The Social Construction of Consumer Trust in Food:

An Exploration of Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China

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Abstract

Consumer trust in food has become a global concern due to the worldwide occurrences of food safety incidents in the past decades. Despite the growing scholarly interest in trust in the area of marketing and food consumption, little work has addressed how consumers respond to and make sense of the fast-changing food reality in relation to the establishment and development of consumer trust in food under a suspicious atmosphere in contemporary society. To address this gap, this thesis explores the dynamics of consumer trust in food within the context of infant formula consumption in urban China from a social constructionist approach. More specifically, this research explores the factors that are involved in the building and development of trust by addressing how these factors influence consumer trust in food individually and collectively over the course of infant formula consumption. Taking a social constructionist epistemology and adopting hermeneutics as the methodology, this research employed qualitative in-depth interviews to collect longitudinal data from a group of Chinese mothers before and after giving birth in relation to how they choose, purchase, and consume infant formula. The findings reveal that food regulations of multiple countries, personal relationships, and food brands/products are the major factors that influence consumer trust in food, in the forms of institutional, interpersonal, and brand trust. Prior to actual consumption, institutional assurance by food regulations and experience sharing from trusted acquaintances compensate for the lack of direct interaction with target infant formula brands and products to enable a certain level of initial trust. Then personal experience with the brand and product after consumption may develop this initial trust in three different directions according to post-consumption experience and satisfaction. Based on empirical findings, a social construction framework is proposed to depict the individual and collective influence of these factors on the establishment and development of consumer trust in food. The thesis sheds light on extant knowledge of trust in food with a social constructionist approach to integrating relational factors both within and outside the micro consumer-food dyad to a more comprehensive macro landscape. The proposed social construction framework of building trust also provides practical implications to food industry players as well as policy makers at both domestic and international levels to address the growing public concern of trust in food.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the thesis by providing an overview of the research background, the research objectives and questions, the significance of this study, and the research approach and methodology. The research context of infant formula consumption in China is justified and the potential contributions to trust in the Marketing literature are discussed. At the end of this chapter, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.1. Background

Food consumption, an indispensable part of our everyday life, is closely related to the very fundamental human needs for survival and security. A positive relationship with food at both the individual and societal levels is important to our overall food wellbeing (Block et al., 2011). Trust, recognised as essential for successful relationships and exchanges (Blau, 1964; Granovetter, 1985; Zucker, 1986), is therefore worthy of more attention from scholars and practitioners in the area of food consumption.

As Baier (1986, p. 234) argues, "we inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted". The more we talk about trust in food, the more we feel a lack of it or a need for it. In modern societies, consumers have become more temporally and spatially detached from food processing and provisioning in the industrialisation processes of the food sector (Meijboom, Visak, & Brom, 2006). Such detachment makes consumers vulnerable in front of the food provisioning system since they are dependent upon yet have little control over the food industry, and therefore, public food control is required to ensure food safety. However, the frequent worldwide occurrences of food incidents and scandals in the past decades have given rise to suspicion of the food industry as well as the authorities in charge of public food control in both developed countries (Henderson, Coveney, & Ward, 2010) and developing countries (Yan, 2012). In light of such suspicion, consumer trust becomes a keyword in daily conversations, public debates, and policy initiatives in relation to food (Kjærnes, Harvey, & Warde, 2007).

It is noteworthy that, although trust has been intensively studied in various disciplines, more integrated work to synthesise these theories to advance our understanding is still desired

(McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998), so that our understanding of the phenomenon of trust in different contexts could be also advanced to a more in-depth level. With regards to trust in food, while different types of trust have been addressed in various studies (e.g., de Jonge, van Trijp, van der Lans, Renes, & Frewer, 2008; Lindgreen, 2003; Zhang, Xu, Oosterveer, & Mol, 2015a), in the area of Marketing, research on trust remains largely limited to the relationship marketing framework (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the brand trust framework (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001). What types of trust are contributing to the development of consumer trust in food in actual consumption scenario, and. how these varying types of trust in food interplay with each other over time is less discussed in Marketing literature.

Furthermore, despite an excessive body of trust literature across the disciplines of social science as well as a growing interest in trust in the area of marketing and food consumption, little work has addressed how consumers respond to and make sense of the fast-changing food reality in relation to building and developing consumer trust in food under a suspicious atmosphere in contemporary society. In addition, recognising that food consumption is part of the social practice rather than merely individual behaviours (Atkins & Bowler, 2016; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007), it is also unknown yet how the increasingly globalised and complicated food provisioning and the international food trading ecosystem may contribute to the construction of consumer trust in food at a societal level. Thus, empirical study on consumer trust in food is warranted to extend current knowledge in the Marketing area through a closer investigation of the ongoing consumer-food relationship as well as a broader approach to incorporate broader social-cultural factors that may significantly influence the consumer-food relationship.

1.2. Research Context

Infant feeding is a special yet important aspect of food consumption. Infant formula, the common breastmilk substitute for babies under six months of age, is a high-involvement food category for parents, especially mothers, with regards to their functional and emotional needs as both buyers and caregivers (Afflerback, Carter, Anthony, & Grauerholz, 2013; Lee, 2007). Although infant formula is ultimately taken by babies, parents or caregivers are the party who is most active in the process of choosing brands, purchasing products, and administering

product intake. In this sense, parents as the buyer and user of infant formula, are proactively and entirely involved in infant formula consumption, behaviourally and emotionally. Therefore, for the exploration of trust in the relationship between consumer and food product, this research argues that parents, particularly mothers, are appropriated to be viewed as the consumer of infant formula.

The past four decades have witnessed significant economic achievement as well as changes in other social aspects in China. With regards to the food sector, China has gone through the food security stage after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), to the "better quality food" stage between 1998 and 2008, and has been in the stage of healthy food since 2014 (Meng & Jen, 2017). The progressing urbanisation has greatly increased the population in urban areas, which profoundly changed the food supply and food consumption pattern in China. Due to the large population size and the decline in breastfeeding rates in urban areas, China is now the world's largest baby food market as well as the fastest-growing emerging market (Euromonitor, 2015). Furthermore, the October 2015 ending of the one-child policy which was implemented in 1979 as part of a birth control programme, has also given out positive signals to the baby food market in China (Euromonitor, 2018).

Chinese consumers' concern with food has also shifted from food security to food safety due to the frequent occurrences of food safety incidents, especially contamination in infant formula in China in the past two decades. The Melamine-contaminated infant formula scandal in 2008, which killed six babies and sickened thousands has greatly hit both the domestic food industry as well as Chinese consumers' trust in domestic food, leading food safety to become one of the top concerns among Chinese society since then. Aided by fast-developing cross-border e-commerce many Chinese parents have turned to overseas markets to buy infant formula products that they see as more trustworthy than domestic products.

How could consumer trust in infant formula be built from distant foreign countries whilst domestic infant formula is viewed as less trustworthy or even not safe? Given that trust is context-specific (Bhattacharya, Devinney, & Pillutla, 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), the case of infant formula consumption in urban China offers a rich context for the exploration of consumer trust development in food. Formula milk is viewed as special among all food categories as it is the most commonly used breastmilk substitute for babies. Infant formula, the

focus of this study, is the product specifically for babies under six months. The fact that babies under six months are basically sustained on breastmilk or breastmilk substitutes makes the consumption of infant formula a sensitive and high-involvement context for the study of consumer trust. Using the specific food category of infant formula and the infant feeding practice in urban China as a context, this research explores the evolving process of consumer trust development in high-involvement food products by interpreting the living consumption experience from consumers.

1.3. Research Objective and Questions

This thesis attempts to fill the gaps in the Marketing literature on the under-addressed phenomenon of building and developing consumer trust in food in a modern society where food safety is a prevalent public concern. Using infant formula consumption in urban China as a context, the basis and dynamics of consumer trust in food may be closely and thoroughly investigated so as to extend current knowledge on this subject in the Marketing area. The overall goal of this research is to explore the social construction of consumer trust in food, with an emphasis not only on the dyad relationship between the consumer and the food being consumed, but also on a broader scope to incorporate other relevant social factors outside of the direct consumer-food relationship that may also shape consumer trust in food. More specifically, two research questions were developed in response to the research objective outlined above, and for the guidance of the subsequent research process (Figure 1).

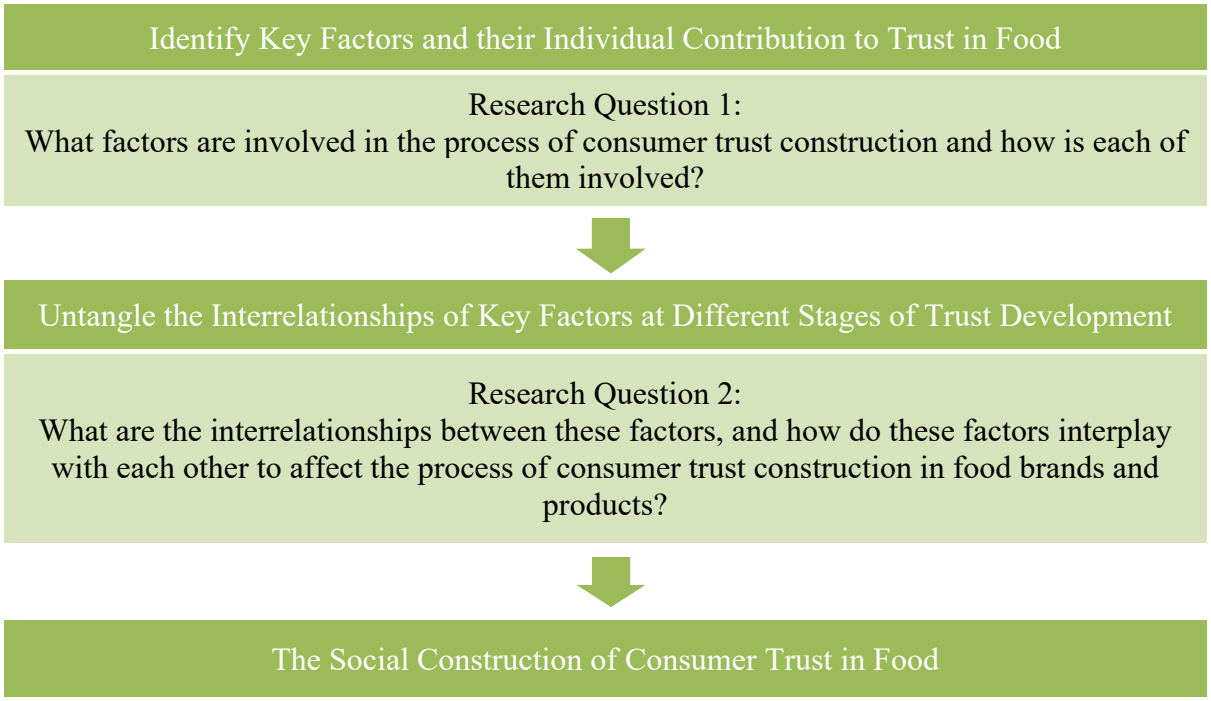
The first question seeks to identify the major factors that influence the development of consumer trust in food and generates insights on the role played by each factor individually.

> *Research Question 1: What factors are involved in the process of consumer trust construction and how is each of them involved?*

After identifying the major factors and their specific role in shaping consumer trust in food, the second question seeks further understanding of how these factors interplay with each other to collectively shape consumer trust in food.

Research Question 2: What are the interrelationships between these factors, and how do these factors interplay with each other to affect the process of consumer trust construction in food brands and products?

Figure 1: Overall Research Objective and Research Questions



As indicated by these two questions, this research is exploratory in nature because it is unknown what other social factors would be influential to the construction of consumer trust in food, and how these factors, together with the consumer-food dyad, may interplay with each other in the trust construction process.

1.4. Research Approach

Given the exploratory nature of this research, an interpretivist approach was adopted to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour and subjective experience (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) in relation to consumer trust in food. The interpretive approach is grounded in an epistemology of social constructionism, which sees knowledge and reality as neither discovered nor created, but constructed through the interaction between human beings and the world in which they are engaging and interpreting (Crotty, 1998).

Corresponding to the epistemological stance and the theoretical perspective taken, this thesis employed hermeneutics as the methodology to guide the subsequent research activities, including research design, data collection, and data analysis. The specific method for empirical data collection employed in this research was in-depth interview, which is particularly suitable for exploring a phenomenon at significant depth (Esterberg, 2002). A longitudinal research design was also applied so as to collect ongoing consumer experience with a food over time. A total of 28 Chinese mothers from six major cities of China were recruited by purposive sampling and snowballing to take part in this research. These participants were interviewed both before and after they gave birth to their baby, generating two data sets, and 51 interviews in total. Thereafter, hermeneutic analysis continues to guide the researcher to treat all data collected as a form of text to comprehend the meaning imposed by the participants both individually and collectively (Morgan & Smircich, 1980).

Specifically, this research adopts a sociological proposition of trust, viewing trust as a social construction based on both emotional and cognitive dimensions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This view of trust also emphasises that trust should be understood as "relations among people" rather than "psychological states taken individually" (p. 968). Furthermore, food consumption and infant feeding are important aspects of social practices rather than merely individual behaviours. Infant feeding and infant formula consumption are also socially constructed (Afflerback et al., 2013; Lee, 2007), and should be understood as "embedded" in social relations and contexts (Granovetter, 1985). The objective of this research emphasises the "social construction" of consumer trust in a particular social context rather than an individual's meaning-making processes solely in their mind. Thus, social constructionism is considered as appropriate to be taken as the epistemological stance to address the research questions. Hermeneutics as the methodology can also benefit this research from the exploration of emerging themes from the real consumption stories articulated by consumers (Stern, Thompson, & Arnould, 1998). Full methodological details of this research are elaborated in Chapter 4.

1.5. Potential Research Contributions

This thesis makes contributions to three knowledge domains of theory, methodology, and context (Ladik & Stewart, 2008). Firstly, noting that trust research in the Marketing area is mainly limited to the relationship marketing paradigm or constrained within the brand/product-

consumer relationship at micro level, understanding trust at an extended scope is important to advance Marketing theories. This exploratory study contributes to consumer trust and the consumer-product relationship literature by extending current knowledge of consumer trust in food to incorporate broader social relations in the given context. It integrates varying theories of trust in the existing literature and offers a socially-constructed view of trust in food based on empirical investigation, which was under-addressed in the literature. In particular, players such as trusted acquaintances who are outside the food supply chain was found influential to consumer's trust in food, implying that consumer trust in food shall be understood not only limited to the relationship between consumers and food chain players.

Secondly, with regards to the methodology, this study addresses the calls for more qualitative approaches and longitudinal design in empirical research on the topic of trust (e.g., Kim & Tadisina, 2007; Lyon, Möllering, & Saunders, 2012). Interviewing target consumers before and after consumption in a real consumption scenario rather than in an experimental setting may offer insightful implications for methodology.

In addition, this research was conducted in the context of China, a fast-developing country which has a close connection with, and significant influence on, the global market. On the one hand, China provides a context where trust in the government with regards to food regulation was considered to be considerably undermined by frequent food safety incidents and scandals. On the other hand, with the globalisation of food provisioning, individual consumers may face more offers within or out of their domestic market. Thus it is possible to have more insights regarding how individual consumers would respond to such reality to establish trust in food in the context of China. Especially when the food provisioning system has become more globalised. Findings from this context of an emerging market may enhance the extant Marketing literature of trust which has been predominantly reported on from a Western-dominant perspective using quantitative techniques.

Finally, this thesis also provides several practical implications to the domestic and overseas food industries with regards to the nurturing of consumer trust, as well as suggestions for policy makers at both domestic and international levels in relation to public concern of trust in food. Although findings of this interpretivist work are not claimed to be generalisable and

transferable, discussion regarding other contexts and food categories are also provided to ensure a comprehensive discussion.

1.6. Structure and Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an overall introduction to the thesis and the central phenomenon of interest of this research, that is, the social construction of consumer trust in high-involvement food in the emerging Chinese market. It identified the research problems concerning how consumer trust in food could be built and developed in the interaction of socially interrelated factors over time, and then set out the research purpose and research questions to address the significance of this research. The theoretical approach and methodology applied in this research were also briefly outlined and followed by an overview of the research context, and the potential research contributions.

Chapter Two: Research Context

The second chapter offers detailed information regarding the context where the research questions were addressed. The food safety status and growing concern of trust in food in China were introduced as part of the fast-changing social environment in China in the past four decades. The baby feeding practice and formula milk market are also presented to inform the uniqueness of the chosen research context. It justifies why infant formula consumption in urban China is a suitable context for the focal object of inquiry in this research, that is, consumer trust in high-involvement food.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

The third chapter systematically reviews the existing literature concerning consumer trust from relevant disciplines. It provides the theoretical foundation for the conceptualisation of trust in this research and the identification of the essence of the multi-dimensional construct of trust for this research. The typology of trust as well as the processes of trust building and

development are also included in this chapter. Trust in food is also specifically reviewed in the final part of this chapter to assist the identification of knowledge gaps.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter addresses the methodological issues and justifies the adoption of the social constructionism epistemology, the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the hermeneutic analysis methodology, and the in-depth interview method in this research, based on the exploratory nature of the research question. The research procedure is further elaborated to cover details of the longitudinal research design, the sampling and recruitment, interviewing, and data analysis process.

Chapter Five: Findings

This chapter consists of two sections of analysis and findings pertaining to the two overarching research questions posed at the beginning of the thesis. Full details are presented to reveal the themes and sub-themes emerged from participant responses with regards to the main contributors to consumer trust in food and the interrelationships of these contributors.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusions

The final chapter reviews and discusses the empirical findings in response to the original research purpose and research questions. Drawing from relevant literature in marketing and broader social disciplines, the social construction model of consumer trust in food is proposed to extend the current understanding of trust. Then the contributions of this research to the theory of consumer trust, the methodological advantages of longitudinal in-depth interviews, and the practical implications for the context of research are discussed. At the end of this chapter, the researcher acknowledges the limitations of this research and suggests how future research could be built upon the current work, before drawing a final conclusion to the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO RESEARCH CONTEXT

> *"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, …"*
>
> - *Article 25, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The United Nations, 1948.*

Access to safe and healthy food is a fundamental need and basic human right. Everyday mundane food and eating activities are not merely an individual behaviour that sustains the human body, but also an important aspect of social practice (Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009). This chapter provides a more detailed background of the context of this research, which is infant formula consumption in urban China. The rapidly changing China, as an important part of the global economy, is overviewed to address the shifting concern of food safety and the rising issue of trust in food in contemporary China. Next, infant feeding practice in urban China is introduced. At the end of this chapter, why infant formula consumption is an appropriate context for a trust-related study is justified.

2.1. Shifting Concern of Food Security to Food Safety in China

Since the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Modern China experienced a short period of being a republic, during which there were the First and the Second World Wars, the Sino-Japanese War, and Civil War, before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Severely damaged by the continuous wars in that period, fighting against hunger and poverty were the critical demands of Chinese people. However, the outbreak of natural hazards and a three-year nation-wide famine in the early 1960s, accompanied by the government's "Great Leap Forward" plan during 1958 to 1962 aiming for unrealistic increases in industrial and agricultural production, made the turbulence in food production and supply even more severe. Constrained by environmental factors, and the need to feed more than 20% of the world's population with only 7-9% of the world's arable land remained a key concern of the government for a long time after the establishment of the PRC (Lam, Remais, Fung, Xu, & Sun, 2013).

In 1978, with the start of China's "Four Modernisations" programme in agriculture, industry, defence, and science, China adopted the "reform and opening-up" policy as the path to Chinese socialism. Since the early 1980s, the Chinese government began to open its economy and initiated a series of economic reforms to reduce governmental control on the economy. The process of market liberalisation since 1992 has also led to closer and more frequent involvement and interaction with other economies. In 2001, China became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which signified China's further integration into the world economy. In 2010, China overtook Japan as the world's second-largest economy. Nevertheless, given the huge population and large geographical heterogeneity, the per capita income of China remains that of a developing country and less than one-quarter of the average of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, according to the latest figures from The World Bank (2019).

Whilst acknowledging the significant economic achievements, the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation which drive the economic development are accompanied by some transitional problems in China, for example, food safety, has become a major concern for the Chinese public during the last decade.

After four decades of spectacular economic growth since the reform and opening-up policy in 1978, food supply in China has also been greatly increased to feed the simultaneously increased population. The food industry in China, following the fast growth of the whole economy in the past four decades, has maintained an annual growth rate of 15-20% since the middle of the 1980s, which successfully facilitated the big leap of China from food shortage to food security (Arita, Gale, & Mao, 2017). Major investments have been put into agriculture and the modern food industry in order to boost productivity and secure food supply.

The development of the food sector in China, including the industrialisation of agriculture, has witnessed three major stages, namely, the "food security" stage in 1998, to the "better quality food" stage of 2008, to the "healthy food" stage of 2014 (Meng & Jen, 2017). As the per-person income continuously grows hand in hand with economic development, there has been a rapid increase in the consumption of animal products (e.g., meat, milk, and eggs), edible oils, and processed foods. It is also worth noting that the food sector has broadened ingredient sourcing from domestic origins to global sourcing when at the same time the import and export of food

products between China and other countries has become more regular as China engages more with international business and the globalisation process.

Raising the living quality of people has been a political and everyday discourse in China since the 1980s (Anagnost, 1995). In the rising of living standards, the concerns related to food in China has gradually shifted from food security to food safety. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations and World Health Organisation (WHO) define food safety as the "assurance that food will not cause harm to consumers when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use" (FAO & WHO, 2003, p. 7). While food security mainly refers to the sufficient supply of food, food safety places more emphasis on the internal property of the food that is offered to consumers. With the significant per capita income growth in these four decades, the food demands of Chinese consumers have shifted from quantity to quality, that is, from sufficient food to avoid hunger, to the demand for high-quality food, as well as safe, nutritious, and healthy foods. Alongside the industrialisation of the food sector, food products have become not only a basic survival necessity, but also an ordinary commercial commodity for profit making, resulting in some illegal activities in food supply when producers, manufacturers, and distributors are in pursuit of economic gains (Lam et al., 2013). There have been frequent outbreaks of food safety incidents and food frauds since the late 1990s, making food safety an increasing and long-lasting public concern. Given the growing awareness of consumers in food safety, how to satisfy the increasing demand of safe and healthy food is the current challenge confronting the food industry and the government in China, in responses to public health and wellbeing.

2.2. The Food Safety Status in China

Over recent years in various consumer surveys, Chinese consumers have ranked food safety as one of the top safety concerns, if not the top itself (e.g., ChinaDaily, 2015; ChinaDaily, 2018; Ouyang, 2011). Despite the great effort that the Chinese government has put into promoting public confidence in food safety over the years, these surveys consistently demonstrate the unsatisfying food safety status among people and reveal the difficulties in regaining consumer trust in food once it has been damaged. Nevertheless, food safety is a complicated issue as it goes across the entire process from farm to table, involving the farmers/producers, manufacturers, distributors, regulators, consumers, as well as other external actors such as the

media, academia, and even voices from overseas markets. Further introductions concerning the key stakeholders in the food chain are presented here, including the food industry, the food regulator and food regulation, and the food consumers.

2.2.1. The Food Industry

Within the constraints of limited arable land and water resources, China's food industry has contributed greatly to feeding the large population of the country in its short history of industrialisation. Fast economic growth alongside rapid industrialisation, and urbanisation in China since the 1980s have profoundly changed food supply and food safety in Chinese society. While in western countries, consumer concerns over food are dominated by issues such as food-borne-diseases, the use of biotechnology in food production, environmental and animal welfare, and genetic modification, the case of China seems to be different. Yan (2012) classifies food safety problems in contemporary China into three levels: conventional food-hygiene problems, unsafe food using modern agricultural techniques, and poisonous food with deliberate contamination. Criminal activities such as deliberate contamination and illegal use of chemicals in food production are frequently reported in China, which has significantly affected the public's trust in food safety (Lam et al., 2013).

Compared to industrialised western countries, the agriculture sector and food industry in China is currently in a unique condition in terms of its large scale of food production and processing companies which are un-centralised and dominated by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to a report by the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in China (2008), there are around 450,000 food production and processing enterprises in China, of which about 350,000 (78%) are small enterprises with less than 10 employees but collectively accounting for less than 10% of market share; in addition, scattered across the country there are a considerable number of informal and unregistered producers, such as family workshops, whom could be easily overlooked by regulators. The report (2008) also recognises that the large scale of small food processors presents many of the greatest food safety challenges in China, and make the alignment of Chinese food products with international standards an ongoing and arduous task.

The large number of SMEs and low level of centralisation have posed challenges to the food safety control inside China's food sector itself. Take the dairy industry as an example, it has become very challenging to integrate the supply networks from heterogeneous entities and coordinate multiple links between the farmers, manufacturers, and retailers so as to secure food safety from farm to table (Wu et al., 2018). SMEs, at their early stage of industrialisation, are usually of low standard, have poor hygiene conditions, and lack the ability and resources to implement food safety management and self-inspection. Therefore, there are considerable difficulties in the access to, and adoption of, advanced food technologies and innovations, as well as challenges in the promotion of good business practice among these food enterprises and their employees.

Moreover, there is an insufficient presence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and food safety culture among China's food industry as enterprises are driven by the pursuit of profit (Jen, 2017; Zhang, Morse, Kambhamptati, & Li, 2014; Zhu, 2013). Although the history of the "responsible business" in China can be traced back more than 2,500 years when the Confucian virtue of righteousness and sincerity was applied to business, there was a long period when the idea of CSR was disassociated and absent from business after the establishment of PRC, until western CSR was introduced to China in the mid-1990s (Wang & Juslin, 2009). Nevertheless, the concept and the understanding of CSR among Chinese food companies are still low and poor (Zhang, Jiang, Ma, & Li, 2014), and the Chinese food industry has been criticised as having "not developed a spirit of goodwill towards society and many enterprises are still driven by a 'quick profit above all else' attitude" (Jen, 2017, p. 4). The empirical study conducted by Zhu (2013) also suggests that many Chinese food companies are still struggling to find a balance between business survival and commitment to social responsibility. Given the significant amount of SMEs with limited capacity in food safety management, in their pursuit of economic gains, the large-scale usage of inferior raw materials, food adulteration and contamination, food fraud, abuse of pesticides and veterinary drugs, and other illegal usage of chemical additives and preservatives, are prominent food safety problems in China at present (Lam et al., 2013).

Indeed, both the Chinese food industry's ability to produce safe food, and the good will of doing so, are questionable in light of the continuous occurrences of food safety incidents. The 2008 Melamine Scandal in the dairy industry has brought a low level of centralisation and other

safety problems of the Chinese food sector to the surface and, this incident has also become a watershed for the food industry, as well as being the start of a long-lasting lack of consumer trust in both the industry and food regulation. The Chinese government has invested major effort to rectify and centralise the dairy industry following this event. Together with stricter food regulation, some large-scale food companies are more committed to social responsibility and are taking food safety seriously, but it will require considerable time for the whole food industry to adopt a food safety culture (Jen, 2017).

While top-down food safety regulation and government-led industry rectification together with food safety education and training to the industry are still necessary, raising the industry's active engagement in social responsibility is also deemed crucial to the assurance of food safety and the restoration of public trust in China (Lam et al., 2013). Just as the president of the Chinese Agriculture Industry Chamber of Commerce (CAICC) acknowledged, safe foods are the result of production not inspection, food safety could only be ultimately secured when the food industry realises their primary responsibility is to provide safe food products, and they shall prioritise their commitment to social responsibility rather than the maximisation of profits, which is at the expense of consumer welfare (Jen, 2017).

2.2.2. The Food Regulation and Regulator

It is widely acknowledged that the government of a country, acting as the watchdog of the agricultural and food processing industries, bears the major responsibility for food safety at home and in international food trading, mainly through the establishment and implementation of food-related laws and rules (Kjærnes et al., 2007). Echoing the shifting concern from food security to food safety among consumers, during the past decade the focus of food regulation in China has also shifted from the emphasis on food hygiene to a broader concept of food safety which means food is free from any possible contaminant or hazard. Meanwhile, given the importance of international food trading to China, the Chinese government has also been facing increasing pressure from home and overseas to improve food safety and to fill the gap between Chinese and international food safety standards.

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has issued a series of laws and regulations to address the emerging safety issues in the food industry. In 1995, the Food Hygiene Law of the PRC

was promulgated to cover a wide range of food safety issues besides food hygiene. This law, originated from a temporary trial law on food and health in 1982, was the PRC's first law related to food safety. For the first time, food hygiene was addressed at the level of national legislation in China, while at the same time the Good Manufacturing Practice and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point were also introduced to the regulatory regime for the first time (Zhou, 2017). After joining the WTO in 2001, China also strengthened its participation in Codex Alimentarius Commission activities and applied Codex standards in developing its own food standards.

Another significant step forward taken by the Chinese Government was the implementation of the Food Safety Law of the PRC in 2009, while at the same time the Food Hygiene Law was abolished. The replacement of food hygiene with food safety in legislation clearly signals the shifting priority for the food regulatory regime. The 2009 Food Safety Law was further amended into the new Food Safety Law which was enacted in 2015. The promulgation of the Food Safety Law and its quick amendment, together with other intensive regulatory actions within this period, were governmental responses to the exposure of food safety incidents since 2004 when 13 babies were killed in the Fuyang "Big-headed Babies" incident due to fake infant formula with little nutrition (Wikipedia, 2015c). Over a decade afterwards, baby and children's food, particularly baby formula, were treated as the priority of food regulation. The pace of strengthening food safety regulation has been accelerated by the 2008 Melamine Contamination Scandal which killed 6 babies and sickened over 300,000 (Wikipedia, 2015a). In response, government authorities and agencies have introduced more than 20 laws and regulations that were directed towards improving the quality and safety of dairy products (Wu et al., 2018). Major actions regarding infant formula include the amendment of three national food safety standards of infant formula in 2010, and the issue of China Food and Drug Administration Measures (CFDA) for the Registration of Formulas of Infant Formula Milk Powder, which came into effect 1 October 2016.

Undeniably, the central government has made great efforts into strengthening the food regulatory system so as to achieve food safety and restore consumer trust. However, apart from the low efficiency of the "remedial rather than proactive" approach taken by the government in response to the emergence of new safety issues, the implementation of existing laws and rules has become another challenge confronting the government. Given the vast territory and

the unbalanced development between regions, although the central government has put considerable effort into the improvement of food standards, rules, and laws, it is very challenging to ensure the effective implementation of food regulation in the realm of local authorities (Zhou, 2017). Another significant challenge was created by the ambiguity of regulatory responsibilities and overlapping regulatory bodies in the implementation of food laws and rules. To improve coordination and unity across different regulatory authorities and agencies, the State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) was established and following the enforcement of the Food Safety Law in 2009 was renamed as the CFDA in 2013. CFDA was established as a ministry-level agency operating directly under China's State Council to centralise almost all of the authorities dealing with food safety, which demonstrated the government's holistic approach towards overall food safety regulation.

The regulatory segmentation in food safety is also noteworthy in China. Indeed, food products produced in China for different markets and different groups of consumers could be under different food standards and monitored by different regulatory bodies. For example, comparison between the food standards and inspection procedures for export markets and the domestic market indicates a higher level of comprehensiveness and rigidness for the former than those for the latter (Broughton & Walker, 2010). The segmentation even exists within the domestic market, where food safety for the political privileged has been secured by designated producers through an exclusive supply chain ("*tegong*", in Chinese "特供"). Similarly, affluent consumers can afford high-quality food at premium prices, and the group of average consumers, which is the largest in population and the most vulnerable in nature, are left with less protection and limited access to safe food (Zhou, 2017).

With the introduction of a wide range of legislative and administrative measures, China has made significant progress in food safety to create a better overall food safety situation at both domestic and international levels. However, food safety remains a major concern among the people and still requires continuous input from the government in improving food safety before consumer trust in food can be restored (Zhang et al., 2015a).

2.2.3. The Food Consumers

Due to the industrialisation and commercialisation of food provision, consumers have become largely separated from, and unrelated to, the production, processing, or marketing part of the modern food chain (Meijboom et al., 2006). However, it is argued that the consumer, together with other actors on the farm to table continuum, collectively bear the responsibility of food safety (Leighton & Sperber, 2015). Good practice in food consumption and active participation on the part of consumers are both indispensable to the improvement of food safety in China.

Public food safety education on safe food purchase and handling to empower consumer self-protection practices is necessary to reduce food safety issues in China (Bai & Gong, 2017). As a result of economic development and material abundance, Chinese consumers' focus on food has moved from quantity towards safety, quality, nutrition, and taste. Frequent food safety incidents across the country have also driven the demand for safe food among consumers. However, according to the reports issued by the Chinese government, more than half of the food poisoning cases reported in China occur at home, mostly due to improper food handling practice (Arita et al., 2017; Bai, Tang, Yang, & Gong, 2014). Furthermore, a scholarly review finds that Chinese consumers are widely aware of safe food and their need for safe food is increasing, but their knowledge about the concept of safe food as well as their ability to identify safe food through relevant labels is limited (Liu, Pieniak, & Verbeke, 2013). Lack of authentic food safety information sources and the confusion among consumers due to widespread Internet messages have made Chinese consumers susceptible to food safety rumours (Liu et al., 2013). Therefore, it is urgent to promote good food handling practice at home, as well as scientific food safety communication among consumers.

Apart from public food safety education to consumers, it is also important that consumers raise their awareness of and actively participate in food control so as to better voice their rights and interests in food consumption. As suggested by the FAO of the United Nations, consumer groups are an effective means of integrating consumer voices into food control (Macfarlane, 1993). Currently, in China, there is only one well-known consumer association, namely, the Chinese Consumer Association (CCA), which was established by the government in 1984. According to the public figures from the CCA website, a total of 2,852 local consumer associations above the county level had been established across the country by 2016 (CCA,

2019). In 2013, the amendment of the Law of the PRC on the Protection of Consumer Rights and Interests categorised CCA as public organisations to exercise social supervision over commodities and services, which meanwhile authorised the CCA's legal status for its participation in the legislative process. However, there have been debates over the "semi-official" nature of the CCA, given that the CCA is funded by the government and there is no individual consumer member in the CCA. Consequently, some scholars argue that there is a lack of active consumer participation in the consumer movements towards the protection of their rights and interests by consumer organisations in China (Ho, 1997). A particular degree of independence of the CCA to improve its social influence is therefore deemed necessary, according to some scholars (Zhang et al., 2015b).

2.3. Baby Feeding and Baby Food Market in China

Baby feeding is a social practice heavily embedded in the social and cultural context (Afflerback et al., 2013; Lee, 2007). The baby formula market of China, being an indispensable part of the worldwide market, also features its uniqueness among other markets in the world. Given its huge population base, despite the One Child Policy being enforced to control the birth rate for over 30 years, the increasing demand for this breastmilk substitute and declining breastfeeding rates have made China the largest formula milk market in the world. The Chinese market has witnessed an outbreak of domestic baby formula milk incidents, the loss of consumer trust in the domestic market, and the changing consumption patterns of baby formula in the process of food globalisation and increasing connections with international markets. The dynamics of consumer trust in food, therefore, could be substantially explored in such a rich social context.

2.3.1. The One Child Policy and Its Ending

The mandatory one-child policy in China, introduced in 1979, was part of a birth control programme designed to control China's population size. It set a limit on the number of children that parents could have, and imposed enormous fines for violations. Rural parents, as well as ethnic minorities, however, were allowed to have more than one child in some conditions. Apart from resulting in demographic changes, the one-child policy has also impacted significantly on the social life of Chinese people during its enforcement. One of the

consequences was its contribution to the "4-2-1" family structure (four grandparents, two parents and the only child) in urban China area, where the policy was most strictly enforced, and where the household income has increased most rapidly.

Meanwhile, with the national pursuance of modernity in contemporary China, the ideas of "science" and "modern" have also penetrated into infant feeding practice (Gottschang, 2000). These notions help to build the linkage between "the best" and "the scientific" within food products. Scientific infant feeding, therefore, becomes a raising practice in a social environment where the one-child policy places a premium on the health of single children, for both the family and the future of a modern nation (Anagnost, 1995). It is common for many Chinese parents to provide the very best they can afford for their only child. In the aforementioned 4-2-1 structured family, the only child is central and treated as a "little emperor", and indulged by the parents' love and money. These "little emperors" are not only given branded toys and clothes, but also fed with imported foods that are believed to be highly nutritious, including baby formula and a wide range of other foodstuffs.

In November 2013, when the first generation of the One Child Policy were moving forward to their own marriage and facing the future of supporting two pairs of ageing parents on their own while also raising their own child, China announced the decision to relax the one-child policy by allowing couples to have a second child if one parent of the couple was an only child. Later in October 2015, China announced that couples will be allowed to have two children, which marks the end of the one-child policy. The government estimated that 90 million couples would be eligible for the new two-child policy. How this new policy may impact parents' baby-related consumption behaviours and patterns is an area for further investigation.

2.3.2. Breastfeeding Rate Declination

Traditionally, breastfeeding was the norm of infant feeding in China for thousands of years. However, the practice of infant feeding has changed over the past decades with a significant decline in breastfeeding rates and the widespread use of breastmilk substitutes. Figures from China's National Health and Family Planning Commission (NHFPC) indicate that the rates of exclusive breastfeeding until the age of six months were 30% in rural areas and less than 16% in urban areas of China in 2014 (NHFPC, 2014). Despite the official encouragement of

breastfeeding since the 1990s with the implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, breastfeeding rates in China witnessed a significant decline from 27.6% in 2008 to 20.8% in 2013 (UNICEF, 2017), remaining lower than the global average of 41% (UNICEF, 2018). In extreme cases, some parts of China were reported to have an exclusive breastfeeding rate as low as 0.2% (Harney, 2013). Furthermore, a government study found that only 28% of mothers who wished to continue breastfeeding after returning to the workplace successfully managed to do so (Euromonitor, 2018).

