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Appetite

Research report

The role of personal values in Chinese consumers' food consumption decisions. A case study of healthy drinks ☆

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Differences in culture, language, and behavior between Chinese and Western consumers make entering the Chinese market a challenge. Chinese consumers may desire similar product features (e.g. brand name, quality, and flavor) to Western consumers but the value that consumers attach to the same product may differ cross-nationally. Besides values, an understanding of desired product attributes and the consequences linking to these values is also important. To the authors' knowledge, there is no published scientific research that investigates how personal values influence Chinese consumers' food consumption decisions. The aim of this research was to identify the links among product attributes, consequences of these attributes, and personal values associated with healthy drink consumption decisions within the Chinese market. Specifically, this research employed means-end chain theory and used association pattern technique (APT) as the main data collection technique to identify these links. Focus groups ($n = 6$) were held in Hangzhou, China to identify the important attributes and consequences involved in the consumption decisions of healthy drinks. These attributes and consequences along with Schwartz's 10 basic values were used to construct the matrices included in the APT survey. A total of 600 APT surveys were administered in six different companies in Hangzhou, with 570 returned. Construction of the hierarchical value map (HVM) identified four of Schwartz's personal values influencing Chinese consumers' healthy drink consumption decisions: *security*, *hedonism*, *benevolence*, and *self-direction*. Food safety was the foremost concern for Chinese consumers when choosing healthy drinks. Chinese consumers also sought a good tasting and nutritious drink that was good value for money. Results from this study provide food marketers with an in-depth understanding of Chinese consumers' healthy drink consumption decisions. Implications and recommendations are provided that will assist food marketers to effectively enact marketing strategies in China.

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Introduction

China is currently the world's fastest growing economy and its contribution to global economic growth is expected to remain dominant in the near future (Yu, Stith, Liu, & Chen, 2012). As of 2012, China had a population of 1.35 billion inhabitants and a gross domestic product of 8.3 trillion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2013). In the past 20 years, China's retail food sales have grown by nearly 15% annually, making it the third largest food retail market globally (Hingley, Lindgreen, & Chen, 2009). The increasing standard of living in China has created a demand for products from first world countries (Gale & Huang, 2007).

While China is an emerging consumer market that creates tremendous opportunity for multinational corporations, distinct differences in behavior between Chinese and Western consumers make entering the Chinese market a challenge. Consumers' needs may be universal, but their attitudes, motivations and expressions of needs may vary (De Mooij, 2009, chap. 3). Culture and language are hurdles for foreign marketers to accurately assess the market demands and effectively enact marketing strategies targeting Chinese consumers (Hingley et al., 2009). To successfully develop and market products, it is necessary to understand which values Chinese consumers prioritize and the role these values play in the management of their food consumption decisions (e.g. how these link to underlying choices of preferred product attributes).

Personal value and food consumption decisions

Vinson, Scott, and Lamont (1977) defined personal value as "a centrally held, enduring belief which guides actions and judgments across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more

ultimate end-states of existence" (p. 44). A person's set of personal values are derived from, and modified through personal, social, and cultural learning (Clawson & Vinson, 1978; Rokeach, 1979, chap. 1). In addition, values are also used to explain the differences in behavior among people from different cultures (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998). A person may hold thousands of attitudes towards specific objects and situations, but these only result in a handful of values (Rokeach, 1979, chap. 1).

Values are the standards or criteria of a person's conduct that guide and drive consumers' decision making (Croissant, 2008; Schwartz, 1992). For example, women who hold strong values such as traditionalism, self-fulfillment and belonging are predicted to be less likely to consume meals away from home or purchase convenience food products (Rose, Kahle, & Shoham, 1995). Information on consumers' personal values is useful to food marketers and policy makers to form the basis of food product marketing strategies when targeting specific consumer segments.

Different classification systems have been proposed to define consumers' personal values. An early system used to investigate values was Rokeach Value System that consisted of eighteen instrumental values (ideal modes of behavior) and eighteen terminal values (ideal end states of existence) (Kahle & Kennedy, 1989). However, some of the values in the Rokeach Value System (e.g. world at peace) were found to have less impact on people's daily lives (Kahle & Kennedy, 1989). A 'List of Values' was developed as an alternative classification system to be more related to human lives and consists of nine values: *self-respect, security, warm relationships with others, sense of accomplishment, self-fulfillment, sense of belonging, being well respected, fun and enjoyment in life*, and *excitement* (Kahle, Beatty, & Homer, 1986). Both the Rokeach Value System and the List of Values were tailored to assess the values of Americans (Grunert, Brunsø, & Bisp, 1993). Schwartz's theory of human value is a cross-culturally validated classification system of personal values that has been experimented with 200 samples in more than 60 countries, including China and the United States (Schwartz, 1992). Schwartz's classification system includes ten values: *security, hedonism, benevolence, self-direction, stimulation, universalism, tradition, conformity, achievement*, and *power* (Schwartz, 1992).

Chinese culture and personal values

According to Rokeach (1979, chap. 1), it is the individual's weighting of the importance of different values that motivates different actions. Certain types of values may be regarded as more important to consumers in one country than to those in another country due to differences in culture and socio-economic conditions (Kim, Forsythe, Gu, & Moon, 2002). For example, Feather (1986) carried out a Rokeach Value Survey comparing value systems between Chinese and Australia students. Australian students ranked the values *an exciting life, a world at peace, family security, happiness, inner harmony, being cheerful, being forgiving, being helpful, being honest, being loving*, and *being responsible*, higher in importance compared to the Chinese students. On the other hand, the Chinese students assigned higher importance to *a world of beauty, national security, pleasure, social recognition, wisdom, being ambitious, being capable, being courageous, being imaginative, being intellectual, being logical*, and *being self-controlled* than the Australian students (Feather, 1986). The study by Feather (1986) illustrates that the values Chinese consumers held do not mirror those of Western cultures. The study emphasizes that thorough consumer research is critical to understand consumers' values before food marketers can successfully enter the Chinese food market.

