FDA complements the on-the-go mentality of the end users, and if the new “social norm” formed around the convenience of FDAs provides value, perhaps a new form of food well-being is being formed.

Against this backdrop, the central objective of this study is to examine why consumers decide to use food delivery apps and how well-being influences (and is influenced by) those decisions. Given our research objective’s focus on understanding the lived experiences of consumers with regard to their food choices, specifically the choice of ordering food via FDAs and their justifications for FDA use, we adopted a phenomenological perspective through a qualitative interpretive approach (Mugel et al., 2019). Conceptually, we adopt two theoretical perspectives to help us understand consumers’ relationship with food and FDAs: a justification framework based on the licensing effect (Khan & Dhar, 2006), and eudaimonic theory of well-being applied to consumers’ relationship with food (Mugel et al., 2019). The purchase of indulgent or hedonic products, such as choosing to order food via FDAs, even though it carries delivery fees and is more expensive than home cooking (Ahuja et al., 2021; Lichtenstein, 2020; Parwez & Ranjan, 2021) can produce negative self-attribution because consumers may have difficulties justifying this choice. In this case, consumers may use a licensing effect to lessen the negative self-attribution, for example, by being virtuous in other aspects of their life or by justifying the use of FDAs as a virtue instead of a vice (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Additionally, we take the position of eudaimonic well-being to examine the relationship between food, FDA use, and well-being. A eudaimonic perspective to food well-being goes beyond food pleasure (a hedonic aspect of satisfaction as a result of food ingestions). It incorporates a holistic food well-being standpoint that emphasizes immersion in the food experience, including the acquisition and preparation of food, procedural knowledge and food literacy (such as mastery of skills), and attention to the whole process of meal preparation, ingestion, and social and relational aspects associated with it (Mugel et al., 2019).

Our study offers contributions to the FDA and food well-being literature by uncovering four groups of licensing effects that consumers use in justifying FDA use. Those licensing effects can have either positive or negative influence on consumers’ well-being depending on the degree to which

consumers engage in self-regulation, awareness, and conscious managing of their relationship with food. We also unravel the importance of dealing with the tensions between FDA use and well-being by shedding light on feelings of guilt and financial anxiety related to FDA use.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. We begin by reviewing the literature on food delivery, followed by an explanation of the licensing effect and eudaimonic theory of well-being as applied to food consumption. Next, we present the methodology, including sample and data collection, and our analytical approach. Subsequently, the findings of the study are described. We then present a discussion of the findings and offer a conclusion and future research directions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Food delivery apps (FDAs) and online food delivery (OFD)

There are two types of food delivery services: aggregators or online food delivery (OFD) platforms, and new delivery providers (food delivery apps). Both forms allow the consumer to compare menus, look and post reviews, and place orders from different restaurants. What separates the two platforms is that an OFD processes orders on an online portal managed by the restaurant/company, while the FDA acts as a third-party contractor (Hirschberg et al., 2016; Pigatto et al., 2017). As such, the FDA solely provides a user interface and a delivery driver network.

FDAs are considered an m-commerce app (McLean et al., 2020) because they were designed to process orders through a mobile application upon introduction into the market (Ray et al., 2019; Pigatto et al., 2017). However, FDAs like UberEats and Skip the Dishes accept website orders as well. By merging OFD and FDA, this model ensured more convenience and lifestyle compatibility, and due to COVID-19, more restaurants integrated these apps into their businesses for survival. For the consumer, work from home orders and lockdown measures meant that they had to adapt to a new social climate. We can see this integration through increases in revenue in both OFD and FDAs (Statista, 2020). FDAs grew in popularity because they allowed customers to enjoy restaurant-quality food from the comfort of their home and quickly became a substitute for meals prepared and eaten at home (Hirschberg et al., 2016).

These companies innovated food delivery because people were no longer restricted to certain foods; rather, FDAs provide customers more variety. Furthermore, implementing a tracking system (when the food order has been placed, where the driver is, and when it is close to their destination) gave customers more security and control (Pigatto et., 2017), thus increasing trustworthiness. For the customer, the driver network is a primary value-adding attribute because it is what personifies convenience. The addition of the delivery network is marketed as the ability to “gain time.” Overall, FDAs offer value to the consumer through these propositions: the ability to track, gain time, and convenience.

The literature on FDAs and OFDs has examined why consumers adopt and use the app using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2010; Ray et al., 2019; O’Cass & Fenech, 2003). The TAM model sets the baseline of adoption by evaluating the technology’s perceived ease of use and usefulness. Research has shown that customers adopt the technology because of a positive attitude towards the app. Once the consumer has a positive attitude towards the app, they are more likely to perceive the technology as easy to use and useful and will adopt it (Ray et al., 2019; O’Cass et al., 2003).

Lee et al. (2019) examined continuous use and willingness through the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2). They demonstrated that the app’s performance significantly influenced perceived ease of use, usefulness, satisfaction, and attitude. Social influence and performing facets like timesaving, transaction speed, and diversity of purchasing opportunities were determinants of continuous use (Lee et al., 2019). Cho et al. (2019) used online-to-offline commerce (O2O) as a framework and looked at how single versus multi-person households affect the usage of FDAs in China. Single-person households typically represent the young consumer seeking an FDA, and trustworthiness was the most important factor to improve perceived value (Cho et al., 2019). The approach taken by Belanche, Flavián, and Pérez-Rueda (2020) examined the consumer via the subjective norm (from the Theory of Planned Behaviour) and lifestyle compatibility. Their study confirmed TAM relationships from previous research and revealed that some variables of planned behaviour will increase the likelihood of recommending FDAs. The researchers showed that lifestyle compatibility largely contributed to app loyalty and usage. Overall, the literature on FDAs has provided evidence about what

factors influence the adoption and use of the apps (with a focus on technology-related factors) but has not considered how FDAs may alter consumers' relationships with food, nor their food well-being. In order to understand how continuous use of FDAs may impact consumers' daily lives and their relationship with food, we look at the literature on justification and licensing effects.

2.2 Justification for use and the licensing effects

Consumers typically have several options for their food acquisition, such as cooking at home with ingredients they have acquired at a grocery store, food ordered from a food app, fast food, food trucks, dine-in eating, etc. Research suggests that the choice of how to acquire food can be influenced by location, means, socio-economic status, available time, and hunger effects, among other factors (Anater, McWilliams, & Latkin, 2011; Otterbring, Folwarczny, & Gidlöf, 2021). How one acquires food influences overall nutrition intake and the development of food behaviour (Anater et al., 2011). For instance, a person might choose between hedonic foods which provide sensory pleasure (for example, ice cream) or utilitarian foods which have a more instrumental value (for example, vegetables) (Otterbring et al., 2021). While choice is not restricted to one or the other (i.e., consumers may choose both at the same time, and compensate for guilty feelings from eating ice cream by also eating vegetables), for the purposes of this research, we build upon literature on vice and virtue food choices and licensing effects (Kivetz & Zheng, 2006; Yan et al., 2017) to understand the consumers' decisions to use FDAs.

Having to make a choice is characterized by being in a "conflict situation," where people have two or more alternatives which arouses a level of conflict, and there are cognitive processes aiming at reducing the conflict (Flemming, 1976). Decision-making consumption processes typically fall into two categories: vices and virtues (Kivetz & Zheng, 2006; Yan et al., 2017). Vices and virtues work relative to each other (Read, Loewenstein, & Kalyanaram, 1999) and can be considered as choosing between utility and luxury / indulgent products (Kivetz & Zheng, 2006). Consequently, virtues are more utilitarian, while vices are more hedonic and pleasure-seeking products. Relative vices are products that provide instantaneous benefits (e.g., the good taste of fast-food now) but have delayed costs (e.g., gaining weight

over time); while relative virtues are perceived to have immediate costs (e.g., lack of enjoyment while eating a healthy meal) but offer delayed benefits (e.g., good health in the future) (Yan et al., 2017, p. 462).