According to multiple studies, there are some common reasons for Chinese mothers (especially in urban areas) to cease breastfeeding, either exclusive breastfeeding or mixed with bottle-feeding, before six months. Reasons include perceived breast milk insufficiency, returning to the workplace/end of paid maternity leave, maternal and child illness, breast problems, and caesarean delivery (Nan, Dong, & Song, 2018; Xu, Qiu, Binns, & Liu, 2009; Zhao, Zhao, Du, Binns, & Lee, 2017). Currently, Chinese women are entitled to 98 days maternity leave (with basic wages) for a single normal childbirth, plus several extra entitlements ranging from 15 to 35 days according to different childbirth conditions and areas of location. Returning to the workplace after maternity leave and the availability of breast milk substitutes such as infant formula have contributed greatly to the cessation of breastfeeding, particularly in urban areas. Various other factors also contribute to the growing demand for infant formula, such as the lack of public breastfeeding facilities and social support, and even the fear of chronic air pollution, which was perceived to lower breastmilk quality (Harney, 2013).

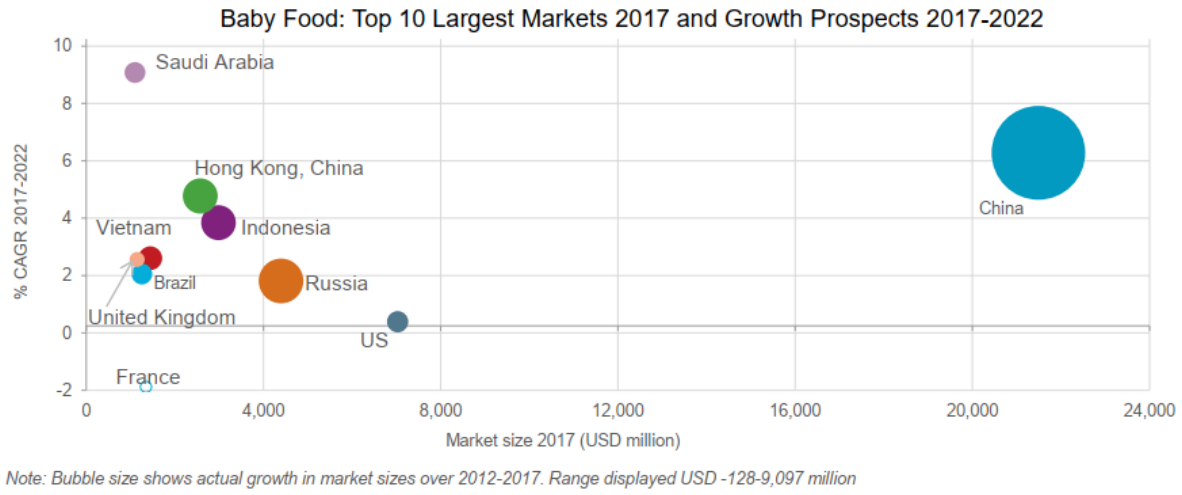
The marketing of the breastmilk substitute, which is mainly formula milk, is also considered as a great barrier to the promotion of breastfeeding (UNICEF, 2017). In 1995, the Chinese Government adopted the WHO International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, a code initiated in 1981 to promote breastfeeding practice. The code bars hospital personnel from promoting infant formula to the families of babies younger than six months, except in the rare cases when a woman has insufficient breast milk or cannot breastfeed for medical reasons. However, enforcement of this code is rare and public awareness of it is low. Many mothers reported having experienced the aggressive tactics of formula makers in different ways (Gottschang, 2000; Harney, 2013), such as brand logos shown on the hospital floor guides, free samples offered by infant formula representatives, infant formula discount cards given by doctors, and formula brand-sponsored pamphlets distributed in pre-delivery classes. Moreover,

by tactfully associating with the use of the idea of "science" in promoting breastfeeding, infant formula brands were found to market their products as "scientific" and "natural" to attract parents (Gottschang, 2000).

2.3.3. The Formula Milk Market

China now is the world's largest baby food market as well as the fastest-growing emerging market, mainly due to the large consumption/purchase of formula milk among parents in urban areas (Euromonitor, 2015). The latest business forecast indicates that China remains the largest growth-contributing market in baby food, expected to generate over half of the global sale growth (Euromonitor, 2018).

Figure 2: Baby Food Forecast by Euromonitor (2018)



Among all food categories, milk formula is viewed as special because it is the most commonly used breastmilk substitute for babies. According to a report from Euromonitor (2016), milk formula is one of the largest categories within health and wellness packaged food at a global level, as well as the fastest growing category between 2010-2015. The report (Euromonitor, 2016) further announced that China is not just the largest but also the fastest growing formula milk market globally, leading the largest absolute growth of global milk formula sales over 2010-2015, and accounting for 43% of global milk formula sales in 2015, and will continue to lead growth during the forecast period of 2015-2020.

Marketing reports on baby food released by Euromonitor (2016, 2018) have also witnessed the rising significance of premiumisation as a key trend in emerging markets like China over these years. Especially since the Melamine Contamination Scandal in 2008, these reports consistently observed that Chinese parents had been looking for safety and trust in reputable brands, and premium ranges are more trusted and performing well in China. It is thus one of the key recommendations for milk formula manufacturers to establish stronger and more premium brands on which parents can rely and trust.

Infant formula consumption is a sensitive issue in China. Chinese consumers' reactions have a profound influence, not only on this emerging Chinese market itself, but also the global market by causing sales rationing in areas of Hong Kong, Macau, and as far as the US, European Union countries, Australia, and New Zealand. "Trust" is one of the key factors driving the behaviour of Chinese consumers when they make decisions regarding infant formula, therefore this research is delimited to explore consumer trust in brand in the setting of infant formula consumption in the China market.

2.3.4. Baby Formula Safety Incidents

Although extremely important in terms of its safety and provision of nutrition, a series of baby formula safety incidents and contaminations have occurred in China within the past two decades. Table 1 lists some major safety incidents in the formula milk category.

Table 1: Recent Baby Formula Incidents in China Market

Year	Incident	Details
2004	Fuyang "big-headed" Babies Incident	The incident caused 13 deaths and 229 "big-headed" babies due to fake infant formula with little nutrition (Wikipedia, 2015c).
2008	Melamine-Contaminated Formula Milk Scandal	The contamination killed 6 and sickened over 300,000 babies, with 22 domestic brands being found to be Melamine-contaminated. It also led to the collapse of the biggest milk powder producer in China at that time (Wikipedia, 2015a).

Year	Incident	Details
2010	"Precocious puberty" Claims and Investigation	A small number of parents claimed that formula milk of Synutra, a Chinese dairy company, caused premature puberty (ChinaDaily, 2010b). However, the authority announced that investigation found that the contents of sex hormones did not exceed either national or international standards (ChinaDaily, 2010a).
2013	Baby formula trademarked by Hero Nutradefense pulled off shelves	About 1.3 tons of baby formula products from the Netherlands-based Hero Group's Nutradefense were pulled off shelves, since the Chinese dealer Xile Lier was suspected of putting new expiration dates on older products before repackaging them with a Chinese label, as well as mixing imported milk powder with expired powder and replacing the production and expiration dates (Xinhua, 2013).
2013	Fonterra Botulism Scare	The scare, which was found to be a false alarm, triggered mass global formula brands recalls, including Danone, Dumex, Karicare, and Abbott. No case of sickened consumers was reported (Wikipedia, 2015b).
2016	Counterfeit Baby Formula Scandal	During 2014-2015, more than 30,000 tins of formula milk with counterfeit Beingmate and Abbott trademarks were manufactured with milk powder of other brands. These counterfeit products were sold in several provinces across China (ChinaDaily, 2017a).
2017	Lactalis Formula Recall	Nearly 7,000 tons of salmonella-infected baby formula of French dairy giant Lactalis were recalled worldwide, and China was on the list of countries affected with 37 batches of products involved (ChinaDaily, 2017b).

The 2008 Melamine-contaminated formula milk scandal was a turning point for the emerging Chinese baby food market. It ultimately led to the collapse of the biggest milk powder producer in China at that time, and 22 domestic brands, including leading national ones, were found to be Melamine-contaminated (Xinhua, 2008). Many Chinese parents turned to foreign formula brands as their trust in domestic brands was dramatically destroyed in this scandal. It is stated that by 2009, the top five international brands had taken over 50% of the market in China (USDA, 2010). However, extensive negative publicity concerning foreign formula brands after the 2008 scandal, such as the large scale global Fonterra recall in 2013 (Howard, 2013) and the

Lactalis Formula recall in 2017 (ChinaDaily, 2017b), has caused consumers to ask other questions – "Who/what else can I trust? Which brand can I choose?"

2.3.5. The E-commerce and Cross-border Businesses

Since its entry into China in 1994, the Internet has brought fundamental changes to China across all sectors, in particular the commerce and business sector. Now China is the largest e-commerce market in the world. The prosperity of e-commerce has significantly reshaped consumers' everyday life and patterns of consumption in China. PwC's Global Consumer Insights Survey 2018 reported that 50% of Chinese consumers (compared to the global average of 22%) practice online shopping on a weekly basis, and 59% of them are likely to buy grocery online (compared to the global average of 21%) (PwC, 2018).

Since 2008, one of the most noticeable e-commerce trends in China is the booming development of cross-border e-commerce. According to eMarketer (2017), the market size of cross-border retail e-commerce sales in China was $78.5 billion in 2016, and this figure is expected to exceed $140 billion by 2021. Another recently released joint report on the imported consumer goods market sees a ten-fold increase in cross-border e-commerce consumers in China in the three year period from 2014 to 2017; and, according to the report, China's cross-border e-commerce retail import penetration rate (consumers buying goods through cross-border e-commerce as a proportion of online consumers) has increased rapidly from 1.6% in 2014 to 10.2% in 2017 (China Chamber of International Commerce, Deloitte Research, & AliResearch Institute, 2018).

Concern for food safety is one of the key drivers of cross-border e-commerce retail in China, especially since the 2008 Melamine Contamination Scandal. For several key product categories, including baby products and other high-value food products, many Chinese consumers adopt cross-border e-commerce as a way to access safe and trusted brands and products from overseas. The joint report by China Chamber of International Commerce, Deloitte Research, & AliResearch Institute (2018) also points out that across all categories, foodstuffs, and mother and baby products are both featured with "strong" purchase intention and "very strong" import intention among Chinese consumers, with an exceptional unanimous consumer focus on "safety" and "ingredient".

There are different channels for Chinese consumers to perform cross-border online shopping, including local cross-border e-commerce platforms offered by Chinese e-commerce giants such as Alibaba's TMall Global, and JD's JD Worldwide, overseas online shopping sites such as Amazon (with direct international logistics or a third-party transhipment), and the channel of "Daigou". Daigou, which means "buy on behalf of" in Mandarin, is a term to describe those overseas Chinese and their practice of making purchases of international products on behalf of their personal connections in China. These daigou persons, usually living or studying overseas, purchase desired items from local markets in countries where they reside, and sell these items to their inner circle of friends and family in China, as well as broader social networks through word-of-mouth extensions on social media and platforms such as WeChat and Taobao. In addition, in 2015, China has also established new cross-border e-commerce pilot zones in cities across the country from where consumers could also have easy access to foreign products, including baby formula from various countries.

The prosperity of e-commerce, particularly cross-border e-commerce, indicates the increasing economic connection between China and the rest of the world. In particular, for the shopping of infant formula, cross-border e-commerce makes it possible for Chinese parents to access international brands directly from overseas markets where food regulation is considered to have higher accountability. Food supply through cross-border e-commerce transactions offers Chinese consumers a wider range of choices. Meanwhile, it creates opportunities and challenges for the Chinese food industry to learn from its western counterparts and grow market competition, and for the Chinese government to also learn through international collaboration with other countries and improve its domestic food regulation.

2.4. Chapter Summary

This chapter offers a comprehensive but not exhaustive introduction to the context of this research, outlining the brief history of the food industry and food regulation development in China wherein the concern of food safety and consumer trust was raised. The food industry, the food regulations and regulator, as well as food consumers, were discussed as key stakeholders of food safety with regards to the current status and challenges presented. The dairy industry, in particular the infant formula segment, is a case of the unique food safety problem in China while also reflecting the universal food safety concern and trust in food issues

over the world. Being the largest and fastest growing milk formula market, China is of strategic importance for many local and international players. However, it is also an emerging market where its market's environment, social, and cultural background, and consumer behaviours are different from its western counterparts. As trust is a context-specific construct (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), existing knowledge and understanding of western markets and consumers cannot be simply applied to this emerging market, therefore, it is necessary and worthwhile to explore consumer trust in this emerging market. The uniqueness of the context and its rich social embeddedness will contribute to the theoretical depth and width of trust in the existing literature. Furthermore, as part of the increasingly globalised food system, this study on infant formula consumption in China could also provide practical implications for international collaboration in improving food safety. Therefore, infant formula consumption in urban China was considered appropriate as the context for the exploration of consumer trust in food in this research.

CHAPTER THREE LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter systematically reviews the existing literature in areas that are relevant to the research questions concerning consumer trust and trust in food specifically, then identifies further knowledge gaps which are under-addressed with regards to the specific research context. In existing literature, intensive work has been done to explore the complex phenomenon of trust. Due to the considerable amount of trust research across various disciplines, and the exploratory nature of this research, this chapter primarily considers trust research in marketing literature, while at the same time also refers to broader fields e.g. psychology, sociology, management and organisational behaviour, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current research on trust, and to identify the gaps for further exploration.

The review starts with an overall account on trust conceptualisation across disciplines, then proceeds to the essences and nature of trust in general. Next, major types of trust are discussed in a typology framework, followed by a more specific account of consumer trust in food consumption contexts. Finally, the gaps in the trust literature with regards to the current research questions and research contexts are addressed.

3.1. Trust Conceptualisation: A Cross-disciplinary Account

> *"The clear and simple fact [is] that, without trust, the everyday social life which we take for granted is simply not possible."*
>
> ---- *Good (1988, p. 22)*

Although trust has been actively playing an important role in human history, the systematic study of trust by social scholars only emerged in the late 1950s and increased significantly thereafter (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Acknowledged as an essential part of human life and social relationships, trust has received intensive scholarly attention from a wide range of social disciplines, with different approaches and perspectives, including psychology (e.g., Worchel, 1979), sociology (e.g., Lewis & Weigert, 1985), political science (e.g., Barber, 1983), economics (e.g., Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981), management and organisation (e.g., Mayer,

Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), education (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), as well as marketing (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

3.1.1. The Diversity in Trust Conceptualisation

The widespread agreement on the importance of trust has not, however, generated a widespread agreement on the conceptualisation of trust (Hosmer, 1995). Rather, the fundamentality and complexity of trust in different areas of social life has led to significantly diverse definitions and conceptualisations of trust among different disciplines.

The diversity in trust conceptualisation reflects the paradigms of the particular academic discipline of each researcher (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). For example, in a psychological paradigm, scholars view trust as a personal trait of individuals which is learned in early childhood and tends to persist in later life (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Rotter, 1967). Defining trust as a personal trait allows trust to act as one's general disposition regarding the trustworthiness of other people in a broad range of situations. From a more rational perspective, economists treat trust as a rational choice resulting from the calculation of costs and rewards concerning the possibility of the other party to act in an untrustworthy way (e.g., Dasgupta, 2000; Williamson, 1993). Social psychologists, however, are more likely to see trust as an interpersonal phenomenon (e.g., Deutsch, 1977; Holmes, 1991), emphasising the relational involvement between two people or parties. For sociologists, trust reflects the relations among people rather than isolated individuals' psychological states or personal traits (e.g., Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In macro perspectives, trust has also been treated as a cultural phenomenon (e.g., Fukuyama, 1996; Uslaner, 2002), or a product of institutional structure that reduces risk and uncertainty through sanctions against untrustworthy behaviours (e.g., Zucker, 1986).

Some of the popular definitions of trust in the extant literature are listed out in Table 2. These definitions are mainly from studies in general social life, business relationships, and organisational settings. Some of these definitions have treated trust as a unidimensional concept, while others have suggested that trust involves several dimensions, although the dimensions proposed appear to vary from one definition to another.

Table 2: Conceptualisations of Trust in the Literature

Study	Trust definition and dimensions	Discipline
Rotter (1971)	The expectation that one's word or promise can be relied upon.	Psychology
Barber (1983)	Expectation of the persistence of the moral social order. Two dimensions included: competence and responsibility.	Sociology
Zucker (1986)	A set of expectations shared by all those involved in an exchange.	Economics and organisational study
Gambetta (1988)	A particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both before he can monitor such action and in a context in which it affects his own action.	Economics
Mayer et al. (1995)	The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. Three dimensions included: ability, benevolence, and integrity.	Management
McAllister (1995)	The extent to which a person is confident in and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another. Two dimensions included: cognitive-based and affect-based trust.	Management
Hosmer (1995)	Trust is the expectation by one person, group, or firm of ethically justifiable behaviour - that is, morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis - on the part of the other person, group, or firm in a joint endeavour or economic exchange.	Management
Fukuyama (1996)	Expectations of regular, honest, cooperative behaviour.	Sociology
Mishra (1996)	One party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the latter party is 1) competent, 2) open, 3) concerned, and 4) reliable.	Organisational study
Hart and Saunders (1997)	Trust refers to confidence 1) that the behaviour of another will conform to one's expectations, and 2) in the goodwill of another.	Organisational study

Study	Trust definition and dimensions	Discipline
Doney, Cannon, and Mullen (1998)	Willingness to rely on another party and to take action in circumstances where such action makes one vulnerable to the other party.	Management
Rousseau et al. (1998)	A psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another.	Management
McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany (1998)	One believes in and is willing to depend on another party, including two constructs: trusting intention and trusting beliefs. Four dimensions included: benevolence, competence, honesty, and predictability.	Management

Since the 1980s, the lack of consensus on the conceptualisation of trust has become well-realised among scholars. For example, scholars have commented that trust was an "elusive concept" (Gambetta, 1988, p. ix), and criticised that trust definitions are a "confusing potpourri" (Shapiro, 1987, p. 625), a "conceptual confusion" (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 975), or even a "conceptual morass" (Barber, 1983, p. 1). Lewicki and Bunker (1995) use the story of the six blind men and an elephant to describe the homonymy in trust definitions: due to the narrow and different portion of the elephant ("trust") that each of them blindly felt, they perceived the elephant ("trust") to be different things since they were unable to see the full picture of the entire elephant. This metaphor implies that a holistic comprehension of trust shall be a collective contribution from different disciplines rather than a single perspective. To make the most value of trust, McKnight and Chervany (1996, p. 5) also argue that "trust is appropriately difficult to define narrowly", rather, "trust should be characterised as a set of inter-related constructs".

In the 1990s, seeking a more integrated comprehension of trust, scholars started to conduct cross-disciplinary analysis on the conceptualisation of trust and realised that trust is a multi-dimensional construct, existing at multiple levels, including individuals, groups, firms and organisations, and institutional levels (Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). For example, one of the most cited works of Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712) proposes an integrative model of trust in organisational settings, and defines trust as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor

or control that other party". Specifically, Mayer et al. (1995) have integrated the propensity of the trustor and the characteristics of the trusted party, including ability, benevolence, and integrity, into their conceptualisation of trust.

Scholars also propose trust as a two-dimensional construct with regards to its cognitive and affective/emotional foundations (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). McAllister (1995) further develops the conceptual and empirical work to differentiate the cognitive and emotional aspects of trust in interpersonal relationships. On the one hand, people cognitively choose whom to trust in a given circumstance based on knowledge, good reasons, and evidence of trustworthiness (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 1979; Möllering, 2001); on the other hand, emotional investments are made into trusting relationships through the expression of genuine care and concern for the welfare of each other, and creating emotional bonds among all parties who participate in the relationship (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985).

3.1.2. The Essences of Trust

Agreeing on the multidimensional nature of trust, controversy continues on the particular dimensions that constitute trust. The definitions of trust listed out in Table 2 present a broad range of dimensions which scholars consider to be integral for trust. Nevertheless, Rousseau et al. (1998) argue that the composition of trust, which refers to the fundamental elements of its definition, are comparable across research and theories from different disciplinary vantage points. Building on a cross-disciplinary review of trust literature, this research identified several key elements that are common and essential to trust regardless of the diversity in conceptualising lenses. These key elements include the trustor's positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable, the trusted party's characteristics that form the trustworthiness, and the situation of uncertainty, risk, and interdependency.

3.1.2.1. The trustor: positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable

The widely cited review work on trust by Rousseau et al. (1998) finds considerable overlap and synthesis in contemporary scholarship on trust, suggesting that "confident expectations" and "a willingness to be vulnerable" are critical in many trust definitions. Both the

"expectations" and "the willingness to be vulnerable", are from the point of view of the trustor who makes a decision to place trust in another party.

The word "expectation(s)" is repeatedly found in most trust definitions listed in Table 2. For example, in Rotter's (1971) definition, trust is the expectation that one's word or promise can be relied upon, whereas for Mayer et al. (1995); Möllering (2001) further argues that the destination of trust is a state of favourable expectation towards the other party's intentions and actions. Although many of these trust definitions tend to refer the expectation directly to a specific trusted party, Barber (1983) has included three levels of expectation in trust, namely, 1) an expectation of the fulfilment of the natural social order, 2) an expectation of competent role performance on the part of the trusted party, and 3) an expectation that a trusted party will fulfil all fiduciary obligations. In line with Barber, Meijboom et al. (2006) also assert that the trust-related expectation often involves a moral dimension apart from a reasonable and cognitive evaluation of the trusted party's intention and behaviour, in which case the trusted party has a moral obligation to respond in the entrusted way.

To trust, one's expectation is grounded in the trusted party's concern with the trustor's interest (Hardin, 2002). However, the word "expectation" infers a possibility that the trusted party, to some extent, may disappoint the trustor's expectations (Gambetta, 1988), given that the trust is not based on control or power over the other party (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Thus, one's trust-related positive expectations regarding the other party requires a willingness to be vulnerable (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). Being vulnerable means that something of importance may be lost in trusting behaviour because, by trust, one voluntarily allows the possibility of the trusted party acting in a way to disappoint the trustor and cause loss to the trustor (Mayer et al., 1995). Without the willingness to be vulnerable, one may not be able to enter a trusting relationship with another party. Therefore, the willingness to be vulnerable is viewed as essential to distinguish trust from other concepts such as control and power (McKnight & Chervany, 1996; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007).

It is noteworthy that trust as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party may not necessarily result in trusting behaviours. As Mayer et al. (1995) assert, the actual action of risk-taking and trusting behaviour is dependent on the amount of trust and the perceived of risk inherent in such trusting behaviour. In this sense, trust at the behavioural level has been

recognised as actions that increase one's vulnerability by relying on the other party (Zand, 1972).

3.1.2.2. The trusted party: ability/competence, and intention/good will

Scholars argue that the expectation of the trustor is based on how another party will behave (Good, 1988; Rousseau et al., 1998), as perceived by the trustor. Mayer et al. (1995) propose that the relationship-specific boundary condition between the trustor and the trusted party is important to the understanding of a trust relationship, and thus it is equally important to consider the characteristics of the trusted party with regards to why a party is judged as trustworthy and is trusted by the trustor.

Many studies have investigated the particular characteristics of the trusted party that lead to trust. However, the identification of these characteristics, again, appears to be diverse in different studies. For example, Mayer et al. (1995) find that some scholars identify a single trusted party characteristic while others may propose as many as 10 characteristics. In their integrative model of trust, Mayer et al. (1995) propose that ability, benevolence, and integrity are the three common characteristics shared by the majority of studies on trust in the existing literature. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) suggest that, based on a factor-analytic study, the essential elements of trust concerning the trusted party include benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. According to a later cross-disciplinary review by McKnight and Chervany (2001), there are 16 categories of trust-related characteristics found in articles and books on trust, which could be further distilled into five second-order conceptual categories, namely, competence, predictability, benevolence, integrity, and others.

Reviews on trust show that *competence* is one of the characteristics that has gained consistent acknowledgement among scholars across disciplines (e.g., Connelly, Crook, Combs, Ketchen, & Aguinis, 2018; Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Competence, including synonyms of "ability" and "expertise", refers to "a group of skills, competencies, and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domains" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 717), or the "technically competent role performance" (Barber, 1983, p. 14). One must technically have the ability to promise, perform, or carry out the expectation of the trustor so that the interdependency between two parties can be fulfilled in exchange. The competence

element highlights the task- and situation-specific nature of trust, as competence and ability connote a set of skills applicable to specific domains and situations (Mayer et al., 1995; Zand, 1972).

Benevolence also repeatedly appears in studies on trust. It refers to the extent to which a trusted party is believed to want to do good to the trustor, or to care about the trustor and be motived to act in the trustor's interest (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). With benevolence, the trusted party is supposed not to harm the trustor, or in other words, there is an assurance that the trusted party will not exploit the trustor's vulnerability even though such opportunity is available (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996). Benevolence connotes the personal orientation of intentions taken by the trusted party with regards to the welfare and interests of the trustor (Mayer et al., 1995). In addition, argued by Colquitt, Scott, and LePine (2007), benevolence can create an emotional attachment to the trusted party so that a sense of positive affect could be fostered with the trustor.

A third widely cited characteristic, *integrity,* refers to the trusted party's adherence to a set of moral and ethical principles that the trustor also finds acceptable and appropriate (Mayer et al., 1995). It reflects the belief of the trustor that the trusted party will act faithfully to fulfil its promise and ethical obligations (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). The characteristics of fairness, openness, justice, consistency, and honesty, share similar meanings with integrity with regards to the trusted party's moral commitment in future actions (Colquitt et al., 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Integrity also implies the extent to which the trusted party will consistently "do the right thing" so that the trustor can be confident of the trusted party's ongoing future behaviour (Sekhon, Ennew, Kharouf, & Devlin, 2014). Compared to benevolence, integrity is more rational and cognitive-based since it represents a sense of fairness or moral characteristic which could provide a long-term prediction for the trustor when coping with uncertainty (Colquitt et al., 2007).

Predictability, which is also a characteristic addressed in many studies, refers to the extent to which one party's actions are consistent enough so that the trustor is able to forecast them in a given situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). In McKnight & Chervany's (2001) account, a high level of predictability implies that the trusted party's willingness and ability to serve the trustor's interest does not change over time. However, Mayer et al. (1995) insist that one can

believe another party to be predictable but not necessarily means an equal level of perceived trustworthiness attached to that party as well.

There are some other characteristics of the trusted party addressed by scholars, such as fairness and openness (Schurr & Ozanne, 1985), reliability (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), and responsibility (Barber, 1983), etc., which overlap with the above major characteristics in one way or another. These characteristics can further be categorised into two groups, which are the "can-do" component describing the trusted party's skills and abilities to act in response to the trustor's expectations, and the "will-do" component, indicating to what extent the trusted party will choose to act in the best interest of the trustor with those skills and abilities (Colquitt et al., 2007). The "will-do" component of the trusted party's characteristics also indicates the importance of moral elements in trust. Concerning the intention or the goodwill of the trusted party, the moral element in trust refers to the "expectation that some others in our social relationships have moral obligations and responsibility to demonstrate a special concern for other's interests above their own" (Barber, 1983, p. 14). In the face of risk, the moral element enables one to believe or be confident that the trusted party will not take advantage of one's vulnerability, even though the trustor has no control over the trusted party. Contrarily, even a single demonstration of the lack of moral commitment can significantly undermine the good-will dimension of trust (Connelly et al., 2018; Kramer, 1994).

3.1.2.3. The context of trust: interdependency, uncertainty, and risk

Although not specified in every definition of trust, it is also widely agreed that some situational conditions are necessary for the existence of trust. The primary condition necessary for trust is *interdependency*, which drives exchanges between parties when the interests of one could not be achieved without reliance upon another (Rousseau et al., 1998). In an interdependent situation, therefore, the other party possesses some degree of control over the outcome that one may obtain in that interaction or exchange (Boon & Holmes, 1991). Social exchange theory suggests that all relationships evolve into trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments over time, otherwise they may terminate if reciprocity is not accomplished to fulfil each party's self-interests (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Without interdependency, there will be no need for one party to rely upon the other party's intentions and actions; or in other words, the intentions and actions of one party would be irrelevant to the expectations and interests of the other.

However, to trust is "to live *as if* certain rationally possible futures will not occur" (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 969), or "trust is paid ahead of time as an advance on success" (Luhmann, 1979, p. 25). This future-orientation of trust indicates the involvement of *uncertainty* and *risk* (Das & Teng, 2004) given that the interest and welfare of one party cannot be achieved without relying upon another. Uncertainty is concerned with whether the other party intends to and will act appropriately in the future, wherein risk resides and makes one vulnerable to potential loss when taking the risk by trusting the other party (Rousseau et al., 1998). Predetermined by the interdependency between exchange parties, all forms of social exchange involve uncertainty and risk, although varying in the amount and type (Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). Therefore, the situation of uncertainty and risk is rooted in the interdependent nature of social exchange relationships (Lawler & Thye, 1999).

The tension between the situation of risk and the need for trust is mutual. Some scholars believe that there would be no need for trust if actions could be undertaken with absolute certainty, or without risk (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). As concluded by Rousseau et al. (1998), trust is only required in risky situations. To trust means to suspend, discount, and "bracket" the risk, "acting as if the risk were not existent" (Sztompka, 2000, p. 31). On the other hand, if the fulfilment of trust is not certain, as argued by Deutsch (1977, p. 208), one could experience the "conflicting tendencies to engage in and to avoid engaging in trusting behaviour".

3.1.2.4. Trust definition of this research

The trustor's perception of the other party's characteristics forms a subjective set of confident beliefs for the trustor to evaluate the trustworthiness of that party and inform the decision to trust (Dietz, Gillespie, & Chao, 2010). In line with the "can-do" and "will-do" categorisation of the trusted party's characteristics which formulate the trustworthiness beliefs, our review on trust finds that trust is generally accepted as:

> *The positive expectations of the competence (or ability) and intentions (or goodwill) of the trusted individual or institution in the face of risk (Barber, 1983; Hart & Saunders, 1997; Jones, 1996; McAllister, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998).*

When the ability and goodwill of the trusted party are perceived as enough, the trustor shall be enabled to believe that his expectations will be positively fulfilled by the trusted party and the trusted party will express genuine care towards the trustor's best interest in fulfilling the trustor's expectations; furthermore, the trusted party's response in future occasions shall also be considered confidently predictable, given such ability and intention are presented.

To make the trust definition most valuable for this research, we adopt this general approach of trust definition to reflect two essential dimensions of trust: whether the trusted party is technically capable to fulfil the expectation of the trustor, and whether the trusted party will behave with goodwill towards the trustor when fulfilling the trustor's expectations. This definition of trust is considered appropriate for the current research given that the researcher views trust as a dynamic process between the trustor and the trusted party in a given social context. This definition of trust incorporates the trustor's expectation (with a certain level of propensity to trust), the most essential characteristics of the trusted party (competence and intentions), and the situation or context of trust (uncertainty and risk in the case of interdependency), thus this is a complete definition of trust upon which to lay the concrete theoretical foundation for this research. Furthermore, the focus of this research is to explore the social construction of trust rather than seeking a precise conceptualisation of trust definition or the operationalisation of a scale to measure trust. This adopted definition of trust lays out the dyad between the trustor and trusted party but also allows for potential broader social contributors to impact this dyad in the face of risky situations, making it appropriate for the exploration of the social construction of trust in this research.

3.2. Typology of Trust

Given the complexity of the trust concept, a typology of trust is necessary for a more thorough understanding of this phenomena by distinguishing and relating different conceptualisations of trust across disciplines (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). There are several approaches to trust typology found in literature. Trust can be divided into either a generalised form of attitude towards the external world in a psychological approach (e.g., Erikson, 1968), or a context- and object-specific form as a three-party relationship of A trusts B to do X (in a certain situation) (Baier, 1986; Luhmann, 1979). Sociologists tend to see trust in either an impersonal or an interpersonal form (Lewis & Weigert, 1985); whilst some scholars, drawing on the pattern of

planned behaviour theory developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), classify trust in terms of trusting beliefs, trusting attitudes, trusting intentions, and trusting behaviours (McKnight & Chervany, 1996).

Based on existing literature, this research categorises trust into four types, namely, dispositional trust, institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and object-specific trust (in this research, the focus is trust in food brands and products) according to the target of trust. This classification of trust recognises different targets of trust (the party being trusted, or the trusted party) from a more generalised system or situation to a more concrete and specific person or object, plus the perspective of the trustor with regards to the individual differences towards trust.

3.2.1. Dispositional Trust

Dispositional trust, from a psychological perspective, refers to one's consistent tendency to trust across a broad spectrum of situations and persons in the external world. In Erikson's (1968, p. 96) description, among the early trust theories, dispositional trust is "a sense of basic trust, which is a pervasive attitude toward oneself and the world," and an "essential trustfulness of others as well as a fundamental sense of one's own trustworthiness".

Dispositional trust characterises a "global, context-free" conceptualisation of trust and sees trust as a stable dispositional orientation toward the world and the people in it (Simpson, 2007). It recognises that moulded by their own childhood experiences and over the course of their lives, people may develop generalised expectations and consistent tendencies about the trustworthiness of other parties across different situations (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). The level of dispositional trust of an individual tends to be more or less stable over time but may vary significantly between individuals given different personal life encounters, personality types, and cultural backgrounds (Mayer et al., 1995). Therefore, some people may appear more likely to trust than others do, repeatedly, from one situation to another. Holding a disposition to trust does not necessarily imply the perceived trustworthiness of a specific other party, rather, it suggests the trustor's general propensity and willingness to depend on others (Mayer et al., 1995).

Thus, the target of dispositional is the unspecified external world as a whole, and dispositional trust is mainly treated as a personal trait that can be measured through scales. Scholars have developed several scales to measure dispositional trust, including the Machiavellianism Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970), the Interpersonal Trust Scale (Rotter, 1967), and the Philosophies of Human Nature Scales (Wrightsman & Wuescher, 1974). It is argued that higher scored individuals tend to have a warmer, more communal, and more benevolent perception of others, whereas lower scored individuals hold colder, more individualistic, and more cynical views of others (Wrightsman, 1991).

3.2.2. Interpersonal trust

While dispositional trust addresses a more individualistic view of trust, interpersonal trust emphasises the dyadic perspective of trust which features the interaction between the trustor and the trusted party. Indeed, trust between two individuals is salient in our daily life, and has been intensively studied in the field of intimate relationships (e.g., Good, 1988; Rempel et al., 1985), cooperation and competition in organisational settings (e.g., Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Gambetta, 1988; McAllister, 1995), and exchange in business settings (e.g., Doney & Cannon, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), etc.

By definition, interpersonal trust refers to the extent to which one is "confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another" (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). Interpersonal trust usually reflects a more specific relationship between two parties. For example, one may trust others to do some things X, but may not necessarily trust them to do other things Y (Hardin, 1992). This tripartite view of trust further sets a boundary to the unique features of the current situation in which the dyadic relationship between the trustor and the trusted party develops. Within this boundary, Simpson (2007) argues that assorted social motives and personal needs can serve as the basis of interpersonal trust with different partners, and in different forms of relationship, compounding the complexity of the phenomenon of interpersonal trust.

Among all factors that have been investigated to predict interpersonal trust, relationship history has been granted intensive significance. Boon and Holmes (1991) state that past experiences concerning needs being met or not may profoundly shape one's expectation of the other party

and the readiness to engage in trusting behaviour. This is in line with Offe's (1999, p. 56) statement that "trust in [a] person results from past experience with concrete persons". In the process of interpersonal trust development, repeated interactions over time can enhance knowledge and predictability of the other party (Lewicki et al., 2006). It is also widely agreed that interpersonal trust involves familiarity and emotional bonds which are grounded in repeated interactions between individuals, thus, the emotional pain that each would experience in the occasion of betrayal could serve as a protective mechanism to maintain trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Misztal, 2013; Rousseau et al., 1998). Integrating both the cognitive and emotional aspects in the process of interpersonal trust development in close relationships, Holmes and Rempel (1989) suggest there is a migration process of uncertainty reduction from having confidence in the other party's predictability, to having confidence in the other party's benevolence, values, motives, goals, and intentions.

3.2.3. Institutional Trust

In modern social life, one has to trust not only familiar people, but there are also increasing situations that people need to place trust in "absent others" (Giddens, 1994, p. 89), or even more abstract institutions or structural arrangements within which actions and interactions take place (Sztompka, 2000). Institutional trust, also understood as "system trust" (Luhmann, 1979), is defined as "trust in the functioning of bureaucratic sanctions and safeguards, especially the legal system" (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). It rests on the belief that necessary impersonal social institutions and structures are in place to enable one to act in anticipation of a successful outcome (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Zucker, 1986). The concept of institutional trust is rooted in a sociological paradigm which assumes that human actions and behaviours are not determined by personal psychological factors, but by the environment or the situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

Institutional trust is supported by structural assurances and situational normality (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Structural assurances includes structural safeguards such as regulations and legal recourse (Shapiro, 1987), while situational normality involves a properly ordered setting of the situation (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), as well as the shared understanding of one's own roles and the other's roles in that setting (Baier, 1986). Structural assurances provide institutional protection for one to trust another, and situational normality facilitates successful

interactions between two parties. By creating an environment where people feel safe and secure to interact with others, McKnight et al. (1998) propose that institutional cues of structural assurances and situational normality can enable one to trust another without first-hand knowledge. In this sense, institutional trust is crucial for establishing initial trust at the beginning of an exchange or relationship (McKnight et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Acknowledging the changing basis of social order from interpersonal relationships that feature small and relatively undifferentiated societies to structural systems that feature modern and complex societies with widespread anonymity, scholars have found increasing importance of institutional trust in our social life (Luhmann, 1979). As situational normality is essential for institutional trust, it is common for people to take such trust for granted until it has been breached. According to Giddens (1990), in modern societies where interactions commonly involve strangers and are mediated through institutions and organisations, institutional trust has to be the predominant type of trust in social life. Giddens (1994, p. 89) further asserts that "trust in the multiplicity of abstract systems is a necessary part of everyday life today".