Yau's (1988) investigation on the underlying dimensions of Chinese cultural values demonstrated that Chinese culture favored

conformity (being polite, obeying the rules, accepting and behaving according to the hierarchical system). Chinese have such respect for authority that it directs them to what is right or wrong (Mok & DeFranco, 2000; Yau, 1988). Hence, advertisements tend to be more effective when opinion leaders (e.g. political leaders, scientists and experts) recommend or promote products/services to target consumers. This is contrary to Western cultures that place higher values on youthfulness and ability, with consumers more likely to be influenced by celebrities, sport heroes, and suggesting sexy images (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998).

China has long been regarded as a collectivistic society in which the linkage between individuals is close and strong with people treasuring values such as *tradition, benevolence*, and *conformity* (Xiao & Kim, 2009). However, recent research has revealed that middle-class urban Chinese consumers are also pursuing individual goals of *self-direction, achievement, stimulation, power*, and *hedonism* (Xiao & Kim, 2009). Given these changing values, a study investigating contemporary Chinese personal values and how these values influence Chinese consumers' food consumption decisions is timely. While there is a large body of literature identifying values that drive food consumption decisions for Western consumers (Bitzios, Fraser, & Haddock-Fraser, 2011; Naspetti & Zanoli, 2009; Sorenson & Henchion, 2011), the published scientific research that specifically investigates how personal values influence Chinese consumers' food consumption decisions is scarce. A study on food related lifestyle and the influence food consumption patterns on Chinese consumers also draws on a value approach (Grunert et al., 2011). However, the study does not demonstrate how behavior is directly linked to values via attributes and consequences through means-end chain (MEC) as is illustrated in the current study. MEC offers a holistic understanding of the cognitive positioning of the products and the consumers' decisions making process (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The lack of knowledge on contemporary Chinese consumers' values, and how these values play a role in the management of their food consumption decisions, currently serves as a major barrier when marketing foreign food products in China.

The aim of this research was to fill this gap by identifying the links among product attributes, consequences of these attributes, and personal values associated with healthy drink consumption decisions within the Chinese market. The term 'food consumption' used in this study involves two processes: purchase decisions and consumption of food products. Specifically, this research employed MEC theory to identify the links among product attributes, consequences and personal values cognitively. Association pattern technique (APT) is one of the hard laddering that measures participants' subjective links between attributes, consequences and personal values quantitatively (Russell et al., 2004) and was used as the main data collection in this research. Investigation of Chinese personal values will allow food exporters to more effectively design their products and enact successful marketing strategies in China.

Theoretical and methodological background of MEC and APT theory

MEC theory has been recommended by scholars to understand how consumers perceive value (Gutman, 1982; Reynolds & Olson, 2001, chap. 1). In MEC theory, products are seen as means through which consumers obtain value ends. Consumers choose products because they believe that the specific attributes of the product can help them to fulfill desired values through the consequences or benefits of product use (Reynolds & Gutman, 1984). In a MEC model, every product has attributes that lead to consequences (benefits) and values (Reynolds & Gutman, 1984).

By understanding the subjective links among attribute–consequence–value, we gain insight into which product attributes consumers prefer and why they prefer them.

Laddering is the most commonly used technique to understand how consumers associate product attributes with respect to consequences and personal values (Gutman, 1982). There are two common laddering techniques namely soft and hard laddering. Soft laddering is a technique that utilizes individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to reveal consumers' values qualitatively. Soft laddering is time-consuming, expensive, and requires well-trained interviewers (Russell et al., 2004). The hard laddering that relies upon a structured questionnaire is developed as an alternative technique to uncover MEC quantitatively (Russell et al., 2004; ter Hofstede, Audenaert, Steenkamp, & Wedel, 1998). An example of hard laddering is the APT technique that can be conducted using paper-and-pencil or computerized questionnaires. The APT technique entails a survey to measure participants' subjective links between attributes, consequences and values quantitatively (Russell et al., 2004). Alternatively, these attributes, consequences and values can be obtained as a secondary source, from literature or from a primary source conducting laddering interviews with consumers (Weissnar & du Rand, 2012). The measurement of APT survey is conceived as a series of connected matrices (attribute–consequence (AC) matrix and consequence–value (CV) matrix) where consumers are instructed to read each matrix and indicate which linkage (AC or CV) are perceived to be important by ticking the boxes (Rezvani, 2009).

Design and methods

Data collection (case study, research location, and participants)

In 2011, the Chinese government announced the 'Healthy China 2020' program. One important component of the program is to reduce chronic diseases by promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles (Hu, Liu, & Willett, 2011). Healthy drinks were identified as food products in line with the government initiative. Extant research that defines the healthy drink product category in the Chinese context is scarce. Therefore for the purpose of the present research, the definition "healthy drink" was purposely left broad. In this way, potential participants were able to self-define what a healthy drink is and therefore self-identify whether or not they are a healthy drink consumer. In terms of initial recruitment, the definition of healthy drink used in this study was beverages that provided a health benefit such as improving heart health, immunity, digestion, joint health, satiety, and boosting energy (American Dietetic Association, 1999). Based on this definition, some healthy drink examples (e.g. dairy beverages such as yoghurt drinks, fruit and vegetable juices, and teas) were provided to participants but these were not inclusive participant recruitment criteria.

Data was collected in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China between December 2012 and February 2013. Hangzhou was selected as the research location as it is the capital, economic and political center of Zhejiang Province (The Editorial Department of Hangzhou, 2011). Participant selection for both the focus group and survey was restricted to consumers of healthy drinks. A healthy drink consumer was defined as an individual who consumed a healthy drink at least once in the three months prior to participating in the study. The recruitment of focus group and survey participants was carried out in six different companies in Hangzhou. The six companies fall under one telecommunications umbrella organization; however each company is independent with no direct linkage among them. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee (Reference number: 12/194). Selection of case study, research location, and

participants was set to be similar throughout the data collection to allow the attributes and consequences discussed in the focus groups to be included in the APT survey.