In the context of FDAs, the use of an app can be considered an indulgent choice, as it is typically more costly to use the app instead of cooking at home due to delivery fees, service fees, and optionally gratuity fees (Ahuja et al., 2021; Lichtenstein, 2020; Parwez & Ranjan, 2021). This conflict situation, therefore, makes this type of food behaviour a question of vice vs. virtue because the individual must choose between their willingness to cook and expend effort versus the convenience of ordering via FDAs (Otterbring et al., 2021). While research has used different labels for products, such as vices and virtues, hedonic and utilitarian, luxury and necessity, an assumption underlying the studies in this stream of research is that the purchase of relative luxuries / indulgent products is associated with feelings of guilt (Dahl, Honea, & Manchanda, 2003). Khan and Dhar (2006) explain that the purchase of luxuries for personal consumption usually produces negative self-attribution since consumers have difficulty justifying such items. As such, the decision to choose a vice product is oftentimes linked to a justification, or a licensing effect.

The licensing effect acts as a form of guilt reduction because what consumers choose to do no longer becomes a luxury, but rather something they have earned. Engaging in a virtuous act (such as contributing to a charity, expending effort / working hard) thus gives consumers a licence to indulge (for example, purchase more expensive items for themselves). This is because virtuous acts lead to a boost in consumer's self-image and counteract the negative self-attribution from hedonic experiences. However, a licensing effect can be an unconscious decision as consumers may not realize that their past experiences (engaging in a virtuous activity) can influence choice (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Furthermore, the initial determinant of use must produce the need for a license. In other words, the choice consumers are making needs to have a form of justification attributed to it. For example, one does not license because they are hungry, they license because they do not want to cook. Another basis of judgement and licensing effect is “mental or actual resource depletion” (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Khan & Dhar, 2006). Baumeister,

Muraven and Tice (2000) define this as a lack of inner energy because of use, whereby self-regulation declines over time. The absence of self-control makes it difficult to resist temptation (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Depletion of mental or physical faculties could become an unconscious license as consumers are not mentally or physically engaged. In the context of FDAs, feelings of guilt, mental or physical depletion, and justification of vice choices can affect a person's relationship with food, and subsequently their well-being.

2.3 Food well-being and eudaimonia

Because food is such an integral part of people's lives, our relationship with food is a major contributor to well-being (Scott & Vallen, 2019). Food well-being is a multi-faceted concept that incorporates the emotional attachments and feelings towards food alongside the physical and social relationship with food (Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2019; Mendini, Pizzetti, & Peter, 2019; Mugel et al., 2019). The literature distinguishes two approaches to well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic. In the hedonic approach, well-being is defined in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. The hedonic aspect of well-being is commonly assessed as positive affect (positive mood), the absence of negative affect (mood), as well as life satisfaction, which together are summarized as subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener & Lucas, 1999; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). The food well-being literature has discussed hedonic goals as pursuing gustatory pleasure (Bublitz et al., 2013). From this perspective, eating is viewed in terms of pleasure attainment.

The eudaimonic approach, on the other hand, assumes that you cannot equate subjective happiness with well-being, because some outcomes – although pleasure-producing – might not be conducive to wellness or be good for the people (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Well-being is thus not simply the result of attaining pleasure, but striving to realize one's potential, which has been termed psychological well-being (Ryff, 1995). Eudaimonia is a theory of well-being where a person's life activities align with their values allowing them to be fully engaged, thus achieving human fulfillment (Bhullar, Schutte, & Malouff, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Characteristics of eudaimonia are "autonomy, personal growth,

purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relatedness, and self-acceptance” (Ryff, 1989, p. 2). In the context of food research, Mugel et al. (2019) found that food well-being emerged through feelings of emancipation (mastery/control), immersion, sharing (positive feelings), and sensory processes (savouring the moment). Looking at food well-being through a eudaimonic perspective thus provides a more comprehensive view of the relationship people have with food and can explain some behaviours we develop towards food consumption, beyond gustatory pleasure attainment. Therefore, a distinction is made between food pleasure (a hedonic aspect as a result of food ingestions) and holistic food well-being, which relates to an immersion in the food experience through an experiential, eudaimonic approach, which includes the acquisition and preparation of food (and the corresponding autonomy and mastery of skills), the ingestion and the social aspects surrounding food well-being (Mugel et al., 2019). In line with this literature, we refer to food consumption from a eudaimonic perspective as the holistic experience of food preparation, ingestion, and the social and experiential process forming part of it. This is different from eating, which focuses on food ingestion and gustatory pleasure only.

Food well-being, therefore, encompasses the overall value and social connection that a person derives not just from eating a meal but in preparing it. In order to attain food well-being, a person must have the motivation to apply basic food/cooking knowledge. Block’s et al. (2011) study discusses five primary domains of food well-being: Food Socialization, Food Literacy, Food Marketing, Food Availability, and Food Policy. Food socialization and food literacy are related to the development of what Block et al. (2011) call procedural knowledge and food scripts. A food script is an organized behavioural sequence (Flemming, 1976) defined as procedural knowledge learned from food socialization and literacy to explain how to consume/prepare food (Block et al., 2011). A stipulation of procedural knowledge is the willingness to be food literate. The person must be willing to learn and then utilize their skills to acquire, educate, and comprehend food and its sources (Block et al., 2011). However, food marketing, food availability, and food policy can affect food socialization and literacy, as eating habits are formed as a response to the environment or influenced by the environment. Within a eudaimonic perspective, food well-being fosters feelings of fulfillment, learning, and closeness through people’s hands-on interaction

with food. Each dimension (socialization, literacy, food marketing, food availability, policy) can affect the achievement of eudaimonia in different ways. If limitations are imposed in the food consumption process (for instance, inadequate food availability), the person cannot be fully engaged because obstacles limit their ability to be active in their diet, which may affect their food patterns, and consequently their well-being. Similarly, food policy impacts how we eat, produce, distribute, and price food (Hawkes & Parsons, 2019). Food policy works alongside food socialization, thereby, affecting food availability and the development of a food script. According to Kapetanaki, Tzempelikos, and Halliday (2021), there is power asymmetry in food policy development where larger food corporations have more power over the government. In order to create effective food policy, the citizens must be willing to “co-create” and become active consumers working towards better well-being (Kapetanaki et al., 2021). Research also suggests that food policy that builds healthier lifestyles is contingent on a culture and the citizens that interact in it working towards this goal together (Kaplan & Iyer, 2019). A eudaimonic approach to food well-being thus recognizes the multiple influences on food preparation and ingestion going beyond gustatory (hedonic) pleasure.

Considering the multiple aspects that can influence food well-being from a eudaimonic perspective, in this paper we are interested in understanding the relationship between FDA use and well-being. Particularly, we focus on different justifications / licensing effects consumers use for choosing to order food via FDAs. By unravelling those licensing effects, we bring to light the importance of conscious management of one’s relationship with food in the context of FDAs, and the potential perils of overuse of FDAs for consumers’ food well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research used an interpretivist qualitative methodology in order to understand the experiences of FDA users and their relationship with food. Previous research has suggested that qualitative interpretive approaches are particularly well suited to exploring the manifestations of food

well-being and understanding the consumers' lived experiences about their relationship with food (Mugel et al., 2019). Following this approach, we chose an interpretivist methodology which included in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with consumers, focused on understanding consumers' choices and daily experiences with food consumption with particular emphasis on the use of FDAs.

3.1 Sample and data collection

Nineteen in-depth interviews and two focus groups (with five and six participants, respectively) were conducted with a total of 30 unique participants (each FDA user participated in only one of the data collection methods - either interview or focus group). We used both interviews and focus groups, as the combination of the two data collection methods can provide a richer account of consumers' experiences with FDAs. While interviews offer an in-depth exploration of individual participants' experiences, focus groups elicit interactions among participants and as such offer an additional layer of data where participants' interactions contribute to data richness by questioning and commenting on each other's experiences (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). It was observed that during the focus groups, participants felt a sense of kinship, which allowed for open conversation and enriched the data with observations of participants' interactions. The use of the two methods provided data triangulation that offers a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and contributes to the credibility of the findings (Denzin, 2009).