Institutional trust functions in the way that it imposes controls and mitigates the possibility of misconduct so that a more trustful orientation towards others could be stimulated (Sztompka, 2000). Compared to interpersonal trust, institutional trust could be more vulnerable due to the lack of emotional bond and repeated interactions between specific individuals (Zhang et al., 2015a).

3.2.4. Trust in the Brand and Products

Sztompka (2000) argues that the various products and utensils we purchase and use are the more tangible targets of trust that we routinely deploy in everyday life. Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorised that the concept of trust is central to the relationship marketing paradigm, which includes the exchange relationship between firms and ultimate customers. Different from the seller-buyer and customer-service provider relationships which rely on interpersonal interactions to develop trust, it is unlikely for a firm to develop personal relationships with each anonymous individual consumer in the case of the consumer goods market (Lau & Lee, 1999).

In this case, the brand plays an important role as the interface between consumers and the firm, and functions as a partner with whom relationships can be developed.

By addressing brands as animated, humanised, or somehow personalised, Fournier (1998) argues that brands are active relationship partners rather than passive objects of marketing transactions. Although the firm, the brand, and the products are different concepts, they are also intertwined and integrally combined for the consumers to identify any part of them. Hence, in this research, which does not aim at a precise conceptualisation of different types of trust, the expression "trust in the brand and products" refers to the type of trust that consumers place in both the abstract brand (owned by a company) and its physical products, such as the infant formula products of a certain brand in the current research.

In line with the notion that trust includes both cognitive and emotional dimensions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995), this research views consumer trust as both cognitive and emotional-based. On the one hand, consumer trust serves as a mental mechanism by means of which customers reduce the uncertain risks associated with product choice (Matzler, Grabner-Kräuter, & Bidmon, 2008). On the other hand, trust is also "a feeling of security held by a consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations" (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001, p. 1242), especially in the face of risk and in the situation of consumer vulnerability.

The practical significance of consumer trust in the business context is so important that intensive empirical studies have been conducted in the marketing discipline to specify the antecedents and factors of trust building, and to explore the effects and outcomes of trust. A wide range of antecedents regarding the characteristics of the consumer and of the brand/product/company have been identified, including 1) brand/company-related factors such as brand predictability, brand liking, brand competence, brand reputation, brand knowledge, brand credibility, corporate image, product category (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006; Hess & Story, 2005; Lau & Lee, 1999; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Moon, 2007; Srivastava, Dash, & Mookerjee, 2015), etc.; and 2) consumer-related factors such as consumer involvement, propensity to trust, risk aversion, past experience and overall satisfaction (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2008; Matzler et al., 2008); as well as 3) other

factors such as country-of-origin (COO) (Rosenbloom & Haefner, 2009). The outcomes and consequences of consumer trust include purchase intention, brand commitment and loyalty, word-of-mouth behaviour, and price tolerance, etc (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Lau & Lee, 1999; Sichtmann, 2007). In addition, several scales have been developed to measure the level of consumer trust (e.g., Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán, & Yagüe-Guillén, 2003; Koschate-Fischer & Gärtner, 2015). The majority of current studies have been conducted in post-consumption contexts ; with only a few exceptions (e.g., Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007; Romaniuk & Bogomolova, 2005) considering consumer trust in the pre-consumption contexts.

Overall, in the Marketing area, trust research has largely focussed on the relationship marketing framework and brand trust framework. Both of these two frameworks feature a micro perspective of trust as they were primarily developed from the field of interpersonal trust. As a result, the extant work on trust, at least from a marketing perspective, typically provides a restricted perspective between the two parties in the trusting relationship, neglecting the broader social environments where these trusting relationships are rooted.

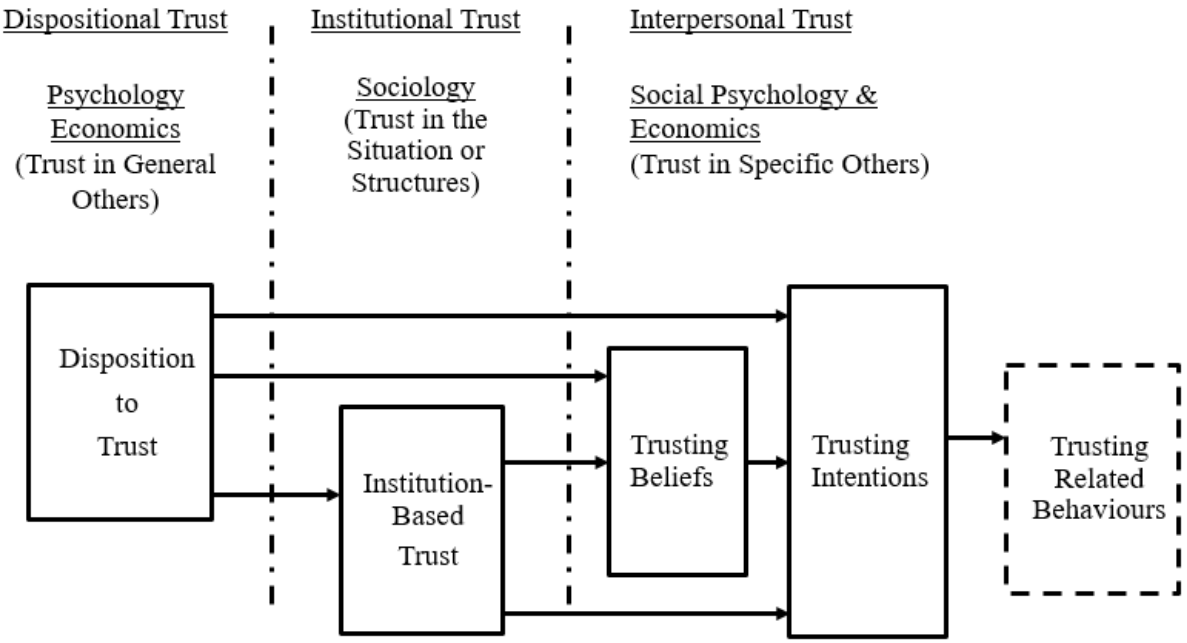
3.2.5. Interrelationships of Trust Constructs

Referring back to the metaphor of the six blind men and the elephant, each conceptualisation and each type of trust reflects one different aspect or facet of trust, and each aspect is equally important to the full understanding of the integral phenomenon of trust. Therefore, some scholars have noted that it is necessary to synthesise knowledge from disciplines in order to achieve a holistic comprehension of trust. One influential model was developed by McKnight and Chervany (2001), which integrates trust concepts originating from multiple disciplines including psychology, social psychology, economics, and sociology, and logically relates these trust concepts to outline a big picture of trust development in an attitude-belief-intention-behaviour flow (Figure 3).

Three distinctive but interrelated trust constructs, namely, dispositional, institutional, and interpersonal trust, are highlighted in McKnight and Chervany's (2001) model. As psychologists suggest that one has a consistent tendency to trust across situations and persons

with a generalised expectation (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Rotter, 1971), dispositional trust functions like a personal trait and denotes the general intention of an individual to trust.

Figure 3: Interrelationship of Trust Constructs across Disciplines



(McKnight & Chervany, 2001)

Yet trust is not only a property of isolated individuals (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). From a sociological perspective, institutional trust is one's belief about the social situations and structures, which consists of structural assurance and the situational normality of the society (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). It functions as a safety net to encourage people to trust general others in a given situation. "Trusting beliefs" reflects the cognitive belief about a specific other party's characteristics regarding that party's trustworthiness, which mainly refers to the competence and good will; "trust intentions" means the extent to which one is willing to depend on the other party even though negative consequences are possible (McKnight & Chervany, 1996). Trusting beliefs and trusting intentions work together to shape one's trust in a specific object, and to inform further trust-related behaviours.

McKnight and Chervany's (2001) model is inclusive and integrated in the way that it features both the trustor and the trusted party, both the general/abstract and specific/concrete target of

trust, and various forms of trust in the process of trust building. A feedback loop could also be added to this model to complete the circle of trust in ongoing relationships.

3.3. The Process of Trust Building and Development

Viewing trust as a dynamic process instead of a static state, scholars have developed several models of trust building and development (Lewicki et al., 2006). Rousseau et al. (1998) suggest that in the ebb and flow of relationships, trust may experience a three-phase development, namely, the building phase, stability phase, and the dissolution phase. Since the late 1990s trust violation and repair has increasingly attracted scholarly attention, and scholars have called for more work in this regard (Schoorman et al., 2007) given that trust violation has become more prominent in modern society and thus more understanding on this topic is needed at both theoretical and practical levels (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014). The next section follows a similar framework to feature the process of trust building and development (as well as distrust), trust violation, and trust rebuilding.

3.3.1. Initial Trust and Trust Development

With regards to how trust is initially established, scholars have provided different explanations on the mechanism and bases of trust development. Traditionally, scholars assumed that trust begins from a neutral zero of neither trust nor distrust, then develops gradually over time towards trust (or the other way around towards distrust), based on evidence/experience of trustworthiness (e.g., Blau, 1964; Rempel et al., 1985). However, several studies have also found that a moderate-high level of initial trust is possible at the beginning of a relationship even though there is a lack of direct interaction between the two parties (McKnight et al., 1998).

Zucker (1986), from a sociological perspective, proposed that trust can be built upon three bases, which are process-based, characteristic-based, and institutional-based. In Zucker's framework, process-based trust is produced from repeated exchanges or expected future exchanges between two parties. Characteristic-based trust, on the other hand, is more related to the defining characteristics possessed by the specific person or group trusted. And institutional-based trust is tied to formal social structures, including the legal, political, and social systems that monitor and sanction social behaviours. The significance of institutional

structures in building trust is particularly highlighted in this framework, and Zucker (1986) states that institutional-based trust will play an increasingly important role in modern societies. The institutional-basis enables one to consistently trust across a broad range of personas and situations as long as the institutional protection is in place.

Particularly addressing interpersonal relationships between individuals, Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin (1992), and Lewicki and Bunker (1995, 1996) propose that there are three ways or stages, to develop interpersonal trust, namely, calculus-based, knowledge-based, and identification-based trust. The calculus-based trust, which is also called deterrence-based trust (Shapiro et al., 1992), develops on the assumption that individuals will deliver their promises because of fear of the consequences of not doing so. It is called calculus-based given that trust at this stage is grounded in the calculation of costs of violating the trust as well as the rewards of maintaining trust (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014). The development of calculus-based trust is rational in nature, although Lewicki and Tomlinson (2014) also suggest that the dynamics of this trust development may not be rational, as such. Knowledge-based trust is grounded in the cumulative understanding of the trusted party, making a prediction of the trusted party's behaviour possible (Lewicki et al., 2006). Identification-based trust, however, only exists when the two parties identify with each other, internalise the interests of each other and act accordingly for each other (Shapiro et al., 1992). Based on mutual understanding and reciprocity over time, the identification-based trust is also called relationship-based trust in the work of Rousseau et al. (1998). This model of three-stage development of trust in interpersonal relationships outlines the different bases and nature of trust as it changes in an ongoing relationship.

Doney and Cannon (1997) summarise five distinct processes by which trust can develop in business relationships, namely, calculative process, prediction process, capability process, intentionality process, and transference process. While the calculative process is in line with the deterrence-based or calculus-based trust aforementioned, the capability process and intentionality process of trust development address the trustor's cognitive judgement on the essential characteristics of the trusted party, resonating the knowledge-based and identification-based trust, respectively. Also, the prediction process is cognitively based on the accumulating knowledge to anticipate possible future actions of the trusted party. As for the transference process, Doney et al. (1998) suggest that trust can be transferred from one trusted

"proof source" to another party that the trustor has little knowledge of, given that connections in a network are strong and reliable. The transference process drawing on a "third party" that acts as the "proof source" has also been identified as an "extension patter" (Strub & Priest, 1976, p. 399) of trust development. Incorporating broader social actors to the dyad relationship between the trustor and the trusted party could allow for a more holistic understanding of the social construction of trust.

McKnight et al. (1998), suggest that the bases of trust are categorised as personality-based, institution-based, cognition-based, calculative-based, and knowledge-based. Personality-based trust refers to the formation of a general disposition to trust that develops during childhood to become a relatively stable individual tendency towards the external world (Erikson, 1968). The remaining four types of trust bases, however, are more or less covered by the categorisations discussed above. The contribution of McKnight et al. (1998), however, is the theoretical model of the initial formation of trust. They suggest that personality-based, institution-based, and cognition-based trust work together to sustain a relatively high initial trust at the early stage of a relationship. Initial trust between parties, therefore, is "based on an individual's disposition to trust, or on institutional cues that enable one person to trust another without first-hand knowledge" rather than "based on any kind of experience with, or first-hand knowledge of the other party" (McKnight et al., 1998, p. 474).

3.3.2. Distrust

Traditionally, scholars treat trust and distrust as the opposite ends of the same continuum, thus the complete lack of trust and distrust are the same thing (Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Rotter, 1967). Luhmann (1979, p. 71) also argues that distrust is a "functional equivalent of trust". However, Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998) started the debate that trust and distrust are separate but linked dimensions rather than the opposite ends of a single continuum based on the argument that the growth and decline of trust, and the growth and decline of distrust, may be subject to different elements. The bipolar approach of trust and distrust equals the complete lack of trust and distrust (Schoorman et al., 2007), whereas the two-dimensional model by Lewicki et al. (1998, p. 439) assert that "both trust and distrust involve movements toward certainty: trust concerning expectations of things hoped for and distrust concerning expectations of things feared". That is, distrust is not merely the absence of trust, but the "active

expectation that the other party will behave in a way that violates one's welfare and security" (Cho, 2006, p. 26), and the belief that the other party will be incompetent, irresponsible, not caring, or even intending to act harmfully (Lewicki et al., 1998)

Initial distrust could occur in various conditions. Some individuals, according to their personality-based predispositions, may possess a higher tendency to distrust other people in general, irrespective of situations, as a result of trust disconfirming events in the past (Mayer et al., 1995; Rotter, 1967). Also, if the initial encounter is trust disconfirming at the commencing of an interaction, an orientation of distrust may be triggered in future exchanges and relationships (Lewicki et al., 2006). While direct experience with the other party is not available at the commencement of the relationship, a reputation of that party being untrustworthy may also evoke distrust given that the individual is aware of that reputation (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). Furthermore, individuals' perceptions of value incongruence with others can also promote initial distrust (Sitkin & Roth, 1993). The process of social categorisation is also found to have an impact on breeding distrust between different groups, since individuals of one group may see outgroup members as less trustworthy than members of their own group (Kramer, 1999).

One of the noteworthy features of distrust is that "distrust has an inherent tendency to endorse and reinforce itself in social interaction" (Luhmann, 1979, p. 74). This is also in line with Gambetta (1988, p. 234) who argues that distrust tends to prevent people from engaging in the accumulation of trust-building experiences, which consequently makes the initial or presumptive distrust become perpetual distrust.

3.3.3. Trust Violation

It is argued that "we inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted" (Baier, 1986, p. 234). Indeed, it is when relationships are vulnerable that trust is likely to play a more explicit role in the process of transition (Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007). While trust is viewed as positive expectations, a trust violation normally occurs when evidence disconfirms one's confident expectations upon the trusted party and causes one to redefine his/her perception of the relationship with the trusted party (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). Previous studies

on trust have largely emphasised the positive qualities of trust in various social exchanges and relationships, yet there are many cases in which trust may be violated or even broken. Consequently, a need for repairing or rebuilding trust will emerge if one or both parties wish to maintain the relationship (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014).

Trust is a situation-sensitive construct in the way that perceptions and interpretations of the context of that relationship will affect one's trusting beliefs and trusting intentions (Mayer et al., 1995). One of the most opportune times to examine trust may occur when stress and conflict have created a situation where confidence in the other is an issue (Rempel et al., 1985). Lewicki and Bunker (1996) propose a model to illustrate the dynamics of a trust violation from the trusting party's perspective. This model suggests that when a trust violation occurs, the trust relationship falls into the state of instability, negative affect and uncertainty, resulting in both cognitive and emotional activities. The cognitive activity assesses the degree of violation and negative effects, and attributes the responsibility, whereas the emotional activity deals with feelings like hurt, anger, fear, and frustration, and causes people to reassess feelings about the other. Some research supports the idea that violation of trust may be an emotional event for the trusting party (see Schoorman et al., 2007 for examples).

In the marketing discipline and business settings, consumers' direct personal experiences with a brand, through the consumption practice, will be a test of their expectations. In consumer goods markets, several situations have been documented as circumstances in which consumer trust may be violated or broken, namely, product-harm crises, product recalls, and other negative publicity. Elliott and Yannopoulou (2007) documented that when trust was broken, consumers felt disappointed and became angry and upset, meanwhile, consumers changed their perception of the brand and products, and trust decreased dramatically or was eliminated. In the case of major negative publicity, the media preference for reporting bad news could worsen the perceived violation of trust, making people weigh negative information over positive information and resulting in contradictions against consumers' positive expectations of the brand and its products (Dean, 2004; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991).

It has been empirically examined that brand misconducts can damage consumer trust in the brand and sometimes the whole product category and the industry if the inadequacy of the product is considered to be an industry-wide problematic process (Cleeren, Dekimpe, & Helsen,

2008; Cleeren, van Heerde, & Dekimpe, 2013). Schoorman et al. (2007) have called for more work to explore trust violation and repair because the issue warrants more research effort to address its theoretical value and practical merit. It is also necessary to understand how trust is damaged before repairing the violated trust or rebuilding the broken trust.

3.3.4. Trust Repairing and Rebuilding

Regardless of the contexts and types of trust, researchers have generally suggested that trust repair is much more difficult than initial building (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004), and even more difficult after repeated violations than after an initial failure (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). Some even believe that lost trust may never be regained (Slovic, 1993). Given trust is desirable in various relationships, a growing body of work is investigating the issue of trust repair and rebuilding (e.g., Cao, Shi, & Yin, 2014; Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006; Xie & Peng, 2009).

Kim et al. (2004) summarise three major challenges which may add difficulty to the process of trust repairing and rebuilding: 1) the magnitude of the increase in trust may be greater than that required in establishing trust initially; 2) mistrusted parties must not only re-establish positive expectations but also overcome negative expectations; and 3) information about the violation may remain particularly salient, reinforcing the low trust level despite efforts by the mistrusted party to demonstrate trustworthiness. Slovic (1993) argues that there is a fundamental mechanism of human psychology called the “asymmetry principle” accounting for the fact that trust is easier to destroy than to create. Cognitively, people undergo a reappraisal of the relationship following a trust failure, with a tendency to privilege negative evidence over positive evidence (Kim et al., 2004; Slovic, 1993). During this fragile period, people are strongly motivated to avoid risk, are “hypervigilant” to suggestions of future untrustworthy behaviour, and are susceptible to “paranoid cognitions” and “sinister attribution error” (Kramer, 1994, 1995).

In the field of relationship repair, Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer (2009) point out that at the theoretical level, researchers have approached trust repair from the attributional, social equilibrium, and structural perspectives. From an attributional theory perspective, violations result in negative judgments rather than positive expectations, and repair strategies address how

to change those attributions to positive ones (e.g., Kim et al., 2004; Tomlinson & Mryer, 2009). From a social equilibrium approach, a trust violation creates an imbalance in favour of the other party, and subsequent actions aim to restore one's perceptions of the social equilibrium (e.g., Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002; Ren & Gray, 2009). In the structural approach, a trust violation suggests an inadequacy and/or breakdown in existing structural monitoring and control mechanisms, and repair strategies usually emphasise assurance and prevention of future violations (e.g., Gillespie & Dietz, 2009; Sitkin & Roth, 1993).

There are also a number of studies that have empirically tested trust rebuilding by addressing the trustworthiness (e.g., competence, benevolence, and integrity) of the mistrusted party through strategies to make one's trusting beliefs and trusting intentions more positive after a violation is perceived to have occurred (e.g., Kim et al., 2004). However, trust violated on the integrity dimension is considered less likely to be effectively rebuilt, because such violations may undermine the very basis by which one can cognitively and emotionally predict the other's behaviour (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Schweitzer et al. (2006) also demonstrated that if the untrustworthy behaviour was accompanied by deception, which denotes a shortfall in integrity, trust may never fully recover.

In business contexts, it is also noted that damage to consumer trust can be long-lasting and trust is more difficult to repair/rebuild, especially in situations of high-risk products that are closely related to consumers' safety and health (Xie & Peng, 2009). For example, empirical studies suggest that consumers may be willing to accept apologies and compensations or be satisfied with the recovery of a service failure, yet still they would not forget the bad experience, nor can high levels of trust be necessarily rebuilt (Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003a; Weun, Beatty, & Jones, 2004).

Despite the growing work on the subject of trust rebuilding, Lewicki and Tomlinson (2014) have argued that it is unclear whether violated trust is actually repaired or restored, and whether the then repaired/rebuilt trust is significantly different from trust that has never been violated in terms of its structure and features.

3.4. Trust in Food

Food and eating are of the utmost importance to our daily life. A closer observation of contemporary food consumption practice and the relationship between consumers and their food suggests that a crisis of food anxiety has arisen in the last few decades with "distrust in food" becoming a daily expression, and concerns over food safety becoming a global issue (Kjærnes et al., 2007). The growing public concerns over the contemporary food sector has stimulated intensive work on consumer trust in food across various disciplines.

3.4.1. Credence Attributes, Risk, and Rising Concerns of Food Safety

Food supply and food quality are crucial in everyday life. According to the research-experience-credence framework of product classification developed by Nelson (1970, 1974) and Darby and Karni (1973), however, most aspects of food quality are viewed as either experience or credence attributes (Röhr, Lüddecke, Drusch, Müller, & Alvensleben, 2005). The research attributes of a product can be easily accessed prior to purchase or use via relevant information such as price, size, and colour, and experience attributes can be evaluated with high certainty after purchase or use, whereas credence attributes, such as health-related and process-related qualities, cannot be readily verified by average consumers even in or after the process of consuming, mainly due to their lack of technical expertise or practical possibilities (Fernqvist & Ekelund, 2014). As a result, in situations where credence attributes of the food product are important to the consumer decision-making process, trust is viewed as essential for food consumption since the consumer has to make the choice based on the basis of faith in the product, rather than concrete knowledge and judgement.

Meanwhile, modern food systems have become more complicated. As a result of the modern industrialised food system, and shifts in food consumption patterns, contemporary consumers have become detached from food production and no longer have close interpersonal relationships with food providers, as they might have had in the past (Meyer, Coveney, Henderson, Ward, & Taylor, 2012). Fischler (1980) claims that the delinking of consumers and food production systems creates uncertainty and fear, as "modern individuals are left without clear sociocultural cues as to what their choices should be as to when, how, and how much they should eat" (p. 92). Temporally and spatially distant from food provisioning, consumers are

often designated only as end users of food (Meijboom et al., 2006). Moreover, the application of novel food science and technologies has created and enlarged information asymmetry between food providers and consumers. This information asymmetry greatly contributes to a generation of food uncertainty among lay consumers who have less knowledge then sellers do (Verbeke, 2005).

The uncertainty and potential risks involved in modern food systems have increased the research of trust in food (e.g., Chen, 2008; Kjærnes et al., 2007; Mazzocchi, Lobb, Traill, & Cavicchi, 2008b). Studies which have examined a mixture of convenience and shopping goods demonstrate that, in general, higher value, more complicated, and more involving food products are riskier than the lower value, low-involvement, simpler convenience food products (see for examples, Mitchell, 1999).

Moreover, the outbreak of worldwide food safety incidents since the 1990s has further made trust in food a rising global concern in both developed western countries (Henderson et al., 2010), and developing countries (Yan, 2012). On an individual level, increasing concern of food safety and health has caused anxiety in food consumption, and on a societal level, how to protect the population from food-related health risks has been a challenge to policy makers (BildtgÅrd, 2008).

In the context of China, Yan (2012) classifies food safety problems in contemporary China into three levels: conventional food-hygiene problems, unsafe food using modern agricultural techniques, and poisonous food with deliberate contamination. Criminal activities such as deliberate contamination and illegal use of chemicals in food production are frequently reported in China, which have jeopardised the public's trust in food safety (Lam et al., 2013). After the Melamine Contamination Scandal in 2008, many studies have found that food safety problems and concerns persist amongst consumers (He & Wang, 2014), and the decline of public trust in food remains significant in China (Wang, Si, Ng, & Scott, 2015).

3.4.2. Approaches towards Trust in Food

Seeing food as "the outcome of what has been done with it at all stages of production and distribution until it ends up on somebody's plate" (Poppe & Kjærnes, 2003, p. 16), Kjærnes et

al. (2007) argue that in modern society, trust in food is dependent on the division of responsibility among all stakeholders. Examining the interaction between consumers and food in modern society, a number of prior studies have found that trust in food is actually trust in a certain brand, a food chain actor, or a government agency (BildtgÅrd, 2008; Chen, 2011; Kjærnes et al., 2007; Sassatelli & Scott, 2001). To understand how trust in food is established and maintained, existing literature has predominately focused on the contributions of interpersonal trust and institutional trust, which are related to food regulation and regulators, and specific food system actors, respectively (Zhang et al., 2015a). Consumer trust in food brands is relatively unexplored in food consumption literature (Lassoued & Hobbs, 2015).

3.4.3.1. Trust in food regulation

Contemporary food consumers have been largely detached from, and have little control over, the modern food provisioning system (Meijboom et al., 2006). Therefore, institutional public control of food safety is essential because individual consumers have neither complete knowledge nor sufficient control, regarding the processing of food. Consequently, institutional trust has received increasing scholarly attention among the exploration of trust in food (e.g., de Jonge et al., 2008; Kjærnes et al., 2007; Tonkin, Webb, Coveney, Meyer, & Wilson, 2016).

Institutional trust in food comes from consumers' faith that relevant social assurances and institutions are functioning to guarantee overall food safety, such as the food safety law enforced by the government, or an organic label certified by a third-party organisation. For example, based on a comparative study conducted in six European countries, Kjærnes et al. (2007) demonstrate that consumer trust in food varies significantly among countries because of different social relations and institution structures, highlighting the social and institutional root of trust in food.

Food regulatory authorities have been identified as one of the most essential actors in the construction of consumer trust in food (Berg et al., 2005). The government, acting as the food regulator, assumes full responsibility to protect its citizens through command-and-control processes to assure the safety of food provision, and thus consumer trust could be institutionalised based on the legitimacy of the government as the defender of the public interest (Zhang et al., 2015a). For example, after the breakout of the BSE crisis (bovine

spongiform encephalopathy, which is known as mad cow disease and can transmit to humans through infected meat and cause Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease) in 1996 in European countries (mainly in England), Almas (1999) argues that Norway was the only country in Western Europe that witnessed no decrease in meat consumption because Norwegian consumers trust their food industry and regulators more than most Europeans, given the history of strict food regulation in Norway. In addition to strict regulation, de Jonge et al. (2008) further point out that it is important for the regulators to emphasise its concerns about public wellbeing and the attention it pays to food safety.

Research also finds that the governmental role in food regulation is "widely taken for granted" (Kjærnes et al., 2007, p. 13). Another study on trust in the Australian food system states that although participants could seldom name the national food regulator, there is a strong belief that the government is responsible for regulating the quality and safety of food, while at the same time, it is believed that the profit motives of the government will undermine the effectiveness of food regulation (Henderson et al., 2010).

3.4.3.2. Trust in food industry actors

Modern food systems usually involve processes of food production, processing, transportation, consumption, and waste disposal (Ericksen, 2008). In this sense, trust in food also involves actors of the entire food chain from the farm to the table, therefore, trust in food may roughly be divided into trust in the key actors, including the farmers, the manufacturers, and the retailers.

At the starting point of the food chain, the farmers are found to be mostly trusted in some empirical studies conducted in countries such as Canada (Ding, Veeman, & Adamowicz, 2012), and Australia (Henderson, Coveney, Ward, & Taylor, 2011). Meanwhile, some studies also suggest that trust in farmers is not directly related to overall food safety perceptions, especially in a processed food context (Chen, 2013). Food processors and manufacturers are usually assigned primary responsibility for providing safe food to the public, and the levels of trust in food manufacturers most significantly influences consumer trust in food (de Jonge et al., 2008). The general belief that food industrial actors are purely vested in profit-making is argued to be a significant barrier for growing consumer trust in food (Coveney, 2008). Viktoria Rampl, Eberhardt, Schütte, and Kenning (2012) have also applied Mayer et al.'s (1995) established

model of trust in the food-retailing market and found that the retailer's ability and integrity are essential to consumer's trust in that specific retailer and based on higher levels of trust and subsequent risk-taking behaviour, the consumer may remain loyal to the retailer as a measure to reduce uncertainty with other potentially insecure food products.

An interpersonal approach to trust has been frequently adopted to explore the relationship between consumers and food chain actors, particularly at a buyer-seller level. Based on repeated face-to-face interactions between the consumer and a specific actor of the food provisioning system, for example, a familiar seller in a farmers' market the consumer regularly visits, an individual consumer may be able to establish trust in the seller and his food products accordingly. Some recent studies have noted that when trust in food regulation systems is undermined, individual consumers may seek interpersonal trust to compensate for the absence of institutional trust (Wang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015a). The worldwide growth of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs) reflects the significance of interpersonal trust in food, which primarily nests between food producers/vendors and consumers. Common forms of AFNs, such as farmers' markets and Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA), provide space and opportunities for intensive face-to-face interactions between consumers and producers, thus it is possible to foster the reconnection between people and food, and the re-embeddedness of food within social and geographical relations (Wang et al., 2015).

On the other hand, scholars have recognised the changing reality that trust in food "is no longer primarily a function of a personal relationship with, for example, the local butcher or farmer, but rather trust in a certain brand, food chain, or government agency" (BildtgÅrd, 2008, p. 114). It is also recognised that the globalisation of the food industry has led to a more complex marketplace with raising competitive pressures to gain consumer trust and royalty (Lassoued & Hobbs, 2015). Recently, some research work on consumer trust in food at a brand level also emerged. Lassoued and Hobbs (2015), for example, find that consumer trust in food brands is distinct from trust in a non-food context, and suggest that consumer trust in food brands is mediated by trust in the food system. In another empirical study, Lassoued, Hobbs, Micheels, and Zhang (2015) find that while trust in food brands is important, consumers' trust in who guarantees the quality of these brands (i.e., food manufacturers and food retailers) is even more important. Furthermore, some attributes of a food company or brand were identified to be influential to trust in food. For example, CSR is found as a positive contributor to achieving

competitive advantage in areas where trust is crucial in consumers' choices and decision making, such as the purchase of organic products (Pivato, Misani, & Tencati, 2008). COO information of a brand has also been tested as an extrinsic cue for food safety, and food produced in a consumer's home country is usually considered as more trustworthy given that more confidence is placed in local food systems (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2006).

3.4.3.3. Trust in other players

Apart from the food regulators and food industrial actors, the mass media, third-party consumer organisations, and food scientists/experts are also all considered to be influential to consumer trust in food. Empirical evidence suggests that negative media reports can easily damage trust relationships (Coveney, 2008), due to the "social amplification" (Slovic, 2000) effect of the negative publicity of products. However, comparative studies, such as the empirical work done by Mazzocchi et al. (2008b), indicate that the levels of trust in the information provided by the media vary across countries. The same mixed findings regarding consumer trust in food experts are also found in the literature. Kjærnes et al. (2007) found that food experts, together with consumer organisations, ranked at the top of actors consumers considered tell the whole truth about food safety. The work by Mazzocchi, Lobb, Bruce Traill, and Cavicchi (2008a); Mazzocchi et al. (2008b), however, clustered consumers from five European countries as trustors, non-trustors, and mixed trustors, and found that non-trustors see information provided by experts least trustworthy, while the other two groups trust expert information at an above-average level.

For consumer organisations, Kjærnes et al. (2007) found that consumer associations are the most trusted actors in terms of truth-telling across six European countries since these organisations are viewed as particularly devoted to voicing consumer interests and are usually constituted directly by consumer members. Chen (2008) also suggests that third-parties such as mass media, consumer organisations, and food experts are more trusted to telling the truth when a food scandal erupts, and are particularly trusted for the monitoring role; consumer organisations are expected to take more responsibility in advocating consumer interests against the industry. Nevertheless, the roles of mass media, consumer organisations, and food experts, and the ways in which these actors shape consumer trust in food are largely dependent on the broader relationships and interactions of all relevant actors (Kjærnes et al., 2007).

3.5. Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing interest in trust, the literature review revealed important knowledge gaps worthy of further exploration, particularly in the area of the social construction of consumer trust in food. These gaps are summarised below and linked to the research questions of the current research, and to the subsequent research approach adopted.

The primary gap identified is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of consumer trust development and evolution with high-involvement food brands and products over time in the period from before to after consumption in the Marketing discipline. Drawn on the interpersonal tradition of trust, the relationship marketing framework and brand trust framework have been focussed on the success of relational exchange. One of the main interests of such research is to see trust as a facilitator or mediator to promote such positive relational outcome, e.g., B2B partnership (Altinay, Brookes, Madanoglu, & Aktas, 2014), purchase intention (Lin & Lu, 2010), brand and customer commitment and loyalty (Hong & Cho, 2011), etc. With the booming of e-commerce in the recent decade, it is evident that taking the same approach to study trust has been tested in an online marketing environment (e.g., Boateng & Narteh, 2016; Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2014; Liu et al., 2015). Similarly, in the study of trust in food, trust has been more often studied with its antecedents and outcomes together with other variables rather than exploring trust in food *per se* (e.g., Calvo Porral, 2016; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017).

In addition, consumer trust in an emerging and turbulent market like China is worthy of further exploration. There has been a consistent call for more academic attention among marketing scholars on emerging markets (e.g., Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Roberts, Kayande, & Srivastava, 2015; Sheth, 2011), so that the Western based Marketing theories could be advanced to reflect the reality of globalisation. Both the western Marketing theories as well as the trust theories may not necessarily be applicable to China without taking into account China's unique social and cultural background. As discussed in Chapter 2, China is now closely connected to and interacting with, the world due to the process of globalisation. The Chinese market shares some modern similarities with its western counterparts, yet still there are significant differences in many aspects, such as the socio-cultural background, consumer characteristics, and consumption patterns. Given that trust is context-specific (Bhattacharya et

al., 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), an exploration of consumer trust in China warrants more attention so as to enrich current knowledge of trust which is largely western-dominated.

A methodological gap is also recognised in the literature review. The review of existing work indicates that there is limited work employing interpretivist, qualitative approaches to explore the construct of consumer trust (Arnott, 2007). Möllering (2001) suggests that the assumptions made about how people understand their life-world need to be considered carefully in future trust research, where open-ended approaches like reflexive qualitative methods are more appropriate than restrictive approaches such as positivist methods. Most existing research has adopted quantitative approaches, focusing on the scale development and measurement, and the causal explanation of consumer trust in relation to a wide range of other variables. How consumers actually understand and interpret the world around them, and how such a wider understanding and interpretation may be reflected in their trust in a given context, e.g., consumption of a certain category of food is under-addressed. Interpretivist qualitative methods, for example, in-depth interviews, provide another perspective and can be a more suitable approach to step into consumers' lived experiences with high-involvement products and shed light on the understanding of consumer trust building and development processes. In response to this methodological gap, and according to the exploratory nature of this research, this thesis adopts a hermeneutic approach as its methodology. The full justification for adopting this methodology is elaborated in Chapter 4.

In summary, what we know about trust in human relationships cannot be directly applied to consumer trust in consumer-food relationships without theoretical justification and empirical testing, and the diversity of trust conceptualisation in the existing literature drives further diversity in applying trust theories in the research of consumer trust in food. What we know about trust in food in developed countries can not be directly applied in the context of China. While different approaches (such as institutional and interpersonal perspectives of trust) and various key food system actors (including the regulators, the farmers, the manufacturers, and the retailers) have been studied separately by different scholars, it is also necessary to investigate how these different types of trust, and how these different actors, interplay with each other in the process of trust building and development. Based on the identified gaps, this thesis addresses two research questions as follows:

Question 1: What factors are involved in the process of trust construction and how is each of them involved?

Question 2: What are the interrelationships between these factors, and how have these factors interplayed with each other to affect the process of trust construction in food brands and products?

3.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the literature concerning trust in general and particularly, trust in food, in both the Marketing discipline and broader social science. The review summarises current approaches of research on trust and reveals knowledge gaps regarding the holistic understanding of consumer trust in food, the methodology applied in prior studies of trust, and the context of trust research. Recognising these gaps, this thesis proposes a social constructionism approach to explore the phenomenon of trust in food in a given social context by employing a hermeneutic approach as the methodology.

The adopted research methodology will be further discussed and justified in the next chapter. Chapter 5 will report and discuss the relevant results derived from the empirical data.

CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY

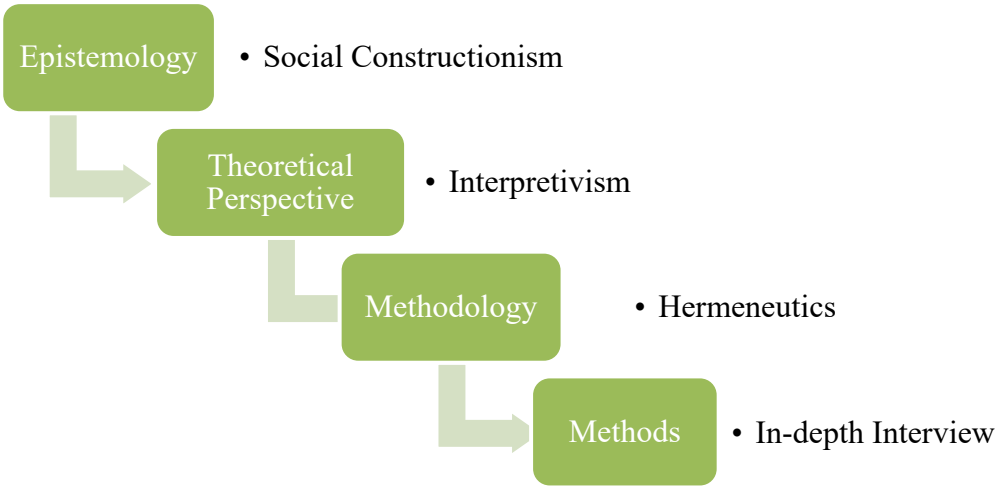
This chapter elaborates on the research process that was employed to address the research questions regarding the social construction of consumer trust in food over a period of time. Following the principles of a social research process developed by Crotty (1998), four basic elements underpinning the process of research will be addressed, namely, the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. These four elements will be discussed to justify the research approach.