Means-end chain

To derive the APT matrix, focus groups (*n* = 6) were held in Hangzhou, China to identify the important attributes and consequences. These attributes and consequences along with Schwartz's 10 basic values (1992) were used to construct the matrices of the APT survey.

Identification of attributes and consequences for APT survey (focus groups)

To ensure focus groups were an appropriate technique to identify the important product attributes and consequences, two pilot focus groups were conducted in Dunedin, New Zealand (September 2012). The pilot focus groups were conducted in Mandarin to ensure that the language, constructs, and probing techniques relating to attributes, consequences and values were appropriate for the Chinese culture. Elicitation of attributes and consequences using focus groups were found to be a suitable technique in this study as participants were relaxed, comfortable and forthcoming with their opinions. As indicated in focus group literature, we found that the synergism created from interactions of group participants stimulated relevant attributes and consequences with regards to healthy drink consumption decisions in the discussion (Morgan, 1997, chap. 2).

Six focus groups were carried out (each consisting of 8–10 participants) in Hangzhou, China to identify Chinese consumers' preferred attributes and the consequences of these attributes with regards to healthy drink consumption decisions. Focus groups were composed of participants similar in age, occupation, income, and education level. An introductory exercise was carried out at the beginning of each focus group to create a relaxed atmosphere. As there were no participants holding senior level management positions in the focus groups, participants were able to talk and discuss freely in a group format without feeling the need to monitor their responses. The resulting attributes and consequences derived from these sessions were then inserted into the APT survey. All focus groups were conducted in Mandarin. To identify product attributes and consequences, focus group participants were asked to imagine they were in a supermarket or a convenience store and had decided to purchase a healthy drink. The collectivistic nature of Chinese culture and the potential that this might on group discussion (e.g. encouraging consensus decision making among group members rather than allowing for a diverse range of opinions to be voiced) was taken into consideration when designing the focus group protocol. To overcome this potential issue, participants were asked at the start of the focus group to individually list on a piece of paper the main attributes that were important to them when purchasing a healthy drink. This helped ensure that both participants' individual and collective views were taken into consideration throughout the focus group discussion. If the moderator detected bias in the discussion (e.g. people agreeing just to agree), they were able to check back to what attributes participants wrote on their initial list. This type of technique for identifying attributes is referred to in the MEC literature as a direct elicitation technique (Bech-Larsen & Nielsen, 1999). The direct elicitation technique does not constrain or guide participant answers as compared to triadic and free sorting techniques that are characterized by a higher degree of guidance and formalization (Bech-Larsen & Nielsen, 1999). The listed attributes were the starting point for the focus group discussions, where participants were probed to explain the attributes relevance in terms of the perceived consequences. The moderator probed participants with questions such as "why would that attribute be important to you?" This helped

guide participants to increase their level of abstraction (from attributes to consequences). The probing was continued until the participants could give no further explanation as to why certain attributes and consequences were important. Each focus group was recorded and was approximately one hour. Upon completion of the focus groups, 100 RMB (16.26 USD) was given to each participant. Audio recordings were transcribed to identify the central attributes and consequences. Content analysis was carried out on transcribed data to reduce the bulk of the raw data by finding common patterns of meaning in the focus group in order to allow for objective evaluation of the data (Kassarjian, 1977). As a result, content analysis identified ten attributes and seven consequences for inclusion in the APT survey. The attributes, consequences, and values that were implemented in the APT survey were derived from a combination of two approaches: data-driven and theory-driven. Using a data-driven approach, attributes and consequences were elicited through the focus groups, while a theory-driven approach was used by applying Schwartz's 10 basic values as the value set.

Development of the APT survey

The attributes and consequences from the focus groups along with the Schwartz's (1992) ten basic values were put into the APT survey (Figs. 1 and 2). Schwartz's values were used in this study as it is a more cross-culturally valid classification system for value research. Two matrices were constructed for the APT questionnaire: attribute–consequence (AC) and consequence–value (CV). The AC matrix was derived from the attributes (columns) and consequences (rows) identified from the focus groups. The CV matrix was designed where the consequences formed the rows and the values formed the columns. The values were interpreted and defined with respect to this study (Table 1). This value interpretation is proposed to explain the concepts of value that are relevant to Chinese consumers in terms of food consumption decisions.

In addition to the APT matrices, socio-demographic questions were included in the survey to profile participants. Surveys were written in Mandarin and pilot tested by five local native Mandarin speaking Chinese to test if the survey constructs, instructions, and language use was correct. Back translation was used to pick up remaining issues.

APT survey data collection

The manager of each of the six companies was responsible for distributing the surveys to company staff. Company staffs were permitted by the manager to complete the survey during work hours. All surveys were conducted anonymously and individually and participants were given an option not to participate. In the survey, participants were firstly presented with an empty AC matrix (Fig. 1) and instructed to tick the boxes where they believed that the corresponding consequence would follow on from the attribute. For example, consuming a healthy drink that "has a well-known brand" means to me "food safety", so I tick this option. In addition, participants were presented with a second empty CV matrix (Fig. 2), and instructed to tick the boxes where they believed that the corresponding values would follow on from the consequences. For example, consuming a healthy drink that "is safe" means to me "feel secure about my health (not getting sick, longevity), food safety and a sense of belonging – security", so I tick this option. Lastly participants completed the attitudinal, food consumption behavior and socio-demographic questions. The survey took approximately 15 min to complete.