Questions asked during the interviews and focus groups focused on consumers' lifestyle, reasons for using the app, and thoughts on well-being. Using Lavelle et al.'s (2017) study as inspiration, respondents were asked if they budgeted for their meals and prepared meals ahead of time to establish baseline procedural knowledge and daily routine. Respondents were asked if food was a part of their upbringing to understand food socialization and their relationships to food. These questions focused on participants' level of engagement in their diet and their willingness to use/adopt procedural knowledge. Questions that evaluated the FDA asked how often participants order, what type of food they order, and if their food orders were tied to their emotional state. Feelings of guilt, control, and freedom related to FDA

use were asked to assess how they use the app, and to understand how licensing effects are developed and used by participants.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify study participants. Users had to use an FDA at least once a week as continuous use is dependent upon having a positive attitude towards the service and perceiving it to be easy and useful. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, some users both decreased and increased their ordering habits during the quarantine. For those participants, they were asked how many times they ordered before quarantine and after. In those instances, they were asked why they changed their ordering habits. Respondents were found through social posts on various platforms and pages from June-November 2020. Potential participants were asked to email one of the researchers for study details. Participants were screened by asking how often they use a food delivery app to qualify for the study. Members of the sample came from cities in Western Canada. Interviews were held in-person and online over Zoom, Skype, and WebEx and averaged 60-120 minutes. The platforms changed based on the respondents' access and preferences. One of the two focus groups was held in a closed and private environment with six members, where the recording lasted for 180 minutes. The second was done via Zoom and lasted for 120 minutes with five members. All participants were given pseudonyms and generalized tags for their occupations.

Demographically, users varied from 18-41 years old and included both college students and working professionals. Students are seen to be the highest users of FDAs, representing more than half of the market for use or respondent rate (Chandrasekhar, Gupta, & Nanda, 2019; Cho et al., 2019; Tandon et al., 2021). Students may be the highest users of FDAs because they are typically working on limited time and appreciate the convenience of FDAs (Lavelle et al., 2017). Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

[Insert Table 1 here]

3.2 Data analysis

Focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim and synthesized through a thematic analysis that utilized inductive reasoning. Analysis was done iteratively in the order in which data was collected: first, a set of three in-depth interviews helped establish a baseline understanding of the phenomenon and refine the questions in the discussion guide; next, a focus group was conducted to add the richness of participant interaction data which provided complementary insights; this was followed by the rest of the individual interviews and finally the second focus group. This iterative process led to a convergence of the emerging themes across focus groups and interviews, which enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). The analysis was done manually following open coding procedures to arrive at common themes and emerging patterns which were further reduced to core categories (Charmaz, 2006). Following interpretivist qualitative research procedures, the data analysis started with a line-by-line analysis and open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In this process, instances in the data were compared with others for similarities and differences and were then given conceptual labels. We used the constant comparison method through the exploration of similarities and differences across incidents in the data to allow for the emergence of codes from the data. The process iterated between data collection, analysis, and consulting the extant literature as far as it had relevance to the emerging themes. In this iterative process, emerging themes were compared for theory development and verification (Sharma et al., 2017). As such, we relied on the Gioia methodology as it provides a systematic approach to concept development that captures both concepts in terms that are meaningful for the participants and a level of scientific theorizing (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of the data resulted in two major theoretical dimensions, and their corresponding second-order categories: (1) Licensing effects (with second-order themes of food fatigue, food on time, food for mood, and escapism); and (2) Well-being tensions (with second-order themes of guilt, financial

stress, and lack of control and environmental mastery). Table 2 presents the data structure, which illustrates the process of how data was organized from first-order codes and quotes based on raw data, through successively more abstract second-order categories, and finally to aggregate theoretical dimensions, following a systematic approach to concept development which enhances reliability (Gioia et al., 2013). We discuss all major categories in turn, giving examples from our study participants.

[Insert Table 2 here]

4.1 Licensing effects

The justifications for using FDAs by our study participants provided a variety of licensing effects that consumers used to indulge in food delivery and compensate for possible guilt feelings stemming from paying more for delivery (compared to picking up the food or cooking at home), or from feeling that they are overusing FDAs. We discuss those licensing effects in turn.

Food fatigue

Food fatigue is a term we coined to describe the unwillingness to eat the same food because it does not fulfill the immediate need. Consumers were not unwilling because of diminished quality or perishability of food but because they have deemed that food item unsuitable for that moment in time. In this category, people use the licensing effect to act virtuously for the self—in turn, this is also a mode for self-gratification and compensation. It is compensation as they typically exert effort through acts such as meal planning or cooking throughout the week, which gives them a license to indulge every once in a while (such as, on the weekend). As explained by our participants:

“I kind of get tired of eating the same thing for the fourth and fifth time if I’m being honest”

(Hubert)

“I find if you do a whole week by like day six or seven, you’re like, Oh man, this thing? You’re out of it.” (Douglas)

“I don't like eating the same food twice so even if I do eat leftovers I usually eat very little of it. “
(John)

Through the analysis process, food was shown to be a tool used to enhance mood. When the same food is eaten too often, many respondents expressed that they felt dissatisfied, tired, and unhappy. This is the most common use for the app, as many in the sample use it to break the monotony of eating the same thing. The individuals who used this licensing effect have the willingness to use procedural knowledge, and sufficient food literacy to prepare meals. They have a developed meal plan and are engaged with their diet on a regular basis which leads them to use the app guilt-free. The licensing effect that is used is “I have done good by cooking and eating healthy”. For instance, Douglas prepares three to four meals for the week allowing him to use his FDA guilt-free. He makes healthy meals; therefore, he allows himself to indulge when he orders on FDAs. He explicitly states that when he orders he will not pick a salad because it is like going out for dinner. With this type of belief, we infer this ordering behaviour is more special, like a “cheat meal.” This example aligns with Kivetz and Zheng’s (2006) concept about expending effort. In this regard, Douglas has a developed food script and is engaged in his consumption process. Because he is highly involved, he can enjoy food variety via the app. Respondents using this licensing effect have high engagement in their food process, where most of their diet consists of foods to thrive. When the individual understands what is going into their body, they can enjoy treats guilt-free and experience the sensory food process and have good feelings.

Another license for app use related to food fatigue includes “I want to try something new.” As Karissa explained: *“I like to order things that I don’t have, and I can’t just make by myself. I can’t make sushi at home.”* Participants who were not introduced to other cuisines via food socialization use it to diversify their palette and try something new. Financial independence or moving out of the family home open the door for newness. In John’s case, his preferences do not always align with his household, so he orders food that he enjoys. Jarromie uses the app to order food *“that I would never make for myself.”* The app broadened his food horizons allowing him to develop preferences and add to his sensory experience. He can enjoy new foods without the guilt of wasted time or money. We specify that it is not the app that

creates the willingness to be more food adventurous. Instead, it has become an easier mode of enjoying food variety. Some respondents have used it to try new restaurants they have been recommended or have seen featured on the app. The app allows the consumer to enjoy food variety without spending more time and money shopping for the ingredients and preparing the meal. More so, they add to their meal plans by inserting newness. The desire for variety licenses self-gratuitous behaviour because it uplifts the mood through self-care. But because they are engaged and aware of their habits, this is also an act of compensation.

Food on time

Many respondents expressed that they could not cook because there is not enough time in a day. Others said they could not pick up food because that would affect their work-flow productivity. The time needed to factor in buying groceries or preparing oneself to leave (in order to pick up food) was also perceived as cumbersome. One way the license is developed is through compensation where it is framed as “acts of service”. Compensation is where social conventions, like being a mother, can lead to app usage. In this situation, participants feel it is their motherly duty to provide for the family. When they are unable to provide because of time constraints, the app is used. In that sense, they license the app as “I am feeding my family on time.”

“As a parent, mother, spouse, there’s responsibility associated with cooking and food and, you know, feeding your family and feeding their bodies, their minds”. (Janet)

Feelings of guilt arise when this type of license is used too often. Janet stated that she would seek reassurance from her husband when she feels like they have ordered too much. In this scenario, how food is acquired creates guilt because it was not done “*by hand*” (Janet).

