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A middle-brow taste? How ultraprocessed food consumption relates to class, the market and eating practices in France

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➤ A middle-brow taste?

How ultraprocessed food consumption relates to class, the market and eating practices in France

Bridg'it Workshop
Giessen, 2023-05-10

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Return of the UPF

➤ Research question (1)

❖ Tastes and markets : the literature on the social stratification of food tastes

- Following Bourdieu (1979), analyses in terms of distinction
- Tastes for products, but also eating out (Paddock et al 2017, Lindblom and Mustonen 2019), shopping places (Oncini 2019, Huddart Kennedy et al 2019), labels...
- Market segmentation provides signifiers for class tastes and symbolic boundaries
- Focus on the opposition between the top and bottom of the social space

❖ From markets to practices: the sociology of eating

- Eating is a complex and sometimes inconsistent bundle of practices
- Repudiating mass-produced convenience foods = part of a 'hegemonic habitus that highlights idealised feminine positions' (Bugge and Almas 2006)
- Yet interviewees use these products in specific circumstances

➤ Research question (2)

❖ From convenience to ultraprocessed foods (UPF)

- **Actors tend to conflate convenience and food processing**
 - The literature allows to analytically separate them (Jackson et al 2018...)
 - Convenience as a sale narrative for processed foods (Shapiro, 2005; Warde, 2016)
- **Define processing?**
 - Theoretically-driven definitions (Daniels and Glorieux, 2015; Plessz and Gojard, 2015): outsourcing to the industry
 - Expert-driven definition: ultraprocessing the NOVA classification, designed by nutritionists
 - Vilified, yet widely used (36% of energy intakes in France, 60% in the USA, Julia et al 2018)

Do UPF purchases depend on class ?

Should we understand them in terms of tastes or as resulting from food provisioning practices?

➤ Ultraprocessed foods

The NOVA classification (Monteiro 2010)

1 Minimally processed: fresh or raw foods only slightly modified: dried, frozen, sliced...



2 Culinary ingredients: extracted from raw products (pressed, ground...)



3 Processed: made from 1 + 2, with simple formula and culinary processes (cook, bake, can)



4 Ultraprocessed:
- complex formula (>4 ingredients)
- non-culinary ingredients or processes (additives, extruded cereals)



➤ Data and methods

❖ Household expenditure survey 2017

- Run by French national statistical office every 5 years
- A random sample of 12,081 regular households living in France (+ 5,000 in remote territories)

▪ Data collection

- Expense diary (or purchase receipts) during one week for all household members.
- 2 interviews collect household characteristics, durable expenses over the month or year, and check accuracy of expense diaries
- Info on provisioning practices and housework (home production, meals away from home, cooking...)