APT data coding and analysis

Data were pre-processed to remove incomplete surveys (Feunekes & den Hoed, 2001). Participants who completed less than 20% of the AC and CV matrices, and those who had skipped full pages of the survey were removed from data analysis. An implication matrix was constructed with the processed survey participants' data, representing the numbers of associations between attribute–consequence (AC) and consequence–value (CV). Microsoft Excel 2010 was used to construct the implication matrix (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA). The rows contained individual participants and the columns were the cells of AC–CV matrixes. The implication matrix then enabled the construction of a hierarchical value map (HVM) using Microsoft PowerPoint 2010 (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, WA, USA). The HVM is a tree-diagram mapping the participants' thought process through the various levels of abstraction (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). A cut-off level of 30% was used in this study in order to obtain the most meaningful results, meaning at least 150 participants had to make
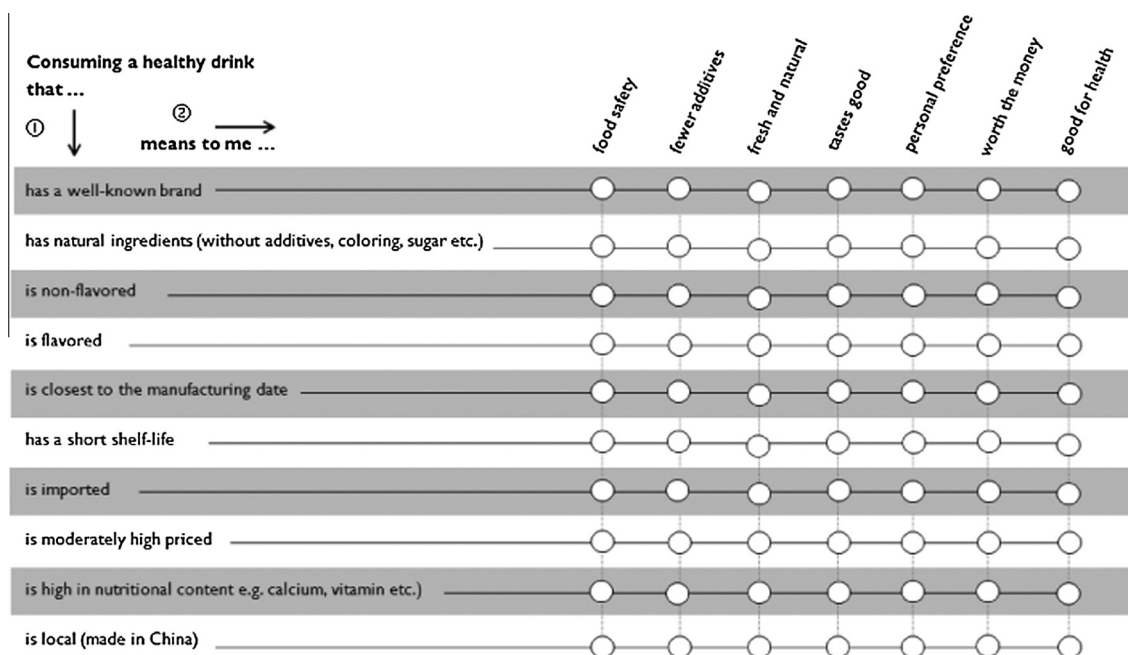

Fig. 1. Attribute and consequence (AC) matrix. Participants were instructed to tick the boxes where they believed that the corresponding consequence would follow on from the attribute (tick all options that applies).
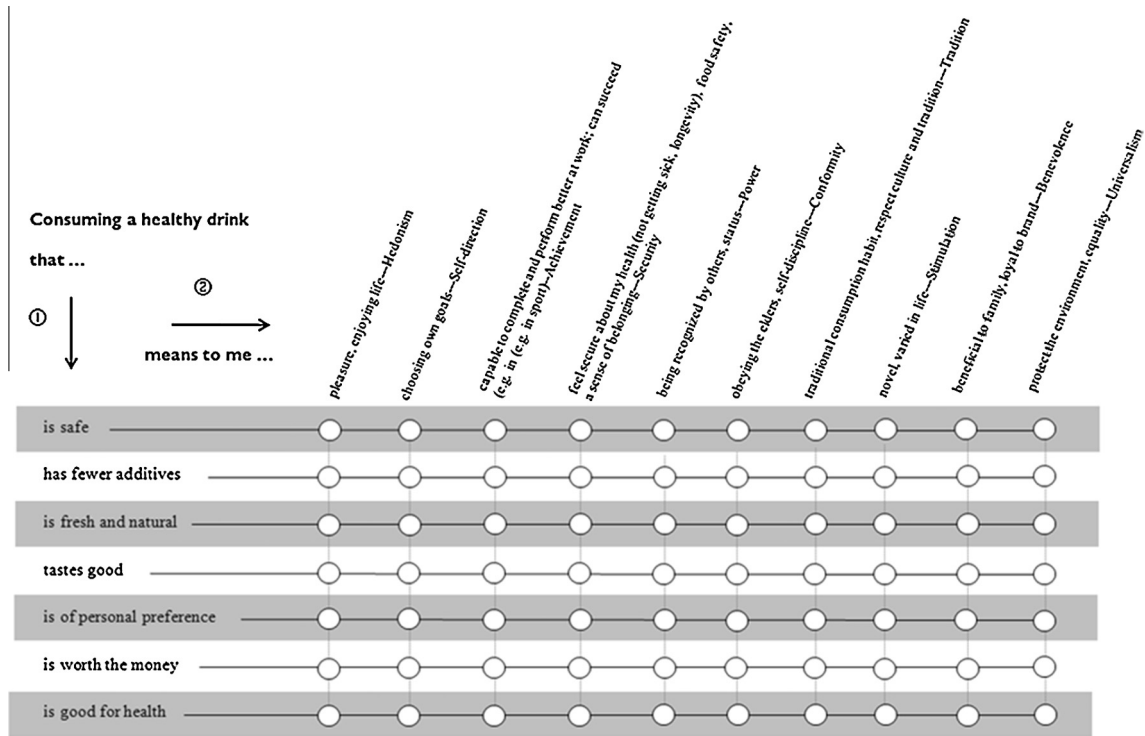
Fig. 2. Consequence and value (CV) matrix. Participants were instructed to tick the boxes where they believed that the corresponding values would follow on from the consequences (tick all options that applies).