Another form of license built on compensation is “I can spend time with my family.” This license is founded on the belief that by ordering food they are compensating for the time lost during the day. As one participant explained, “*freeing up time where we can either do things together or where I can just take time for myself or my husband, and I can spend time together is -especially at the age that the kids*

are at- is the most important thing; that's time you won't get back". Similarly, Bailey and his wife will order so they can spend quality time together. Bailey called this an act of self-care, and explained that *"I know we should be cooking more. But at the same time, that's fleeting, because I am [again] starting to appreciate the time, the quality time rather than the [meal] prep"*. These are labeled as positive licensing effects because they come from a place of virtue. When the app is licensed as such, it allowed these individuals to gain time with their loved ones. However, this type of behaviour can also induce guilt, especially when they are home and have access to food resources. But the desire for connection replaces guilt and eudaimonia is enhanced. They experienced control due to the high awareness of their usage and the purposes behind it.

Compensation also comes in the form of compensating for time gained and contributing to one's daily productivity. Time gained is used as a license by those who do not feel that they have enough time to complete everything. Therefore, they forgo either cooking, leaving the house to shop for groceries, preparing food, or even eating throughout their day. For example, one will forget or will choose not to eat to gain time and then order food later to compensate. Food on time allows the customer to experience control and autonomy by alleviating stress from perceived time constraints. What can happen when the app is used too often to fulfill food on time is that it becomes a negative cycle where the person will experience a loss of control.

One participant stated: *"We don't live in families anymore where one person is exclusively responsible for anything that has to do with the household and cooking and taking care of people, and another person is bringing in the money. It doesn't work like that anymore. You have to be those two people in one person, especially if you live alone."* (Colin)

In Colin's case, he is a teaching assistant and Ph.D. student. He has a demanding, erratic schedule filled with marking, research work, and the stress of paying tuition and rent. Ultimately, he compromised his eating and food habits in order to gain more time because preparing food/cooking is not the priority for him. The license for using FDAs in this situation is "I am being virtuous working hard and gaining time." But this form of compensation built an unhealthy relationship with his FDA where he felt

“trapped.” He said that convenience is a vicious cycle, because one will have to offset the cost of that payment, i.e., you are paying to experience continued convenience. Colin was losing money because he was ordering to gain time, which meant he had to work more to compensate for that monetary loss. Other costs incurred when consumers use unsustainably coping mechanisms include reduced mental health, lack of control, autonomy, and environmental mastery (Ryff, 1989).

For Colin, the process of having to shop and buy groceries induced anxiety because of the apparent lack of time. When an individual licenses based on gaining time, it inhibits the use of procedural knowledge because it is perceived to be a more challenging option. In that respect, the cycle can create a new food script where to order food becomes the behaviour sequence. Because the app is shown to reduce anxiety from wasting time or having to focus on making more time, it becomes the default choice.

This effect aligns with the notion of what option meets future or current needs in the vice vs. virtue scenario (Yan et al., 2017). Gaining time is the current need, but it also may create less than satisfactory results for the future. Colin expressed feelings of *“disgust with himself”* and *“scurvy”* due to the food ordered. While he enjoyed the food he ordered (food pleasure), the amount ordered, and the lack of portion control affected his well-being. The desire to gain time is utilitarian and virtuous at first. But when abused or unacknowledged, it can lead to dissatisfaction and a negative relationship with food. Colin started to look at food as just fuel, meaning he ate to survive. However, the food ordered was not conducive to his well-being because it limited food to thrive. Furthermore, his sensory experience with his food decreased, leading to levels of dissatisfaction. While he experienced immersion in work, it was at the cost of engagement in his diet.

Similarly to Colin, Sebastian licenses the use of the app by *“I am being productive.”* He found himself ordering when he is exclusively at his office and, *“it [is] two-three in the morning and [he’s] just working away.”* In this sense, productive means full immersion in work. Eating is not the priority making consumers push or ignore their hunger, in some cases, to the point of mental exhaustion. This was evident in the case of Bailey, who would skip lunch and dinner and only stop once *“[he] was struggling to focus [and] getting a headache.”* This license is used most for those who are very work-focused. This effect is

formed by the unwillingness to leave or stop work and lack of immediate food availability. Ironically, while this licensing effect intends to gain productivity by not stopping consumers' workflow via cooking or leaving, what ends up occurring is a loss of time by: (a) Longer deliberation for food items while on the app (*"I end up spending 30 minutes to an hour deciding on what I want to eat."* (Connor); (b) Fixation on the time bar on the app (i.e., looking at the time bar every five minutes and being distracted by it); (c) Fixation on the driver on the map (becoming angry that the driver is delayed); and (d) Leaving their task to help the driver or waiting by the door, which in effect is taking them away from their intended task. While the licensing effect is aimed at achieving environmental mastery, when food on time occurs too often, and the licensing effect is used to justify ordering, it can lead to guilt, anger, and loss of control.

Food for (social) mood

Food for mood is a form of use where the user is looking to add to the social experience or immerse themselves while socializing. Mood encapsulates the feelings occurring at that moment as well as the physical and mental setting. It is the ability to immerse themselves with friends or in a hobby uninterrupted. We propose that food for mood is a driver of social eating as this licensing effect facilitates food sharing and augments the shared identity of a social group (Higgs, 2015). Social eating refers to how consumers modify their food consumption behaviour based on their social surroundings (Higgs, 2015; Higgs & Thomas, 2016; Herman, 2017). When the FDA user(s) choose to order from the app for a social gathering, the food, or the process of getting food has to fit the setting. Generally, people do not want to disengage by leaving to get food or cook food. For instance, participants stated:

"Every time I order Skip... It depends how much I go with the boys" (Jacob)

"Well, If I'm playing war zone with the boys as soon as I get home from work, I'm not going to cook" (Isiah)

Social eating literature examines the relationship between the social norm and how that informs food intake/consumption (Higgs, 2015; Higgs & Thomas, 2016; Herman, 2017). Higgs (2015) states that

“norm following is most usefully conceptualized as an adaptive behaviour” (p. 40) making it more likely to consume foods and promote food sharing. The adaptive behaviour in this context being how consumers choose to order food. Food for mood aligns and adds to social eating research regarding normative behaviour and food intake (Higgs, 2015) by exploring more in-depth how (choosing to order food via FDA) and why (the licensing effects used) a consumer will follow the social norm in the context of food delivery. In social settings, a licensing effect that develops is “We planned this.” The ability to order and not break away from the group dynamic increased enjoyment, adding to the sensory experience. Sensory experience may also be labelled as social food pleasure. Social food pleasure is a sensory process where food is a driver for socialization and unification; it is receiving enjoyment from the entire food experience, not just the flavours (Medini et al., 2019). Social pleasure comes from social activities and experiences (Kubovy, 1999), and when mixed with food, it enhances the experience. When used in groups or shared between people, we suggest that the app adds to social food pleasure. For instance, because of a weekly board game night, Jarromie and friends plan to order food to engross themselves in gameplay. The knowledge they will be ordering suggests that this is a topic communicated among the group. The planning behind this ordering behaviour makes this more of an event. Jarromie does not order sporadically; in fact, this particular habit becomes ritualistic, enhancing the group’s dynamic. Akin to planning a dinner date or an evening out, this particular use of the app can reflect that type of process. Food scripts are behaviour sequences where consumers ask themselves “how to prepare,” or they go through food prep motions (Block et al., 2011). One could argue that dinner dates or planned orders in social settings are adjustments or additions to the food script. Once the event becomes ritualistic, like board game night, then it adds to social food pleasure. More so, this type of use adds to positive relatedness for the self and their relationships, and as such enhances eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 1989).

The app can also be used as “*something that allows for conversation*” (Bailey). It does not detract from social settings but rather enhances social food pleasure. Many participants were shown to order with their family, siblings, or even passing their phone around the room to make joint orders. Not only does this allow for full immersion, but it can also create closeness, moments of bonding and sharing. The

license to this type of ordering is “I am bonding”. For Patrick for example, his definition of comfort food included experience, and his most comfortable experiences are the foods he eats with friends. In fact, his stated definition of comfort food is “*something I’d be eating with friends.*” When he chooses to order via FDAs it is because he has been on a voice chat with his friends and starts to crave food late at night. Not only is this their method of connection, but this is also how he derives fulfillment.