4.1. Overview of Methodology

As Crotty (1998) suggested within these principles, an interrelationship exists between methodology and methods, the theoretical stance adopted, and the epistemology informing the research. Epistemology represents a way of understanding and explaining "how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3), and it refers to the theory of knowledge that informs the adopted theoretical perspective. The theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that lies behind the chosen methodology, providing a context for the research process and grounding its logic and criteria. Methodology is the strategy or plan that underpins the research design and provides a rationale behind the choice and use of particular methods for achieving the desired research outcomes. Finally, methods are the concrete techniques employed to appropriately gather and analyse the data of inquiry.

Figure 4 features not only the interrelationship between these four elements within Crotty's framework but also highlights the adopted research approach of the current research correspondingly. This research adopted a social constructionist epistemological stance, which is consistent with the interpretivism theoretical perspective. Specifically, hermeneutics was the methodology employed to guide the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Semi-structured in-depth interview was the particular method to acquire necessary primary data in response to the research questions. Each of these four elements will be detailed in the following sections of this chapter.

Figure 4: Methodological Flow



(Adopted from Crotty, 1998)

The chapter starts with the research questions and the nature of the subject of inquiry, then justifies the adopted research approach by addressing the four elements, proceeding from the broader philosophical issues towards the specific method employed in this research. In addition, the procedures of data collection and analysis, as well as the trustworthiness of the entire research process, and the ethical considerations, are discussed at the end of this chapter.

4.2. Research Objective and Questions

This research aims to respond to the gap identified in the extant literature with regards to the phenomenon of consumer trust in food in a fast-changing society with frequent occurrences of food safety incidents. Since trust in food has become a prevalent public concern in modern society, a more in-depth and holistic understanding of how consumer trust in food is built and how it develops in the interactions between relevant factors over time is necessary. Correspondingly, this research seeks to identify key factors which may significantly contribute to the construction of trust, in and out of the consumer-food dyad, and further untangles the interrelationships of these factors to shed light on the dynamics of trust development in food over time. Thus, this research is exploratory in nature. Two specific questions are asked in response to the overall research objective:

Research Question 1: What factors are involved in the process of consumer trust construction and how is each of them involved?

Research Question 2: What are the interrelationships between these factors, and how do these factors interplay with each other to affect the process of consumer trust construction in food brands and products?

4.3. Research Approach

To answer the research questions, an appropriate research approach shall be taken according to the nature of the subject of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Crotty, 1998). As outlined in Figure 4, the research approach of this thesis consists of four fundamental elements, namely, social constructionism as the epistemology, interpretivism as the theoretical perspective, hermeneutics as the methodology, and semi-structured in-depth interview as the method to collect data. The appropriateness of the chosen epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and method for this research will be discussed as follows.

4.3.1. Epistemology

Epistemology signals and explains the philosophical grounding of a researcher through a specific piece of research work. Crotty (1998) identifies three different epistemological stances according to the relationship between the subject and the object with regards to "what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Maynard, 1994, p. 10), on a continuum with Objectivism and Subjectivism as the two ends, and Constructionism in between.

Objectivism assumes that meaning and meaningful reality exist independently of human perception and consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Traditionally found in a positivist theoretical perspective, and in more contemporary post-positivism, objectivism holds that an objective truth exists apart from the operation of any consciousness, waiting for human beings to identify and discover it (Jonassen, 1991). Therefore, objectivism concerns for an "objective" form of knowledge with precision and certitude when the subject "correctly mirrors or represents objective reality" (Bernstein, 2011, p. 9).

Subjectivism assumes that meaning and meaningful reality are independent of the object and solely relies on the subject (Crotty, 1998). In subjectivism, there are objects existing but the object makes no contribution to the generation of meaning (Mingers, 1984). Therefore, meaning is created out of nothing but imposed on the object by the subject, and reality is more like a projection of individual imagination. This epistemological stance is usually informed by structuralist, post-structuralist, and postmodernist forms of theoretical perspectives (Crotty, 1998).

A third epistemological stance, which does not separate the interplay between the object and the subject, is *Constructionism*. In the view of constructionism, meaning is not discovered nor created but comes into existence in and out of human beings' engagement with the world they are interpreting, i.e., meaning is constructed out of the object by the subject (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Erickson, 2017). From this point of view, there is no meaning without a mind. Prior to human consciousness, objects exist but hold no meaning. Constructionism brings and holds together objectivity and subjectivity in the generation of meaning (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Thus, different people may have different ways of meaning construction, even in the face of the same phenomenon.

There are two common variations of the constructionist position in terms of whether the social dimension of meaning is at central stage. Constructionism, or more commonly called social constructionism, emphasises "the collective generation (and transmission) of meaning" (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Crotty, 1998). The word "social" here is about the mode of meaning generation, which denotes "the social construction of reality" rather than "the construction of social reality" (Crotty, 1998). In other words, all meaningful realities, including thoughts and emotions, are socially constructed. Constructivism, on the contrary, is primarily an individualistic understanding of the constructionist position (Fosnot, 2013), with epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on "the meaning-making activity of the individual mind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43).

As argued by Khodyakov (2007), trust has been mostly studied as either an independent variable concerning the benefits of trust or as a dependent variable concerning factors that impact trust. These approaches, however, fail to capture the dynamic nature of trust in the given social context and neglect the influence of broader social-cultural factors on the trust building

and evolving processes. To address this aspect of trust, the present work adopts a sociological proposition of trust, viewing trust as a social construction based on both emotional and cognitive dimensions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This view of trust also emphasises that trust should be understood as "relations among people" rather than "psychological states taken individually" (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 968). Furthermore, food consumption and infant feeding are important aspects of social practices rather than merely individual behaviours. Thus, feeding practice and infant formula consumption are also socially constructed (Afflerback et al., 2013; Lee, 2007), and should be understood as "embedded" in social relations and contexts (Granovetter, 1985; Lyon et al., 2012; Möllering, 2006).

Infant feeding is a food consumption practice linked to both individual and societal domains. For parents, or caregivers, even though different in their personal consumption and feeding practices, their interpretation of the world, and the construction of their knowledge are embedded in the culture and society where they are raised (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, social constructionism is suitable for this research to explore how trust is built and developed between the consumer and the product/brand within a given social context.

4.3.2. Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of a study signals the view of the human world and social life based on the fundamental assumptions of an individual (Crotty, 1998). This study adopted an interpretivist theoretical perspective which looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world and the constructions of meanings (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, interpretivism espouses that there is no direct one-to-one relationship between the subject and the object, or human beings and their world, as the reality is socially constructed and cannot be separated from the individual (Gray, 2013). Thus, the way in which the interpreter interprets the social world determines the social reality, and both interpreters and participants are involved in constructing reality (Daymon & Holloway, 2010). Therefore, interpretivism is the key theoretical perspective to inform a constructionist epistemological stance, which assumes that all knowledge and reality emerge in and out of the interaction between human beings and the world within a social context.

Due to the fundamental divergences lying in different philosophical assumptions, interpretivist research seldom involves quantitative methods adopted by traditional positivist philosophies, which advocate a single scientific method for the justification of knowledge (Anderson, 1986). Rather, qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, phenomenology, and discourse analysis, are widely employed in interpretivist research. A qualitative approach is especially useful "when the research is concerned with either a novel domain or where the issues are complex or dilemmatic" (Smith, Michie, Stephenson, & Quarrell, 2002, p. 133). In consumer research, interpretivism and qualitative methodologies have also been adopted to explore the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, consumer experiences, and cultural meanings (e.g., Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988; Stern, 1995; Thompson, 2004).

Interpretivism is concerned with understanding rather than explaining, in contrast to positivism, the theoretical perspective linked to Objectivism (Crotty, 1998). The primary goal of interpretivist research is not to generalise and predict causes and effects, but to understand and interpret the meanings in human behaviour, including motives, reasons, and other subjective experiences, which are time and context bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Therefore, interpretivism is considered appropriate for this research which aims to understand the context-specific phenomenon of trust through the consumer's perspective within their personal consumption stories.

Additionally, there are two particular reasons for employing an interpretivist qualitative approach in the current research. First, there is a need for qualitative research to achieve the goal of this research as it can address the research questions better than a quantitative approach. It is difficult to measure and describe the dynamic development of trust and the emotional changes of consumers over a time period by using quantitative questionnaires. There is also a need for qualitative methods to get a "thick-description" (Creswell & Miller, 2000) of consumer trust in food from a social construction approach. By being "flexible and sensitive" to the social context wherein data is collected (Mason, 2002), qualitative methods can gather a substantial amount of raw data rather than the measurements of variables, and the findings from raw data can be presented in an interpretative way.

Second, there is a call for the type of insights that qualitative research can achieve on the subject of trust. Qualitative approaches are gaining in popularity in consumer research and in

marketing, and the progress made by researchers has proved the benefits of applying qualitative methods (Daymon & Holloway, 2010; Levy, 2007). However, according to the preceding literature review, the majority of existing work on trust and the consumer-brand relationship has adopted an essentially positivist approach and employed quantitative methods, despite growth in interpretivist approaches in the study of marketing phenomena. In a special issue editorial on trust in the *European Journal of Marketing*, Arnott (2007, p. 986) explicitly raised his concern that "it was surprising, and a little disappointing, that case study, grounded theory, or ethnographic studies were not viewed as viable methods of studying what is, in essence, an unmeasurable entity (i.e., trust)". Although the work of Elliott and Yannopoulou (2007) and Yannopoulou, Koronis, and Elliott (2010) "breaks some new methodological ground in the field" (Arnott, 2007, p. 986), there is still little methodological breakthrough in the study of trust.

4.3.3. Research Methodology

Methodology guides how we know the world and get knowledge of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The methodology of a study, corresponding to the epistemological stance and theoretical perspective taken by the researcher, predetermines the available choices of particular research methods for data collection and data analysis. Hermeneutics together with phenomenology and symbolic interactionism are the three main methodologies which are grounded in the constructionism epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998).

Symbolic interactionism postulates a socially derived self which mediates the individual's interaction with the environment (Osborne, 1994). Treating meanings as derived and evolving from social interactions, symbolic interactionists aim to understand the internal meanings of individual experience by description rather than seeking explanations of causes (Van Maanen, 1983). Phenomenology understands how phenomena are perceived by individuals from their own perspectives and thus is powerful for understanding subjective experience (Lester, 1999). Hermeneutics, originating from biblical interpretation, has been adopted in the interpretation of texts and other unwritten sources such as human practices, events, and situations by treating language as the pivot of all human activities, so as to bring understanding through the "reading" of these materials (Crotty, 1998). Hermeneutics shares the same aim of phenomenology - to illuminate the phenomenon through exploring lived-experience from the inside, rather than

through positivist observation and measurement, but is different in the way that phenomenology emphasises seeing "things as they are" and hermeneutics sees the presence of interpretation from the researcher as unavoidable (Osborne, 1994, p. 170). Van Manen (1997, p. 4) further distinguishes the two as "phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life".

To be coherent with the social constructionism epistemology and the interpretivism perspective taken in this research, hermeneutic analysis was adopted as the methodology to guide the specific data collection and analysis process. Seeing reality as constituted by language, hermeneutics allows the researcher to treat all data gathered for this research as a form of text to comprehend the meaning imposed by the participants both individually and collectively (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Although there are arguments over slight variations of the hermeneutic approach, the hermeneutic circle is maintained as the key component of hermeneutic analysis (Crotty, 1998). To provide a guide to conducting interpretive research of hermeneutic nature, Klein and Myers (1999) further proposed seven principles to hermeneutic analysis, which includes the hermeneutic circle, contextualisation, interaction between the researcher and subjects, abstraction and generalisation, dialogical reasoning, multiple interpretations, and suspicion (Klein & Myers, 1999).

Hermeneutics guides researchers to explore emerging themes (Aronson, 1995) from the narrated consumption stories (Stern et al., 1998), with the purpose of gaining insights into the meanings of the consumption experiences and how these meanings were formed at both individual and collective level. In consumer research, this methodology has been adopted widely in empirical research that studied consumer experiences through data gathered from in-depth interviews and focus groups (e.g., Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver, 2010; Martin, 2004). According to Spiggle (1994), the purpose of such studies is, generally, to understand meanings that consumers ascribe to their consumption experiences (e.g., Martin, 2004), and also to portray broader cultural meanings by understanding individual consumers' points of view (e.g., Stern, 1995). This study aimed to investigate how consumers make sense of their trust in certain infant formula brands by means of analysing their consumption experience as texts narrated by the participants in interviews, therefore, hermeneutics was deemed to be an appropriate choice of methodology.

4.3.4. Research Method

This research employed semi-structured in-depth interviews as the specific method to gather primary data. In-depth interviews are widely used in many qualitative methodologies and are particularly valuable for exploring a phenomenon at significant depth (Esterberg, 2002).

In contrast to large scale quantitative surveys, in-depth interviews provide an opportunity for participants to fully elaborate on their attitudes and behaviours more freely and in a deepened manner (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekeran, 2001). Rich and complex information from individuals can be generated from in-depth interviews by encouraging individuals to share intrinsic opinions and even thoughts from the unconscious mind (Cavana et al., 2001). Furthermore, it allows researchers to elicit the social world from the point of view of the interviewees who are in the context being studied. Thus, this method of data collection enables the researcher to view and experience reality through the participant's perspective and to understand their construction of meaning around a specific phenomenon (McCracken, 1990). Therefore, qualitative in-depth interviews are particularly suitable when one is interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is controversial or personal (Smith, 1995).

Compared to structured interviews, in-depth interviews are usually semi-structured and include a number of set questions followed by unstructured, open-ended questions to further explore participants' responses to the questions. The adoption of in-depth interviews is appropriate in this research because its flexibility allows for potential probing into the participants' experience and thinking more deeply and freely based on responses the researcher received from the participant (Esterberg, 2002). Moreover, the process of in-depth interviews is also consistent with the constructionism epistemological stance as it acknowledges the co-constructed meaning in the interactions between the researcher and the participants through open conversations.

Previous research that sought to understand not only consumer behaviour but why they do so and how they feel, has also benefitted from qualitative in-depth interviews (as opposed to quantitative methods) (Levy, 2007), which provided richer and thicker data. Given the exploratory nature of this research and the complexity of the research object (trust), it is

appropriate for this research to use semi-structured in-depth interviews as the method to collect empirical data from target Chinese parents.

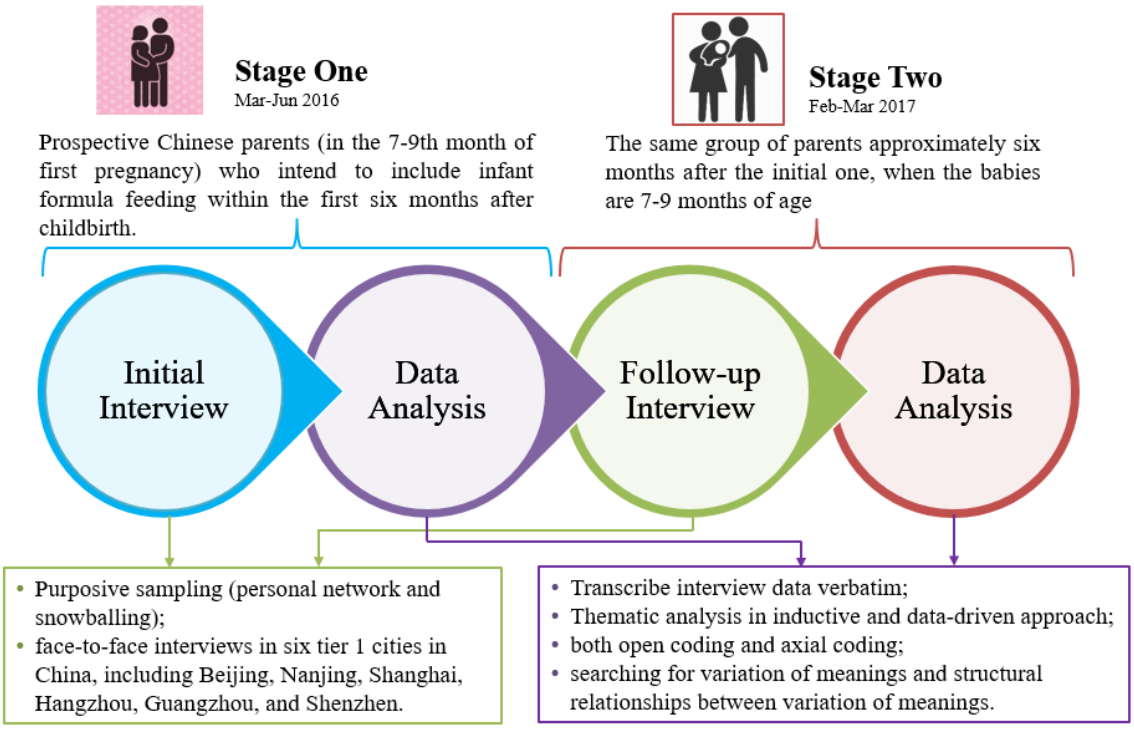
4.4. Research Procedure

This section outlines the procedures of the research activities from data collection to data analysis. It includes the research design, sampling, recruitment of participants, the process of interviews, and how the data was treated and analysed.

4.4.1. Longitudinal Research Design

Longitudinal data collection methods are highly recommended and necessary to capture the temporal element of a dynamic trust development process (Lyon et al., 2012). Furthermore, longitudinal design for social research "offers unique insights into process, change, and continuity over time in phenomena ranging from individuals, families, and institutions to societies" (Elliott, Holland, & Thomson, 2008, p. 228), thus is appropriate for the exploration of trust development between consumer and food over time.

Figure 5: Longitudinal Research Design



The longitudinal design of this research (Figure 5) allowed the researcher to collect data with the same group of participants using two sets of interviews in different time periods, i.e., before and after the purchase and use of infant formula in this research context. The same group of participants were interviewed before and post-consumption of infant formula in order to capture their ongoing experiences with their chosen brands and products. Specifically, the goal of the interviews was to document the interactions between the participants and infant formula brands/products as they went through pregnancy, childbirth, and infant feeding, in order to explore the process of trust construction by the participants during the journey from inexperienced to experienced consumers of infant formula. Specifically, the second interview was to document whether participants' understanding of trust changed as their personal situations and the external environment may have changed during this period of time. Thus, the longitudinal design enables the researcher to investigate how the changing social environment and contexts may shape consumers' sense-making regarding their trust in infant formula brands and products.

Data collection lasted for a period of 12 months, from March 2016 to March 2017, covering six cities in urban China. In total, 28 mothers were interviewed at the time of their late pregnancy, and 23 of them were interviewed for a second time when their babies were 7-9 months old, five participants declined a second interview.

4.4.2. Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was initially employed to recruit participants according to the exploratory nature of the research and the need for participants to be pregnant. In the process of recruitment, snowballing was also employed in order to reach out to potential participants.

4.4.2.1. Sampling Criteria

Purposive sampling, as a criterion-based sampling method, allows detailed exploration of the subject of interest according to the particular features or characteristics conveyed by the selective participants, in order to obtain qualified participants who will be able to provide the most credible information for the research (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2013). The criteria for participant selection were set according to the research objectives and the lines of

enquiry being pursued (Ritchie et al., 2013). The overall criteria set for participant recruitment of this research were described as "first-time pregnant women who are in their 7-8th month of pregnancy, live in urban China, and intend to include bottle feeding within the first 6 months after giving birth to their baby".

The first criterion requires participants to be expectant mothers in their 7-8th month of first pregnancy. Although babies are the end consumers who consume the baby formula product, the parents, particularly mothers in China, are the people who make decisions on what and how to buy infant formula and are involved in the feeding practice. In contrast to Western mothers who seldom buy infant formula until it is considered necessary to introduce bottle-feeding, it is common practice among Chinese mothers to purchase infant formula before giving birth, usually around the 7-9th month of their pregnancy. Hence, the relationship between mothers and infant formula typically starts from inexperienced mothers' early preparation of infant formula. This criterion of prospective mothers in their first pregnancy was for the purpose of documenting participants' trust-building process as inexperienced consumers.

The second criterion of recruitment was the intention to include infant formula feeding within the first six months after childbirth. The participants' intention of including bottle-feeding within the first six months after childbirth was to ensure that they would be positively involved in choosing and purchasing infant formula products so that they could share relevant experiences in the interview. The second interview was conducted when the babies were 7-9 months old so that mothers could have introduced bottle-feeding by the time of interviewing. Furthermore, at the age of 7-9 months, babies could have also been introduced to complementary food, making infant formula no longer the only substitute baby food if breastmilk was insufficient or not available. Follow-up interviews taken at this time would allow participants for more articulation on the changes in the needs for infant formula as well as changes in the external social environment.

The third criterion of recruitment was that participants shall be living in urban China, partly due to the vast territory of China where the differences in consumer characteristics and consumption patterns between urban and rural areas are still prominent. Urban residents may have higher income levels which makes high-end infant formula brands more affordable; furthermore, they may be exposed to a wider range of infant formula brands and possible

purchasing channels, as was indeed reflected in interviews. In addition, demand for infant formula is larger in urban areas than rural areas. Breastfeeding rates are lower in urban areas than rural areas, due to the fact that many mothers in cities have to return to workplaces after maternity leave (which is less than 6 months) and stop breastfeeding. Therefore, urban China was determined to be more appropriate for this research since it may provide richer social embeddedness related to the consumption of infant formula. Six tier 1 cities, Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen, which are located across the most developed areas from the northern, central, to the southern region of urban China, were covered in the field work of this research.

Therefore, for the purpose of exploration of trust in food in the context of infant formula in urban China, Chinese mothers who are transitioning from inexperienced to experienced consumers of infant formula are considered as the appropriate subject to be studied in this research. The criteria set for recruitment helped the researcher to recruit suitable participants for data collection.

4.4.2.2. Recruitment Process

With regards to the recruiting of participants, "the more sensitive or threatening the phenomenon under study" the more difficult the sampling will be (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p. 791). Although the experience with infant formula *per se* is presumably neither sensitive nor threatening, sitting alone with and talking to a stranger researcher for 60 minutes on a given topic may trigger cautiousness in a woman late in her pregnancy.

To ensure that these expectant mothers felt comfortable and would be open to sharing personal experience with the researcher, who was a stranger to them, the sampling technique of 'snowballing' was used to recruit participants. Snowball sampling allows the researcher to access specific populations through interpersonal relations and connections of the participants and their social network, thus is commonly used to recruit participants who may be hidden from the researcher (Browne, 2005).

To be specific, the researcher's personal network was approached in the first instance and they were invited to share the recruitment notice within their own personal networks. Potential

participants who met the criteria were then introduced to the researcher and were invited to take part in this research. Next, 'snowballing' was used to find additional potential participants in the extended personal contacts of initial participants. The researcher was also introduced to several internet-based mothers' groups by some initial participants and more participants were recruited from these groups.

In total, 28 participants (mothers) were recruited to take part in the interviews and the interviewing continued until data saturation was reached. In the second round of interviews, 23 participants from the original pool of 28 returned to the conversation, whilst five of the original participants withdrew for personal reasons or lack of availability. None of the participants in this study were immediate friends or close in kinship to the researcher.

4.4.2.3. Participant Profiles

Essential details of the participants are listed in Table 3. All participants recruited for this research were aged between 20-35, living and/or working in urban China, and from a wide range of professionals.

Of the 28 participants, two were expecting their second child when interviewed, and the rest of the participants were first-time pregnant women. Although the second time pregnant mothers had previously bought infant formula products for the first-born, their experience with previous brands was less applicable to the second child as they were planning to buy infant formula from brands they had not used for their first baby due to brand availability or other reasons. In this sense, these two participants were also inexperienced consumers of the infant formula brands they were planning to use for their second child.

Table 3: Participant Profiles - the First Interview

No.	Pseudonym	Location	1st Interview	2nd Interview	Professional	Age
1	Mary*	Shenzhen	29/03/2016	Dropped out	Housewife	31-35
2	Vivian	Guangzhou	31/03/2016	17/03/2017	Self-employed	26-30
3	Penny	Guangzhou	31/03/2016	2/03/2017	Lecturer	26-30

No.	Pseudonym	Location	1st Interview	2nd Interview	Professional	Age
4	Serena	Guangzhou	6/04/2016	2/03/2017	Housewife	20-25
5	Vicky	Beijing	8/04/2016	7/03/2017	Project manager	31-35
6	Sarah	Beijing	8/04/2016	6/03/2017	Teacher	26-30
7	Ruby	Beijing	10/04/2016	5/03/2017	Doctor	26-30
8	Sunny	Beijing	11/04/2016	7/03/2017	Doctor	26-30
9	Linda	Beijing	11/04/2016	6/03/2017	Project manager	26-30
10	Miranda	Nanjing	15/04/2016	9/03/2017	Government official	31-35
11	Carol	Shanghai	21/04/2016	10/03/2017	Housewife	26-30
12	Yilia	Shanghai	21/04/2016	11/03/2017	Customer service	26-30
13	Suzanne	Shanghai	22/04/2016	11/03/2017	Office administrator	31-35
14	Katie	Shanghai	22/04/2016	10/03/2017	Government official	26-30
15	Barbara	Shanghai	24/04/2016	10/03/2017	Telecommunication engineer	31-35
16	Sally	Hangzhou	26/04/2016	12/03/2017	Editor	26-30
17	Sandy	Guangzhou	2/05/2016	Dropped out	Salesperson	26-30
18	Sharon	Shenzhen	10/05/2016	Dropped out	Office administrator	26-30
19	Tina*	Guangzhou	14/05/2016	1/03/2017	Salesperson	26-30
20	Lily	Guangzhou	16/05/2016	2/03/2017	Housewife	26-30
21	Charlotte	Guangzhou	16/05/2016	14/03/2017	Customer service	26-30
22	Iris	Shenzhen	17/05/2016	Dropped out	Project manager	31-35
23	Bonnie	Guangzhou	24/05/2016	19/03/2017	Government official	26-30
24	Luna	Shenzhen	25/05/2016	Dropped out	Housewife	26-30
25	Zenny	Guangzhou	25/05/2016	1/03/2017	Project manager	26-30
26	Lucy	Guangzhou	26/05/2016	28/02/2017	Customer service	26-30
27	Yuki**	Guangzhou	27/05/2016	28/02/2017	Teacher	31-35
28	Amy	Guangzhou	5/06/2016	28/03/2017	Insurance consultant	31-35

*The participants were expecting the 2nd child while interviewed.

** The participant had a premature delivery before the first interview took place.

4.4.3. Data Gathering

Empirical data for this study was gathered through two sets of in-depth interview over two periods of time with the same group of participants.

4.4.3.1. Development of Interview Guide

Developing questions for the interview is one of the most crucial component of a qualitative research at the design stage (Turner III, 2010). An interview guide usually outlines the key issues and topics to be explored with participants and keeps the consistency of data being collected whilst also allowing flexibility to pursue more details which are salient to each participant through the researcher's probing activities (Ritchie et al., 2013). As a piece of interpretivist work with a purpose to explore the phenomenon of trust in high involvement food in the context of infant formula consumption in urban China, and given the exploratory nature of the research, interview questions in this study were not developed by following interview guides in other research. Rather, questions were "customised" for the research context and research objectives (see Appendix 2: Interview Guide).

Based on literature review and according to research objectives, a list of general questions were created to cover topics concerning participants' involvement in infant formula, their trust in infant formula, their experience of choosing infant formula, their decisions on which infant formula brand/product to trust or not to trust, and what a trusted infant formula brand/product means to them. The interview guide for the follow-up interview covers their actual feeding experiences with infant formula, their evaluation and levels of satisfaction with chosen infant formula brands/products, their changes in trust in chosen brands/products (if any) and the reasons for such changes. These semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to gather narratives surrounding participants' personal experiences with their trusted infant formula brands/products, allowing access to understanding how trust was developed in these lived experiences.

A pilot study with three Chinese mothers who lived in New Zealand was conducted in order to provide insights into decisions on what questions should be asked, and what wording of questions should be used during the actual interview process.

4.4.3.2. Interviewing Process

All interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner, taking place at locations which were convenient to the participant, most usually a coffee shop near the participant's home or other places designated by the participant. A relatively public place with a casual atmosphere, such as a coffee shop, created a relaxed and sociable environment for the participant to engage in the conversation with the researcher.

The interviews were conducted in Chinese, the mother tongue of both the participants and the researcher. The conversations typically lasted 45-90 minutes, were audio-taped by a digital recorder, transcribed verbatim, and then translated from Chinese into English by the researcher herself as well as a contracted bilingual student at the University of Auckland who has signed a Translator Confidentiality Agreement (see Appendix 5). Combined, these two sets of interviews generated over 800 pages of transcripts.

It is important to note that, although this section is presented in chronological order, due to the hermeneutic nature of the research, several activities and procedures were carried out simultaneously. In particular, in order to achieve an iterative research process, the analysis of data commenced at the same time as data gathering, where the analysis of earlier interviews would help to inform the reading of later ones, until the point when the researcher reached theoretical saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Spiggle, 1994).

4.4.4. Data Analysis - Thematic analysis

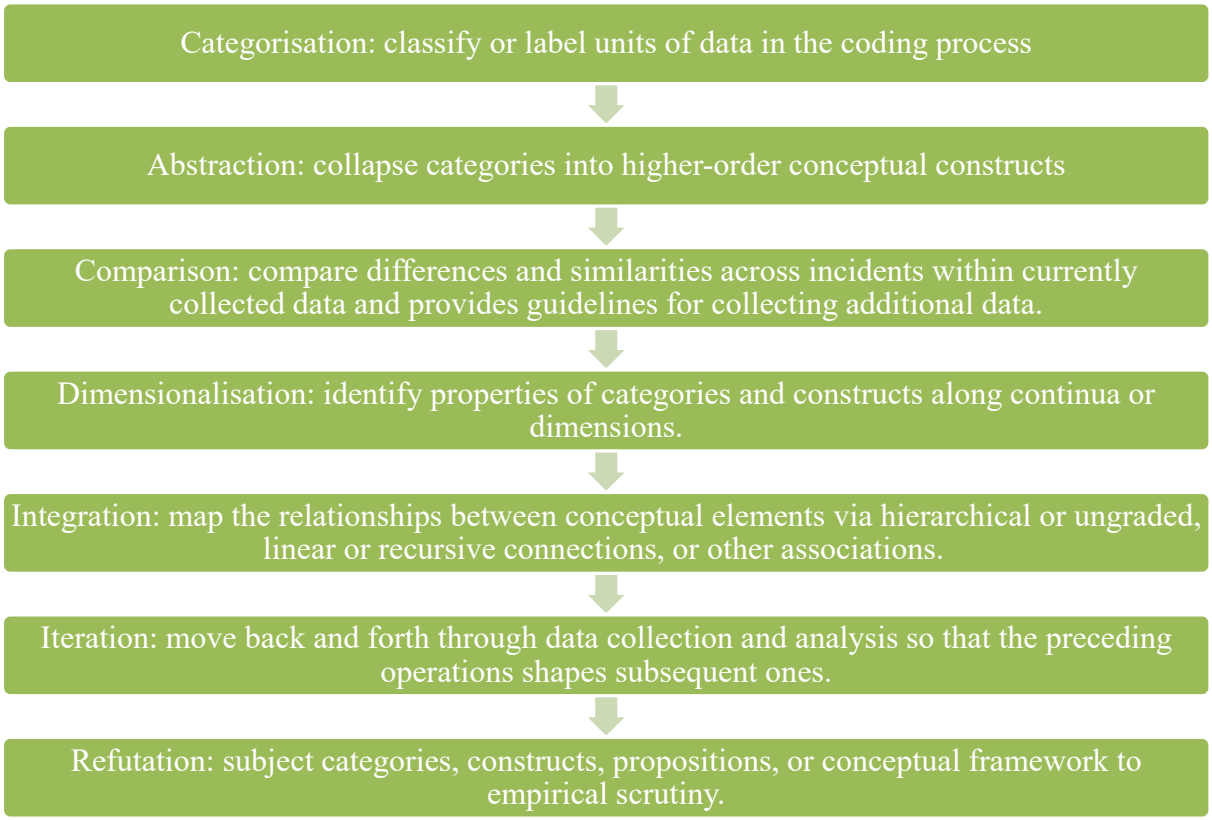
All interview scripts generated from the interviews were thematically analysed once transcribed and translated. Through thematic analysis, the researcher identified and categorised empirical qualitative data into several broader themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants' responses to offer rich insights into the phenomena under inquiry (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Furthermore, thematic analysis also involves the identification of the relationships between themes that emerged from data gathered, and the comparisons between themes currently emerged and the existing classification patterns regarding the same phenomena in the literature (Aronson, 1995).

To conduct the thematic analysis, this research followed the qualitative data analytic procedures suggested by Spiggle (1994), with an "inductive" (Spiggle, 1994), and "data-driven" (Boyatzis, 1998) approach. Specifically, inductive thematic analysis was used to identify, code, and categorise key themes/patterns emerging from the data as opposed to the deductive approach which categorises data according to priori constructs, themes, or ideas (Boyatzis, 1998; Spiggle, 1994). The "data-driven" approach constructs codes and patterns inductively from the words and syntax of the raw data and requires the researcher to interpret the meaning after obtaining the findings thereafter (Boyatzis, 1998). This means that the themes identified are strongly grounded in the data (Patton, 1990). Both the "open coding" and "axial coding" techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) which originated from grounded theory were employed to facilitate the coding process, with "open coding" used to identify concepts as well as their properties and dimensions in the data, and "axial coding" to relate categories and their subcategories around the axis of each category.

The analytical operations specified by Spiggle (1994), as illustrated in Figure 6, including categorisation, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, iteration, and refutation, are basically applicable guidelines for this analysing process. Following these procedures, the first set of interview scripts was analysed and was used to develop questions for the second round of interviews. Later, the two sets of scripts were compared against each other and then analysed as a whole data set. Specifically, the scripts were firstly open coded to allow for the identification of general patterns which conveyed meanings that reoccurred in the responses from participants. Next, the interview transcripts were axial coded by reviewing the open codes to reveal more definitive themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The final stage involved selective coding, where descriptions were made of the main phenomena that emerged from the axial coded data (see Appendix 6: Coding Examples for a detailed demonstration of coding process). The different categories were then combined around core themes.

Although usually presented in a linear, step-by-step way, the research data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process from the beginning towards the end of analyses (Spiggle, 1994). This iterative process is also a way to ensure that the researcher is as faithful to the data as possible when doing analysis and interpretation (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008; Spiggle, 1994). NVivo 11 as a rigorous and systematic qualitative research tool was also employed to facilitate analysis.

Figure 6: Data Analysis Operations (Spiggle, 1994)



4.4.5. Trustworthiness

Research rigour is a requisite in qualitative research and is seriously considered in this research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in qualitative research, trustworthiness is the main measure to evaluate the rigour in the research process, whereas quantitative research places emphasise reliability and validity. Traditionally, trustworthiness can be assured in data analysis and interpretation performed by more than one researcher to achieve triangulation (Cavana et al., 2001). For qualitative research undertaken by PhD students, it is normal practice that the researcher's supervisors work as a main source of triangulation. Seeking feedback on preliminary outcomes from other researchers through seminars and conference presentations was also taken as a procedure to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study undertaken by a PhD student.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

The participation of humans is crucial for qualitative research and ethical consideration shall be taken seriously when conducting human-participating research so as to protect participants from any potential negative consequences of their involvement in the study (Esterberg, 2002; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The research process strictly followed the guidelines set out by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) regarding human participation in research. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from UAHPEC on 11th January 2016 (see Appendix 1: Letter of Ethics Approval).

The Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 4) was given to each participant at recruitment so as to inform them of the purpose of the study and the overall research process. After receiving the Participant Information Sheet, participants were also given the opportunity to raise questions and have all questions answered to their satisfaction prior to giving their consent to participation. At the beginning of each interview, a Consent Form (see Appendix 3) was signed by the participant as proof of voluntary participation. The consent form addresses the rights of the participant to withdraw their participation during the interview as well as to withdraw their information provided in the interview within two weeks of the completion of the interview. A voucher at the value of 100CNY was given to participants for each interview.

To keep the participants well-informed, the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form also detail the use of digital voice recorder during the interview, the storage of the recordings and transcripts generated thereafter, and the usage of the data in future research outputs. In addition, how the participants' privacy and confidentiality would be protected was specified in relevant documents. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and other personal information was also removed from the scripts, articles, and thesis based on this research so that individuals will not be identified.

The contact details of UAHPEC and the Reference Number of the Ethics Approval granted to this study were both included in the Participant Information Sheet for the participants to seek further counselling services whenever they deemed necessary.

4.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented details of the qualitative research approach and method used to examine the specific research questions concerning the evolving trust-building process of consumers in food. The epistemological stance of social constructionism underpinning the whole study and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism deploying a hermeneutical approach to research have been justified. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were employed as the data collection method to generate thick descriptions to facilitate understanding of consumer trust building through the narration of consumers' living experience. Finally, the approaches taken to ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the qualitative research, and ethical considerations relating to the study, were discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interpretations of 51 interviews (28 for the first interview set and 23 for the follow-up interview set) to address the research questions posed earlier. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse and interpret all interview transcripts, with both open coding and axial coding techniques, in a back and forth iterative manner (see Appendix 7: Coding System for a review of a detailed summaries of codes and categories identified from transcripts). This chapter flows as follow: each main contributors of consumer trust in food identified from the transcripts will be addressed and supported by representative quotes from the participants, then the interactions between these contributors will be interpreted and further demonstrated with empirical data.