Table 1
Values interpretations for APT surveys.

Values	Schwartz value types (and sub values)	Research interpretation
Self-direction	Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring (freedom, creativity, independent, choosing own goals, curious, self-respect)	Choosing own goals
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (an exciting life, a varied life, daring)	Novel, varied in life
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself (pleasure, enjoying life)	Pleasure, enjoying life
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (ambitious, influential, capable, successful, intelligent, self-respect)	Capable to complete and perform better at work; Can succeed (e.g. in sport)
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources (social power, wealth, authority, preserving my public image, social recognition)	Being recognized by others, status
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self (national security, reciprocation of favors, family security, sense of belonging, social order, healthy, clean)	Feel secure about my health (not getting sick, longevity), food safety, a sense of belonging
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (obedient, self-discipline, politeness, honoring of parents and elders)	Obeying the elders, self-discipline
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self (respect for tradition, devout, accepting my portion in life, humble, moderate)	Traditional consumption habit, respect culture and tradition
Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (helpful, responsible, forgiving, honest, loyal, mature love, true friendship)	Beneficial to family, loyal to brand
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (equality, unit with nature, wisdom, a world of beauty, social justice, broad-minded, protecting the environment, a world at peace)	Protect the environment, equality

the link between an AC or CV to be included in the HVM and all other connections below this level were excluded from the map. Usually, links by more than 60% of the participants would create an overview of the most important links (Feunekes & den Hoed, 2001). In this study, links scored by 30%, 40%, 50% and 60% of the participants were taken into account.

Results

Survey pre-processing

In total, 570 of 600 distributed surveys were returned. The high response rate was due to the fact that company staff members were permitted time during working hours to complete the survey. After pre-processing, 70 surveys (12%) were excluded. An implication matrix and HVM were then constructed using the 500 survey participants' data.

Participant profile

The demographic profile of the focus group and APT survey participants are presented in Table 2. The focus group and APT survey participants were similar with regards to their age, occupation, education level, and high income (compared to the average income of 23,979 RMB per person in 2011) (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2012). This allowed for the use of focus group quotes to

Table 2
Demographic profile of focus groups and APT survey participants.

Characteristics	Focus group percentages (%) n = 53	APT survey percentages (%) n = 500
Gender		
Male	45	60
Female	55	40
Age		
20–29	49	69
30–39	42	27
40–49	8	3
50–59	1	–
60–69		1
Marital status		
Single	43	55
Married, without children	6	17
Married, with children	51	26
Others	–	2
Province		
Hangzhou	100	100
Occupation		
Self-employed	–	6
White collar	79	64
Blue collar	19	22
Student	–	5
Others	2	3
Annual income (RMB)		
<10,000	6	4
10,000–30,000	10	17
30,001–60,000	26	41
60,001–90,000	30	19
90,001–150,000	28	17
150,001–300,000	–	1
Above 300,001	–	–
Others	–	1
Education level		
Primary school	–	1
Secondary school	–	2
Polytechnic	2	13
University	98	84

further explain the attributes, consequences, and values that drive participants' healthy drink consumption decisions.

Hierarchical value map

The resulting HVM is presented in Fig. 3. The strength of association between attributes, consequences and values is indicated by the thickness of the connecting lines according to the frequency of association; e.g. thicker lines representing stronger association.

Nine attributes, seven consequences, and four personal values were important to Chinese consumers when making consumption decisions regarding healthy drinks (Fig. 3). The strongest attribute–consequence link for healthy drink consumption was *well-known brand* to *food safety* (73%), which was linked with the value *security* (58%). The consequences *food safety* (58%), *fewer additives* (66%), and *fresh and natural* (54%) were linked to the value *security* by more than half of the participants. Sixty-five percent of the participants stated *high in nutritional content* was associated with the consequence *good for health* and two values of *security* (45%) and *benevolence* (32%). *Tastes good* (60%) and *personal preference* (55%) were important consequences of *flavored* healthy drinks and participants believed that these consequences would lead to the value *hedonism*. The attribute *moderately high price* was associated with *worth the money* by 40% of the participants and was linked to the value *self-direction* (44%).

Overall, *security*, *hedonism*, *benevolence*, and *self-direction* were the most influential values for Chinese consumers when making healthy drink consumption decisions. *Security* was the foremost value perceived by participants in this study as it dominated half of the HVM with the majority of the attributes (six out of nine) contributing to this value chain.

Discussion

In this discussion, the four dominant values (*security*, *hedonism*, *benevolence*, and *self-direction*) driving healthy drink consumption decisions are presented and discussed in turn. While values represent the highest level of consumer abstraction that guides consumers' food consumption decisions (Vinson et al., 1977), it is also important to understand the underlying product attributes and consequences that form the pathways leading to these values. Thus under each value type, the attributes and consequences that link to the value are discussed. Participants' quotes from focus groups are provided to help understand the underlying influence of these values on participants' food consumption decisions.

Security

According to Schwartz (1992, p. 9), the defining goal of the value *security* is "safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self". In the context of this research, *security* is interpreted as *feeling secure about health* (*not getting sick*, *longevity*) and *food safety*. *Security* was the most widely mentioned value for healthy drink consumption as the following focus group quote exemplifies: "*My primary concern when purchasing a healthy drink is the food safety and will it cause harm to my health.*" Chinese consumers who are concerned about *security* want a safe food product that can make them feel secure about their health. This coincides with the research by Grunert et al. (2011) that found Chinese consumers who held the value of *security* were "concerned" and "traditional" consumers. In the study by Grunert et al. (2011), these consumers placed the largest importance on food quality aspects and mainly on the food product's freshness.