For use outside of in-person meetings, participants have used the app to allow them to play video games, watch movies, or relax. The intent behind this scenario is to not break away from their online activity by cooking or preparing food. In regard to video games or voice chats, consumers would like to stay engaged with their friends. This form of use can be positive if the user self-regulates their behaviour. Isaiah, for example, will not break away from his video game and chooses to order to stay immersed. He is self-regulated because he will correct the next day by cooking or eating something he made earlier in the week. Overall, food for mood can contribute to positive well-being as it allows consumers to stay immersed and engaged in what they want to do, providing fulfillment, bonding, and overall rest and pleasure. However, when the individual aims to use food for mood to stay immersed in online situations due to lack of fulfillment in their life, ordering food can also become a negative contributor to well-being, as with the situation of escapism which we discuss next.

Escapism

Escapism can be a form of reward and compensation. Escapism is an important situational factor impacting the use of FDAs because what consumers are escaping from can be both physical and mental manifestations of ill-being in their lives. Participants used the app as a tool to add to their escapism or a tool for self-care in an attempt to deal with the pressures of daily life. As such they used the app to aid in mental and / or physical comfort. For instance, Patrick started feeling exhausted and unfulfilled after work because he could no longer interact with co-workers. He understands that he is “*ordering too often*” but his licensing effect is that he needs this for “*his mental health.*” He showed a high self-awareness in knowing that when he overorders and overeats unhealthy food, it affected his mental health, but the

willingness to change his diet is contingent on feeling fulfilled. A behaviour pattern like this, if done continuously, may lead to an unsustainable coping mechanism. Engagement or immersion can allow the individual to feel like they are in control because they choose to immerse themselves. Nevertheless, what makes it unsustainable is the cycle that develops. If the individual feels unfulfilled or upset and is seeking comfort, it is the food ordered that perpetuates the cycle.

In the case of another participant - Peter, he ordered food to escape his physical place because mentally, it did not feel like his own. The lack of ownership led him to order more often and initially, he was unaware that he was ordering because of this. He showed surprise upon looking at his order history and comparing usage from his old apartment to the new. Peter is a professionally trained chef, and he had the highest confidence in his procedural knowledge and voiced that he could quickly prepare a meal. However, a stipulation of procedural knowledge is that the individual must show a willingness to use it. While Peter has the skillset, he was unwilling to cook because of his environment. He is a strong example of how the level of skill or confidence in the kitchen is not necessarily the main reason why people are susceptible to order via FDAs. Once Peter moved into a new apartment, he found that he could explore and adapt, improving his life quality. Moving into a new place allowed him to change his drinking, drug, and sleeping patterns, bringing him more happiness. In turn, these changes motivated him to cook more in his kitchen and order less food via apps.

Another reason for ordering within the escapism context is licensed by “I deserve this.” For instance, Peter does not have the luxury of enjoying a weekend off. Ordering food is a conscious choice because he does not feel like cooking. Ordering for him is a form of self-care and reward because “*it’s the way I treat myself...because I don’t get weekends off*”. Unlike his fast-paced work environment, once he arrives home, he would like to relax, eat his mushroom Swiss burger and escape into a night of video games or movies. Ordering food is his way of enjoying a weekend by taking care of himself, thus achieving a moment of mental and physical comfort. Using the license “I deserve this” thus comes from a system of mental reward when the person feels that they have done good work or accomplished something, and they allow themselves to order. This is a form of gaining comfort and adding to care

because they have pushed themselves or worked hard throughout the week, therefore they deserve a treat. It should be noted this can adversely affect the user if they find themselves using this system of reward to achieve comfort too often where the license stems from a position of mental discomfort.

Meah and Jackson's study (2017) examined the relationship between convenience foods and caring for oneself or others. Socially, convenience foods are generally looked at negatively; but when used as a form of care it eases the burden of perceived social roles or the stress of having to make time for meal prep, adding to mental and emotional well-being. In cases where food is treated as a reward, it comes from being virtuous and meant to self-gratify because consumers are caring for themselves. This was the situation for one of our study participants, Catrina, who is a very busy individual and has to work to pay for her education. Her total hours of work (school/occupation) amounted to 55 hours a week. She stated that when she *"had an extremely successful week...and executed the goals or plans [she] mentally had noted,"* ordering food on a Friday is a reward. But once food is treated as a reward and blended with mental exhaustion, it will be licensed as "I am taking care of myself" because of mental/physical depletion. Once the individual becomes exhausted or reaches burnout, they will try and look for comfort by making easy life choices. To lower negative feelings of the self, they will justify the act by thinking they are taking care of themselves by not leaving their physical environments, as the act of leaving causes mental distress, and ordering becomes the most comfortable option. Well-being (or lack thereof) is the primary antecedent to this habit because consumers' burnout cycle is contingent upon their lifestyle and occupation. Belanche et al. (2020) found that occupation is a contributor to the use of the app. For these individuals, they value work and future life success to a higher degree, and they push themselves and then require forms of disengagement. As some of our participants described:

"If I'm mentally exhausted, yes. But it's like if I'm in a good mood, I can go grab it. Or if I can just cook it, then no, but it's related to exhaustion yeah... I'm exhausted or something, then yeah, I won't hesitate to click a button and order food." (Anthony)

"I was just exhausted from constantly working. Every day I would just come back, order it [food], [and] almost go to bed before it even showed up. Like, I was just so tired." (Gary)

Occupation is critical to note for Gary because it affects life satisfaction and has spill-off effects for his ordering habit. Like Colin, he also has a negative relationship with the app, believing that he abuses it. He ordered from the app due to a combination of physical and mental exhaustion. He diverts what remaining mental energy he has left to order food and then hopes to disengage when he comes home. When FDAs are used to alleviate fatigue or escape from mental stressors continuously, they become an unsustainable coping mechanism where well-being and food well-being will be adversely affected.

More positive uses of this type of ordering behaviour are for those who have experienced a bad or long day and hope to escape into what brings them mental comfort or pleasure. Individuals will license as “I deserve this”. Isiah’s definition of comfort food is “*sitting on the couch on a Friday night, throwing on a romantic comedy... I’d like to have a bag of chips with some dip.*” The picture described is the same for when he has a bad day, “*I don’t feel like doing anything, I just want to sit on my couch, and I’ll order food.*” A significant factor to Isiah is his valuation of life. Respondents who showed a higher level of job satisfaction and control in their schedule used the license of “I deserve this” as self-care or personal time.

4.2 Well-being tensions

While our study participants exhibited a wide variety of justifications used as a license to order food via FDAs, there was also evidence of several conflicting aspects in their relationship with food and the apps. We have grouped them into the categories of guilt, financial stress, and lack of control and environmental mastery, which we discuss in turn.

Guilt

Notwithstanding the fact that licensing effects are designed to suppress feelings of guilt for consumers (Khan & Dhar, 2006), study participants were often riddled with guilt from overusing the app. This was especially noticeable for people who lacked self-regulation. Participants who used FDAs as a way of bonding with family / friends or to introduce variety to their diet through a conscious

understanding of the role of FDAs in their life were mostly spared from guilt feelings, whereas those who used it as escapism were particularly susceptible to the guilt. Feelings of guilt could come from two sources: (1) guilt from ordering and eating unhealthy food; and (2) guilt from falling into a pattern (food script) that prevents consumers from learning new things and growing.

The case of Patrick was indicative of the first type of guilt:

“Like if it’s the third time I’m ordering the same week, I feel guilty. Cause I’m like just eating lots of junk, knowing that it’s bad for me. And also not balancing that with going out and going to the gym. Like just two weeks ago I would go like three times. But, with my work schedule being so unpredictable, like all of a sudden they’re giving me a bunch of hours on random days and at different times, like I can’t have that regular workout schedule anymore. (Patrick)

For many participants, the knowledge that they are willingly contributing to their intake of unhealthy food was causing stress and internal tensions. This situation impacts consumers’ self-concept as consumers are aware of the negative impact on their body by ingesting this kind of food, and this further affects negatively their psychological well-being as they feel they are unable to self-regulate their behaviour.