▪ Study population

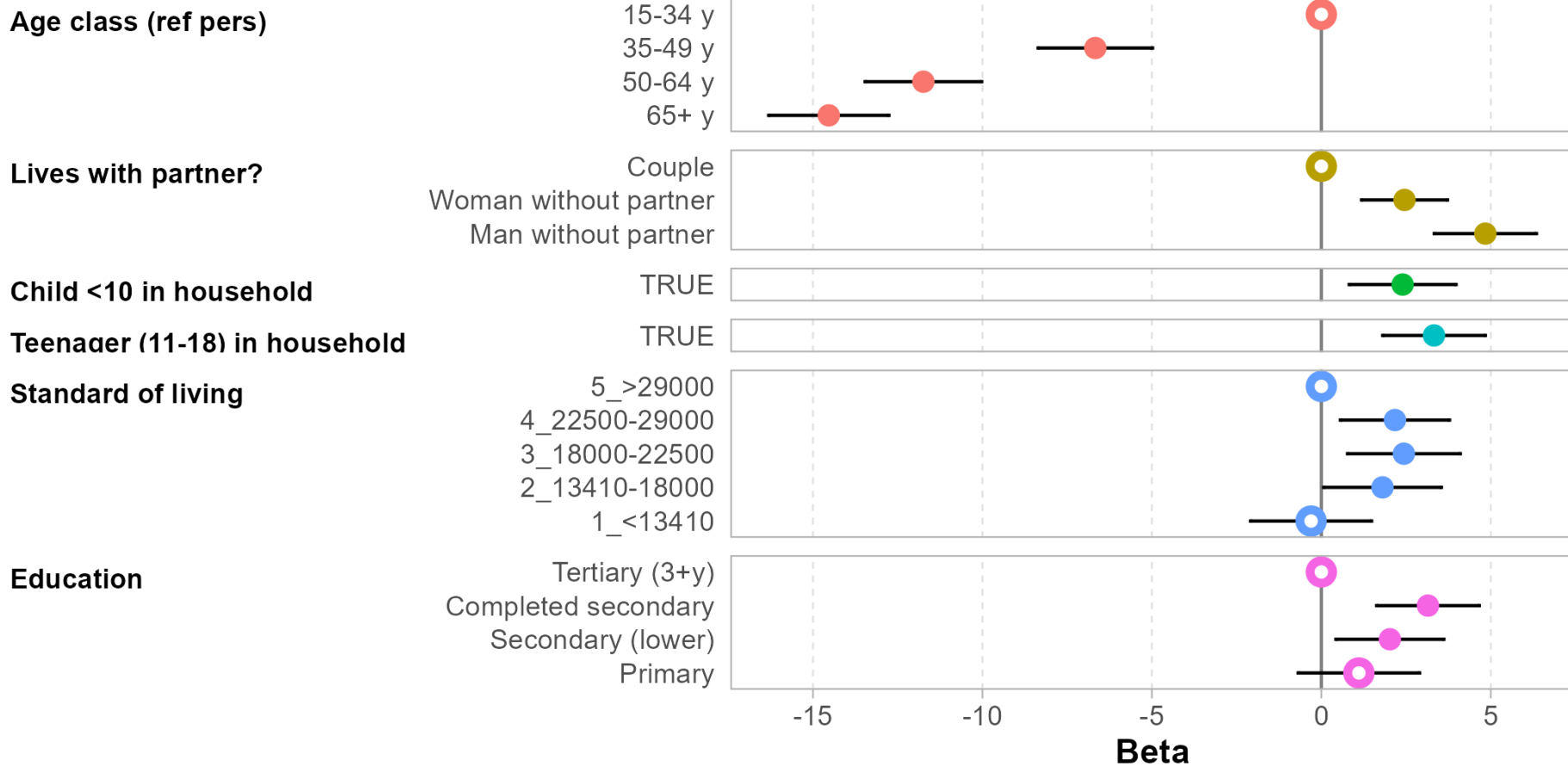
- Metropolitan France sample: half randomly selected for questions on housework (6,012)
 - 5,476 households with complete answer and good-quality expense records.

▪ Key variables

- Linear regression, with weights, unstandardised coefficients
- Dependent var: Budget share of ultraprocessed foods in the food-at-home COICOP group.
 - Together with experts of the food market we examined the most detailed, level of the COICOP nomenclature and classified each item according to NOVA nomenclature.
- Class position and household composition: income level, education, age, partner, children
- Food provisioning practices
 - Frequency of cooking and shopping
 - Home production
 - Types of shopping places and eating out