With regards to healthy drink consumption decisions, the value *security* was achieved via six attributes (*well-known brand*, *natural ingredients*, *non-flavored*, *short shelf life*, *closest to the manufacturing date*, and *imported*) and three consequences (*food safety*, *fewer additives*, and *fresh and natural*).

The most mentioned attribute for healthy drink consumption was *well-known brand* (73%). Chinese consumers are faced with a wide range of food products of various brands, packaging, flavors, and price. A series of food contamination scandals in China (e.g. fake chicken eggs, plastic tapioca pearls, and melamine in infant formula) have fuelled demand for safe processed foods and beverages (Foster, 2011). Chinese consumers who held a strong value of *security* perceived *well-known brand* and large manufacturers with a long history as a means to guarantee *food safety*. A statement from a focus group participant demonstrates this: "*I think well-known brands are more trustable as they are large manufacturers, have a social responsibility and money to invest in food productions.*" Chinese consumers believe large manufacturers are more willing to invest in equipment, facilities, and follow safety regulations (e.g. Food Hygiene Standards) to assure the quality and safety of the foods. Similarly, Wang, Mao, and Gale (2008) found that participants chose products from the two largest dairy brands (Yili and Mengniu) in China when asked about their preferences for milk products.

Chinese participants indicated that healthy drinks with *natural ingredients* led to the consequences of containing *fewer additives* (41%) and being *safe for food consumption* (38%), thus leading to
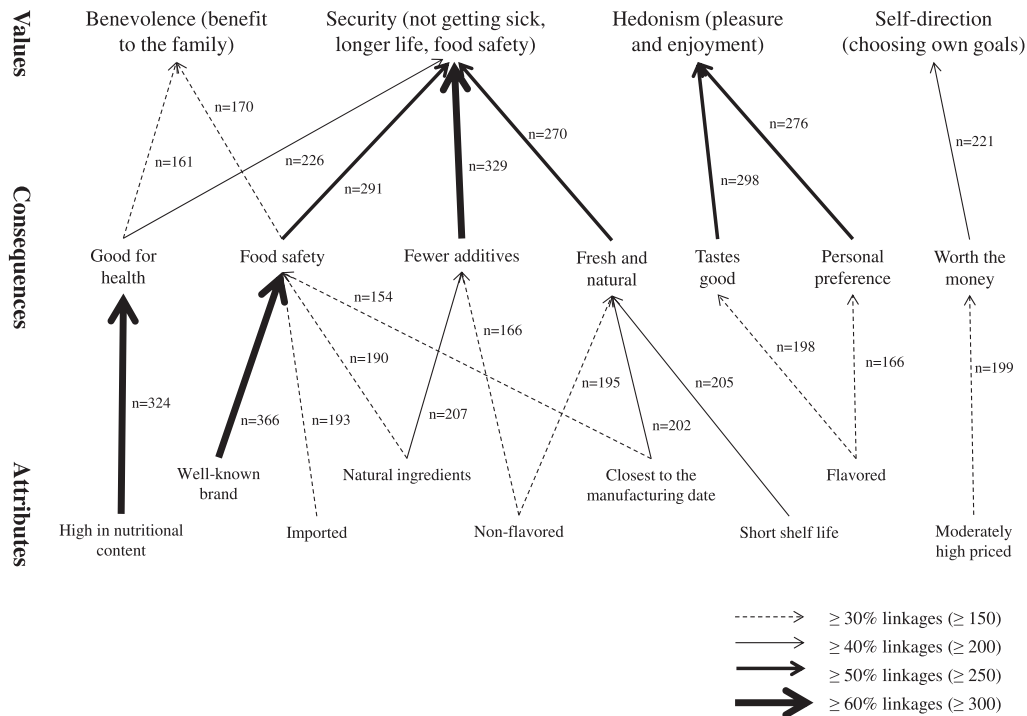
Fig. 3. Hierarchical value map for 500 participants concerning healthy drinks consumption.

the value of *security*. Chinese who perceive *security* as an important value have great interest in knowing what goes in the foods and drinks they consume. Supporting this finding, a marketing report recently revealed that seven out of ten Chinese consumers were trying to avoid drinks with artificial ingredients, with the majority wanting to purchase drinks with natural ingredients (Brenchley, Trombini, & Lintott, 2012).

Non-flavored is an important attribute closely related to *natural ingredients*. An interesting observation in the present study was that the range of potential healthy drink product categories (e.g. dairy beverages such as yoghurt drink, fruit and vegetable juices, and teas) discussed in the focus groups tended in the direction of dairy-based beverages. While elicitation of *flavored* and *non-flavored* attributes may appear to be dairy-based, in the greater context of healthy drinks, *non-flavored* and *flavored* could also be referred to as single flavored and multi-flavored beverages, respectively. Future research would be advantageous to further clarify the category of "healthy drinks" in the Chinese context. *Non-flavored* was perceived by a third of the Chinese consumers as having *fewer additives* (33%), and being *fresh and natural* (39%) which then led to the value of *security*. Artificial additives and colorings are often necessary to produce flavored healthy drinks because the naturally occurring additives are generally less intense and less stable (Wheelock, 1992). The value *security* was mentioned in relation to healthy drink consumption as the following statement exemplifies: "*Errr…...I think non-flavored means original and nothing (additives) has been added to it. For flavored drinks, I think something like artificial coloring has been added into it to make it look nice and colorful. To me, non-flavored is always better for my health.*"

Two important attributes that Chinese consumers consider when making decisions for healthy drink consumption are *closest to manufacturing date* and *short shelf life*. Chinese participants consider these two attributes lead to consequences of *food safety* (31%) and *fresh and natural* in healthy drinks (41%). Chinese participants who held the value *security* prefer to purchase food products that are manufactured on the same day or as close as possible to the manufacturing date as these products are considered *safe, fresh*

and natural. Fresh and natural is an important consequence that is highly valued by Chinese consumers. In the Chinese context, food that is truly fresh has been pulled out of the ground or butchered that day (Veeck & Burns, 2005). Chinese participants also associated *shorter shelf-life* with product quality and safety. Ortega, Wang, Wu, Bai, and Olynk (2011) found Chinese consumers perceived shorter shelf-life UHT milk to be of higher quality and safer for consumption compared to a longer shelf-life product because it was perceived to be fresher. In contrast to the Western cultures where a typical grocery shopping practice of buying large numbers of items weekly or less often, Chinese consumers were found to shop at supermarkets more frequently but buy a small number of products on each occasion (McDonald, Darbyshire, & Jevons, 2000).