Another contributor to feelings of guilt was the realization by consumers that adopting a food script that overuses FDAs affects negatively their ability to learn new things (such as, advance their cooking skills) and to grow personally in the process. The case of Sal is indicative of this group of consumers:

“I always feel guilty cause I’m like, okay, that’s money that I could have not spent on Skip the dishes. Like, I could have just gone to the grocery store. And then that’s also preventing me from learning how to cook something new or other”. (Sal)

Similarly, another participant stated: *“I just kind of feel like it’s like a slap in my face... I’m like disappointed in myself... I used to overuse it and I definitely used to feel like I overused it.” (Peter)*

This second contributor to guilt relates to the concepts of competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000), that is, the ability to engage in activities that use and extend a person’s skills and expertise and contribute to

fulfilment in life. Falling into a pattern of overuse of FDAs diminishes the ability of consumers to break away from a food script that relies on ordering food and decreases their feelings of competence and personal learning, and as such reduces well-being.

Financial stress

Study participants were also acutely attuned to the fact that using FDAs was the more expensive option of getting food, and this posed tensions because of the financial stress they perceived. In this category, participants displayed two types of behaviour: (1) being aware and trying to avoid financial stress by managing their routine; and (2) preferring to ignore the thoughts of the financial burden while knowing the impact of (over)using FDAs on their finances.

For instance, Gary was very much aware that his daily routine and habits should include grocery shopping and he should plan ahead, but when this does not happen, he accepts the consequences:

“So... if I didn’t plan ahead, ordering Skip is almost just like the punishment in a way. I just have to eat a delivery fee to get my food. It’s a punishment for you being lazy. You just pay a fee.” (Gary)

In this case, while financial stress exists, the negative impact on well-being is significantly reduced by the internalization of the fact that it was the result of not managing the daily tasks well, and the consumer accepts the consequences. Acceptance, thus, leads to a positive reinterpretation and reduces the burden on consumer’s well-being (Jaud & Lunardo, 2022).

Conversely, for Colin, that awareness and acceptance was missing, and the consumer preferred to push aside any negative feelings associated with the financial burden from using FDAs:

“I was ordering every day, but I was still lying to myself. And again, I knew that I was spending \$30-35 on a meal every day. But seeing that in your bank account is not fun at all. And I did not want to see that. Things add up. Yeah, I was lying to myself, or at least trying to; it was really hard to - you know - to lie to yourself when you have every day no dishes to do.” (Colin)

While this approach of pushing away undesirable thoughts may lead to short-term subjective well-being by suppressing negative affect, it eventually reaches a point where the consumer cannot ignore

the situation. From this perspective, it contributes to an unhealthy relationship with FDAs, and consequently larger negative impact on well-being over long-term.

Additionally, there was a significant intersection between the category of guilt and financial stress. If consumers did not consciously accept the fact that they have to manage their relationship with FDAs on all levels – including financial impact – they were prone to guilt from the realization that they are not actively regulating their behaviour to diminish the financial stress that comes with FDAs. As one participant explained:

“It’s become the path of least resistance for finding your meal so that’s when the guilt comes in because you look at how much you’ve spent and then you become more stressed and then you order more food and then I feel more guilty.” (Rob)

Lack of control and environmental mastery

An especially important aspect of the tensions between FDA use and well-being was the concept of consumers’ lack of control and reduced environmental mastery. In the well-being literature, environmental mastery refers to whether individuals are able to be efficient at managing and controlling their daily responsibilities (Ryff, 1989). It is defined as the “capacity to manage effectively one’s life and surrounding world” (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 720). Thus, lack of environmental mastery is related to well-being by reducing feelings of control over the daily tasks of consumers. If consumers are in a state of ill-being (such as, mental or physical exhaustion), they may feel they don’t have control over their daily tasks. In our study, if consumers lacked that sense of control in their daily lives and were feeling unsatisfied as a result, ordering food was used as a counterbalance to achieve some form of “normalcy”:

“I would just say lack of motivation. Um, given the fact that, you know, like I’m spending the entire day in my house with my family, I didn’t feel I was, you know, like I had handled it. I didn’t feel like I had a purpose. So yeah, like I think that my food choices were pretty representative of how I felt. ... but it kind of added a sense of norm, like normalcy to everything, so it [ordering food] made things feel more comfortable. (Pam)

However, consumers also showed patterns of unhealthy relationships with FDAs where they were over-relying on FDAs to bring them comfort, and exemplified unrealistic expectations from what the FDA can actually deliver:

“In a sense, I was delegating [my mental health], but ... I lost a sense of control at the same time, because you have to be vulnerable and by vulnerable, I mean that trust that what you mentally envisioned when you were ordering your item and, and how you’re going to receive it may not be the outcome. So mentally, it was extremely frustrating when those situations would actually come into fruition because like, who do you hold accountable? Do I hold myself accountable? When I have so many different options, meaning later I could have just went out and physically gotten the food. I could prepare food. I could have eaten food at home. Do I hold the app accountable? Although it’s just a third-party virtual platform or do I hold the rest of the restaurant accountable? ... And so with frustration, like, yeah, definitely mentally affects one’s well-being.” (Catrina)

The consumers’ level of well-being was thus a direct contributor to their ordering habits. Feeling a lack of control over one’s life and weak environmental mastery led to a cycle of suboptimal food decisions and frustrations, based on overusing the FDA.

4.3 An integrated model of the findings

The identification of the licensing effects and well-being tensions from our study led us to an integrated model of how FDAs affect consumers’ food well-being. Figure 1 offers a graphical representation of the integrated model, and the relationship among the different themes identified in the study. In the figure, the four groups of licensing effects (food fatigue, food for mood, food on time, and escapism) are positioned as boundary conditions that can alter the relationship between the decision to order food via FDAs and consumer’s well-being. Consumers’ food acquisition choices (the decision to use FDA) can affect well-being through two pathways: (1) Overuse of FDA leads to a negative cycle of feelings of guilt and financial stress which reduce well-being; (2) Moderate use of FDA, in which

consumers consciously manage their relationship with food and are engaged in self-regulation, can enhance consumers' well-being. While some licensing effects can contribute to enhancing consumer's well-being, others can detract from it. In our study sample, consumers using the licensing effects of food fatigue and food for mood were largely aware of their decision to use FDAs and the impact it has on their daily lives. For those consumers, using the FDA enhanced their well-being, and their justification for use complemented their lives and contributed to a healthy relationship with their food choices. Therefore, we position those two licensing effects in the model as boundary conditions that enhance the relationship between FDA use and well-being in the moderate FDA use pathway. Conversely, consumers using the licensing effect of escapism detracted from their well-being, as they were "delegating" their mental health to the app and were not actively engaged with the process of self-regulation and food choice. While using this licensing effect could have temporary positive effects through a feeling of self-care, more often than not it led to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Similarly, consumers using the licensing effect of food on time showed the importance of being actively aware in their diet for well-being to occur. While using food on time as a justification could lead to temporary well-being benefits for consumers, overusing this licensing effect can backfire and contribute to ill-being. Correspondingly, we position those two licensing effects in the figure as boundary conditions that can affect the relationship between FDAs and well-being in two ways: (1) when used to justify overuse of FDAs it contributes to an unsustainable mechanisms that leads to a negative cycle and reduced well-being (represented with a solid arrow in the figure); and (2) contributing to short-term gains in well-being in moderate use of FDAs (represented with a dotted arrow in the figure).

Figure 1 also exemplifies the three groups of well-being tensions and their relationship to FDA use. If not properly managed, those tensions can create a negative feedback loop, where consumers' state of mental or physical exhaustion / depletion (low levels of well-being) inhibits consumer's ability to actively manage the pressures of their daily lives and lowers their feelings of control and environmental mastery. This in turn results in more use of FDAs / overuse as an unsustainable coping mechanism.