➤ UPF share is highest for intermediate levels of income and education

Household composition and class



● p ≤ 0,05 ○ p > 0,05

➤ UPF share varies according to provisioning practices

Cooking: at least 7times/week

Homeproduction: yes

Hypermarket: yes

Supermarket: yes

Discount stores: yes

Local producers/streetmarket: yes

Small/specialised shops: yes

Bakery: yes

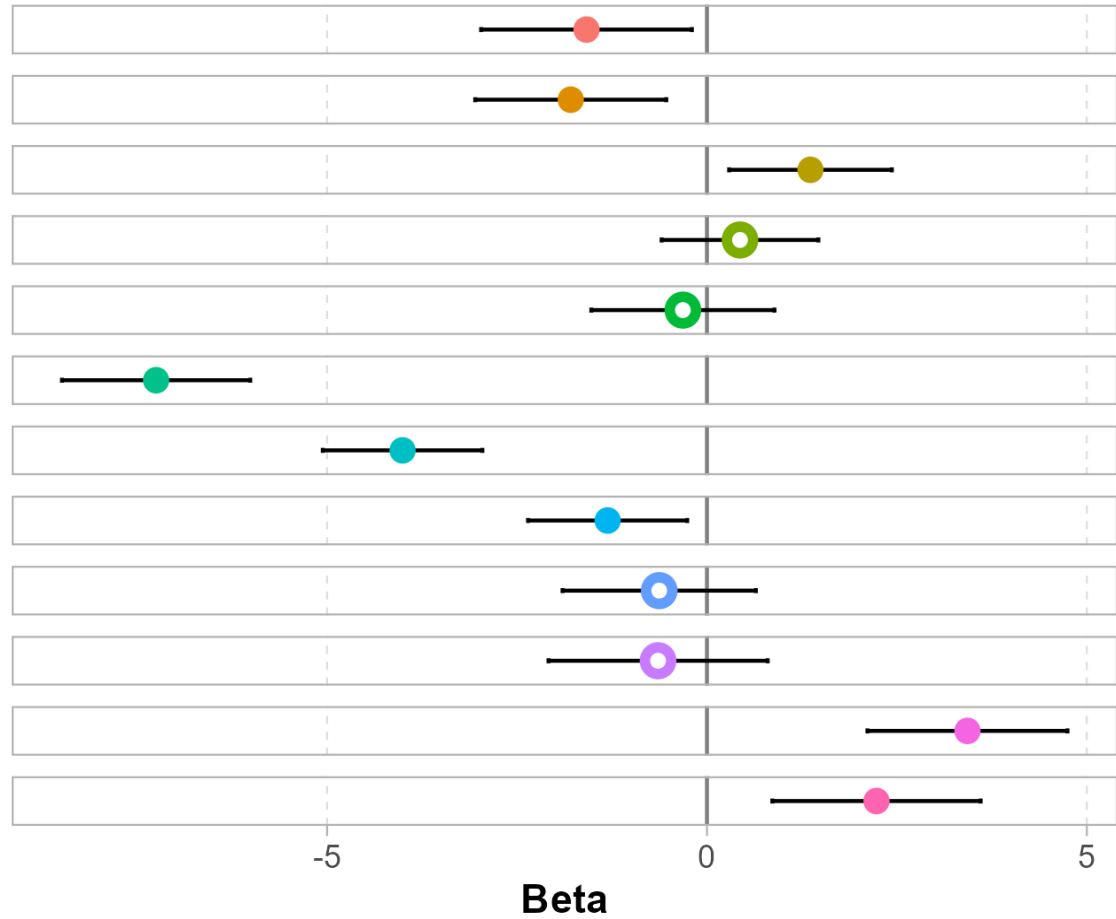
Restaurant: yes

Canteen (school, work...): yes

Fast-food: yes

Take-away: yes

Food provisioning practices

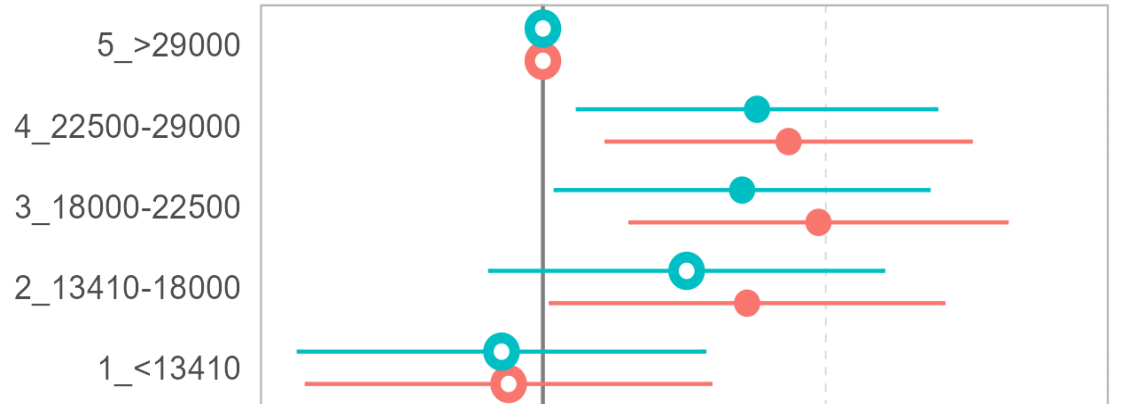


● $p \leq 0,05$ ○ $p > 0,05$

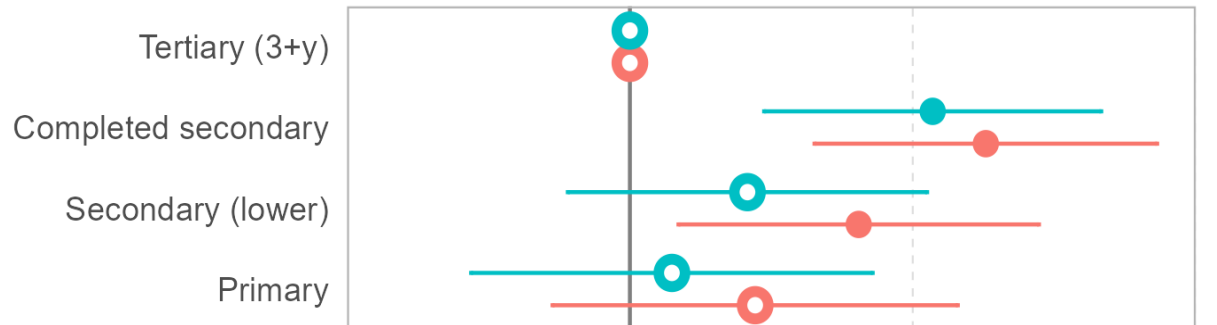
➤ Provisioning practices do not account for education and income effects

Class effects in restricted and full models

Standard of living (euros/CU/y, quintiles)



Educational level (ref pers)



● Model 1 ● Full model

Beta

Model 1: only household characteristics

Full Model: household characteristics + provisioning practices

> Discussion

A middle-brow taste?

- ❖ **Families with intermediate socioeconomic status spend more on UPF**
 - The home-cooked dinner appears as a moral imperative for mothers
 - Symbolic boundary-making often relates junk/convenience/ultraprocessed food with lower-class lifestyle