Participants indicated that *imported food products* were an important attribute associated with the consequence of *food safety* and the value of *security* (58%) when deciding on healthy drink consumption. Chinese consumers have access to a wider array of consumer products unavailable to them in past decades (Zhang, 1996). Consumers from both Western and Eastern countries value country-of-origin (CoO), which has been found to influence the quality perceptions of products (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, & Hyder, 2000). Food scandals have caused Chinese consumers to lose confidence in local (Chinese manufactured) food products, creating demand for safe and quality imported foods and beverages with CoO (Gale & Huang, 2007; Yau, 1994, chap. 3). Chinese participants who strongly held the value of *security* are more likely to purchase *imported* healthy drink even though prices are higher than locally produced. Imported products are perceived to have guaranteed quality and safety. Hence, countries with a positive CoO image in China certainly have an advantage entering the market.

Hedonism

The second most influential value with regards to healthy drink consumption is *hedonism*. The value type for *hedonism* is

defined as "pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 8). In the context of this research, *hedonism* is interpreted to mean *pleasure* and *enjoying life*. Consumers for whom *hedonism* is important may care a great deal about taste and visual appearance (Schwartz, 1992). For instance, Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Aberg, and Sjöden (2001) found that taste was the most important purchase criterion among Swedish consumers when buying food (milk, meat, potatoes and bread). In this study, 40% of Chinese participants perceived *flavored* healthy drinks as having *good taste* which could bring them *enjoyment* and *pleasure* when consuming the product. A third of the participants classified *flavored* healthy drinks as their *personal preference* choice and claimed that they felt happy when consuming the product. Hence, Chinese consumers emphasize strongly on the value *hedonism* where eating is not just filing an empty stomach, it is the satisfaction and pleasure gained throughout the process of eating.

Benevolence

Benevolence is defined as "preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 11). Adjectives to describe *benevolence* include *helpful, responsible, forgiving, honest, loyal, mature love,* and *true friendship.* With regards to healthy drink consumption decisions, the value relates to *mature love,* which is interpreted as *benefitting the family.* This is comparable to the finding of Brunso, Scholderer, and Grunert (2004) that consumers who held strong value of *benevolence* were positively linked with making home cooked meals as an act of caring and providing for family. Research by Grunert et al. (2011) also demonstrated that Chinese consumers who held the strong *benevolence* value (the "concerned" and "traditional" consumers) perceived social relationships as an important food purchasing motive. Hence, consumers for whom *benevolence* is an important value are concerned how their healthy drink consumption affects others in the family. The present study found that 32% of Chinese consumers held *benevolence* as an important value when making healthy drink consumption decisions. Chinese participants believed that healthy drinks that were *high in nutritional content* (*e.g. calcium, vitamin, etc.*) would bring *good health* to the family (65%).

Benevolence is one of the five virtues mentioned by Confucius as the key in producing a harmonious life (Luo, 2009). To the Chinese, 'family' means more than just father, mother and children, and would sacrifice their own well-being for the benefits of their family members and offspring (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998). This family and kinship system is continuous and long-lasting which does not have clearly defined boundaries (Lowe & Corkindale, 1998). When grocery shopping, a Chinese consumer is likely to purchase foods for themselves, their parents and their children. Chinese consumers who perceive *benevolence* as an important value are more likely to purchase healthy drinks for the family in order to provide them with good health.

Self-direction

Self-direction is defined as "independent thought and action, choosing, creating, and exploring" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 7). In the context of this research, the value self-direction is interpreted as *choosing own goals.* Individuals who held *self-direction* as a value might place priority on following their own path, rather than merely accepting the status quo (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). The value *self-direction* was anchored by 44% and 40% links to the consequence *worth the money* and attribute *moderately high price,* respectively.

In the early days, Chinese consumers had been regarded as price-sensitive and tended to go for cheaper rather than quality products (Wang et al., 2008). However, the food scandals in China have proven that one could not get quality food products at cheap prices. For example, farmers in China were found using excessive toxic pesticides for crops and antibiotics for animals to increase their production and hence able to sell the products at lower prices to attract consumers (Zhou & Jin, 2009). Therefore, Chinese consumers who can afford premium prices are tending not to purchase low priced food products these days as they expect the product to be low quality, unsafe for consumption and hence a waste of money.

Chinese consumers who perceive *self-direction* as an important value in relation to healthy drink consumption decisions want the product to be *worth the money* by having greater quality and safety despite a premium price. However, only 20% of the participants linked the attribute *moderately high priced* to the consequence *food safety* in this study, which was below the HVM cut-off level. Due to the design of the APT matrix, participants may not have been allowed to make a comparison between choosing a moderately high priced healthy drink and low priced product as in the focus groups. Thereby the linkage between the attribute *moderately high priced* and the consequence *food safety* was not apparent in this study.

Overall, price was not the most important attribute determining the consumption decisions of healthy drinks among the product attributes identified in this study. It was the benefit from the food product that Chinese consumers in this study valued. This coincides with the findings by Luo (2011) where price was found to be the least important to Chinese participants' evaluation of infant milk formula.