Overuse of FDAs produces feelings of guilt and financial stress, which feed off from one another and reduce well-being.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

5. DISCUSSION

Consumers' relationship with food and the effect this relationship has on people's well-being has attracted increased attention in the marketing literature (Scott & Vallen, 2019). In recent years, consumers have been presented with an amplified choice of how to satisfy their need for food intake because of the introduction of food delivery apps, that make it easy and convenient for consumers to satisfy food cravings. Extant literature on FDAs has centered mainly on understanding how aspects of the technology impact FDAs' adoption and use (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019; O'Cass & Fenech, 2003). While this stream of literature has produced a number of implications for managers related to features and approaches that can help reach target markets and expand the use of FDAs, the literature is silent about consumers' internal processes and justifications for use. This is the perspective that our study contributes. By adopting an interpretivist qualitative approach, our study was able to delve into the underlying mechanisms of consumers' experiences of the apps, their justification for use, and the various tensions that underscore their relationship with food and FDAs, which ultimately affect consumers' well-being. In seeking to answer our research question of why consumers decide to use food delivery apps and how well-being influences (and is influenced by) those decisions, we offer four justifications / licensing effects of why consumers use FDAs, and we uncover well-being implications of the use of those licensing effects. Consumers' use of FDAs can have a positive effect on their well-being if they approach the use of the app from a place of conscious choice, good procedural knowledge, and understanding of the role FDAs have in their food script (as was the case with consumers using the licensing effects of food fatigue and food for mood). Conversely, consumers using the app as a way of escaping the pressures of daily life were more prone to have an unhealthy relationship with the app, and detract from their well-being. This

could create a negative feedback loop of low environmental mastery leading to overuse of the app, and creating more stressors and reduced well-being. Our study offers theoretical, policy, and practical implications which we discuss in turn.

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides several theoretical implications that contribute to the literature on food well-being. First, our findings revealed four major groups of licensing effects that consumers use to justify the choice of ordering food via FDAs (considered indulgent / hedonic products) vs. the other more utilitarian options that consumers have available (such as cooking at home). The licensing effects of food fatigue, food on time, food for mood, and escapism can have differential effects (positive or negative) on consumers' well-being depending on the level of consumer awareness and engagement with their food choices, life satisfaction, mental state / health, and procedural knowledge / food literacy. As such, our study adds to the existing literature on food well-being by exemplifying how FDAs have been integrated into existing food scripts and complement consumers' procedural knowledge. Extant literature has pointed to the importance of food literacy and food socialization as key components of food well-being (Block et al., 2011). Our findings show that consumers who have good food literacy and procedural knowledge use licensing effects that complement their food script and enhance rather than detract from well-being. Those consumers incorporate a new behavioral sequence into their food script (ordering via FDAs) that adds variety and / or socialization aspects to their food choices.

For busy consumers with demanding schedules, the food apps alleviate the stress of focusing on how they will feed themselves and afford more freedom to enjoy life (e.g., socialize with friends and family) and / or work longer, leading to feelings of fulfillment because of increased productivity. However, the food accessible on these apps is still subject to the user's choice. In that respect, if the user continuously does not pick foods that allow them to thrive, they will undermine their well-being by willingly engaging in unhealthy choices. Subsequently, because they are not eating the foods required for sustained productivity and positive well-being, consumers may lower their valuation of themselves. The

literature on consumer choice and licensing effects has indicated that the purchase of indulgent products for own consumption usually produces negative self-attribution since consumers have difficulty justifying such items (Khan & Dhar, 2006). Our findings show that in the context of FDAs consumers may use justifications leading to unsustainable coping mechanisms that produce a negative feedback loop. Thus, the initial negative self-attribution can lead to overuse of the FDA, which produces guilt and stress. The willingness to change and correct that habit or alter those feelings is contingent upon the ability of consumers to manage the tensions associated with their perceived life satisfaction and well-being and their relationship with food. If consumers feel unfulfilled or disengaged in life, they are less likely to utilize their skills or resources to change their food-ordering habit. As such, by using FDAs they can fulfill hunger, but they are not contributing to well-being from a eudaimonic perspective (Mugel et al., 2019). Therefore, our study joins recent calls to look at food well-being from a holistic eudaimonic perspective, going beyond hedonic aspects and gustatory pleasure to encompass how food is positioned in consumers' daily lives and relationships (Block et al., 2011; Scott & Vallen, 2019; Mugel et al., 2019). While ordering food via FDAs evidently skips some steps in a holistic food consumption process (i.e., shopping for ingredients, food preparation), it can still have a positive effect on consumer's well-being if used as a means of socialization and / or self-care, and approached from a position of mindful management of one's relationship with food.

Further, we show how with the introduction of FDAs on the market, food scripts are changing and ordering food is becoming normalized in the behaviour sequence. Once it has become normalized, the willingness to improve procedural knowledge is impeded. Further implications are that the specialness attributed to "going out for food" diminishes. The rituals associated with date night, or family outings become less special as that food is frequently brought into the home. Procedural knowledge can also be impacted by the level of engagement in the individuals' diet and the extent to which they value that knowledge. Occupation / work when regarded above the self and its current needs led to higher rates of exhaustion where the willingness to exert procedural knowledge diminishes overtime.

When consumers approach the use of FDAs with full awareness, however, the FDA is a mode for indulgence but also care. It can reward people because of hard work, and it can contribute to relatedness and socialization. Importantly, from this perspective FDAs can add to well-being through the knowledge that consumers can take care of themselves and their family, reward themselves, and spend quality time together. Ultimately, consumers' valuation of themselves and their life and work affect the decision to use FDAs as a vice or virtue. Consumers can lessen negative self-attributions through the use of licensing effects (Khan & Dhar, 2006; Yan et al., 2017). When an FDA can provide comfort and alleviate life's stresses, it is a treat leading to satisfaction. However, when the treat is used too often, and the stresses persist and are not acknowledged, it may add to or become an unsustainable coping mechanism. Food delivery apps can have a significant benefit because they allow people to savour time or gain more time, increasing satisfaction, and adding to rest, pleasure, and happiness. What is contingent upon it staying a benefit is the user's overall well-being and life valuation and how their relationship with food evolves after they have adopted the app.

5.2 Policy implications

The results of our study provide important implications for consumers and policymakers. Consumers' ability to access food that will contribute to a healthy and fulfilling life is a major concern for public policy. While previous research has examined implications related to food labeling and nutrition policy formulation (Kapetanaki et al., 2021), we demonstrate the need to consider consumer choices in relation to new technology options available on the market (such as apps), and the way consumers' well-being impacts and is impacted by such options. Recent research has pointed to the importance of coping and adaptive strategies for consumers to be able to avoid vice food consumption under anxiety situations (Jaud & Lunardo, 2022). In line with this, our research highlights that consumers' relationships with food, how they use FDAs, and their ability to achieve food well-being is contingent upon stressors in life. We add that policymakers need to be aware of the interrelationships of food availability via FDAs and external stressors in consumers' lives when designing guidelines and programs. The ease and convenience

of FDAs can enhance or detract from consumers' well-being, and policy interventions need to take into account the effect of new technologies on consumers' food choices.

5.3 Managerial implications

The implications of our study provide managers and restaurateurs an insight into their consumers' behaviour and how the FDAs affects their food script. Extant literature on food delivery apps explores what technological factors lead to continued use and how managers can use their findings to improve retention and usability (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019; O'Cass & Fenech, 2003). While those factors are very important, our findings show that managers should also contribute to the well-being of the consumer. Past literature on brand image and well-being showed that well-being perceptions are a powerful determinant of a patron's positive behavioural intentions (Kim et al., 2012). Similarly, our findings suggest that if a manager can work with the consumer to build positive well-being, this may add to feelings of connection, environmental mastery, and positive self-image thereby improving their relationship with the app. Furthermore, the data showed that the feelings resulting from the food eaten (overeating, portion control, type of food) or acquired from FDA use can lead to negative well-being as the dysregulation of the habit adversely affects the willingness to exert effort (for food acquisition). While the customer may still order from the FDA, the cycle that is created is not conducive to building loyalty. Research suggests that managers who build on customer perceived experiential value influence consumption emotions and contribute to consumer attachment to the restaurant brand (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2017). The disconnect that can develop between consumer, food, and business should be of concern to the managers working towards service excellence (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2017). Our study adds to previous literature by offering insights into consumers' relationship with food. If managers understand the mental concerns of their customers, they can work towards a positive brand image which will help uplift the consumer, and consequently improve brand image.