 - Purchase data suggest that at least when it comes to food processing main contrast is not between the lowest and highest SES
- ❖ **UPF is not only about convenience for the consumers**
 - Innovation, new products, textures, shapes...
 - Products designed and advertised for children
- ❖ **UPF and eating out**
 - Are they two different ways of outsourcing food work?
 - More meals away from home on a regular week <-> more UPF
 - Eating out expensive and not always convenient (kids?)
 - Lower class households probably rather buy cheaper (UPF) foods in discount stores (price effect?)
- ❖ **How UPF may tap into class tastes?**
 - Higher SES: UPF vs distinction in food provisioning : exotic products, organic/ethical labels, specialised shops... weigh more in budget
 - Lower SES: UPF vs frugality/respectability: domestic labour, traditional recipes...
 - Intermediate SES: Taking advantage of what the market offers as a middle-brow taste?

DINNER PLANS

What I hoped for

Meatless Monday



What happened

Avengers chicken nuggets



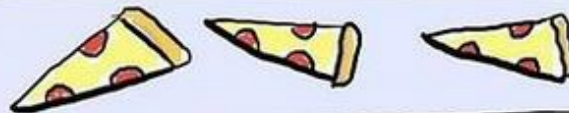
Taco Tuesday



Buncha random things radiating around a bowl of guacamole



Blursday???