Marketing implications

This section uses the four P's framework (product, place, price, and promotion) (Borden, 1964) to discuss the marketing implications for food marketers and manufacturers based on the findings in this study. According to Kotler, Roberto, and Lee (2002, chap. 2), "product" refers to the item that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy consumers' needs or wants; "place" relates to the physical distribution of the products and the location of sales and service encounters; "price" is the cost or sacrifice exchanged for the promised benefits, and considered from the consumer's point of view; and "promotion" refers to the advertising and other activities that marketers use to convey product benefits and to the consumers. The following order of considerations across the four elements of the marketing mix does not indicate any priority of importance. Successful entry into the Chinese market requires an appropriate blend.

Product

Results from the present research found that for the majority of the Chinese consumers sampled, the value *security* is deemed to be highly important in influencing healthy drink consumption decisions. Food manufacturers could consider using natural ingredients (e.g. natural sweetener, colors, aromas, etc.) in their food production and label products accordingly (e.g. "additives-free"). Having information about the nutrition labels and composition table (e.g. vitamin content) on the product packaging will increase the chance that Chinese consumers would consider these products to be safer for consumption. Another idea is implementing online traceability systems that allow consumers, for example, to trace back to the important links of production and transportation to improve consumers' confidence about the product.

Hedonism was another value that the present research found the Chinese consumers to appreciate. Chinese consumers preferred flavored healthy drinks that can bring them pleasure when consuming the product. Catering to the Chinese consumers' taste buds is critical to ensure product success in China. Apart from

developing safer, more natural, and healthier food product options for Chinese consumers, the product must still live up to its hedonic expectations.

Thus, safety, natural, health, and taste need to be considered when developing a food product targeting Chinese consumers.

Place

Security was the dominant value Chinese consumers perceived when making healthy drink consumption decisions and, the credibility of the retail outlet was said to be heavily relied upon confirm that the product is genuinely safe and of premium quality. So in terms of distribution of food products in China, countries exporting food to China are best to target major supermarket retailers such as foreign (Carrefour and Wal-Mart) and local (Lianhua and Nong-gongshang) supermarkets (Bai, Wahl, & McCluskey, 2008). These major retail outlets are considered trustable sources that sell quality and safe food products. As the majority of the community patronizes these retail outlets, the product turnover is fast and consumers are able to obtain a food product which is *closer to the manufacturing date*, again something that Chinese consumers regarded as fresher and safer.

Price

One of the challenges for food marketers when entering the Chinese food market is setting the right price for food products. It is imperative to understand if consumers prefer to pay more to obtain "value added" benefits and if they think that free or low priced products are inferior to more expansive ones (Grier & Bryant, 2005). As Chinese perceive *self-direction* as an important value influencing healthy drink consumption decisions, price is no longer an obstacle for premium quality food products in China. The increasing concern for food safety has appeared to change many Chinese consumers' minds and they are now turning to more expansive but safer, healthier food products that they considered good value for money.

This means, therefore, that the pricing strategy for imported food products in China can potentially be set 10–30% higher than the local food prices to distinguish the product from other competitors'. An emerging segment of high-end consumers is willing to pay a modest premium for nutritious, safe and quality food products in China (Wang et al., 2008; Wang, Zhang, Mu, Fu, & Zhang, 2009; Xu, Zeng, Fong, Lone, & Liu, 2012).

Promotion

Promotion of food products should emphasize the values that Chinese consumers consider important, such as *security* and *benevolence*. Chinese consumers who strongly value *security* emphasize brand awareness where consumers tend to choose a known brand even when it is lower in quality than other brands that they are unfamiliar with (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Media visibility (e.g. television, radio, internet, newspaper and magazine) is integral to promote food products (Kotler et al., 2002, chap. 2). Moreover, promoting the company's social responsibility demonstrates the company cares about consumers' health and safety. Advertisements could also include images of the product's CoO and the production facilities in order to make the whole production process transparent, therefore gaining Chinese consumers' confidence in the quality and safety of food products. Given that the value *benevolence* is important in relation to Chinese consumers' food consumption decisions, promotion of healthy drinks should also emphasize that they are natural and can provide health benefits to the family (e.g. a healthy drink that can enhance child's growth, good for mum and dad's heart health).

Conclusion

The use of APT to uncover the links that consumers make between product attributes, the consequences of those attributes and the personal values underpinning behavior can provide clear insights into the factors that drive Chinese consumers' decision making. This understanding of the relative importance of particular personal values, particularly how they link to underlying attributes and consequences, is useful for the food industry and food marketers to devise a better marketing strategy when targeting Chinese consumers.

The most important values that influence Chinese consumers' decision making for consumption of healthy drinks were *security*, *benevolence*, *self-direction*, and *hedonism*. Food safety was the foremost concern for Chinese consumers in food consumption decisions. *Well-known brand* has been used as an important attribute to determine the product food safety in China. Along with increasing disposable income, Chinese consumers are demanding a quality life for themselves and their families. They were more likely to pay a premium price to ensure the food product is safe, worth the money, and can provide health benefits to the family. Apart from being safe, healthy, and moderately high price, hedonic sociality associated to the food product was also important.

The current research has identified the dominant personal values that influence Chinese food consumption decisions; future in-depth qualitative research that explores the meaning of these identified personal values in the Chinese context is needed. For example, *security* (*feel secure about my health*, *food safety*, *a sense of belonging*) was identified as a dominant value in this study and further research regarding the meaning of health in China and on the relation between Chinese traditional medicine, beverages and health is of interest. In relation to the case study of healthy drinks, there is existing research that investigates how beverage preferences relate to consumers' values and motives in European countries (Fotopoulos, Krystallis, & Ness, 2003; Santos, 2012). Future cross-cultural analyses that compare the relationship between beverage preferences and consumers' values and motives in China with other countries is warranted. Given the size of China, cultural and linguistic differences and geographical spread of the Chinese market, further research is recommended to collect data from different regions of China (e.g. Beijing (North), Sichuan (West) and Guangdong (South)) using MEC analysis to allow regional comparability with the results obtained by this study.

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