The current marketing tactics of food delivery companies capitalize on mental and physical resource depletion. For instance, one of Door Dash's commercials depicts an exhausted looking woman surrounded by unfolded laundry that is quickly changed to a dance party with the laundry folded upon her Door Dash order/arrival (Zariffa, 2022). This narrative utilizes mental and physical resource depletion to show the merits of ordering from the FDA. While this marketing tactic uses a facet of the lived-in experiences (as reflected by the participants in this study), we argue that this method feeds the negative feedback loop found in the overuse of FDAs. Those who overused the FDA because of physical and mental resource depletion (escapism) were more likely to experience feelings of monetary guilt, ill-being, or a disuse of food skills leading to discomfort and/or confidence issues in the kitchen. It is our opinion that managers of FDAs should be adding to the narrative of food well-being, thereby, adding more value to their business propositions. For example, instead of sending nudge notifications regarding lunch time, alerts can be sent to clients offering incentives to make healthier choices. Future campaign ideas include opportunities to reward "good" behaviour such as ordering from a local restaurant, buying healthier options, etc., through offering discounts or coupons because the client is "eating towards their health". Another method is by adding an ability to track the amount of "junk food" consumed via the app where the client can hand-select what they consider to be "Reward/Treat" foods vs. "Unhealthy/Junk foods". Nutrition apps use calorie counters (Bjarnadottir & Lang, 2022) to entice people who are looking to work towards healthy food goals; in the case for FDAs, making additions like food/money trackers and counters may add to/enforce feelings of agency and accountability for the user allowing them to feel like they can exert more control in their food well-being. Overall, FDAs must address the cognitive dissonance experienced by their clients in order to promote positive food well-being.

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH LINES

This study examined how justification and food well-being interplay with the use of a food delivery app. We introduced the justifications around use through a licensing effect (Khan & Dhar, 2006)

and found four factors consumers use as a license to indulge (Sela, Berger, & Liu, 2009): food fatigue, food on time, food for mood, and escapism. By doing so, we create a more comprehensive picture of why consumers use a food delivery app, beyond technical characteristics of the app and aspects related to convenience and trust (Alogaz & Hekimoglu, 2012; Lee et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019; O’Cass & Fenech, 2003). Consequently, we add to literature exploring how attitude and social influence affect the decision to order from FDAs (Belanche et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2021). We also highlight the role of the relationship between the use of FDAs and consumer well-being.

Our study has several limitations that present fruitful avenues for future inquiries. While the data we collected was rich and provided a window into the experiences and justifications of consumers using FDAs, it was based on a sample of consumers in a western society (Canada). Therefore, the conclusions reached may be subject to cultural understandings and ways of life. Cross-cultural studies of consumers’ use of FDAs and their relationship with food would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how FDAs affect well-being. For instance, the study of Mugel et al. (2019) underscores that in Mediterranean countries eating is viewed not just as intake of nutrients or pleasurable experience (from hedonic perspective), but as a total experience, emphasizing a more holistic eudaimonic perspective. A further line of future inquiry is an empirical test of our theoretical categories. While we provide theoretically derived constructs that can impact food well-being, further research should be conducted to examine empirically how the different justifications for FDA use and the ability of consumers to manage the tensions related to FDA affect food well-being.

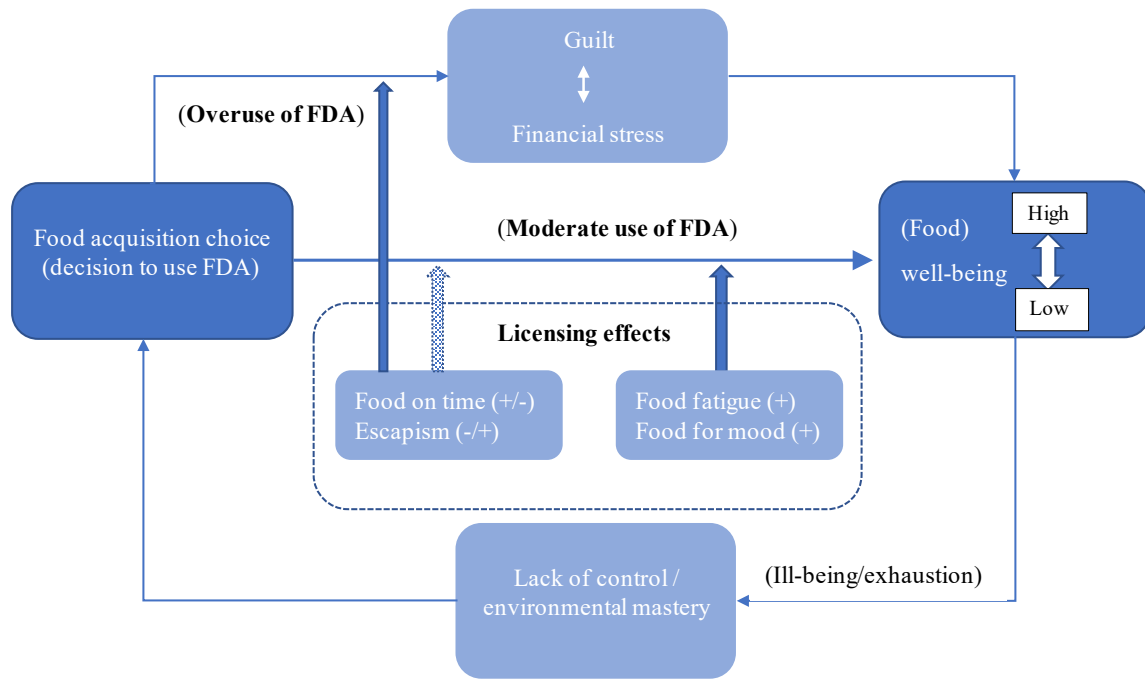
TABLE 1 Characteristics of the study participants

N	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Frequency of use/week
1	Aaron	23	Sales, Auto	3-4x
2	Anthony	24	Sales, Mobile	1-2x
3	Alex	31	Education	1-2x
4	Bailey	30	Architecture	6x
5	Catrina	24	Student	1-2x
6	Celeste	20	Student	3x
7	Clarence	20	Student + Software Engineer	2-3x
8	Colin	34	Education	5-7x
9	Connor	26	Marketing + Student	3-6x
10	Douglas	32	Real Estate	2x
11	Gale	22	Student + Sales, Mobile	1-2x
12	Gary	26	Receiver	2-3x
13	Hubert	23	Student	1-2x
14	Isiah	27	Sales, Heavy Equipment	1-2x
15	Jacob	22	Screening Officer	1-2x
16	Janet	41	Senior Management, Banking	3-4x
17	Jarromie	24	Finances	1-2x
18	John	23	Administration	2x
19	Karissa	22	Student	3x
20	Lito	21	Student	1x
21	Ned	28	Management	1-2x
22	Owen	24	Student + Barista	1-2x
23	Patrick	24	Sales	1-2x
24	Pam	18	Student + PT	1-2x
25	Peter	29	Chef	2-3x
26	Rob	26	Engineering	3-5x
27	Sal	23	Doggy Attendant	3-4x
28	Sebastian	22	Business Owner + Student	1-2x
29	Sydney	24	Student	1-2x
30	Viola	24	Student	3-5x

TABLE 2 Data structure

First-order codes	Second-order themes (theoretical categories)	Aggregate theoretical dimensions
I have done good by cooking and eating healthy and I deserve a treat I want to try something new	<i>Food fatigue</i>	<i>Licensing effects</i>
“Acts of service” Gaining time and productivity	<i>Food on time</i>	
We planned this; (online) social events I am bonding	<i>Food for (social) mood</i>	
I need it for my mental health I am taking care of myself I deserve this	<i>Escapism</i>	
Ordering junk food Falling into bad habits / food scripts	<i>Guilt</i>	<i>Well-being tensions</i>
Awareness of the financial impact of FDAs Ignoring the impact on finances	<i>Financial stress</i>	
Feelings of lack of control in daily life, dissatisfaction, and how this impacts food choices Relationship with food and FDAs, unreasonable expectations from FDAs	<i>Lack of control and environmental mastery</i>	

FIGURE 1 Summary of findings



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