First, this chapter reveals the main contributors which have been involved in the process of trust construction, and how each of them was involved, then reports how these contributors interplayed with each other in the process of trust construction in the context of infant formula consumption in urban China. In the presentation of findings, data excerpts are brought in as the voice of participants in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2017), and are interpreted with the assistance of relevant literature to illustrate the researcher's interpretations (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The first part of this chapter will centre on the identification of the main contributors to trust in food to address the first research question that was posed at the beginning of this thesis:

> *What factors are involved in the process of consumer trust construction and how is each of them involved?*

Through thematic analysis, three contributors are identified as the main factors which are involved in the process of trust construction of infant formula brands, namely, 1) institutional food regulation, 2) trusted acquaintances, and 3) the brand and its products. Three types of trust were found related to each contributor, which are food regulation – institutional trust, interpersonal relationship – interpersonal trust, and the food product – brand and product trust.

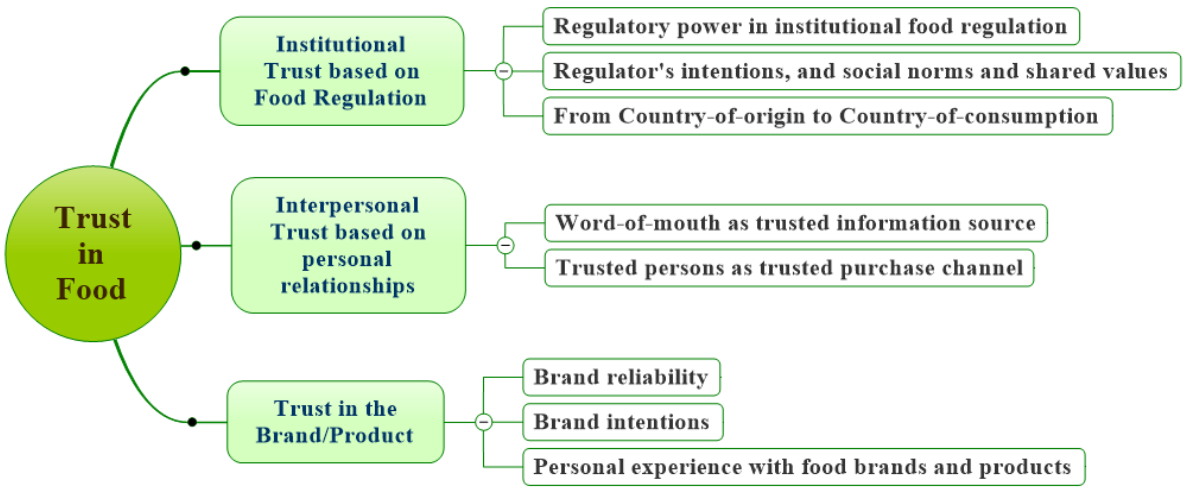
The second part of this chapter will focus on the interplay of the aforementioned trust contributors and the three types of trust so as to address the second research question:

> *What are the interrelationships between these factors, and how do these factors interplay with each other to affect the process of consumer trust construction in food brands and products?*

Three trust contributors were found to be interwoven with each other in the construction of consumer trust in food. Furthermore, they impacted each other in different ways and the dynamics of trust were demonstrated in such interactions.

Figure 7 provides a summary of the themes and sub-themes emerged from data concerning these three contributors and three types of trust in food. The interrelationships between the three will be further discussed and illustrated in the findings as well as in Chapter 7.

Figure 7: Main Themes and Sub-themes



5.1. Food Regulation and Institutional Trust

As noted previously, 25 out of the 28 interviewed Chinese women were in their first pregnancy at the time the first interview took place. They were new mothers, as well as inexperienced infant formula consumers. A certain level of initial trust is essential to enable a sense of security

when purchasing infant formula for their new-born babies for the first time, especially when they were still shadowed by the previous infant formula contamination incidents in China. Lacking sufficient first-hand knowledge of any infant formula brands and products, participants frequently referred to the food regulation system as a crucial factor to secure their trust in an infant formula brand which they had never bought before. Many reported that at least they trust the brand which they had chosen, for example, one participant commented that "*I think I won't even take them (infant formula brands) into consideration if I don't trust them*" (Vivian, interview 1), although she did not have much actual consumption experience with these brands.

In the model of the initial formation of trust developed by McKnight et al. (1998), information regarding the structural safeguards such as regulations, guarantees, and legal recourse are important in the initial relationship because information regarding the specific other party is very incomplete. In line with this model, the food regulation system, as part of the institutional structure of a country, was found influential to participants' trust in infant formula. More specifically, such influence is achieved in two ways, namely, 1) the demonstrated regulatory power of the regulator over food industry actors, and 2) the perceived intentions, social norms, and shared values reflected in the food regulation practice. Furthermore, in a globalised food environment where multiple countries may be involved in the manufacture and consumption of a food product, a holistic evaluation of the food regulation of each involved country is essential to the participants' trust in the end products.

5.1.1. Regulatory Power in Institutional Food Regulation

Usually operated by government authorities and agencies, institutional food regulation includes food-related standards, certification schemes, food safety laws, and broader rules and legal recourses that are embedded in the entire social management system. This research found that the regulatory power resided in institutional food regulation is an important foundation for participants to develop a sense of security with infant formula products they were to purchase and consume. Previous infant formula safety incidents have led to a negative assessment of the efficacy of domestic food regulation, which further bred participants' feelings of insecurity in domestic infant formula products. Two sub-themes concerning the regulatory power of food

regulation were discussed by participants, the first, food-related standards, rules, and laws, and the second, the implementation of food standards, rules, and laws.

5.1.1.1. Past experience of food regulation

It is commonly agreed that food safety and public health is one of the government's key responsibilities, therefore, people generally attribute food safety incidents to the government's insufficient supervision and neglect of duty (Han & Yan, 2019; Wu, Yang, & Chen, 2017). Past experience with food safety incidents heavily shaped participants' perception of domestic food regulation and then impacted their sense of institutional protection. Shadowed by previous infant formula incidents, participants were preoccupied with suspicions of the reliability of domestic food regulation. Apart from blaming the manufacturers who committed these food safety incidents, participants also raised concerns regarding imperfect domestic food regulation given such incidents had happened more than once.

Although participants were not direct victims of previous food contaminations (such as the Melamine-Contamination Scandal in 2008), these past incidents were widely reported and these incidents exist as reminders of the failure of domestic food safety regulation. Iris stated that:

> *"The past incidents like [the] Sanlu scandal demonstrated the major flaws in domestic regulations and inspection." (Iris, interview 1)*

Also, in Sally's opinion the previous infant formula incidents add further proof to existing problems at the higher level of food regulation.

> *"The entire system of Food and Drug Administration may have probably broken down [laugh]…it indicated that when these people (of infant formula industry) were entering this industry, CFDA had limited control on them, lack of regulation and education." (Sally, interview 1)*

Although it was the infant formula makers who committed the frauds, Iris, Sally, as well as many other participants, blamed the Chinese Government for those incidents and questioned

the competence of the government's food regulation scheme. Feeling the absence of proper institutional protection, many participants labelled themselves as "*once bitten, twice shy*" (Serena, Mary, and Penny, interview 1), resulting in a spillover of distrust in domestic infant formula at an industry- and nation-wide level (Chen, Wen, & Luo, 2016; Hongzhi, Hongxia, Xuan, & Knight, 2015). For example, Lily found it challenging to place trust in domestic infant formula although she agreed some of them could be good products.

> *"I think the government's quality inspection and monitoring is not good enough. In fact, many products of Yili (domestic dairy giant) are good, they are very good dairy products. But when it comes to infant formula, I still can't be assured. Maybe they are making efforts, but as a consumer, it's difficult to evaluate them. That is, it's difficult to evaluate whether they are indeed doing well, after so many incidents." (Lily, interview 1)*

Moreover, food safety incidents were viewed as a systematic and general pattern rather than "one-off" incidents in less-developed countries like China, due to its imperfections in food regulation (Knight, Gao, Garrett, & Deans, 2008). For example, Carol attributed the reoccurrence of food incidents to the government.

> *"Because each time after an incident, they will say 'we will strengthen our regulation, we will strengthen our regulation.' But still there are incidents from time to time. For example, an illegal processor is caught, which means they [the regulator] can still catch something. But how have these illegal products flown into the market? How could they make it happen?" (Carol, interview 1)*

In such a suspicious climate against local food regulation authorities and domestic infant formula, participants placed their trust in foreign food systems and foreign products. Such a process of seeking external replacement of trust was termed "externalisation of trust" by Sztompka (2000, p. 118). Coleman (1990, p. 196) also asserts that "whatever the arena of life in which trust is withdrawn, that there is placement of trust elsewhere". Given that interdependency remains and infant formula is required for feeding, participants turned to foreign infant formula.

Sztompka (2000, p. 118) has also warned that "such foreign targets of trust are often blindly idealised, which is even easier because of the distance, the selective bias of the media, and lack of direct contrary evidence". Some participants appeared to be somewhat "blindly" believe that "food regulation in foreign countries is stricter, and foreign products are better" (e.g., Sharon and Lucy), while many actually hold more substantial perceptions regarding foreign food regulation and products through personal experience or shared experience from acquaintances or other trusted sources (e.g., Katie and Barbara).

The following sections reveal further details of participants' perceptions of food regulation concerning its setting up and implementation, and how these perceptions impacted participants' trust and choices of infant formula.

5.1.1.2. Food standards, rules and laws

Throughout all the interviews, food standards and the food-related rules and laws of a country were emphasised frequently by participants when evaluating the perceived quality of an infant formula product associated with that country at a general level. Drawing on broader living experience, many participants raised concerns about the "low food standard" in China. For example, Yuki commented on the national requirement of infant formula as follows and called the low level of standard an "*institutional issue*":

> *"Our country's baseline of control is so low that it is easy for companies to take advantage, and this is what I'm really concerned about." (Yuki, interview 1)*

Similar concerns were pervasive and found among other participants:

> *"The quality inspection standard could be low. After all, we are a developing country, so we may not have a very high standard of requirements." (Charlotte, interview 1)*

> *"I always worry that the baseline, the baseline for acceptable quality, is low in China." (Lucy, interview 1)*

> *"The national standard is usually set at a relatively low level. It's not a high standard, because it has to keep other companies surviving, both high- and low-end manufacturers surviving." (Linda, interview 1)*

Furthermore, the perceived low standard in China may impact participants' evaluation of the quality level of imported infant formula which is sold in China. For example, Katie worried that exporters may lower their product standard in China accordingly.

> *"But you know the food safety standard in China is extremely low. Truly low. According to China's food safety standard, you are to receive and import those products of lower quality [from overseas] which are not accepted by other countries. Because your standard is much lower than others." (Katie, interview 1).*

As a contrast to the distrust in domestic infant formula, participants unanimously believed that food standards of developed Western countries are higher than that of their home country, which is consistent with previous studies on consumers from less-developed countries (El Benni et al., 2019; Jiménez & San-Martin, 2016; Knight et al., 2008). Developed countries such as Germany, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and the European Union as a whole, were frequently acknowledged by participants as countries (areas) of higher standards, not only in the food industry but also in other product categories.

> *"For other consumables, like toothpaste, shampoo, you may also think imported ones are better. Similarly, imported cosmetics are better. In domestic products, there are too many additives of which are mostly harmful, like excessive lead content. Probably because domestic standards are lower, and foreign standards are higher. I mean the standard of safety, etc." (Luna, interview 1)*

Thus, for a high-involvement food product like infant formula, participants generally trusted more in foreign brands and products, based on the belief that a stricter standard may lift the general quality level. For example, Sally explained why she preferred foreign infant formula as follows.

> *"Both my husband and I are agreed that, after all, infant formula is related to the baby's health. The baby is the little one, and it's better to choose the imported products, as foreign countries may have stricter standards than China has in this aspect. It's the same reason for our decision on the overseas purchase channel, and that's why I asked my brother [who's in Germany] to bring me some... Just think the food standards are more stringent in foreign countries." (Sally, interview 1)*

There are also many other participants who made similar decisions on choosing infant formula products from overseas. For Sunny, she emphasised that,

> *"For the quality of the infant formula, it must be originally imported from overseas and is best to be purchased by a friend in a foreign country. Domestic infant formula varies greatly in quality and it's hard to say." (Sunny, interview 1)*

The infant formula product she has finally chosen "*is a German brand and originally made in Germany*" (Sunny, interview 1), which was bought and sent from Germany with the assistance of a friend who lives in Germany to ensure the product authenticity. Given that institutional elements emanating from legislation help to ensure contractual obligations of firms (Jiménez & San-Martin, 2016), Sunny believes that German standards are higher, and Germany infant formula will benefit a lot from such strict food standard.

> *"…their manufacturing techniques and requirements are under very strict standards…I think they are strict, and there won't be issues like expired infant formula, inferior standards, or mixing stage two and stage three milk powder into the processing of stage one products, etc. There shouldn't be issues like that." (Sunny, interview 1)*

This comment from Sunny explicitly illustrated a need for proper "structural assurances" and "situation normality" so that the institutional based trust could be achieved (McKnight & Chervany, 2001) for the construction of overall trust in food. The strict standards indicate that structural assurances are in place, thus undesired situations shall not occur, and positive outcome (i.e., infant formula being safe and up to standard) could be anticipated. At the pre-consumption stage, Sunny's trust in German infant formula was an outcome more of the strict

food standard of Germany than of her own experience with the brand and product. She therefore felt eased, *"especially since Germany is so [strict], definitely there will be no problem [with the infant formula products]*" (Sunny, interview 1).

In conclusion, a higher level of food standards, rules and laws define a higher baseline of product quality, thus a higher level of trust could be generated in infant formula which is supposed to be in line with higher food standards. Therefore, trust in specific infant formula brands and products are closely linked to food-related standards, rules and laws which offer institutional protection to consumers.

5.1.1.3. Implementations and punishments

As Sztompka (2000) argues, monitoring and sanctioning should motivate the trusted party to be trustworthy, rather than untrustworthy, according to the calculation of interests in the face of punishment. With regards to food regulation, whether the food industry players are afraid of being punished if they impair the interests of consumers is crucial for consumer trust building. Therefore, how the food standards, rules and laws are implemented, and what punishment and sanctions will be imposed, was another concern of participants.

The regulatory power enhances the trustworthiness of food industrial players through punishments and sanctions against those who do not comply (Sztompka, 2000). Echoing this, some participants believed that heavier punishment could help to expel lawbreakers and to restrain trust breaching behaviours. For example,

> *"I think it mainly relies on the regulations to set an example. If you have a very strict regulation and punishment system, no one dares to do this, that is, no lawbreakers would commit this…" (Penny, interview 1)*

However, participants perceived that the implementation of the existing food standards, rules and laws to be loose and weak in their home country, according to observations of bureaucratic efficiency and the administration of regulations in relation to food (Kjærnes et al., 2007). For example, Barbara believed that the hierarchical structure of the public administration system has limited the efficacy of food policy enforcement. She said,

> *"I always think that what the government says is one thing, but how they implement it is another thing. The state (central government) requires local authorities to carry it out, but the local authorities carry it out in another way. So, layer by layer, going down from the top to the bottom, basically nothing remains. So, there is no way to trust it." (Barbara, interview 1)*

In fact, Chen (2013) has noted from some empirical work in China that the penalty for the liable industry players is considerably small compared to the potentially devastating consequences caused to the financial and healthy interests of consumers. In this research, Bonnie also believed that punishment was not seriously imposed to lawbreakers although standards have been lifted, which implies the implementation is weak.

> *"To my understanding, it seems some standards have been set up as more stringent, but I don't think that's enough. For example, so far, I didn't see those problematic companies being severely punished. It's far from enough." (Bonnie, interview 1)*

As a result, participants blamed the government for the weak implementation of food regulation which had led to poor industrial compliance. Mary is one of the examples.

> *"I think it's just because the government is weak in regulation. It always speaks aloud but never takes actions to implement [what it has spoken]. All the results are caused by the government. ... I believe if our government was not acting like this, there wouldn't be those… The Chinese government, […] and the weak regulations, are to blame for making the companies acting in this way." (Mary, interview 1)*

Miranda also worried in the same way. She was the only participant who had ever thought of buying domestic infant formula brand for her baby because she herself was once fed by Firmus, a Chinese local brand, when she was a baby. At the beginning, she thought Firmus was a good-enough choice, but at the end, she turned to foreign brands, as a result of her perceived absence of a rigorous food regulation in China, which has impeded the functioning of institutional trust in domestic food (Hobbs & Goddard, 2015). Miranda's comments illustrated how the lack of institutional trust may lead to distrust in domestic food in general.

> *"I'm concerned that they (dairy companies) don't follow the formula (to produce infant formula). You are not sure whether it's been followed as the supervision mechanism is imperfect...There is the national standard of infant formula for all manufacturers to follow, however, some may still break the rules. This is how those previous incidents ended up…Not saying that all domestic infant formula is not trustworthy, yet one or two are being untrustworthy and the whole market ends up untrustworthy." (Miranda, interview 1)*

In the second interview, Miranda consistently repeated that *"when I have my own baby, I'm just not feeling very assured with it [domestic brand Firmus]"* (Miranda, interview 2), as another explanation of the reason why she had brought foreign brands instead of domestic ones.

Again, on the contrary, food regulation in developed countries was perceived as much stricter in the implementation and sanction measures. For example, in Linda's understanding, the US has the strictest standard on infant formula and they enforce this standard in a very serious way.

> *"Only a few companies can make infant formula in the US, and they are audited every year, by a super strict standard. If any issues are found, they will be forced to close down. So, the punishment is very severe. Basically, the possibility that they get into problem is super little – the only disadvantage is that their raw milk is not as good as New Zealand, not that clear and pure since there is still some industrial pollution in the US." (Linda, interview 2)*

Compared to Bonnie's previous comment (p. 89) stating problematic companies not being severely punished in China, Linda's comment indicates that the "strict standard" and "severe punishment" in America guarantees a very positive outcome regarding the quality and safety of American infant formula. Agreeing with Linda, Vivian also believes that severe sanction measures will prevent food industry actors from misconduct.

> *"In foreign countries, food fraud of infant formula may get punished seriously, so the illegal cost of fraud is rather high, so the maker will try their best to avoid making such mistakes. Whereas in our country, the cost is rather low, so the possibility of making mistakes is relatively high…So, I will compare in my mind, if*

> *the illegal cost is little, people will make mistakes, because unless they are caught, they will make big money. Yet in foreign countries, people will think of the consequences – if caught they will be wiped out, even not being caught they don't make that much money – so they will not try to take such a risk." (Vivian, interview 1)*

At a superficial level, many participants stated that it seems there was "little negative news" reporting food safety incidents in foreign countries, which could also be evidence of the positive outcome of superior food regulation in these countries. Through measures of punishment and sanctions, food manufacturers would be encouraged to produce up-to-standard food products rather than making mistakes. This is in line with Meijboom et al. (2006) regarding the double roles of the government to be responsible for its own actions, as well as stimulating other actors in the food chain to take responsibilities.

As pointed out by scholars in previous studies, when impersonal structures are in place, people will feel secure about the situation and be enabled to act in anticipation of a successful future endeavour (McKnight et al., 1998; Zucker, 1986). The lack of institutional protection, on the contrary, may create suspects and restrain one's willingness to rely on others in that situation at a general level (Sztompka, 2000). In this study, participants closely linked the trustworthiness of infant formula of a country to their perceived reliability of the food regulation system of that country. This explains the widespread distrust in domestic infant formula among participants from an institutional perspective, given that negative perceptions of domestic food regulation were still salient. The emphasis on implementation also explains why participants' perceived reliability of domestic food regulation does not increase along with the promulgation of new rules and laws.

5.1.2. Intentions, Norms, and Values

Sociologists argue that trust structures social life in a collective manner, which links trust to a set of moral values, social cohesion, or a cultural community in an abstract sense (Misztal, 2013). With regards to food regulation, apart from the impersonal rules and laws which provide structural assurance for trust building, participants also paid intensive attention to more intangible factors which underpin the food regulation practice. To be specific, the research

found that, whether the government as food regulator has demonstrated its intentions to care about the interests of the public, and how such intentions were justified by the norms and values shared by the society, were two major factors to influence participants' trust building in infant formula, from an institutional perspective.

5.1.2.1. The government's intentions and concerns

The way people make decisions sometimes affects trust more than how people actually behave, especially when the trustor raises questions such as "do they consider my interests and welfare?" (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). It is clear that participants also raised such questions and they expected an institutional level of safeguard to protect them from being taken advantage of by profit seekers of the food industry. Respecting and incorporating consumer interests within the food regulation system is recognised as crucial to the enhancement of trust (Kjærnes et al., 2007). Therefore, of importance is not only the setting up and implementation of food regulations but the food regulator's concern for the interests and welfare of consumers.

For common consumers, the quality of infant formula, the content of nutrients, the sources of raw materials, and the way of product processing, etc., are mostly credence attributes which cannot be easily examined and confirmed even during or after consumption (Darby & Karni, 1973). In this case, the food regulator plays a vital role in monitoring the industry actors and ensuring compliance. The consumers' expectation is that the government sincerely takes care of food safety for consumers, based on the moral obligation associated with the legitimacy of the government and its regime in a society (Meijboom et al., 2006). In this case, how much the government intends to speak for the consumers' interests become a significant factor that influences consumer trust in industrial products.

Take Mary as an example, infant formula products from New Zealand and Japan were considered trustworthy, based on her perceptions of how much the government of these countries are concerned about its people, in particular babies and women, according to her personal experience with and knowledge of New Zealand. Mary was one of the two participants expecting their second child. For her first child, she chose Japanese infant formula at the beginning. Later on, due to the fear of potential radiation after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake, she changed to several other brands, which she found to be not as good as the previous Japanese

brand. For her second child, she decided to buy infant formula from New Zealand, which she never bought for her first child before. She stated that,

> *"I think either Japan or Korea, in Asia, Japan and Korea relatively have better protection of baby products, so I kind of trust them…and I learned that Japan as a country has good regulation over its food products…And New Zealand has very strict requirements for baby formula. It has been doing well in protecting its babies and women. So, I trust the policy of this country, and another one, I trust that the policy will regulate companies…Therefore, truly trusting this company may be mainly because of the trust in the policy of this country, as it indeed pays attention to protecting its babies. Foreign countries pretty much care for women and babies." (Mary, interview 1)*

Mary reported that she had visited New Zealand and stayed in that country for a while. Such experience left her with very a positive impression of that country, including New Zealand food regulation. She also has some friends living in New Zealand and Australia who can help to buy and mail infant formula products for her. All these factors have strengthened her trust in New Zealand infant formula. Yet, as she admitted, beyond the policies and requirements, and beyond the companies, there is an essential belief that "*foreign countries pretty much care for women and babies*". In Mary's comments, she simultaneously addressed 1) the setting up of "strict requirements" and "policy" of New Zealand food regulation; 2) the enforcement and the implementation of those requirements and policies to "regulate companies"; and 3) the government's intention to take care of consumers' interests ("*have better protection of baby products*", "*indeed pays attention to protecting its babies and women*"). These elements collectively work to sustain her trust in the final products of New Zealand infant formula that she bought and consumed.

In the literature, the setting up and the enforcement of food regulation rules and laws has been discussed intensively in relation to fostering consumer trust in food (Berg, 2004; Henderson et al., 2010; Kjærnes et al., 2007), whereas the intention and motivation of the institutional organisations to do so did not receive equal attention. For a product like infant formula which is of high-involvement and high-perceived risk, the intention dimension of trust may be even more sensitive in shaping trust.

For Yilian, in her memory, little negative publicity of infant formula incidents in foreign countries has been exposed to her. Furthermore, she believes that foreign countries may care very much about the interests and welfare of women and babies. Based on the trusting belief that foreign governments care much about its people, she also believes that foreign governments will be strict in food regulation, hence, the food quality in foreign countries could be better guaranteed. Her comments illustrated as follows.

> *"In foreign countries, they have been producing baby formula for so many years, yet so far I haven't heard about any incidents regarding baby formula in foreign countries. And people over there pay more attention to this aspect, like Canada, Australia, and Europe, they pay a lot of attention to baby-related issues. In these countries, if you are willing to have babies, the government will give you subsidies in order to stimulate local population growth. Since these governments are very concerned, much more concerned than China, they must make it stricter in related aspects. If their infant formula is always problematic, what would local people think [about having a baby] given their population is smaller? Perhaps they will be even less willing to have babies." (Yilian, interview 1)*

On the other hand, for her home country, Yilian holds a much more negative perception regarding the government's intentions and actions to protect average consumers. After the 2008 Melamine Scandal, she became very doubtful about all domestic infant formula, and viewed them as "not secure". She doubted not only the infant formula manufacturers but also how much the government is caring about the interests and welfare of the public.

> *"But China is different (from foreign countries), as China has such a huge population...You know China doesn't pay that much attention although we have so many babies. You know, like the recent vaccine incident, I didn't see many actions [taken by the government]…I don't feel secure with domestic infant formula, probably just as what I've mentioned, I feel the government is not very caring and does not value the strength of regulations. In China, actions are always taken after something has happened, nothing would be done before the problem happened. These are mainly issues of national policy and regulation in all aspects." (Yilian, interview 1)*

In the above comment, Yilian explicitly raised her concern that in her home country, the government does not pay enough attention to taking care of the public welfare in food, in particular for the protection of babies. Such perception erodes the basis of trust with regards to benevolence, which refers to the extent to which the other party is believed to want to do good to the trustor (Mayer et al., 1995). Therefore, it is difficult for Yilian to build up trust in domestic infant formula because the government "*is not very caring*" and does not exercise its regulatory power properly over the industry. Rather than preventing consumers from being harmed, according to Yilian's statement, the government only takes actions after such harm has been done to the consumers, which greatly increases the perceived risk of consuming domestic infant formula.

Not surprisingly, the intention of the government to play its roles in an appropriate way was also questioned by participants. Such questions have been demonstrated in participants' interpretation of the underpinning reasons for the unsatisfying governmental performance in food regulation. For example, Penny commented that,

> *"Now here is such a big problem, which means it's not developed in one day or two, and some regulatory authorities must have been turning a blind eye to it, as it's impossible that they are completely unaware of this problem, in my opinion. So, in this aspect, I distrust the national food hygiene surveillance and regulation." (Penny, interview 1)*

Kjærnes et al. (2007) argue that there could be conflicts of interests in relation to the orientation of the regulatory authorities, namely, towards the industry and the responsibility of protecting consumer welfare. In Penny's comment, regulation authorities were accused of "turning a blind eye" to the undesirable situation. In the centre of such criticism is how little the regulator has prioritised the interests of consumers. "A blind eye" indicates the deliberate ignorance of the responsibility which the food regulator was expected to take. Therefore, it has led to the disconfirmation of the regulator's goodwill towards consumers. Likewise, in Yilian's earlier comment, the government was accused of "*not valuing the strength of regulation implementation*", and only taking actions after incidents, which also implies that food regulators do not prioritise the interests of consumers by strengthening the structural assurances to prevent detrimental incidents from occurring.

Previous research has suggested that it is important for food regulators to emphasise their concern about public wellbeing with food (de Jonge et al., 2008). The intention to improve food regulation and enhance food safety may be taken for granted as part of the government's responsibility and moral obligation in modern societies (Meijboom et al., 2006). However, it is another case whether the consumers equally perceive the government as caring as the government intends to demonstrate, or is as caring as the consumers require it to be. Once the government is perceived as not caring, such as the case of Chinese Government for many participants in this research, consumers may feel a higher possibility of being taken advantage of by food industry actors since the regulators are careless.

5.1.2.2. Social norms and shared values

When participants questioned how much the government is caring about the welfare of its people, and how much such caring is demonstrated in food regulation, they treated the government as a collective body. Scholars also argue that trust in institutional organisations is actually trust in individuals who constitute the organisations (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). From a social-cultural perspective, the way of thinking and actions taken by individuals will be inevitably influenced by the culture of that society (Scott, 2014), in a subconscious way. This research reveals that the social norms and shared values conveyed in the actions of food regulators and their representatives have also been taken into consideration by participants in evaluating the trustworthiness of infant formula.

The representatives are one of the direct channels for consumers to interact with the organisations, thus, participants may have a chance to interpret the social norms and shared values through interactions with these representatives of food regulation authorities. For example, Miranda, who herself is a government officer, learned from her experience.

> *"As I work in the government office, I have some knowledge of how quality control and security control authorities work, that is, indeed the regulation work is not very reassuring." (Miranda, interview 1)*

She further commented on the social environment which was corrupted by the impulsiveness to pursue profit regardless of the means, resulting in the industrial wide crisis of trust.

> *"And I also think that nowadays there is an impulsiveness among many companies. And you can't just blame the companies. The impulsiveness covers the entire industrial chain. Just like the value we are after now, everything is for money and profit. However, they don't understand how to get profit by legal ways, and they just want more, regardless of the means. So, under such an ill environment, there must be some companies [that] get blinded by greed and eventually trigger a trust crisis." (Miranda, interview 1)*

Another participant Katie, who also works for the government sector, gave an even more detailed description regarding the way the civil service system works, according to her real-life experience.

> *"I know how loose the officers are at work since I myself work for the inspection and quarantine department. I work at the airport, but I know how the whole civil service system works. I know how loose and casual those staff are. According to the rules, all fruits, dairy, egg products, soil, raw vegetables, blood products are not allowed to bring in China from overseas. But if you take two mangoes back from Australia, it's impossible for me to check you. I don't even bother to check unless you bring in a large box of steak which is more like smuggling, then I have to check." (Katie, interview 1)*

According to their personal experience, participants formed their own perceptions of how the food regulators work in their home country. "*The way how people do things*" or "*the way that people think is appropriate to do things*" reflects the social norms and shared values of that society, which are closely linked to the fundamental motives of any human actions (Scott, 2014). So, Katie concluded that,

> *"There are always countermeasures to cope with the policies. If you can't make changes to the human nature of laziness, all policies will go in vain. The apathy of the companies, and the apathy of inspection staff, and the whole nation…" (Katie, interview 1)*

Social norms and shared values also influence trust building in a more general but also a more fundamental way. In most social interactions, trusting one's in-group and assuming shared values is often preferred to initial distrust because the former is the easier option to reduce complexity, while the latter discourages one to explore and adapt to the environment for the reason of self-protection (Luhmann, 1979). Furthermore, Gambetta (1988) argues that initial trust towards the other party is not usually based on evidence but on the lack of contrary evidence. However, in this research, it is evident that participants held initial distrust of domestic infant formula, and initial trust in foreign infant formula, partly because of their lack of general trust in people of their home country, which can be explained by the feature of China as a "low-social trust" society where people are inclined to trust those who are closely related to them, and distrust those outside their family and kinship group (Fukuyama, 1996; Knight et al., 2008)

As revealed in the data, participants generally have less faith in their own nation, seeing Chinese people as more cunning, more profit-driven, and looser in food regulation and food manufacturing than people of developed countries. In contrast, German and Japanese people were most frequently perceived as rigorous and careful in national personality. Participants generally believe that such rigorousness and carefulness will be also demonstrated in their food regulation and food processing. Conversations with participants have also demonstrated how such perceptions of the national personality could impact participants' evaluation of trustworthiness of infant formula of that country. For example, when talking about why she prefers infant formula from Japan and Germany, Zenny asserted that,

> *"Personally, I believe that Japanese and German people both have a very rigorous spirit and they strictly follow the standards…Then you got to learn about the rigour of Germans in their life, work, and other aspects. German handicraft and other things are well recognised over the world. And for Japanese, their rigour in the attitudes towards work is indeed worthy of my admiration." (Zenny, interview 1)*

Charlotte also holds similar opinions regarding the rigorousness of Japanese people in general. She trusts and holds a very favourable attitude towards Japanese infant formula accordingly.

> *"I think Japanese are very rigorous, and they do things in detail, very rigorous, and up to standard…I have to admit that their products are better than Chinese products…You say Japanese baby formula is not good? Don't you see their own Japanese babies are feeding with Japanese baby formula?" (Charlotte, interview 1)*

Also, social norms and shared values do not exist independently of the fundamental development of a society (Scott, 2014). For example, Miranda believes what the government may prioritise is related to the economic development of that country. She commented that,

> *"For those well-developed countries, they might have endured and gone through this ['profit-seeking'] stage and therefore, their management and regulation system would be more robust than ours." (Miranda, interview 1)*

This comment assumes that developed countries have gone through a necessary 'profit-seeking' stage, indicating that in these countries, the interests of consumers are better-taken care of now than in the past. The "*management and regulation system*" is also assumed to have become "*more robust*" and more "*protective*" since it has developed or evolved together with the entire society. According to Miranda's remark, a developing country may prioritise economic development over the careful protection of consumer rights. Hence, the government intentions and actions may be more focused on boosting economic prosperity (for example, through industrialisation) in developing countries. Whereas in developed countries, more attention may have been paid to maintain and improve public welfare, so that better consumer protection could be anticipated in developed countries. In this research, while identifying their home country as a developing country, participants tend to believe that economic development will be prioritised by the government and limited effort would be made to improve other aspects of social life. By addressing the development status of a country, participants tried to reconcile the inconsistency between the expectation of the government to take care of consumers and the reality of unsatisfied institutional performance. For example,

> *"After all, we are a developing country, so we may not have very high standard of requirements." (Charlotte, interview 1)*

> *"For a country like us at the stage of pursuing its economic development, you must have had something left behind. It hasn't been many years since we have established our country, so we just can't find a solution, not to mention our huge population. The only way is to accept it. Don't accept? Think about the countries that are even behind us and those much poorer areas." (Vicky, interview 1)*

These justifications, embedded in a specific social context, help participants to make the unsatisfying performance of domestic food regulation understandable. However, it is also possible that such justifications may further strengthen distrust among some participants, as these drawbacks are rooted in the fundamental social settings and cannot be changed in the short term through individual efforts. In this sense, it is as argued by Luhmann (1979, p. 74) that "distrust has an inherent tendency to endorse and reinforce itself in social interactions".

5.1.3. From County-of-Origin to Country-of-Consumption

The previous analysis has highlighted the importance of institutional food regulation in building consumer trust in infant formula. Thus, the COO which signals where the infant formula is from and indicates relevant food regulation becomes important for consumer trust building. Further analysis reveals that, in the globalisation of production chains, there are various COO cues signalling the journey of infant formula from production to consumption, and collectively shaping trust at different stages from the farm to the table. The most important COO cues to trust highlighted in this research are country-of-ingredients (COI), country-of-manufacture (COM), and country-of-consumption (COC).

5.1.3.1. Country-of-ingredients

The quality and authenticity pertaining to food, such as dairy products, may be closely linked to its geographical origin (De la Guardia & Illueca, 2013). Many participants agreed that the origin of the raw milk, which is the most important ingredient of infant formula, matters to the quality of the final product, and thus, more trust was placed in products sourced from "better" COI.

For example, Yuki weighted heavily the origin of milk when choosing infant formula brands.

> *"I chose Nestle because I like this brand quite a lot, after all, it's from Europe, a better origin of milk…European milk is more recognised now. North Europe, NZ, and Australia, milk of these two large regions are relatively better. I think American milk is not as good as European, so I leave Mead John as the second option. So, the origin of milk is another factor that influences my choice." (Yuki, interview 1)*

The natural conditions and environment of a country are important for consumer trust in this regard. For example,

> *"Since the environment (in New Zealand) is so great, the milk shall also be great. Then the milk powder shall be great as well." (Ruby, interview 1)*

> *"Infant formula from areas like Europe and Australia, where the environment is good, will have better quality in the raw milk." (Bonnie, interview 1)*

However, beyond the natural environment, participants have noted that there are also crucial institutional factors that support the quality of ingredients. Vicky, who favours Europe, New Zealand and Australia as good origins of raw milk since these countries/regions are clean and pure, raised the concern that China as a developing country, may prioritise economic development, focus on boosting the production, and leave pollution issues behind (Vicky, interview 1). Furthermore, Barbara mentioned that different countries (areas) have different standards and requirements for raw milk.

> *"Because those infant formula of foreign brands but manufactured in China, they use local milk in China, and I think it's not very clean, it's not as good as foreign milk. Previously I read some information about the requirements of raw milk. It's said that American requirements are lower than European requirements, and it's even much lower than Australia's, which means the Australian requirements are very high." (Barbara, interview 1)*

These comments imply that a "pure" and "clean" country and the high quality of raw milk is not only a direct outcome of the geographic advantages and natural resources, but also an institutionally-manipulated outcome of the overall arrangements and approaches taken by the

authorities of a country towards the nature, agriculture, and dairy farming. In this sense, participants' trust induced by a favourable COI is also partly an outcome of the institutional settings beyond the geographic indicator.

5.1.3.2. Country-of-manufacture

The COI is just the first step of the international journey of infant formula production. When entering into the manufacturing stage, COM plays a critical role as "*it's not the place of milk source that determines the processing line and the final products, any mistake in processing may lead to non-qualified products at the end*" (Sunny, interview 1).

Participants believed that infant formula products manufactured in different countries may be different in quality, and ultimately different in trustworthiness. There are reasons for such difference perceived by participants. Firstly, the developed countries are supposed to be more advanced in manufacturing techniques and premium formula design which are backed up by more advanced scientific achievement over the years. For example,

> *"It's said that some foreign brands may have a better formula with extra elements like DHA, which is necessary for the baby's growth. So, their formula may be more scientific than domestic formulae. It may also be the experience accumulated by these foreign brands over the years." (Iris, interview 1)*

Secondly, the differences also lie in the institutional arrangements of food regulation, which again refers back to the food-related standards, rules and laws, and the implementation of these rules and laws. For example, Sunny gave credit to the strict standards for her trust in infant formula made in Germany: "*because their manufacturing techniques and requirements are under very strict standards*" (Sunny, interview 1). Another participant also avoided "made in China" infant formula of overseas brands because she believed that "*the Chinese version should be produced in China, so probably the standard is different from overseas standards*" (Yilian, interview 1).