Weekend Days
something elaborate

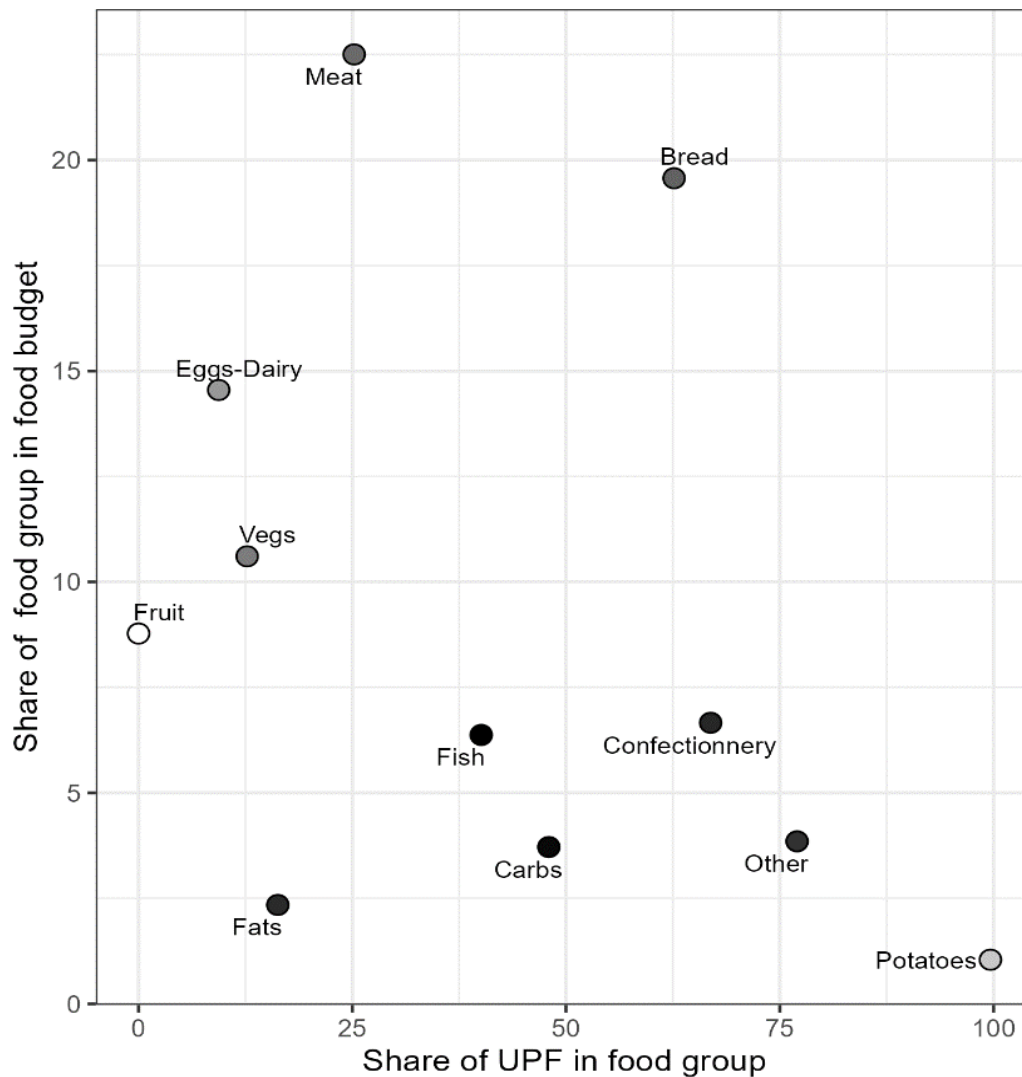


WHAT DO PEOPLE EVEN EAT



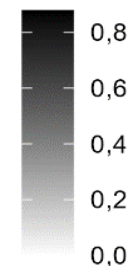
FARRIS

➤ How UPF expenses distribute across food groups



BDF 2017, Metropolitan France, weighted data.

Share of UPF in group: standard deviation



UPF expenses in food budget:

average = 34%

D1 = 10%

D9 = 59%

➤ Results

Results from the linear regression: household structure

Variable	Coefficient (p. value)
(Intercept)	41*** (<0,001)
Age (ref pers)	
15-34 years	—
35-49 years	-5,3*** (<0,001)
50-64 years	-9,0*** (<0,001)
65+ years	-11*** (<0,001)
Household	
Couple	—
Woman without partner	1,6* (0,015)
Man without partner	3,0*** (<0,001)
Child <10 in household	2,8*** (<0,001)
Teenager (11-18) in household	3,3*** (<0,001)

Results from the linear regression: class position

Class position	
Standard of living (euros/CU/y, quintiles)	
Q5_ >29000	—
Q4_ 22500-29000	1,9* (0,019)
Q3_ 18000-22500	1,8* (0,036)
Q2_ 13410-18000	1,3 (0,2)
Q1_ <13410	-0,37 (0,7)
Educational level (ref pers)	
Tertiary (3+y)	—
Completed secondary	2,7*** (<0,001)
Secondary (lower)	1,0 (0,2)
Primary	0,37 (0,7)

Results from the linear regression: food provisioning practices

Food provisioning practices	
Cooking: at least 7times/week	-1,6* (0,025)
Homeproduction: yes	-1,8** (0,005)
Hypermarket: yes	1,4* (0,013)
Supermarket: yes	0,43 (0,4)
Discount stores: yes	-0,32 (0,6)
Local producers/streetmarket: yes	-7,3*** (<0,001)
Small/specialised shops: yes	-4,0*** (<0,001)
Bakery: yes	-1,3* (0,014)
Restaurant: yes	-0,63 (0,3)
Canteen (school, work...): yes	-0,64 (0,4)
Fast-food: yes	3,4*** (<0,001)
Take-away: yes	2,2** (0,001)

Class differences similar in model with and without food provisioning practices