Therefore, the perceived reliability of food regulation systems is influential in participants' evaluation of infant formula manufactured in different countries. For example, Linda acknowledged and ascribed such differences to the varying standards of different countries.

> *"For the same type of product, with the same brand name, and the same specifications, if manufactured in different factories – in domestic factory or overseas factory – the workmanship would be different…After all, for the same type of standard, our national standard is different from the American standard and European standard. […] Especial our national standard, usually set at the low end. It's not a high standard so that both high- and low-end manufactures can survive." (Linda, interview 1)*

In the follow-up interview, Linda stated that she would like to accept infant formula products which are "sub-packaged" in China, but only as "the last choice".

> *"I also take these sub-packaged products into consideration, as long as the ingredients are fine, and the source of raw milk is good…But it is the last choice for me to buy this type of products that use imported milk powder to sub-package in China…In sub-packaging, no matter how much you work on sterility, there are still possibilities." (Linda, interview 2)*

Katie and Amy also explicitly expressed their concerns with imported infant formula that has gone through repackaging in China.

> *"In this [repackaging] process, there must be some sort of contamination or something may be added into the milk powder, therefore I'm not very assured." (Katie, interview 1)*

> *"I know some brands are using imported milk powder, but they do the packaging in China, which means these products have gone through reprocessing and repackaging. I just think that as long as China is involved in any part of the process, there will be some sort of danger." (Amy, interview 1)*

As illustrated in Amy's comment, participants' concerns regarding the potential contamination and adulteration in the process in China were industrial-wide ("*as long as China is involved in any part of the process, there will be some sort of danger*").

When a branded product is manufactured in a country with a less reputable image that of the brand origin, previous research suggests that COM may have negative effects on product evaluation, and the magnitude of such effect may vary according to the brand equity (Hui & Zhou, 2003). There are also debates that the manufacturing origin has become largely irrelevant to product evaluation (Pharr, 2005; Samiee, 2010; Usunier, 2006). This research, however, reveals that COM still plays a significant role in signalling product quality and shaping trust in food through the perceived institutional protection provided by the food regulation of that country.

5.1.3.3. Country-of-consumption

Food products, despite the origins of ingredients and manufacture, are supposed to reach the threshold set by the food regulation system of a country in order to be sold in that country. Many participants reported that they preferred to buy infant formula products that are sold in other countries which they believed to have stricter food regulations. It indicates that the country where the products are to be consumed, i.e., COC, is another factor that contributes to trust building for participants.

For foreign branded products sold in China, participants expressed not only concerns that China as the COM may result in potential contamination or adulteration in infant formula but also concerns that foreign brands may lower their quality standard in China given that they are subject to a lower domestic standard. Consequently, many participants did not consider buying imported infant formula from local retailers as their first choice. For example, Katie worried that,

> *"So, after entering into China, no matter what the brands are, they may lower the requirement of themselves to meet the great demand and needs of the Chinese. Because the amount is so great that they have to lower the cost and quality to feed this amount." (Katie, interview 1)*

Due to the perceived differences in food regulation in different countries, Katie even stated that:

> *"I think they (products of the same brand sold in China and sold in other countries) are completely different things." (Katie, interview 1)*

On the other hand, participants believed that domestic manufacturers are capable to produce products of a higher quality standard if the products are for export, as Sunny claimed,

> *"Some domestically manufactured products which are to export to Europe may be subject to a higher standard than those for domestic markets." (Sunny, interview 1)*

With regards to trust, it is not surprising that statements were made among participants as such,

> *"The most secure way is that I can see my friend buying this infant formula from a supermarket in Holland and mailing it to me. This is the most secure way to me, and I don't really trust any others." (Penny, interview 1).*

These comments imply that COC accounts for the overall level of trust in food as it informs the level of reliability of the food regulation which is the ultimate safeguard before the food products are consumed by consumers of this country. As a result, many participants preferred to buy infant formula products that are sold in foreign countries which they believed to have stricter food regulations.

Previous studies suggest that COO could be influential to trust in products and services (Jiménez & San Martín, 2010; Michaelis, Woisetschläger, Backhaus, & Ahlert, 2008), and the knowledge of the food origin is believed to play an import role in food choice (Cook, Crang, & Thorpe, 1998), with the perception of the government's regulatory power more important than the country image itself with regards to trust (Knight, Holdsworth, & Mather, 2007). The above analysis of how various COO cues impacted participants' trust in infant formula further reveals that, from ingredients to manufacturing and consumption, COO cues associated with countries which have been involved in different stages of the food provisioning process collectively contributed to the construction of trust, although not necessarily even in the magnitude of influence. In conclusion, COO cues, including COI, COM, and COC, of an infant

formula product, play a significant role in building consumer trust through their reference to the related food regulation systems.

5.1.4. The Role of Food Regulation and Institutional Trust

In modern societies, trust in food is found to be closely related to the division of responsibility over food and its provision, and the role of government in the regulation of food has been intensively addressed in literature (de Jonge et al., 2008; Henderson et al., 2010; Kjærnes et al., 2007). As illustrated in the previous analysis, concerns about the weakness of domestic food regulation as well as confidence in the reliability of food regulation in developed countries have contributed to participants' distrust in domestic infant formula and trust in overseas infant formula respectively.

There is an emphasis on the regulatory power of the government over food industry actors, by measures of punishment and sanctions against those who do not conform with regulation. One of the participants, Bonnie, stated that "*companies are profit-driven, so they are keen to gain more profit as long as there is still profit available. If the regulation and control is weak in foreign countries, they may end up with the same circumstances*" (Bonnie, interview 1). "The same circumstances" here refers to the dissatisfied food safety environment in China. Bonnie's comment emphasises the importance of the institutional foundation of trust in food, regardless of whether in China or other countries. Whether the impersonal food regulation system is perceived as in place or not significantly influences participants' trust in food products associated with that country at a general level.

With regard to domestic food regulation, although disappointed and dissatisfied with its standards and its implementation, participants still highlighted the important role of the government in building their trust in infant formula. For example, Bonnie continued her comments,

> *"But the more important thing, in my opinion, is the regulation standard of government authorities. The standards of infant formula should be revised at a national level. It may not be the sole responsibility of companies, as the regulation*

and control system may be not as stringent as those of Europe or other countries." (Bonnie, interview 1)

Other participants also indicated that improving and enhancing food regulation is essential to grow their trust in domestic infant formula. For example,

"I think I can only trust again if a sound national regulation system is established…I can only count on a more stringent national regulation system…You can't deny that everyone has a seed of evil in his heart, and the key is to have external parties to supervise and lead people towards good virtue, and guys will be punished if they are caught behaving wrongly." (Miranda, interview 1)

"I may consider trusting domestic brands unless there is no longer negative news, our country has set up many relevant policies, the regulation indeed becomes effective, the legal sanction is strong, and the mainstream of consumers have good experience with the product." (Penny, interview 1)

However, if the government was viewed as not caring, its efforts on improving the institutional assurance may be subsequently viewed as not beneficial to consumer trust. For example,

"But our government…One officer corrupts, then those under him corrupt as well; one regulates loosely, others also follow. And they don't make the people in the centre. So how the government works on improving the dairy industry is not making sense to me." (Mary, interview 1)

These comments reflect participants' strong demand for an "up-to-standard" and "caring" domestic food regulation system to oversee the food industry so as to build trust in domestic infant formula. Such emphasis on institutional trust makes Chinese consumers distinctive from consumers in developed countries who rely more on market actors and civil society organisations (e.g., consumer associations), as argued by Zhang et al. (2015a).

This section outlines how institutional food regulation may impact consumer trust in infant formula throughout the entire food process from ingredient to the product, from the

manufacturer to retailer and to end consumer. Institutional food regulation plays an essential role in providing structural assurances for consumers to build trust in infant formula at a general level in a given situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). The setting up and implementation of food regulation rules and laws, as well as the intention of the authority to utilise such regulation systems to protect the public, work together to generate a sense of security for consumers and enable them to trust a specific infant formula brand and its products which are subject to such regulation.

5.2. Interpersonal Relationships and Interpersonal Trust

As indicated previously, most participants of this research were inexperienced mothers at the time of the first interview. Even for the two participants who were having their second child, their actual experience with infant formula was limited to a small range of brands that they have consumed in feeding the first baby. In this case, experience and reviews shared by other consumers could be utilised as second-handed knowledge for inexperienced consumers to evaluate the trustworthiness of the brand (McKnight et al., 1998).

This research reveals that, in the process of selecting a trustworthy infant formula for their coming babies, participants frequently consulted and sought recommendations from trusted personal contacts within their social network. Furthermore, they treated trusted persons as a channel to get access to the desired infant formula so that they could avoid conventional retail outlets in their home country which they trust less. Through trusting a person, participants were found to build trust in the infant formula which is recommended and/or purchased by that trusted person, in a trust transference process (Stewart, 2003).

5.2.1. WOM as Trusted Information Source

Although participants were inexperienced consumers of infant formula, it was not difficult for them to draw on past experience of those within the scope of their social network. The process of one mother consulting another is actually a process of word of mouth (WOM) communication, which is the verbal communication related to a certain brand, product, or service among individuals (Arndt, 1967). Analysis of these interviews reveals that in the process of WOM communication, first-hand experience concerning specific brands transferred

from existing consumers to inexperienced participants to become second-hand knowledge of the latter.

WOM from trusted acquaintances, such as friends, colleagues, and relatives, significantly influenced participants' evaluation of the trustworthiness of target infant formula brands, although to various extents. Some participants, like Sarah and Suzanne, heavily relied on their friends' recommendations and treated WOM as the only trusted information source, thus their trusted brands for purchase were also limited to what their friends were using.

Labelling herself as "*that kind of person who follows the majority*", Sarah admitted that "*I just have a single source of information from people around me…it seems I've done nothing except for the word of mouth from my friends*" (Sarah, interview 1). Furthermore, she emphasised that she would only select from brands recommended by people around.

> *"I would just follow others, those experienced mothers… I'll only buy what they have already tried and used. Since they have used it, I think it should be no problem…I think their babies are all good with it [infant formula], so my baby should also be alright…As long as the baby is fed with the genuine products [of these brands], he/she will be all good." (Sarah, interview 1)*

Suzanne also simplified her decision-making on infant formula by relying on recommendations from familiar colleagues and close relatives, making her choice mainly a result of "*the influence of my colleagues, as I didn't do other investigation, not even checking anything*".

> *"I spend a long time at work every day, so actually I am more influenced by my colleagues, including referring to their suggestions when choosing baby formula brands. And within the family, my sisters who have already had babies also gave me lots of suggestions." (Suzanne, interview 1)*

A number of participants relied less on recommendations from others because they were more confident in their own ability and knowledge to make a good judgement and decision. However, acknowledging themselves as inexperienced in infant formula, this group of participants still

treated WOM recommendations as complementary support to their judgement, given such recommendations were considered trustworthy. For example,

> *"I'm relatively confident in my own ability to make good choices…in this regard, as long as I and my husband are agreed with each other, our opinion weights 80% and others' opinions weights 20%. That is, our own views will weight heavier. Other people's opinions don't affect us too much…It's more like that we were casually chatting when I asked 'which brand did you choose', and they said that they bought Aptamil, and they also said Aptamil was quite good. This [comment] just strengthened our trust in this brand." (Sally, interview 1)*

Another participant, Miranda, started with personal investigation but ended up relying on WOM recommendations from acquaintances as a strategy to reduce complexity.

> *"At that time when choosing among different brands, bearing in mind that it's the only food for the baby, I felt it must be carefully selected and compared, which made me really annoyed…At the very beginning, I did a search about the advantages and disadvantages of different brands, I did all these by myself and felt tired. But later on, I realised that I shouldn't take this matter as too big a deal. Rather, I should just rely on average peoples' judgement. Then I started to listen to my colleagues' advice…At the end, I collected the advice from my colleagues and just did a comparison among these selective brands, which was more targeted…And I found out that the majority of my friends around are having Aptamil, so I also selected this one." (Miranda, interview 1)*

For other participants, WOM was an important source of information which collectively works with other available information to facilitate their evaluation of potential choices. For example, Sharon did online research and asked for recommendations simultaneously.

> *"When I had time, I just surfed on the internet to learn about baby formula brands and found there are several popular brands. Then I listened to my friends who have had bottle-fed babies. They told me which one is good, and which one they are*

feeding the baby. So, I searched on the internet to learn more about the brands recommended by them…I did these all at the same time." (Sharon, interview 1)

Previous research has found that Chinese consumers tend to perceive relatives and friends to be more trustworthy sources of information (Liu, Pieniak, & Verbeke, 2014). Compared to the information that participants could acquire, such as online reviews and advertisements, WOM recommendations from acquaintances were viewed as more trustworthy and more influential on developing participants' trust in infant formula brands. Detailed experience shared by acquaintances provides traceable evidence for trust building. For example, Suzanne justified her reliance on her friends and relatives as follows.

"At least these (friends and relatives) are traceable samples around me. If I'm to learn from other sources, let say, online forums or other sites, people may live in different areas, perhaps she lives in the north, so their diet is quite different from us, so she would be a very different sample to me. And I don't know whether those messages online are true or false." (Suzanne, interview 1)

Furthermore, consulting acquaintances promotes the sense of security, which is viewed as critical, particularly for the emotional aspect of trust based on the familiarity of the two parties (Lewis & Weigert, 1985), whereas a stranger may possibly be a "daigou" person who wants to reach out and make a profit by selling products to another person. For example,

"If I ask people who I don't know, perhaps they could be "daigou" persons of a specific brand or a representative of that brand, so when they give you suggestions, it may be a kind of advertising or promoting. So, I think I'd better ask relatives and friends whom I know, which make me feel more secure." (Sandy, interview 1)

In addition, WOM recommendations from acquaintances were usually accompanied by visible evidence of the physical presentation of babies, which was viewed as the most direct clues to evaluate the reliability of a certain infant formula product before gaining their own experience. For Linda, the examples of her colleagues' babies have strongly convinced her trust in the recommended two brands. For Charlotte, the visible "*real experience*" is also the "*most important thing*" which comes from feeding practice.

"About the selection of brands, I mainly refer to the brands that my colleagues are using, via word of mouth…Again, it's by word of mouth. I may not believe the example of only one baby, neither may I believe the examples of two babies, yet basically there are about 10 colleagues feeding with these two brands…Many people are using these brands, and their babies are growing well without any abnormal issues." (Linda, interview 1)

"So, I prefer those who have real experience, after all, I can see their children have grown up, right?…I think the most important thing comes from practice. When my child has grown up, people may also ask what brand I fed my kid…Well, let say, my son has grown up to be a smart boy, then I can tell people that my colleagues recommended Aptamil to me at that time, and indeed my boy goes well with it, and he has grown now, healthy and smart. So, I will show my successful experience to other people." (Charlotte, interview 1)

Positive WOM was found to be an outcome from satisfaction and trust, according to Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003b). Therefore, WOM recommendations from experienced acquaintances may be treated as a trusted source of information to indicate the trustworthiness of targeted brands, which may compensate participants' lack of direct interaction with these brands. In turn, positive WOM recommendation, together with other clues, serves as an endorsement for inexperienced consumers to form initial trust in these brands (McKnight et al., 1998). In this sense, WOM is also an antecedent of consumer trust (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008), which explains the role of WOM recommendations from trusted acquaintances on building participants' initial trust in inexperienced brands of infant formula. The recommendations from experienced consumers who participants considered trustworthy facilitate trust transference from the acquaintance to the recommended brand, through a WOM-based communication process (Liu, Lee, Liu, & Chen, 2018; Stewart, 2003).

5.2.2. Trusted Person as Trusted Purchase Channel

Although technically speaking, the purchase channel is not part of the infant formula processing, but it became an issue when participants were talking about how they could trust the final purchased infant formula. Many participants also stated that they trusted the infant

formula of foreign brands purchased directly from overseas the most, especially when such purchase was assisted by a trusted overseas personal contact (e.g., Penny and Tina). Throughout the interviews, it is found that trusted persons played a unique but significant role in building participants' trust in a specific infant formula product, by acting as a bridge to connect participants and the products of their trusted brand.

According to participants, common channels for such overseas products include international shopping sites, domestic shopping sites which could handle imported goods, "daigou" persons who offer overseas purchasing services, and overseas personal contacts. For example, Katie was advised by her friend not to trust online shopping sites due to concerns of counterfeits.

> *"My friend in Japan told me that even Amazon Japan would sell products mixed with counterfeits. It practices this according to the address, as some orders are directly from China. She herself has received counterfeits, so she advised me not to trust this too much." (Katie, interview 1)*

Therefore, for infant formula, she said,

> *"I would ask my friends to buy on behalf of me, rather than doing overseas purchasing on these cross-border e-commerce sites." (Katie, interview 1)*

Sunny also preferred to buy from overseas via friends or relatives and viewed it as "*the most secure way*" as well, because "*she is a friend whom I know, and she is not doing this for profit*". But those online shopping sites, "*they are selling products for profit. You don't know the origin of the products, the real origin*" (Sunny, interview 1). If no personal contacts are available to buy on behalf of her in Germany, Sunny believed that she would fly over to buy it in person, or ask another family member to do so.

Carol also asserted that "*the most important is the purchase channel, which determines what brands are available for you*". In her own case, she chose to ask a friend to buy infant formula from the Netherlands on behalf of her. In the case she does not have any reliable friends or relatives overseas, she would try to build up the connections through her existing social network.

> *"If I don't have any, I may try to find someone who has this connection. Yes, make some connection [through friends]. For example, I may ask, do you have any relative over there? Or, which brand do you buy and how do you buy it? Can you introduce your channel to me? Yip, just like that." (Carol, interview 1)*

As another participant Sharon said, she trusts the infant formula she has bought because "*my friend bought it for me from a local supermarket (in Australia). She sent it back to me directly and no other people has touched on it, so I think it's pretty safe*" (Sharon, interview 1). This comment indicates that the trust of Sharon in her friend compensates the gap of trust between the infant formula brand and the product in the case when the distribution process is not trustworthy.

In contrast to an acquaintance living overseas, some "daigou" persons could be people from extended networks whom participants were not necessarily familiar with or had no direct connections with. Therefore, many participants reported not feeling secure to buy infant formula through "daigou" persons with whom they had no direct personal interactions unless extra evidence of trustworthiness is presented. For example, Miranda demonstrated different attitudes towards two "daigou" persons. For the first "daigou" person, she stated that,

> *"I don't know this 'daigou' person in person, and there is actually no trust between us because we are nothing more than the 'buyer-seller' relationship." (Miranda, interview 1)*

Later on, Miranda got into contact with another 'daigou' person who is a friend of her colleague's and she perceived this "daigou" person differently from the first one.

> *"There is a colleague who has a close relationship with me, and that 'daigou' person is actually a previous classmate of this colleague. She told me that her classmate will take videos at the supermarket when she is purchasing something on behalf of someone. So, I think that will make me feel more secure." (Miranda, interview 1)*

Purchase channel and food distribution are essential parts of the food chain to connect the consumer and the food product. In this research, due to the lack of trust in domestic infant formula, including imported products that are sold in China, trusted overseas contacts were largely utilised by participants to replace regular food outlets (e.g., supermarkets) as a trusted purchase channel for infant formula. For most participants, the process of choosing infant formula brands and choosing the purchase channel were equally important. Or, the latter was even more important than the former at some point, because the purchase channel determines whether the participants get the genuine products that they actually trust and require.

5.2.3. Trust Transferred from Acquaintances to Infant Formula

Scholars suggest that trust can be transferred and extended from a trusted party to another party that the trustor has little knowledge of (Doney et al., 1998; Strub & Priest, 1976), through communication and/or cognitive processes (Stewart, 2003). On the one hand, through WOM communication and experience sharing, participants' trust in the acquaintances may be transferred to the recommended brands and products. On the other hand, when utilising overseas persons as a purchase channel, participants' trust in that trusted person extended to the product by cognitively recognising that product is purchased by and thus closely related to the trusted person. The former transference of trust falls on specific brands, whereas the latter falls on the particular purchased items.

There are two features of those acquaintances who are trusted by participants, and from whom such trust could be transferred to specific infant formula brands and products. The first feature is the close relationship between the participant and the acquaintance. Familiarity and emotional bond are viewed as the foundation of trust between individuals (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In this research, the most influential WOM recommendations and shared experience were from close friends or relatives. For example, Iris reported that she was greatly influenced by her close friends, because,

> *"I have a sense of trust in them (friends) as we have a close relationship… I think opinions from friends around are more reliable." (Iris, interview 1)*

Another participant, Vivian, also believed that the information she received from other mothers "*is from real experiences*" and "*there's no way that she knows that I should go this way but tells me to go the other way opposite*" (Vivian, interview 1). Vivian's comment indicates a goodwill for each other in close interpersonal relationships.

It is also found that some participants who have fewer acquaintances available within their social network may rely on information shared in online mothers' groups where members are not necessarily familiar with each other based on the same identity as mothers. For example, Katie was willing to believe that people in mothers' groups would treat each other with good faith and offer trustworthy information.

> *"Perhaps mothers' groups are purer, unlike those groups for 'daigou' persons, where I may wonder if you are promoting yourself if you say good words about something. After all, after being a mother, you may become softer and kinder. I will recommend what my baby is fed with to you, which is a sincere recommendation in good faith. So, I also trust mothers' recommendations for the most part. For those reports and magazines, I don't care much, because you can write good words about the worst product." (Katie, interview 1)*

Serena also acknowledged and believed in the good faith among group members in the sharing of information regarding infant formula.

> *"I think, people in these mothers' groups all are mothers of babies, and of the same age; each of us wants the best for our babies. There is no reason that I ask you which brand of baby formula is good, and you just speak well of what you are selling. They won't act in this way." (Serena, interview 1)*

Sharing the same identity of being a mother makes members in the mothers' group "effectively understand and appreciate the other's wants" (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 122). Thus, a certain level of trust is possible between participants and these unfamiliar mothers, and such trust may further be transferred to recommended infant formula brands.

For a person to be considered as a potential purchase channel to assist with an overseas purchase, a close relationship is also essential. Without such interpersonal trust in these acquaintances, it is unlikely that participants could be assured that the products purchased are exactly what they wanted. Therefore, they may trust in their friends but hold suspicious attitudes towards unknown "daigou" persons. The emotional bonds within close relationships can prevent trust violations (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Misztal, 2013), so that participants could confidently extend their trust in their friends to trust in the products purchased by these friends, and even trust in the friends of these friends. For example, Mary trusts her friends in New Zealand to buy good infant formula for her, and Vicky trusts in her best friend's good friend.

> *"Because I just have too many friends in New Zealand. Not to mention anything else, I trust them. A friend of mine is now doing the 'daigou' business, so it's good that I can ask her to buy infant formula for me, and I can trust her." (Mary, interview 1)*

> *"One of my best friends has another good friend, whose sister lives in Australia. So, my friend's friend is doing 'daigou' business in Australia. I can buy reliable infant formula from her. No doubt that she won't deceive me, because we are close to each other." (Vicky, interview 1)*

The second feature is the strong connections between the acquaintances and the target infant formula brands/products. For trust to transfer, the unknown target has to be perceived as related to the trusted source (Stewart, 2003). As a trusted purchase channel, acquaintances may be considered as physically connected with the target infant formula product. For the communication process, trust in acquaintances who are experienced mothers was viewed as transferrable given that they possess personal feeding experience and knowledge with infant formula that can be shared with participants.

For example, Iris, admitting the close relationship was influential on her choice, further explained that her colleague is also very capable in verifying the quality of products. Therefore, she preferred to trust what is trusted by her friend, which was an easier option for her.

> *"I have a friend who has been very close to me for a long time. Perhaps it's also because of my trust in this person. Not just because of the intimacy between us,*

rather, I think she has a strong analytical logical mindset. I believe the items verified by her should be reliable, yup." (Iris, interview 1)

Barbara also chose to trust her friend who is a professional nurse, an experienced mother of two babies, and a person who is living in Australia. Therefore, she felt comfortable to follow the recommendation from this friend and asked for some infant formula to be sent from Australia through this friend. Although Barbara ended up with another brand and different purchase channel, she reserves her trust in this friend and this brand.

"She is a nurse, a full-time nurse before having babies…So, I thought, that's fine, I can just buy the cow milk baby formula of this brand since she said it's good after feeding with it. Moreover, I trusted her more as she had local experience there (in Australia)." (Barbara, interview 1)

Furthermore, Katie illustrated how such an experience would be accumulated by mothers and how it could be circulated among new mothers in the long term. Thanks to this accumulation and circulation of experience among mothers, new mothers do not need to repeat this process providing they do trust in the work done and shared by pioneers.

"Mothers' feedback is really important. They will give comments about the weakness of this or that brand, and they make comparisons in all aspects. After the comparison, for example, 10 mothers have compared and chosen the brand they trust. I gather the experience of these 10 mothers to guide my selection. I will also share my experience with my friends in future. Then they gather feedback from their circle of friends, and make decisions after layers of screening and examination." (Katie, interview 1)

Based on familiarity and common identity between mothers (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Shapiro et al., 1992), the experience and opinions shared by these acquaintances may also be viewed as reliable and genuine. In this way, experience accumulated by many "others" could be transferred to participants who lack first-hand information of the target product, so that participants may utilise this information to build trust in that product.

Previous literature suggests that when connections in a network are strong and reliable, the trusting party could draw on proof sources from which trust is transferred to a target (Doney et al., 1998). In this research, a flow of trust from acquaintance to infant formula is observed in the process when participants were drawing on trusted persons to decide what infant formula to buy and how to buy. The close relationship, familiarity, and identity worked together to enable participants to believe in the good will of the other party to provide trustworthy information regarding infant formula. In believing that an experienced acquaintance may honestly share real experience of certain infant formula products, and that acquaintance in close relationship would not behave in an opportunistic manner to take advantage of the vulnerability of the other party, participants were able to place trust in the recommendations from these trusted sources, and further to trust the products purchased by acquaintances from overseas.

Different to a previous study on interpersonal trust in food which emphasises the face-to-face interaction between the food chain actors and the consumers (Doney & Cannon, 1997), this research reveals how interpersonal relationships outside of the food chain function as the bridge between a brand/product and the consumer.

5.3. Food Products and Brand Trust

In this research, the infant formula product of a specific brand is the actual object to be trusted and consumed by consumers. For consumers, the product, the brand, and the company who owns the brand and/or produces the product are interrelated and integral as a whole. Although brand has been commonly viewed as an extrinsic cue for product evaluation (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991), the brand name itself is not easily separated from either the company who owns the brand or from the products of that brand. At the product level, brand is the interface between the infant formula maker and the consumer as well as a symbolic representative to help distinguish one product from another (Lau & Lee, 1999). While institutional food regulation and interpersonal relationships provide participants with external assurances concerning the target product, evaluating the trustworthiness of the product itself is an indispensable part of the consumer trust-building process. In the context of this research, participants were provided with a wide range of choices of infant formula brands. They needed to eliminate brands which they did not trust, and make a purchase decision among those they did trust, then finally purchase products of the chosen brand.

This section discusses the product- and brand-related factors in building consumer trust, particularly through trust in the brand. The research data reveals that participants examined the brand's reliability as well as the brand's intentions to ensure trustworthiness. They developed positive expectations on favourable brands and expected them to fulfil their need of feeding a baby before purchase. Furthermore, their personal experience with the brand after consumption facilitates the confirmation of initial trust at the time of purchase.

5.3.1. Brand Reliability

Brand reliability is related to the competence of the brand (and its products) to technically deliver its value promise and satisfy the consumers' needs (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Perceived brand reliability is essential to trust building in the sense that it encourages the consumer to anticipate a satisfying future in consumption, and thereby increases the probability of the brand to be included in a consumer's consideration set, especially in contexts with a high level of involvement and uncertainty (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

Infant formula is a type of processed baby food product and usually branded. Either online or offline, there are plenty of infant formula brands for participants to choose from. Functionally, participants viewed infant formula as the substitute of breastmilk, which could be the only food for babies under six months if breastmilk is unavailable. Therefore, the brand and its product must be perceived as functionally reliable to satisfy the nutrition needs of babies. Several ways how participants evaluate the reliability of infant formula are revealed as follows.

5.3.1.1. Brand effect

Existing branding literature has pointed out that the brand name of a product is an important clue to signal product quality (Akerlof, 1970; Dawar & Parker, 1994; Rao & Monroe, 1989). Although the previous analysis in Section 5.2 has revealed that infant formula of the same brand may be perceived differently in quality and trustworthiness according to associated COO cues, the brand name was still viewed as a key indicator of trustworthiness when making the final decision of infant formula.

The brand *per se* can act as a proxy for information to indicate assurance of quality so as to save consumers from searching (Ambler, 1997a). For example, Zenny admitted that she has little professional knowledge of infant formula, yet she has enough confidence in a certain range of popular brands from which she could just randomly choose.

> *"When choosing infant formula, I didn't see significant differences among brands. I roughly looked into several brands, like Friso, Nutrilon, and some other brands, I did survey quite a few brands…Now I have chosen Nutrilon…because my sister happened to visit Macau and I asked her to bring me a tin of stage one infant formula…So, I picked one randomly, Nutrilon, that's it." (Zenny, interview 1)*

Choosing and trusting big brands seems like a natural decision which is consistent with participants' daily life experience. For example, Sarah stated that she chooses big brands rather than small brands, and she used buying furniture as an example to explain her preference for big brands.

> *"It's more guaranteed [to choose big brands]. And I think big brands are more…Just like buying furniture, you surely won't visit those small furniture markets. [The big brands] are safe, and all their procedures are formal and more legal. Small manufacturers don't seem to be very formal. And I think big brands offer better service as well." (Sarah, interview 1)*

In common, participants agree that a big brand stands for a higher level of reliability in various aspects concerning the product, and thereby enables higher levels of trust. Ruby also reported that she has a sense of trust in top international infant formula brands. Although she listed out various reasons for such trust, she also acknowledged that it could be a brand halo for her confidence in big brands. Compared to small brands, she thinks that international big brands offer a better-quality guarantee.

> *"They [big brands] use more authentic milk, and the sales channels are not so messed up, usually by official sites, large scale supermarkets, and shopping malls. From what we can touch on, they also have more authentic supply of products, and the key is that the quality is somehow guaranteed…This might be a mindset formed*

> *in the long term that I tend to believe in the halo effect of brands, thinking products of big brands may be more expensive than small ones, but indeed they are more secure." (Ruby, interview 1)*

Bonnie also held an optimistic attitude towards the brand that she prepared for her baby. Based on the fact that it is a well-established brand, she voiced no concern about its quality.

> *"I actually don't care too much about the content of infant formula. I think, since it has been an established brand for so many years, and it has sustained over time, I believe it has its own standard in nutritional content and quality control, so I don't need to worry too much about this." (Bonnie, interview 1)*

Apart from the positive future that a big brand offers to the consumers, participants also took into account the case of unexpected negative outcomes. Take Sharon as an example, she believes that "*big brands usually don't have many problems*" (Sharon, interview 1). Similarly, for Amy, "*a big brand*" means "*a higher level of safety, which means, it will not get into problem very easily. After all, it's doing business worldwide in many countries. I guess big brands may have better regulation, that is, the requirement of product quality*" (Amy, interview 1).

Zenny went deeper than Sharon and Amy into negative situations such as a product proven to be flawed and needing to be recalled. One of the reasons for her to choose big brands is the ability of a brand to take responsibility whenever there is a problem.

> *"Usually when I choose something, I choose a brand which is fairly decent. Why to choose a brand? Because brands have their capacity. That is, if I got an incident, it can bear my accusation, and it can't just escape to avoid responsibility…The reason for choosing brands is just to avoid the case that I pay money for it and then I get a problem…The reason for me to choose brands is not because of its guarantee of no problem, instead, it's because brands have the affordability [to undertake responsibility in case of problem]…The meaning of a brand lies in what I have just said, lies in its affordability, its after-sales service, better after-sales service. Don't*

> *make me unable to get in touch with them when necessary. To save my time." (Zenny, interview 1)*

For Zenny, branded products are not necessarily of better quality than unbranded products, nor big brands better than smaller brands. Her emphasis is not only on the quality guarantee *per se* but also the ability to offer better post-sale service, particularly in case of a problem. Recognising infant formula as a type of product with credence attributes which she neither has professional knowledge of nor is able to evaluate in a professional way by herself during or even after consumption (Darby & Karni, 1973), Zenny prefers to buy products of a decent brand to save her from further efforts to investigate that product and to deal with potential after-sales problems. Ambler (1997a, p. 170) calls it the "brand's insurance effect" by which consumers pay a premium price to eliminate risk.

McKnight et al. (1998) suggest that reputation can help to develop initial trust even without first-hand knowledge. Although participants have no direct experience with any infant formula brands which they were to use in the future, they still to some extent developed initial trust in established brands which are reputable among people in their social networks – through specific word-of-mouth recommendations and/or through specific knowledge of the brands. Various properties associated with a favourable brand, including the good raw material, better management and process, formal retail channel, better after-sale service, and better ability to afford unexpected negative encounters, build up the reputation of the brand and form the perception that this brand is trustworthy to purchase and consume.

5.3.1.2. Free from negative publicity

Previous studies have proposed that consumers may be extremely concerned about negative outcomes in highly involved circumstance (Das & Teng, 2004; Stuteville, 1968). In this research, infant feeding and infant formula consumption were repeatedly confirmed as a high-involvement case, and thus trust in such a situation is crucial for exchange and consumption to continue.

Scholars also argue that trust in the food supply could be habitual unless challenged by adverse events (BildtgÅrd, 2008; Henderson, Ward, Coveney, & Meyer, 2012). Adverse events, such

as negative publicity, were viewed by participants as counter-evidence of the reliability of an infant formula brand. Avoiding brands that have ever been involved in negative news was then a common strategy for participants to reduce uncertainty by excluding all potential negative options and avoiding engaging in a future relationship (Barber, 1983). For example, many participants took "no negative news" as one of the criteria of a trusted brand.

> *"[a trusted brand should be] having a good reputation, and I've tried it, and it doesn't associate with much negative news. It couldn't be that kind of baby formula which is exposed as problematic from time to time." (Serena, interview 1)*

> *"I checked whether these brands had negative reviews, that is, whether they got any incidents in the past." (Sunny, interview 1).*

> *"It must be a real big brand, and have a good reputation. Then it isn't involved in negative news. Plus, many people around me have tried it and there were no safety issues." (Lily interview 1)*

A good record of being free from negative news facilitates a positive expectation that the brand will consistently act as in the past, according to the prediction process of trust based on past performance (Doney et al., 1998). For example, Vicky explained how "*free from negative news*" could keep her trust in and loyalty to the same brand of milk products over the years.

> *"The brand should keep a good brand image, say, at least it's free from negative coverage for many recent years, not like Sanlu, who had committed that kind of scandal….I kind of trust Sanyuan in China. It's a local brand in Beijing, and I drink milk of no other brand except Sanyuan. Because over years and years there has been no negative news of Sanyuan." (Vicky, interview 1)*

Nowadays it is very convenient to search for negative news online, therefore, it is a common practice that participants sought information of brands from both acquaintances' WOM and the internet, as well as other potential available information sources for cross-checking. For example,

> *"I asked my friend (in the Netherlands) at that time. I asked, which infant formula brand is good there? She said, Nutrilon, Nutrilon is the most famous. She said all pregnant women buy Nutrilon there… I then searched on the internet and found no negative news of this brand." (Carol, interview 1)*

A wide range of negative news which may cause concerns has also been listed out by participants. Overall, hygiene conditions in processing and the usage of additives were the most concerned, as they directly influence the quality and safety of final infant formula products. The outbreak of negative news of a brand could negatively influence consumers' perceptions of brand trust and brand purchase likelihood (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). For example, in the second interview, Vivian was talking about buying a different brand for her baby because she was not completely satisfied with the current one. She excluded Wyeth because she heard that "*Wyeth was reported to be problematic a few months ago. Some additives were added into its milk powder*" (Vivian, interview 2). In the conversation with Katie, a similar negative report was mentioned and the mother, Katie's friend, had changed to another brand after the exposure of this problem.

> *"Domestic ones (including products of foreign brands but manufactured in China), like Wyeth Illuma, endorsed by Kunling (a popular star in China), was reported to have excessive vanillin in the milk powder. Vanillin is an edible essence which does no good to babies. After all, it's an additive which makes the formula milk sweet and tasty for the baby. It was reported, and one of the mothers in our group who was feeding with this one, said, I paid nearly 500 yuan to buy it, now you got me such an issue…She didn't have overseas channels to buy infant formula abroad, so she bought the most expensive one in China. Still, the most expensive one was reported to be not good, she was very upset. Afterwards, she changed to another brand called BiosTime." (Katie, interview 2)*

More importantly, negative publicity may last and remain in consumers' minds for a long period, which could be a great challenge to overcome the negative expectations whilst rebuild positive expectations (Kim et al., 2004). For example, a few participants cited themselves as "once bitten, twice shy" after the Melamine Contamination Scandal in 2008. In the second interview, when asking whether any negative news was noted since the first interview,

Charlotte's response represents a large number of mothers who are still concerned about the major baby formula incidents in the past decade.

> *"I don't have much impression (of negative news since last interview). But back to the time before I was pregnant, I've got an impression that there were some problems with domestic baby formula, and the problematic brands. I can't recall the brand names, but when choosing infant formula, I generally excluded all domestic brands. In my memory, it was like there was just a few days ago when domestic baby formula was exposed to be problematic. Wouldn't people think in that way? I did. Even now, I still got the impression that a few years ago domestic baby formula was reportedly problematic. It still stays in my mind." (Charlotte, interview 2)*

As consumers in China, participants were well aware of the previous infant formula incidents that happened in the past decade. In this context, "no negative news" is viewed as "*a proof of good quality control*" (Lucy, interview 1) or denoting "*quality being quite stable*" (Iris, interview 1), whereas "being involved in negative news" is the counter-evidence of trustworthiness, or even worse, a proof of "*being irresponsible towards the nation and the people*" (Sunny, interview 1). Compared to China, participants frequently stated that there was "little negative news" regarding infant formula in developed western countries. That is, little counter-evidence was presented to participants to disconfirm their trust in foreign brands.

To maintain a long-term relationship with consumers is the essence of relationship marketing (Hunt, 1994). In an ongoing long-term relationship, trust in a specific brand is more likely to continue as a habitus if consumers are not presented with negative encounters and the trusting relationship is not challenged by negative events (BildtgÅrd, 2008). Participants valued a brand of "not having incidents in the past" and viewed it as proof of brand reliability. Nevertheless, from the perspective of participants, they still have no direct interaction with any specific brands, therefore, "having no past incidents" can be viewed as a reflection of a brand's positive interactions with its existing and past consumers.

5.3.2. Brand Intentions

According to the conceptualisation of trust, the intention/motive of the trusted party is essential to build and maintain trust (Mayer et al., 1995). Although brands and products have no intention in themselves, companies, brands, and food products are products of human activities, and such human activities could not be completely detached from human intentions, social norms, and shared values. In this sense, brand intentions can be understood as the intentions of the group of people who own and operate the brand.

Throughout the interviews, two categories of motivation were identified by participants to evaluate brand intentions, namely, brand self-protection and survival in negative circumstances. In daily business practice, brand intentions can be manifested through brand self-discipline. In negative occasions, however, brand intentions are more likely to link to the sense of responsibility.

5.3.2.1. Motivation of brand self-protection and self-discipline

It is to the interest of the brand owner to look after the consumer's best interest (Ambler, 1997a), given that brands are not transactional but rely on consumer loyalty with repeated consumption over time (Kapferer, 1994). Thus, avoiding negative consumer encounters and maintaining ongoing consumer relationships are actually crucial for the brand owner to secure its own benefits. The motivation of self-protection will prompt the brand to be rationally more self-disciplined, especially for "big brands", "famous brands", and "popular brands", in participants' eyes.

Firstly, a brand needs to protect itself from negative events so as to avoid business loss. Some participants recognised brand self-discipline as a strategy of self-protection. Therefore, they chose to believe that established brands will be motivated to provide consumers with qualified products so as to avoid losing reputation and consumer trust.

> *"The quality of the product directly impacts its consumers. Once there is an incident, like the Sanlu incident, then it will be beyond redemption." (Ruby, interview 1)*

> *"Big brands are of very high awareness, and they have very strict management. Otherwise, if its products fail to pass the quality inspection, everyone will not trust this brand anymore. They have to protect their own brand, don't they?" (Penny, interview 2)*

> *"Since this brand has run for so long -- you know it's not easy to build a business now, and you know how important it is to build the reputation. Once it is ruined, it has to pay too great a price to rebuild it. I think usually it won't do so." (Mary, interview 1)*

As discussed in the above comments, the long brand history, the reputation, and the high brand awareness are valuable assets of the company which sustain the brand equity and maintain a trustworthy brand image (Ambler, 1997b). Recognition of these aspects can grow participants' confidence in the brand not to intentionally do anything that could harm its established reputation, otherwise, it will be "*too great a price to rebuild it*", or "*beyond redemption*".

Secondly, maintaining a positive long-term relationship with consumers can reward the brand with long-term benefits, including tangible economic benefits and intangible brand loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Therefore, participants also tend to believe that an established brand would be motivated to consistently meet consumers' expectations so that its own interests could be better secured in the long run. For example, Charlotte believed that big brands are supposed to be more responsible in providing high-quality products, while a small brand could be more likely to be motivated by its own instant benefit rather than a long-term relationship with consumers.

> *"I trust those products of big brands. Big brands have higher exposure, and they may care more about the quality. For a big brand, getting into even a minor problem may greatly impact the company…It's possible for a small brand to do business this way: I earn one if I sell one tin today, I earn two if I sell two tins tomorrow, and I would just close down if the third day I got a problem. That's what I'm worried about." (Charlotte, interview 1)*

Another participant, Zenny, further commented that, based on the rational consideration of a brand to care about its own interests, the brand owner will be more cautious than the consumers.

She then concluded, an established brand will value its own effort and input for the brand reputation over time, and act in a responsible way to avoid future problematic situations as much as possible in a long term (Ambler, 1997a).

> *"Why I choose established brands? Just think that it has put into so much effort, it will not easily ruin it. So, the possibility of a problematic situation in the future would be much lower, isn't?" (Zenny, interview 1)*

Zenny's confidence in the self-discipline of established brands was demonstrated in her own choice of infant formula. She firstly chose Nutrilon but later changed to Mead & Johnson, since the former one had caused allergy to her baby.

> *"For an old brand like Mead & Johnson, I believe it in one thing. It has been such a time-honoured brand, it has been maintained for so long, the investment is right there. Even if people want to play any tricks, they won't play on this one. They may launch something new, but I don't think they will try to play tricks on Mead & Johnson. Moreover, it is no longer a family business now, therefore, such possibility further reduces. All shareholders are watching it for their own interests, and they won't allow you to play with their benefits." (Zenny, interview 2)*

Additionally, a high level of self-discipline was found beneficial to the brand in gaining competitive advantage when institutional trust in food is low or lacking, given that the food manufacturers were considered to have the primary responsibility to produce safe food (de Jonge et al., 2008). For example, Iris and Barbara both addressed the importance of self-discipline and conscience when institutional assurance was absent or not reliable.

> *"I think its (food and drug administration authorities in China) work just varies greatly, and I feel it mainly relies on the self-discipline and conscience of the companies." (Iris, interview 1)*

> *"I think it greatly depends on the companies' sense of responsibility…They (regulators) regulate in a way as they do not actually regulate, so it's up to the conscience of the companies." (Barbara, interview 1)*

For Yuki, it is also possible that a brand may keep its standard higher than the national standard, and it is also possible that she would like to try these brands at some time.

> *"I believe that most companies, especially international infant formula makers, keep higher standards than our national standards…The standard is low in China, not necessarily meaning that the standard of the company is equally low. It depends on whether the company has a high requirement of itself." (Yuki, interview 2)*

Demonstrating genuine care and concerns rather than self-interest is considered critical for the affective aspect of trust (McAllister, 1995). Brand intention was not as frequently mentioned as brand reliability when participants were describing a trusting brand, especially when things are going well without any problems. However, participants also acknowledged that maintaining food quality and avoiding negative events such as product recalls could be an outcome of a brand's self-discipline, which is driven by the motivation of reciprocal long-term benefits in long-term consumer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). From a rational and calculative perspective (Doney & Cannon, 1997), established brands would be considered as being more intentional about the care they apply to the interests of consumers, therefore would be less possible to act untrustworthily due to the fear of losing reputation and consumer trust.

5.3.2.2. Surviving in negative events

When problems arise in food safety, the fundamental health and safety of the consumer may be harmed or under threat, which is detrimental to trust in food. Previous research has warned that negative events may be followed by suspicion of the other's current and future motives and intentions (Deutsch, 1958). Thus, negative situations such as product recalls are important occasions for participants to observe the food brand's actions and interpret its intentions. The motivations and intentions underlining the brand's actions in dealing with such situations (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996) may change participants' trusting beliefs and influence their decision on whether the relationship with this food brand shall continue or not.

According to the interviews, there are three key factors that participants would consider in relation to the brand's intention when problems arise in the consumption of infant formula, namely, the way the problem was disclosed, the reason causing such a problem (an intentional

human action or an unintended accident), and the way the problem would be solved (proactively caring or being reluctant).

First, the way that a problem is disclosed, by brand's self-inspection or by the consumer or other third-parties, signals the intentions and the underlying values of the brand's actions, which are considered crucial elements to a commitment-trust based relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). For example, Bonnie viewed it as proof of the company's commitment in long-term values if it proactively initiates a recall. Responding to an imaginary case of infant formula recall, she said,

> *"Is this recall initiated by the company or is it a forced action taken by the company under pressure after being discovered by the media or the government? According to its attitude, if it's positive and making efforts to solve the problem, then I think this brand is trustworthy if it makes efforts to improve afterwards. For example, it may become more stringent in the testing of raw milk…If it is proactive, it indicates that this company is trustworthy in terms of its value, and long-term planning. So, it pursues a long-term development of the company rather than short-term profit. But if the company is trying to conceal its mistake, or dealing negatively with it, it may result in, firstly, great psychological repulsiveness in people, and secondly, it makes people feel that its future products are not trustworthy. This is a chain-effect." (Bonnie, interview 1)*

To the opposite, to conceal the problem is considered as to deny the recognition of consumers' interests. Commenting on the performance of Sanlu, the dairy giant at that time, in the 2008 Melamine Contamination Scandal, Yilian said,

> *"It (the company, Sanlu) didn't initiate the recall, instead, it has been investigated and exposed by the media to the public because many babies had been sickened into hospital. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been informed of it…I feel that they [domestic brands] just want to sell their products. They would only be forced to face the problem when it can't be hidden anymore since it has been exposed to the public. They never proactively discovered the problem." (Yilian, interview 1)*

Zenny also stated that she would accept a proactive recall initiated by her chosen brand and keep buying its products after that recall, but refuse the concealing of problems.

> *"It (infant formula) will be disposed of if close to the recalled batches and I will get a new tin. But I will still buy Mead & Johnson, I won't stop buying it because of such a product recall. I'm fine with a company who dares to recall. Yet I don't accept those who choose to conceal the problem." (Zenny, interview 2)*

Clearly, these comments confirm that concealing problems and denying responsibly could intensify consumers' negative emotional responses and contribute to the perceptions of the brand being indifferent to consumers' interests, which is detrimental to trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Contrary, proactive recalls demonstrate a sense of responsibility and sincere care about consumers, which offers a chance to earn reconciliation from consumers and maintain/repair consumer trust (Tomlinson et al., 2004).

Secondly, with regards to the causes of food safety incidents, participants were concerned whether it is "by accident" or by intended actions. In the literature, scholars also suggest that trust violation may be ascribed to motive and intentionality of the other party, and a negative encounter does not necessarily result in trust violation, given that people believe that the situation can be adequately explained or understood (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). If it is by accident and not causing any issue to the baby, participants viewed it somehow forgivable and their trust would not be impaired. For example,

> *"I think it (product recall) is just normal, and I won't [distrust it] because of this. Contrarily, I think this is a responsible attitude towards its own products. As long as I didn't get the recalled products, I will keep using it. If I got that recalled ones, just return them and do what is supposed to be done… If my baby is getting on well with it, I won't replace this brand just because of this recall and won't never have it anymore in the future. I think it's just normal." (Miranda, interview 1)*

However, if deception of the other party is involved, or a "moral" violation is perceived, trust may be violated and hard to repair (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Intended action refers back to the subjective choice of the trusted party to exploit the vulnerability of the

trustor, which is the trusted party's freedom given by the trustor in trusting behaviour (Gambetta, 1988). Mary explicitly addressed the relationship between the intention of a brand and her trust as follows.

> *"If it's caused by people deliberately, you think, since he has got this intention, he no longer puts babies' health as his first consideration; he prioritises his own interests. If it's not a problem resulted from deliberate human actions, he is still dedicated to the product quality, and he still prioritises the interests of babies and consumers. In those cases that are human caused, they usually don't put consumers in the first place, rather, making profit comes first. Why should I trust them if they only prioritise their profit?" (Mary, interview 1)*

Zenny also highlighted her fear of the intentional harmful behaviour of the brand and linked such behaviour to the intention of profit-seeking.

> *"Usually the problems during processing are just accidents, I think. What we Chinese fear the most? We fear the most that you purposely replace some of the elements or use inferior ingredients. Why does this happen? Just because of the profit." (Zenny, interview 2)*

Finally, when such a negative case has occurred, how the company takes actions to solve the problem is also a vital consideration. "Taking responsibility" is recognised as a key step in situations of trust violation and actions are necessary to demonstrate that the violator is sincere and committed to repairing the trusting relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Zenny stated that she will definitely withdraw from consuming its product in the future if she feels the company is not sincerely caring about consumers' interests, because it is about what the company "will do" (or "will choose to do") rather than what the company "can do" in response to the consumers' interests (Colquitt et al., 2007).

> *"If the brand acts like this: 'it's not that I can't make it easy for you to protect your rights or to submit a request to return the product, just that when confronted by this incident, I wish I could escape it if possible. Yet I have to deal with it now, prompted by the negative publicity, and now the company has to take the responsibility. Even*

> *at this moment when I take the responsibility, when I give out ways to recall, I purposely moderate it and make it inconvenient for you.' If the company acts in this way, I won't never consider this brand anymore…Not a second time, no more, definitely." (Zenny, interview 1)*

Some participants also acknowledged the possibility to restore trust if the goodwill of the brand in its actions is recognised by the participants. Even though some participants stated that they would probably or definitely not return to the brand after a recall, Lewicki and Bunker (1996) suggest that it is still worthy for the trust violator to take initiative to repair trust through behaviour signals such as apologies or compensations.

> *"I'm not saying that companies are not allowed to make any mistakes, rather, you have to figure out whether this mistake occurred due to a problem of management process or due to uncontrollable factors. If your company takes clear and specific actions to correct and make this public to the consumers, I think the trust can be restored in a period of time. But during the time of that incident, I definitely will shift to another brand." (Bonnie, interview 1)*

> *"[If] it keeps transparency about which batches, which process has caused the problem, and what exactly is the problem, the consequence; and it keeps the consumers informed about how to action, or gives suggestions on how to deal with this issue…Overall, it should be transparent and clear. We worry about things that we don't know, so it could be much better if we are informed." (Amy, interview 2)*

Through the comments above, in-time actions, transparency, sincerity, could be taken by the company in dealing with a negative event which may negatively impact consumer trust, which is consistent with findings in existing literature (Kim et al., 2004; Xie & Peng, 2009). As long as consumers feel indeed cared for by the company, there could be a chance to maintain or restore trust (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014).

Brand intentions are closely linked to the "goodwill" dimension of trust. Because trust is future-orientated (Das & Teng, 2004), brand intentions are particularly considered essential in the case of potential future problematic situations resulting from the consumption of the product (Andaleeb, 1992; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Consumers need to maintain the confidence

that the brand is not going to take advantage of the consumer's vulnerability since the consumer has little control over the brand. In the case of unexpected problems, as participants generally commented, admitting the mistake and taking responsibility indicates the brand's commitment in its moral obligation, which is crucial to participants' sense of security in such negative situations (Delgado-Ballester, 2004).

5.3.3. Personal Brand/Product Experience

In post-consumption contexts, past experience and overall satisfaction after consumption are repeatedly viewed as antecedents of trust in the brand (e.g., Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Hess & Story, 2005; Sichtmann, 2007). This is in line with scholars who hold the proposition that trust grows over time with interaction between the trusting party and the trusted party (Blau, 1964; Rempel et al., 1985; Zand, 1972).

While participants recognised that to some extent they trusted the infant formula they had chosen before consumption, they also unanimously emphasised that subsequent first-hand experiences are necessary to confirm such trust. This section illustrates how participants' personal experience, both before and after consumption, has impacted on their trust in infant formula.

5.3.3.1. Pre-consumption expectations

Romaniuk and Bogomolova (2005) argue that trust is a "hygiene" factor, which implies that all brands must have a certain level of trust to be competitive in the market and considered by a consumer as a potential purchase option. Such "hygienic" trust was also found with participants when they realised that they "can't worry too much" even though they were concerned and cautious of infant formula. With recourse to experienced acquaintances and the food regulation systems, participants showed a certain level of initial trust in preferred brands which they had held positive expectations.

For example, Amy felt confident of her chosen brand, and Coral believed that she was not to experience any problem when feeding her baby with her chosen brand.

"I've gathered comprehensive information to make the selection, therefore it should be no problem." (Amy, interview 1)

"I feel that there won't be any problem when I use it to feed my baby. Right. Definitely, no problem to feed my baby with it." (Carol, interview 1)

In addition, trust is evident when the brand is not blamed in the first place if the baby becomes unsettled or ill after drinking infant formula. For example,

"I haven't used it yet, but I think, at least, when the baby has some issues like crying or feeling uncomfortable, I won't associate them with the infant formula in the first place. At least the infant formula won't be considered as the first factor." (Bonnie, interview 1)

To be specific, the most concerned intrinsic properties of infant formula among participants were basic safety and nutrition, as they were still shadowed by previous infant formula safety incidents. Therefore, at the pre-consumption stage, many participants stated that they actually kept relatively low expectations of the infant formula products they had chosen for future feeding. For example,

"What we mothers want is the baby grows healthily with this baby formula. It's fine as long as the nutritional need is met, and it doesn't matter even if other elements are a bit insufficient, as it's impossible [for the infant formula product] to be perfect [in all aspects]. As long as all [necessary] nutrients are included, it's all good. … As mothers we only require that our baby won't have any problem after drinking this baby formula, and this baby formula is not to be found problematic someday in the future. We only have this requirement. It's really not a high requirement." (Charlotte, interview 1)

In addition to the basic safety and nutrition requirements, participants also expected that the chosen infant formula could be suitable to their baby, due to the separation of purchasing decision and actual consumption between parents and babies. For example,

> *"I don't think different infant formula brands are particularly good or not good in some aspects, or have other essential differences. The brand that the baby accepts, and the brand that suits the baby, are good brands, as long as it's safe and healthy, and its quality is guaranteed." (Katie, interview 1)*

As a result of such separation, parents' trust in a brand does not necessarily guarantee subsequent repeated purchase. Participants commonly agreed that only after actual consumption can the trust be confirmed in two aspects: the basic safety and nutrition content, and the acceptance from the baby.

> *"The most important thing of all is that, when my baby drinks it as a trial, there aren't any problems caused, and he accepts the taste of it. This is an important reason for me to continue buying this brand." (Sunny, interview 1)*

> *"I think I can only confirm my trust after using it…In the case that my baby drinks it, it should be well accepted to the extent that I feel it fits people's comments about it; or at that time I may carefully observe my baby, because you can observe it directly with the baby's performance, like his defecation. If I feel my baby performs like a normal baby after given this infant formula, I will place my trust in it, and I will also recommend it to my friends." (Sally, interview 1)*

The concept of "initial trust", theorised by McKnight et al. (1998), establishes that trust may develop at the beginning of a relationship even if there is a lack of direct interpersonal interactions of the two parties. Elliott and Yannopoulou (2007) also found that in a high-involvement context, consumers have to trust the symbolic brand in order to make a purchase choice. In this research, before their own consumption experience with infant formula, it is clear that participants have still developed some level of initial trust in their chosen brand. Although such initial trust was greatly supported by external factors, as the institutional food regulation and interpersonal relationships that have been discussed in previous sections of this chapter, participants were also concerned about the internal properties of the product, which is of the centre to fulfil its promise to the consumers. However, either the safety or nutrition claims maintain credence to participants, leaving them to only convert the initial trust to a confirmed trust after actual consumption.

5.3.3.2. Post-consumption satisfaction and trust

The follow-up interviews were conducted with the same group of participants, at the time when their babies were about 8-9 months old. At the time of the second interview, three participants were practising pure breastfeeding (Penny, Serena, and Sally) while two adopted pure bottle-feeding (Miranda and Bonnie). Others introduced bottle-feeding at different stages to combine with breastfeeding, with some sticking to only one brand and some transferring to other brands. Five participants out of 28 dropped out and were not interviewed for the second time. Table 4 details the feeding practice of the 23 participants at the time of the second interview.

Table 4: Participant Profiles - the Second Interview

No.	Pseudonym	Preferred Brands	Actual Consumed	Preferred Channels
2	Vivian	A2, Aptamil, or Nutrilon	Mead & Johnson, wanted to change to Friso or Aptamil	Haitao/Mum-baby shop/friends
3	Penny	Big brands	Exclusive breastfeeding	Bonded zone
4	Serena	Friso	Exclusive breastfeeding, wanted to switch to A2	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau
5	Vicky	Abbott	A2, wanted to switch to imported Abbott	Overseas acquaintances
6	Sarah	Nutrilon (Netherlands)	Nutrilon (Netherlands)	Haitao/online shopping site
7	Ruby	Aptamil (German)	Aptamil, (German, Australian)	Overseas acquaintances
8	Sunny	Aptamil Pre	Mead & Johnson Ready to Feed Bottles	Overseas acquaintances
9	Linda	Aptamil or Nutrilon	Semper (Swedish)	Overseas acquaintances
10	Miranda	Aptamil	Aptamil, then A2	Overseas acquaintances /Bonded zone
11	Carol	Nutrilon (Netherlands)	Nutrilon (Netherlands)	Overseas acquaintances
12	Yilia	Mead & Johnson (US)	Mead & Johnson (US)	Overseas acquaintances
13	Suzanne	Aptamil (Germany)	Aptamil (Germany)	Overseas acquaintances /Haitao
14	Katie	Aptamil Platinum (Germany)	Aptamil Platinum (Germany)	Overseas acquaintances /Haitao

No.	Pseudonym	Preferred Brands	Actual Consumed	Preferred Channels
15	Barbara	Wyeth (Imported)	Wyeth (Imported)	Authorised stores in China (Mainland)
16	Sally	Aptamil	Currently breastfeeding, will introduce Aptamil (imported) soon	Authorised stores in China (Mainland)
19	Tina	Aptamil (German)	Aptamil (German, Australian)	Overseas acquaintances
20	Lily	Big brands	Mead & Johnson, then Nestle NAN, may switch to Nutrilon	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau
21	Charlotte	Aptamil	Aptamil (Hong Kong)	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau
23	Bonnie	Nutrilon or Friso	Nutrilon, then Mead & Johnson moderate hydrolyzed formula	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau
25	Zenny	Nutrilon	Nutrilon	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau
26	Lucy	Friso	Friso, Wyeth Illuma, Frisolac Prestige, and may switch to A2 or other brands	Authorised stores in Hong Kong/Macau/online shopping site
27	Yuki	Nestle NAN	Nestle NAN, Ausmeadow Special Formula, A2, and planned to switch to Hipp	Authorised stores in China (Mainland)/Haitao
28	Amy	Aptamil	Cowala, Aptamil (UK, Australian), then A2	Overseas acquaintances

5.3.3.2.1. Confirmed trust with satisfaction

Participants who had started bottle-feeding generally reported reasonable satisfaction with their chosen infant formula. Their initial trust established before consumption moved forward to a more solid level at the after-consumption stage, which strengthened their willingness to keep using the same brand. Ruby, for example, was satisfied with the product according to her baby's performance and stated that she would continue to feed the baby with the same brand.

> *"The baby accepted it well, and he grows well with an above-average weight and height, so I think the infant formula is good. It matches with my previous impression of it." (Ruby, interview 2)*

Even though some participants have experienced some issues such as regurgitation, deficiency in calcium, and eczema, they did not change to another brand as they never withdrew their trust

in those brands. For example, Sarah preferred an extra supplement of calcium to changing the brand.

> *"I thought the most direct way is to supplement calcium and take some calcium tablets. Because the formula milk was fine, just possible that stage three is low in nutrition. So, I went back to stage two. I didn't think of changing the brand. It's troublesome, and I have to find a replacement…After calcium supplements he caught up with the height and I worried no more." (Sarah, interview 2)*

Suzanne and Katie also did not attribute the eczema issue to the quality of infant formula, nor did they see the eczema as a result of milk allergy. Without solid evidence regarding the quality, they both continued with the previous brand.

> *"It seemed like eczema but not sure. It might be also because of the saliva on the toys…[Other than that] I didn't see there is any problem, her defecation is good as well….Now the slight allergy is still acceptable…Unless there is a big contamination in the manufacturing plant, or other severe incident, I will keep feeding with this brand." (Suzanne, interview 2)*

> *"I will keep feeding with this infant formula as long as it is not recalled due to quality defect, or the baby has got severe physical issues which require special formula milk." (Katie, interview 2)*

Given that their initial trust with the infant formula brands was confirmed with satisfaction, these participants' perceived uncertainty and risk with these brands were further reduced, making them loyal to the current brand.

> *"It goes well with the baby, she doesn't have diarrhoea or eczema, and she accepts it well…At the beginning, I thought it was very expensive and I had no idea whether it was really good or not, just lots of questions in my mind. Now I have tried it and found it good, so I decided to keep it. We once thought that we could try Illuma if this one was just too expensive. But now we find it indeed good, so we do not think about other brands anymore." (Barbara, interview 2)*

Some scholars found that in everyday lives, people may place trust in food since nothing has happened to indicate the opposite (BildtgÅrd, 2008; Henderson et al., 2012). These above cases demonstrated a continuous trusting relationship between the participants and the infant formula brands since no counter-evidence of the trustworthiness of these brands has been presented from prior to after consumption.

5.3.3.2.2. Expectations not met but trust sustains

Some participants have transferred to other brands due to more severe cases of allergy and eczema, or even potential encounters with counterfeits. Despite the failure of previous brands to meet their needs and expectations, participants did not disconfirm their trust in these brands since the reliability and intention of these brands were not proven as untrustworthy.

Take Zenny as an example, facing a severe eczema problem, she transferred to another brand. Although the previous brand failed to meet her expectation, she did not blame the brand and see it as untrustworthy. Rather, she felt the two brands "more or less the same", and never rated the current brand as better than the previous one.

> *"I don't think it must be Nutrilon [causing the eczema] without reasonable scientific evidence. But I did change to another brand, because he indeed got the eczema problem, so I have to try another one…I don't think it's the problem of this brand. It may be the individual constitution [of my baby]. I tasted it once and felt it good. So, I think it should be nothing to do with the formula milk. We shouldn't be too sensitive and ascribe all problems to formula milk." (Zenny, interview 2)*

Some participants, like Bonnie, Yuki, and Lily, even resorted to hydrolysed formulas to cope with allergy and eczema issues. However, they also did not see it as proof of untrustworthiness associated with their previous brands.

> *"I don't feel it's because the infant formula was bad so that the baby got such problem. Probably my baby was just not fitting well with it. He got eczema from the very beginning, so it was not caused by the infant formula… Friso is actually quite good." (Lily, interview 2)*

Miranda came across a diarrhoea issue which lasted for a month and then changed to another brand. Rather than seeing the previous brand as poor in quality, she believed that she might have bought some counterfeits, according to the abnormal package she observed. She stated that "*as long as it is an authentic product, I don't see any reason why I shall not trust it*" (Miranda, interview 2) even after changing to another brand.

These responses illustrated that, even in cases when the chosen infant formula was viewed as not suitable to their babies and then replaced by products of other brands, participants' initial trust in the previous brand was not impaired accordingly. Rather, they commonly believed that it could be an outcome of individual differences in the babies' acceptance of different products. Since the failure of meeting consumer expectation could be adequately explained and understood (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), no suspicions concerning product quality *per se* have been induced in the process of consumption, thus the essential elements of trust, were neither challenged nor disconfirmed.

5.3.3.2.3. Uncertainty and shallow trust

Another group of participants recognised the difficulties for them to confidently evaluate the product even after consumption, due to the credence nature (Darby & Karni, 1973) of the quality properties of infant formula. In this situation, a shallow level of trust was found both before and after consumption. This shallow trust was enough for these participants to make the first purchase of an infant formula product but not necessarily for keeping continuous purchase, because some level of uncertainty also remained in the course of consumption.

For example, Lucy jumped between several brands, and she did not have a clear definition of "good infant formula". She could just rely on superficial observation of the baby and other extrinsic signals (e.g., reputation and negative news) to maintain satisfaction and trust. This explains why she stated herself as an example of the "*sheep flock effect*" (Lucy, interview 1) to simply follow others.

> *"I don't know whether it [the infant formula] is insufficient in nutrition or my daughter just eats little… The doctor said she is deficient in Iron…I may give Friso 80 marks, for the other 20 marks, I have no idea. For I don't know how to define*

> *'good infant formula', or to define 'bad infant formula'. I think firstly, the reputation of the brand, and secondly, as long as the baby doesn't have any negative response, and there is no other negative news, I can maintain my satisfaction." (Lucy, interview 2)*

Some participants, like Miranda and Yuki, took it as a safety strategy to purposely change the brand from time to time. Even though the current one is seemingly well-performing, they were not completely assured so as to grow more solid trust with the same brand.

> *"There may be problems with one brand and you shall not stick to just one brand, otherwise it may become a disadvantage. If this brand does have a problem in a certain aspect, you get a new one which may not have the same problem in this aspect if you change brands." (Miranda, interview 1)*

> *"What to do before you can confirm whether it has a problem or not? My theory is to take turns to increase diversity because chronic intoxication is still better than acute poisoning. So, it won't affect me much to change to other brands." (Yuki, interview 1)*

For this group of participants, initial trust was neither explicitly confirmed nor disconfirmed given that no strong evidence for either direction, leaving uncertainty lingering around in the relationship. Therefore, it is easy for these participants to drift among different brands with limited confidence.

Referring back to the conceptualisation of trust, in all three groups of participants, there were no cases in which the fundamental basis of brand reliability and intention were questioned. Even in situations of unmet needs and unfulfilled expectations, trust in brands seems to be relatively stable given that the reliability and intention were not questioned.

To summarise, infant formula as a breastmilk substitute is a product designed to meet consumers' functional demand for baby food. Like other product categories, infant formula varies in brand names, producers, and target markets. Although the product, and its brand name, has no intention of its own, they are produced by human beings, therefore ultimately of human

creation. In this way, the ability and the intention of a specific infant formula brand and its product are associated with the people who are involved in the production of them. Therefore, trust in a brand and its products could be understood as trust in the ability of the product to fulfil consumers' expectations and the intention of product makers to care about consumers' interests. Without the perceived ability and goodwill of the brand, it is difficult for the product to gain trust from consumers.

5.4. The Interplay of Trust-building Factors

Having discussed each of the three significant contributors to the trust-building process, this section will continue to address the second research question:

> *What are the interrelationships between these factors, and how have these factors interplayed with each other to affect the process of trust construction in food brands?*

The dyad relationships between each factor and the overall interaction between the three will be elaborated in detail.

5.4.1. Institutional Food Regulation Interplays with Food Brands

Previous sections reveal that both external (regulation and punishment) and internal (self-discipline and pursuit of long-term profit) factors were perceived to be important by participants when evaluating the trustworthiness of an infant formula brand. Given the fact that different countries regulate their food differently when food products travel across borders and enter the surveillance of other countries, the level of trustworthiness induced by the COO cues associated with the product and the food brand itself may be perceived as incongruent by consumers. In this research, participants discussed their trusting beliefs in foreign brands in China and Chinese brands in foreign countries. These two cases illustrated how consumer trust in food may be shaped in the interactions between institutional food regulation and food brand.

5.4.1.1. Foreign brands in China

Nowadays, a wide range of infant formula brands that originate from different countries have entered China and are known by many consumers. A number of participants were concerned that some foreign brands may lower their standard of product quality when China is the COC, given that these foreign branded products are subject to the food standard of China after entering the Chinese market. Such concerns result from participants' general belief that the food standard in China is lower than in developed countries, which leaves leeway for foreign manufacturers to adjust their strictness of quality control accordingly. Katie was one of the representatives to share such concerns. She explained and gave an example about Aptamil, saying that its products in China versus in Germany are different from package, formula, and the production process.

> *"I'm not criticising any specific brand. For instance, there are Aptamil products sold in China, there are also Aptamil products sold in Britain and Germany. But in my eyes, the Aptamil products sold in China are completely different from Aptamil products sold in Europe or America. (-Researcher: Although they share the same brand name?) Definitely, they are not the same. The package and the formula are definitely different. Because they have been transported, processed, and packed in China, I don't trust them anymore." (Katie, interview 1)*

As a result, Katie excluded some imported brands from consideration because she believed they were repackaged in China, and thereby contamination or extra additives may occur in that process.

> *"I once considered those so-called imported brands like Wyeth Illuma, Abbott Eleva, Wyeth S26, which are allowed to sell in China, because they are convenient to buy. But the quality and safety of these brands are not that credible for me. Why? Because there is Chinese label on the can. What does that mean? It means that it's not originally canned and imported, rather, it's repacked in China. In this process, there must be some contamination or something added. So, I'm not very assured." (Katie, interview 1)*

Similar concern was also found with Suzanne, who worried about the possibility of substandard operation of food processing in China.

> *"Even if they are subject to the same standard, probably the manufacturers or the processing lines are not up to that high standard, and they're not so strict in product quality control." (Suzanne, interview 1)*

Reasonably, many participants tended to believe that infant formula officially imported and sold by authorised retailers would be safer than domestically manufactured products, which is not novel to existing research findings that Chinese consumers place more trust in food brands from developed countries (Jap, 2013). However, this research addresses the situation when trust in foreign brands is challenged by the lack of, or low level of, institutional trust in food regulation systems. When trust in a brand is not strong enough to overcome the lack of trust in food regulation, participants' overall trust in the product is more likely to be dominated by the level of trust in the food regulation of the COC. This explains why many participants preferred infant formula sold in overseas markets to those imported to and sold in China in large scale.

5.4.1.2. Domestic brands go overseas

Manipulating the association with different COO cues is viewed as a strategy to make the brand and product appear more international (Heine, Atwal, & He, 2018). After the 2008 Melamine Contamination, some Chinese dairy giants have been carrying out globalised strategies to enhance the competitiveness, of which Yili and Yashili are recent examples.

Yili invested in a new plant with processing and canning lines to produce infant formula with local raw milk in New Zealand (Xinhua, 2014). Associating itself with a more trusted COI and COM, this domestic brand wishes to demonstrate its competence and commitment in providing safe and healthy infant formula for babies. As captured in Figure 8[1], TMALL (www.tmall.com) is one of China's biggest online shopping sites where many foreign infant formula brands have set up their flagship stores. As a marketing tactic, Yili has largely applied wordings such as "originally canned in New Zealand" and "Quality officially certified by New Zealand

[1]Source:https://detail.tmall.com/item.htm?spm=a220o.1000855.1000983.1.7b9dfca0gtjzDG&id=551159001914&standard=1

Government" to assure consumers. English translation on this picture was added by the researcher to illustrate the key wordings regarding the product's New Zealand origin of raw milk and manufacture.

Another company, Yashili, has also invested heavily in New Zealand, and launched its "Super α-Golden Stage" infant formula in the New Zealand market in April 2016 (NZHERALD, 2016) (Figure 9[2]), making New Zealand its COC to promote trust in Chinese consumers.

Figure 8: Snapshots from Yili's Flagship Store on TMALL

2 Source: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=11626354

Figure 9: Yashili Infant Formula on Shelves of Selected New Zealand Supermarkets

Although findings from previous studies indicate that the alteration of COO cues may impact the overall perception of brand authenticity and quality (Cheah, Zainol, & Phau, 2016; Phau & Prendergast, 2000), participants in this research held various suspicions regarding the safety and quality of such "*imported products of domestic brands*". For example, Charlotte questioned the purpose and intentions of Yili and Yashili as they go abroad.

> *"What's the purpose for Yili going abroad? It wants to make itself a 'foreign baby formula', doesn't it? Isn't it making itself like 'foreign baby formula' in China?" (Charlotte, interview 1)*

Furthermore, consumers may not know or evaluate the different COO cues (Phau & Prendergast, 2000). Even though the entire processing is done in New Zealand, Charlotte still considered it as the product of a "domestic company", and she insisted that "*Chinese people have little sense of responsibility*" (Charlotte, interview 1). Therefore, the efforts of domestic brands seeking institutional endorsements from overseas appear to have limited effect on participants as constrained by the association with China as the origin of the brand.

> *"Perhaps the quality may have been improved, but I still reserve my suspicion. I won't 100% trust it, but I think it would be alright to take one or two tins of it occasionally. But if I have others choices, I would not put it first." (Charlotte, interview 1)*

Yuki stated that she would like to question all the details of the production process and sale performance of Yashili in the New Zealand local market, although it would be under the monitor of New Zealand food regulation.

> *"But still, I have to know the pasture, as mentioned before, since it has purchased the pasture, what's the management standard of this pasture? Who is managing this pasture? Whether the pasture has been well managed is also a question to ask. Since its products have been sold in New Zealand, do New Zealanders buy it or not? How long is it going to sell in New Zealand, and how long can it last? These also need to be considered. It doesn't work if it has been for sale in New Zealand supermarket but there's no one to buy any; or the sales just lasts for a while, but you tell consumers that you are selling in New Zealand, and you have followed the New Zealand standard of quality control, so consumers in China can also be assured. But this might not be the real case." (Yuki, interview 1)*

Noting that trust exists somewhere between total knowledge and total ignorance (Simmel, 1964), and the fact that people have limited capacity to reach a full knowledge of others concerning their motivations and responses (Gambetta, 1988), the more details required by Yuki, the less amount of trust she may have in the target brand. Although generally acknowledged that COO cues associated with more effective food regulation may to some extent help improve their confidence, participants were still cautious with the intentions and the future performance of these domestic brands.

While trust reduces complexity by allowing social interactions to proceed on a simple and confident basis (Luhmann, 1979), distrust may also reduce complexity by priming actors to be unwilling to engage in interactions under suspicion (Barber, 1983). Analysis of the above two cases illustrates the overall trusting tendency of participants when facing complicated situations with mixed cues in relation to product trustworthiness. If the food regulation is viewed as reliable, participants tended to believe that all food brands and products under this regulation are at least safe to consume, even for a brand that originated from a less trusted country. If the regulation is under question, participants tended to deny all brands in this market as a strategy to reduce complexity and avoid risk, even brands originated from more trusted countries may also be negatively impacted. In line with Lassoued and Hobbs (2015) consumer's overall

confidence in credence food attributes is positively affected by brand trust, through the mediating role of trust in the food system, this thesis argues that institutional trust umbrellas brand trust and lays the foundation of consumer trust in food.

5.4.2. Interpersonal Relationships Interplay with Food Brands

As discussed in section 5.3, experienced acquaintances served as trusted information sources when participants were seeking for evidence concerning the trustworthiness of infant formula brands. In WOM communication, consumers share their experience and knowledge with others, through which process trust may also be transferred from one to another (Stewart, 2003). To some extent, experiences shared by trusted persons provide the almost concrete knowledge of a brand which participants have never consumed in the past.

How trusted acquaintances facilitated participants' trust in specific brands has been addressed in 5.3. Revealed in this research, trusted acquaintances played another particular role in building participants' trust in infant formula. For many participants, overseas friends and relatives were an essential pathway to getting trusted infant formula. In the case when the recommended brand and the accessible brand by trusted persons are incongruent, participants tended to give up the brand that is most recommended and turn to the brand that a trusted acquaintance may have access to.

Take Linda as an example. Her choice of trustworthy infant formula brand, according to the first interview, resulted from a positive WOM referral (Kim & Prabhakar, 2004).

> *"In terms of brand choice, I mainly refer to what my colleagues are using, via word of mouth…In my mind, there are only two formula brands, which are Aptamil and Nutrilon. I didn't ever consider any other brand…Because all of my colleagues and friends around me are using these two brands." (Linda, interview 1).*

In the follow-up interview, however, Linda ended up feeding with another Swedish brand which was purchased with the assistance of a friend from Sweden.

> *"Because I don't have another reliable channel [for either Aptamil or Nutrilon], so I rather ask a friend from overseas to buy for me. She lives in Sweden, so I rather ask a reliable friend to buy a brand which is not that famous." (Linda, interview 2)*

Although the purchased brand "*is not that famous*", Linda claimed that she never worried about its quality because *"I quite trust this friend, yes, I trust her" (Linda, interview 2)*. The interpersonal trust in this friend thus has secured her trust in an unfamiliar brand, based on the cognitive recognition of the strong connection (Stewart, 2003) between this friend and the brand - that products of this brand would be purchased by this friend in Sweden.

Yilian also did not follow the suggestions from mothers in the same WeChat group to buy the brand they recommended. Rather, she decided to buy an American brand which was less recommended in the group, through a relative who lives in America.

> *"They favour Germany and think German people are very careful and precise, their products are of higher quality, and their food safety is very strict. They prefer German and then Dutch brands. So, I've consulted them and they didn't very much recommend American ones. But I don't want to buy together with them…For me, I've got someone to buy for me, she's living in the US, so I consider American brands for the sake of convenience. From all American brands, I will consider the one which meets my nutrition demand the best…Because she recommended to me that basically there are two brands in American market. So, I think they have a relatively high market share… If she lives in Germany, then I'll consider brands of that country." (Yilian, interview 1)*

Although American brands were not recommended as much as German and Dutch brands among her social network, Yilian was still convinced that American brands are also trustworthy, according to the information shared by her relative in America. Both the mothers' group and her relatives are trusted sources which facilitated Yilian's trust in infant formula but in slightly different ways. WOM recommendations from the mothers' group grew her trust in German and Dutch brands in general, whereas her relative who lives in America not only offers information regarding the trustworthiness of American brands but also secures the genuineness of the products to be purchased.

The above two cases illustrated the situation when the more recognised and recommended brands were different from the more accessible brands through trusted persons. Nevertheless, for Linda and Yilian, all brands that they had ever considered have met the basic requirement of trust, which is called a "hygiene factor" that all brands must possess in order to be competitive in the market and considered by a consumer as a potential purchase option (Romaniuk & Bogomolova, 2005). Thus, feeling secure in the quality of a less recognised or recommended brands from other mothers, both Linda and Yilian decided to rely on a trusted overseas person to ensure the genuineness of the product rather than pursuing a more favourable brand. Their responses elaborate on the condition when an interpersonal relationship was prioritised over a favourable infant formula brand to choose an initially less considered brand, given that both brands were perceived trustworthy.

5.4.3. Interpersonal Relationships Interplay with Institutional Food Regulation

Although interpersonal relationships play a significant role in building participants' trust in infant formula brands, findings from the interviews also reveal that such an influence may be conditioned by participants' perception of the food regulation associated with the target brands. Interpersonal relationship and WOM recommendations may have limited influence on building participants' trust in brands that are under surveillance of less-trusted food regulation systems.

This finding was observed when domestic infant formula brands were recommended to participants by acquaintances in their social network. In both the first and the second interviews, some participants mentioned that, to their knowledge, some friends or relatives were feeding with domestic brands. Having witnessed the well growing of these babies, however, participants were still not convinced that domestic brands were trustworthy to the extent that they would like to consider them as potential options for future purchase.

For example, Charlotte did not grow trust in domestic brands although her sister insisted that the regulation of domestic infant formula had been greatly strengthened after previous incidents. Charlotte still kept an impression that negative news was on the media from time to time, and, in fear of unexpected future problems, she still prefers foreign brands sold in overseas markets to domestic brands.

> *"My sister has chosen domestic brand Yili. She said nowadays the government is very strict about domestic baby formula, the government has been enhancing the regulation, so (domestic brands) should be no problem. Her baby has been given domestic baby formula, and she said domestic ones may be even safer since they are produced in China. If you buy from overseas, since you can't go abroad personally, you have to rely on 'daigou' persons or foreign shopping sites to keep shipping the products, yet this [distributing] process is invisible… So, she kept recommending me to give domestic brands a go. But I just feel quite unassured in my heart as there is negative news on media from time to time. I said [to my sister], it's good that you have no problems after feeding with it [domestic infant formula], but once there is a problem, I don't even know what to do. I said I'm quite afraid, and I think if I have to buy baby formula in future, I would also buy foreign brands from overseas." (Charlotte, interview 1)*

Vicky, similarly, having witnessed a close friend's example of using domestic infant formula, still "*feels unassured*" and not trusting in these domestic brands, whereas Abbott and Wyeth were trusted because they are American brands.

> *"I've got a close friend, her aunt is also kind of familiar to me, and she's buying Firmus, from the childbirth…But if you want me to go with Firmus, I'm still not very assured, I think I still prefer those foreign big brands like Abbott and Weyth…I feel assured with Abbott and Weyth because they are American brands. But Firmus, hmm, not very trusting, or not willing to trust. Just like the diapers, there are lots of domestic diaper brands, but I never try any. Not necessarily they are not good, I just don't want to try any." (Vicky, interview 1)*

Sunny also has personally witnessed her niece who was fed by domestic brands, yet the uncertainty of getting into problems with domestic brands still stops her from trying.

> *"Indeed, there are people around me are feeding with domestic brands and the babies are growing well. Like my niece, who's also drinking Firmus, and she's also quite well. So, some domestic ones are good as well. But what if I got a problem with it?" (Sunny, interview 2)*

Obviously, the perceived high level of risk due to the weakness of institutional assurance from domestic food regulation has become a major barrier for participants to build trust in domestic infant formula brands. Even positive WOM from acquaintances could not eliminate the fear of future risk to induce trust for participants. This finding adds proof to the argument that institutional trust addresses a general level of trust in the situation or the structure, and such trust exists irrespective of the specific people or object in that situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001).

5.4.4. Institutional Trust, Interpersonal Trust, and Brand Trust

The three contributors work collaboratively and intensively to shape the development of overall trust in food. They together lay the pathway for trust to be constructed from the fundamental social fabric to the particular target item. However, different contributors play differently at different stages of consumer trust construction in food and meanwhile are influenced by individual differences of participants.

At the time when participants started looking into infant formula for future feeding, the lack of personal experience has made them rely heavily on external reviews and comments for any specific brands, which were commonly in the form of WOM from acquaintances. Apart from the second-hand knowledge of the brand, however, the emphasis of the institutional assurances resided in the food regulation system of a country was significantly influential as well. The example is participants' general distrust in domestic infant formula products (even including some foreign brands which have their products manufactured or canned in China). After the 2008 Melamine Contamination, together with many other food safety reports, a strong sense of distrust in domestic food regulation was found among many participants. For example, Miranda claimed the loss of trust in the whole food regulation system.

> *"I feel in the domestic market, there's no sound regulation system and many people, companies and even authorities are just blinded by greed and lured by profits. I've lost my trust in it as a whole. So, I pretty much don't trust domestic infant formula." (Miranda, interview 1)*

From the perspective of participants as consumers, the essence of food regulation in building consumer trust is that the regulator, on behalf of the people and through its regulatory power, monitors the performance of industrial food actors to prevent them from taking advantage of consumers by providing unqualified food products (Meijboom et al., 2006). Thus, whether the food regulation rules and laws are perceived strict and effective enough, and the regulator is caring enough to protect the interests of consumers from being harmed, determines the base level of trust in food of that country in a generic sense. As in the above example of Miranda, if the consumer sees the regulator has been lured by profits for his own at the expense of the interest of the consumer, or if the regulator is expected to be independent of industry but in practice is perceived not to be, then the foundation of the regulator to be trusted will be ruined, and trust may be low (Petts, 1998). As a result, products monitored by such regulation will also be under question by the consumer.

While food regulation affects trust in food at a general level through institutional trust, WOM more significantly influences the trusting beliefs regarding specific brands through the mechanism of trust transference (Stewart, 2003). Trusted persons not only serve as a trusted information source but also act as the bridge between participants and their desired products. The availability of the trusted overseas personal connections to some extent determines the final purchase decisions. For example,

> *"My older sister told me that formula milk from NZ, Holland, and Britain may be better, so it'd better to choose among these areas. It seems that Nutrilon is located among these areas, so I picked this one. I would just follow others, those experienced mothers. My sister also tried another one. I will try this first, if the baby doesn't accept it, I can change to another one. Anyway, I will only buy what they have already tried and use. Since they have used it, I think it should be of no problem." (Sarah, interview 1)*

The above comment from Sarah's first interview illustrates a common pattern among participants, as well as many new parents, about how institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and personal experience post-consumption work together to shape the overall trust in a specific brand and product. Trust in institutional food regulation and trust in interpersonal relationships, at the pre-consumption stage, dominates participants' initial trust building in infant formula

while personal knowledge and past experience with a particular brand and product are merely available (McKnight et al., 1998).

At the post-consumption stage, however, personal experiences get more power in determining the development of a future trusting relationship with the chosen brand, through factors such as satisfaction (Kim, 2012). If not disconfirmed by this brand in any aspects to induce distrust, the initial trust will continue. After consumption, the essential factor changes to participants' satisfaction with the product in feeding practice. The continuous consumption of the product, however, is not only driven by the trust in that product alone, as discussed in 5.3.4 regarding post-consumption satisfaction. Nevertheless, after gaining actual experience, more attention would be paid to the product performance, especially whether the product suits the baby well. For example,

> *"At the beginning, I was concern that this one included sugar or that one lack in some nutrients. It turned out to be more or less the same in feeding. So now I'm not as cautious as before. As long as it's bought from authorised channels, the baby is willing to drink it without any negative performance, it's all fine. These are the three things that matter. Afterwards, I feel that all infant formula products are similar, even the formulae are more or less the same." (Amy, interview 2)*

Meanwhile, since these participants have become experienced consumers at this stage, they would also be approached by new mothers to consult their experiences and suggestions on infant formula. For example, many participants like Katie would share their experience with new mothers.

> *"I'll tell her what are the brands that mothers around me are using, and the differences between each one, then myself, what I'm using, and why. I won't particularly recommend any brand, but I will tell about what she wants to buy, let say, if she has three or four options, I'll tell her all I have heard about these three or four brands, good and bad, all of them. Then I should leave her to make the evaluation and judgement, after all I am not to make the decision for her." (Katie, interview 2)*

As participants transited from inexperienced to experienced consumer, from the one who receives recommendations to the one who offers recommendations, trust also evolved and transferred in this process from one to shape the others' trust.

From the point of view of the division of responsibility for food and its provision (Kjærnes et al., 2007), at the actual food supply process, the food industrial players bear direct responsibility of providing safe and qualified food to consumers. Due to the separation between the consumer and food industry, and the fact that consumers have little control over the food provider, whether the food provider will stick to its responsibility rather than taking advantage of consumers is crucial to participants' trust in the final infant formula product. Thus, food regulation plays an important role in offering external assurance to encourage consumer trust in food industry players. Besides, interpersonal relationships also step in the relationship between the food consumer and the food provider as a bridge between the consumer and the brand, either experientially (through experience sharing) or physically (when assisting with overseas purchasing). The pattern is found in this research that institutional food regulation, interpersonal relationships, and the brand and its product, work together at different stages via different processes to build overall consumer trust in food over time.

Still, noteworthy is that participants may weight three contributors differently on various occasions, given the existence of individual differences among them. But the role of individual differences in building trust in food is out of the scope of this research, leaving opportunities for future exploration in this regard.

5.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented details of the empirical findings from the longitudinal research conducted for this thesis. Three major factors were found in relation to three types of trust which collectively constructed the overall consumer trust in food, namely, food regulation and institutional trust, interpersonal relationships and interpersonal trust, and food brands and trust in the brand and product. The role of each factor and each type of trust was addressed, followed by the interpretation of the interrelationship between these factors with regard to how their interactions may shape consumer trust in food over time. The next chapter will further review

and discuss the findings addressed in this chapter in connection with relevant theories in existing literature before making an overall conclusion of this thesis.

CHAPTER SIX DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter reviews and discusses the interpretation of data presented in Chapter 5 in response to the research question regarding the social construction of consumer trust in food. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key contributions this thesis makes to both theory and practice based on the empirical findings, the acknowledgement of potential limitations inherent in the research approach is also discussed, and suggestions for future research based on the findings of this thesis are presented.

6.1. Review and Discussion: The Social Construction of Trust in Food

This research reveals that consumer trust in food is socially constructed through interactions between the consumer and three major contributors, which are - institutional food regulation, interpersonal relationships with trusted acquaintances, and the food brand and product. Each of these contributors plays a distinctive and crucial role in building and developing the consumer's trust in food. Collectively, the three contributors interact with each other to shape the development of the consumer's trust in food as consumption is practised over time in a specific social context. This section further discusses the role of each of these contributors, and their interrelationships, in the social construction of trust in food.

6.1.1. Institutional Food Regulation: Overarching Trust in Food

The first major contribution made by this study is the identification of the role of institutional food regulation of countries that are involved in the globalised food provisioning system. This finding echoes previous studies on institutional trust with an emphasis on appropriate social structures and systems to enable trusting relationships both in a food-specific context (e.g., Hobbs & Goddard, 2015; Kjærnes et al., 2007), and in broader social settings (e.g., McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Pennanen, 2006; Zucker, 1986). Furthermore, this research has advanced current knowledge by crafting the structure of institutional influence on trust in food as a three-layer process demonstrated in Figure 10, by identifying the food regulator's intentions and moral obligations towards consumers as being an integral part of the institutional foundation of trust in food.

Figure 10: The Structure of Institutional Trust in Food

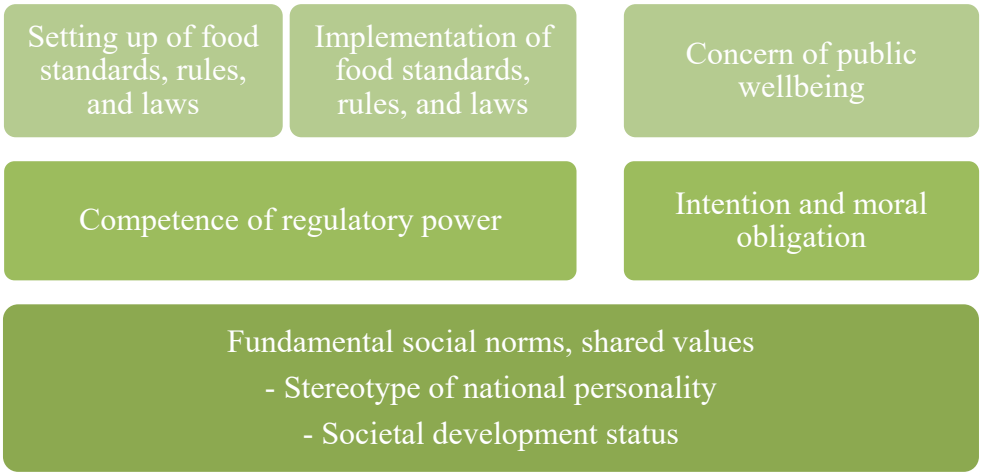


Figure 10 illustrates the three layers of institutional trust in food. Social norms and shared values lay the foundation to support the second layer of the government's regulatory power and the moral obligation in food regulation, which respectively reflect the competence and intention elements of essential trust. Social norms and shared values are inseparable from the culture of a society which functions as the "software of the mind" to shape the patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting of social members, as both individuals and organisations (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In this research, consumers draw on the stereotype of the national personality as well as the societal development status to justify the value stance and motivations taken by the government of a country to perform its duty in food regulation. For example, as mentioned and believed by participants, the rigorousness of the German personality, the concern for women and babies in New Zealand society, and the environmentalist orientation of developed countries, all speak for the social norms and shared values in these countries which subconsciously influence the way how people do things (Scott, 2014). These beliefs, in turn, support consumers' perceptions of the strong competence and goodwill demonstrated in food regulation in these countries.

The third layer specifies that the regulatory power in food regulation is executed in the setting up and implementation (including punishment) of food-related standards, rules, and laws; and moral obligation refers to the food regulators' concern for public wellbeing and consumer interests. In modern societies, individual consumers are dependent on the food provisioning system to provide necessities. The findings indicate that a robust system of food regulation is

required to make sure that food industry players are either afraid of, or punished for, doing harm to consumers (Zucker, 1986). Therefore, such institutional protection is compensation for consumers' lack of control over industrial players, and to ensure that consumers may have trust in food from the provisioning system at a general level, and in an overarching manner (Pavlou & Gefen, 2004). In the context of this research, such need for institutional protection was revealed in that mothers expect the government to be competent in ensuring the safety of infant formula products by setting up strict standards, rules, and laws, and by enforcing such rules and laws. From the moral perspective, mothers expect the government to be morally motivated to act in its regulatory role in order to protect consumers from industry actors who may seek to profit at the expense of consumer well-being. If the government is considered as not caring about, or not prioritising the interests of consumers, institutional trust in food loses its moral foundation.

This study enriches the existing understanding of institutional trust in food by addressing the moral dimension of food regulation in a country. As revealed in the data analysis, Chinese consumers emphasise and value the regulatory power, as well as the moral obligation of a government to supervise the food industry and its intention to protect public welfare in food. As argued by Kjærnes et al. (2007) in previous research, consumers' expectations of the government are derived from the ascribed role and responsibility of the government in food regulation. This research extends the discussion of the governmental role in the social context where social norms and shared values are embedded.

An additional insightful finding regarding the significance of institutional food regulation and its overarching influence on trust in food is the identification of COC, as an extension of COO. In a globalisation era where multiple countries are involved in the international food provisioning industry, the overarching role of institutional food regulation in the construction of overall consumer trust in food is also extending to an international level, as revealed in this study. Further to the extant literature on the COO effect in product and service evaluation (Huang, 2016; Jiménez & San Martín, 2014; Schnettler, Ruiz, Sepúlveda, & Sepúlveda, 2008), findings of this research specifically indicate that various COO cues are linked to the trustworthiness evaluation of food products. These COO cues, including COI, COM, and COC, signal the multiple food regulation systems that a food product may have undergone in its global journey from farm to table (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Multiple COO Cues in Building Trust in Food

As illustrated in Figure 11, COI signals the institutional control of primary food production. Thus, COI is found to be important for a high-involvement food category such as infant formula. The evaluation of product attributes is closely related to the raw material, and may essentially impact on the perceived performance of the product for future consumption. Likewise, COM signals the institutional control of food processing, which is closely linked to the standard and quality of the end products. COC, however, places more emphasis on how much institutional protection and assurance the consumers of a country may be guaranteed by their food regulator. Food products to be sold in a market with high food safety standards and strict regulations, therefore, may be viewed as more trustworthy. These three major COO cues collectively shape consumers' perceptions of the overall institutional regulation of a food product. COC is at the final stage and signals the ultimate level of safeguard before the food products are consumed by consumers in this country. Thus, COC, a COO cue that has been merely addressed in prior studies, has become recognised as an influential factor to shape trust in food. This is important because food products from overseas are more accessible to Chinese consumers nowadays through cross-border e-commerce.

In summary, the influence of institutional trust based on a robust food regulation system is found to be overarching, because institutional trust refers to the trusting belief concerning the structures of a situation, rather than any specific object in that situation (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). When institutional trust is secured by a robust food regulation system, a baseline level of trust in all food products under its surveillance may also be established, irrespective of the consumers being completely aware of it or not. Thus, if the food regulation of a country is trusted, food products under the supervision of that country are generally trustworthy, and vice versa. In this research, when the expectation of an effective food regulation has not been fulfilled in their home country, Chinese mothers seek for institutional protection from overseas countries which are perceived to have implemented a more robust food regulation system with

a more concerned attitude towards consumers. Although many of these mothers may not necessarily have abundant knowledge of an overseas country and its food regulation system, such trust may still be developed since the institutional trust in food could be taken for granted when no evidence to the contrary is presented (Henderson et al., 2012).

6.1.2. Interpersonal Relationships: Transferring Trust in Food

The second major contribution this thesis makes to our understanding of how consumers construct trust in food is the central importance of the consumer's interpersonal relationships with trusted acquaintances. In the existing literature, the interpersonal approach of trust in food has paid primary attention to the face-to-face interactions between food consumers and food providers, for example, a stall owner in a frequently visited farmers' market (Wang et al., 2015). Recent studies further indicate that interpersonal trust may be sought when institutional trust is insufficient to sustain overall trust in food (Wang et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2015a). Following such tradition, the interpersonal aspect of trust in food has been mainly studied within the consumer-food relationship. For example, in western countries, with the proliferation of AFNs which enables local and direct exchanges between consumers and producers, e.g., at a farmers' market or community-supported agriculture, the concept of "reconnections" between consumers and food producers has been intensively addressed by scholars in the last two decades (e.g., Cox et al., 2008; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Hinrichs, 2000). However, some empirical studies in China have found that Chinese consumers who participate in AFNs demonstrated little intention to seek relationships with producers (Schumilas, 2018). These conflicting findings imply that the role of interpersonal relationships in the construction of trust in food may be more sophisticated than previously considered, and thus more novel perspectives can bring more insightful implications to current knowledge.

For AFN contexts, fresh produce is one of the main categories, and a shorter supply chain among smallholders can be expected for local markets (Whatmore, Stassart, & Renting, 2003), thus less players are involved in the food provisioning system. Furthermore, in such markets, the other party of interpersonal interaction with the consumers, i.e., the supplier/seller, is relatively identifiable given the small scale of space and frequency of exchange. It is also possible that the grower, distributor, and seller are closely connected, or can even be the same person in a local community-based agribusiness model. With shorter supply chain and small-

scale production (in particular fresh product) in AFNS, knowledge of the origin and process of food could be easier to gain and maintain (Pollan, 2009), and interactions between consumers and suppliers/sellers are possible to nurture intimacy (Wang et al., 2015).

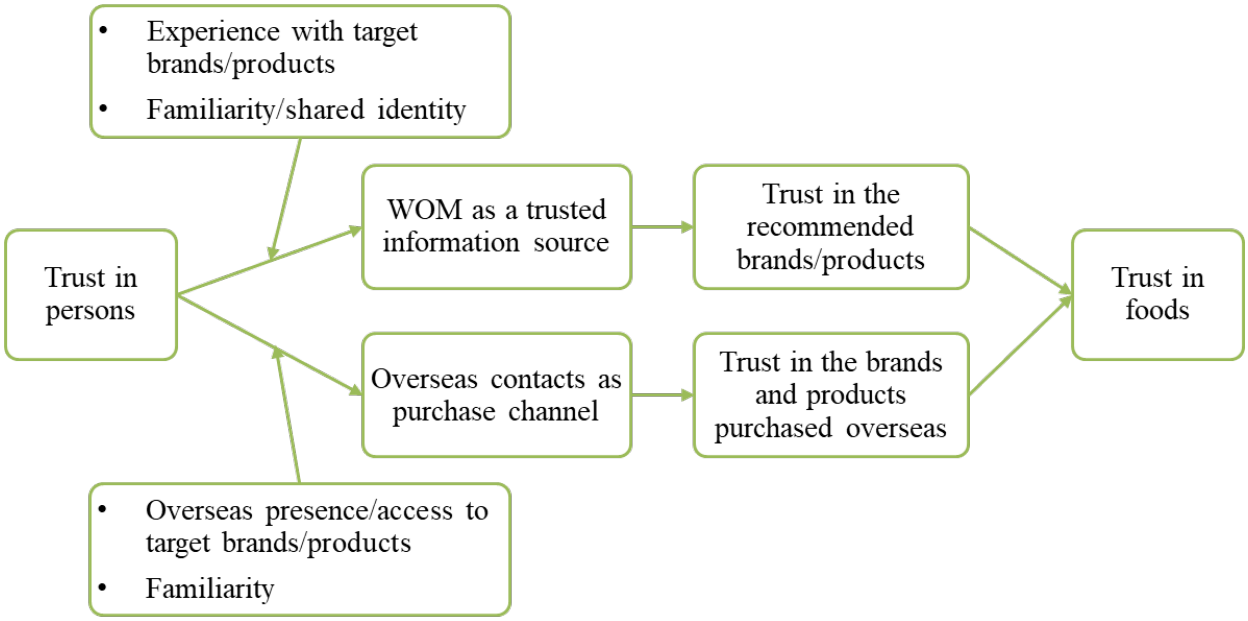
In comparison, for industrialised processed food like infant formula, with its ingredients worldwide sourced and manufacturing factories worldwide located, the retailers/sellers (such as supermarkets) are also largely disconnected with the production of the food. For consumers of infant formula, the players involved in the infant formula production and supply chain are mostly anonymous and strange others. Thus there may be little possibility for effective interpersonal interaction which may contribute to the development of trust in food. The different nature of AFNs and conventional food outlets (like supermarkets), and the different nature of fresh produce and processed food, may explain why the concept of "reconnections" to promote interpersonal trust between the producer and the consumer is not applicable in infant formula consumption.

Due to the high-profile scandals in the food sector in China, the foundation for the reconnection between the producer and the consumer has also been largely undermined. Even for Chinese consumers who participate in ANFs, the primary purpose is found to be health and safety reasons – seeking organic and ecologically produced foods in ANFs to reduce their exposure to chemicals and antibiotics in vegetables and meat (Schumilas, 2018). The safety concern, in a way, has kept Chinese consumers alert to the "profit-driven" nature of the food industry players (Chen, 2013). While the institutional food regulation appears to be weak in monitoring these industry players, seeking interpersonal "third-party" endorsement became a way for Chinese consumers to connect themselves to the target food brand/product.

In light of the Chinese context of food consumption, the perspective of "trust transfer" appears to be more applicable than "reconnections" to explain the distinctive role of interpersonal trust in food found in this research, that is, interpersonal trust in people who exist beyond the food system is greater than in people who work in the food system. This significant finding addresses the contextual differences between the Chinese society and the Western societies and how such differences may influence consumer trust construction in food. Therefore, this thesis extends the scope of the consumer-food relationship by addressing how interpersonal relationships outside of the food provisioning system contribute to the construction of consumer trust in food

through the mechanism of trust transference (Doney et al., 1998; Strub & Priest, 1976; Wang, Shen, & Sun, 2013). The findings of this research reveal two types of trust transference from a trusted person to a target food brand and product (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Two Types of Trust Transference via Interpersonal Relationships



As illustrated in Figure 12, on the one hand, word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations from trusted acquaintances who are experienced with certain infant formula brands are commonly treated as trustworthy information sources for the evaluation of a brand that the new mothers have never experienced before. Such WOM-based communication enables inexperienced consumers to access social support from others with valuable information to make their trust in the target product more substantial, and their decision-making easier (Hajli, Lin, Featherman, & Wang, 2014). Although some studies have argued that information from strangers online may be as influential as, or even more influential than, personal networks in some certain situations (Steffes & Burgee, 2009), the findings of this research is consistent with the traditional view that strong social ties are more likely to be taken as sources of information for related products (Brown & Reingen, 1987). One explanation is that, the more complicated the manufacturing process becomes, the fewer consumers can see what is going on behind the surface of the brand (Holt, 2002), thus the stronger relationship ties are desired to enable trust in a food product like infant formula, which heavily emphasises its scientific and advanced processing. Another reason is that high-involvement food products, like infant formula, are

usually perceived as riskier than low-involvement food products (Mitchell & McGoldrick, 1996), thus more sense of security may be sought after from stronger social ties. In this way, consumers' trust in an acquaintance can be successfully transferred to their trust in the food brands and products recommended by this trusted acquaintance.

Trusted overseas contacts are also treated as a trustworthy purchase channel for Chinese mothers in order to secure the genuineness and authenticity of the purchased item of a trusted brand, should the mothers wish to obtain infant formula products from an overseas market. They maintain their trust in the purchased food product because it is purchased by a trusted person from overseas. The physical linkages between the overseas contacts and the item they purchased ensure the transference of trust to the final food item (Stewart, 2003). In this sense, the overseas presence of this trusted person and his/her access to the wanted food items in the overseas market facilitates the transference of trust from the trusted person to the food products purchased by this person. Essentially, for Chinese mothers who prefer to purchase infant formula products of an overseas COC, the interpersonal relationship with an overseas contact bridges the gap between the consumer and the final product from overseas.

Previous studies on trust transfer (Liu et al., 2018; Stewart, 2003; Wang et al., 2013), propose three key factors of the trust transfer process, namely, trust in the source, trust in the target, and the relationship between the source and the target. In this research, trust in source refers to the trusted acquaintance, and the trust in target is the infant formula brands and products. In the two types of trust transference discussed above, the familiarity and close relationship between the consumer and the acquaintance is the foundation for the acquaintance to be the trust in the source (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Furthermore, the shared identity of mothers to some extent strengthens the emotional bonds between individuals to secure mutual trust (Lewicki et al., 2006). In the WOM-based trust transfer process, the relationship between the trust in source and trust in target lies in the sharing of detailed experience with the food, which means that the trusted acquaintance must be an experienced consumer of the target brand and product. In the trust transference from an overseas contact to an overseas food product, however, the overseas contact may not necessarily be an experienced consumer of any target infant formula brands or products. Instead, the overseas contact purchases and sends the desired product requested by his or her friends or relatives back to China, and such physical connection

between the overseas contact as a purchaser and the purchased product makes the transference of trust possible.

Distinctive to previous studies on interpersonal trust in food which emphasises the face-to-face interaction between the food industry players and the consumers (Doney & Cannon, 1997), this thesis identifies how interpersonal trust in a non-food industry player can be transferred to a target food brand and product through two types of connections. Acknowledging the role of an outsider in influencing the consumer-food relationship also advocates the social constructionist approach of trust adopted in this thesis.

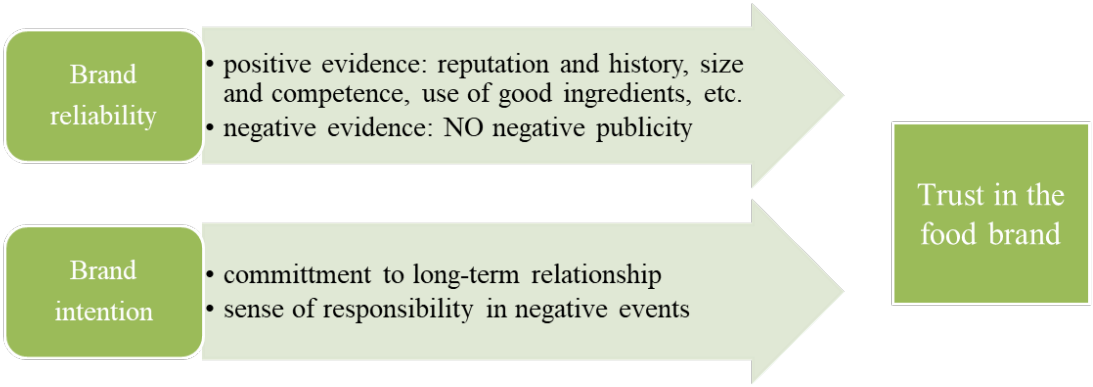
6.1.3. Food Brands and Products: Building Specific Trust in Food

The third major contributor to the construction of trust in food was identified as the actual food brands and products, which are at the end of the "farm to fork" chain of food provisioning. The trusting relationship between the consumers and the food brands and products features a micro-perspective of trust research which essentially assumes that trust develops over time, based on frequent direct interactions between the trustor and the trusted party (Bachmann, 2011). In food-related trusting relationships, food brands and products are the specific objects to be trusted by the consumer, therefore, a close look into the interactions between consumers and specific food brands and products is also integral to the comprehensive understanding of overall consumer trust in food. In this research, the concept of "food brands" is used to not only refer to the brand names *per se* but also in an inclusive manner, i.e., to acknowledge that consumers usually use the brand names to differentiate the manufacturers and their products (Amercian Marketing Association, 2017).

Previous studies have conceptualised the construct of "brand trust" to investigate the consumer-brand relationship in marketing practice (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Koschate-Fischer & Gärtner, 2015). In accordance with the conceptualisation adopted in this study concerning the competence and intention dimensions of trust, brand trust can also be characterised by brand reliability and brand intention, as defined by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001). Specifically, brand reliability refers to the extent to which consumers believe that the brand is able to accomplish its value promises, and brand intention reflects the extent to which consumers believe that the brand would care for

consumers' interests, especially in the situations of unexpected problems (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). Consistent with previous studies on brand trust, this thesis finds that brand reliability and brand intention are evaluated as two important dimensions of the trustworthiness of an infant formula brand. Figure 13 summarises the themes and sub-themes emerging from the data analysis in relation to consumer trust in an infant formula brand, based on the two dimensions of brand reliability and brand intention.

Figure 13: Two Dimensions of Trust in a Food Brand



The findings suggest that to evaluate the reliability dimension of a food brand, both positive and negative evidence may be sought by consumers. On the one hand, consumers rely on positive proofs to perceive the ability and competence of a brand, for example, the reputation and history of the brand, the size and professional management of the company, the use of good raw materials, the application of advanced technologies, the formal retail channels, and the good after-sale service (especially in negative encounters), etc. These positive proofs also substantiate the signalling function of brands to product evaluation (Dawar & Parker, 1994) so that consumers may see the established brands as more reliable and competent to fulfil the brand's promise in the future. On the other hand, consumers may also seek counter-evidence to revoke their trust in these brands. For example, negative news such as product-harm crises may damage brand image to some extent and result in changes of consumer expectation of the brand (Cleeren et al., 2013; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Therefore, "being free from negative publicity", which is an outcome of no presentation of counter-evidence, encourages consumers to take a trusting stance rather than initial distrust towards the brand. Combining the double-sided proofs, the competence of the brand to technically deliver its value promise could be established to satisfy consumers' needs, making trust in this brand possible (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003).

This research has also identified two types of motivation that consumers may perceive with regards to brand intention, as in two different consumption scenarios. In the scenario of daily business practice, brand intentions can be manifested through brand self-discipline, that is, a higher level of internal requirements on its consistent product quality and performance, as motivated by the brand's commitment to serving the consumers on a long-term basis, rather than one-off transactions (Kapferer, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, when unexpected problems occur, demonstrating a sense of responsibility becomes vital for maintaining the brand's intention to care about the consumers. Genuine care and concerns of a food brand could be expressed by in-time actions, a transparency approach, and sincerity, etc., in dealing with negative events such as food recalls, so that a chance to maintain or restore trust could be gained (Lewicki & Tomlinson, 2014). Further to previous research on brand trust which has emphasised the relevance and the measurement of brand intentions particularly in problematic circumstances (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), this research suggests that the consumers' perception of the intentions or motivations of a food brand are relevant when consumers need to make implication of the brand's future behaviour, regardless of whether the situation is problematic.

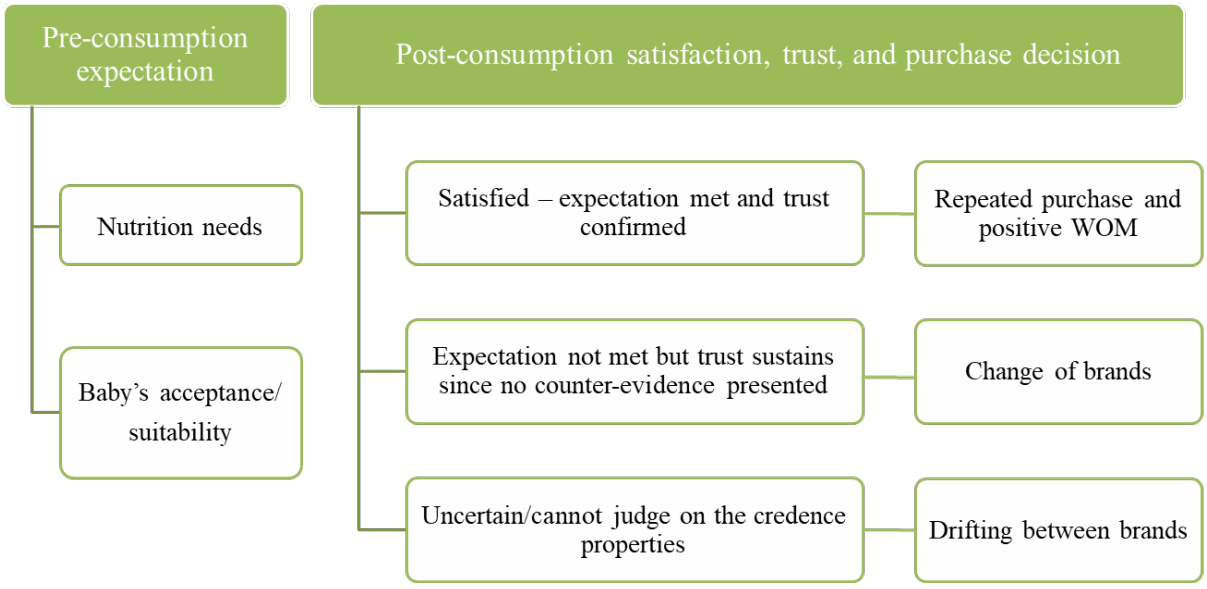
Benefiting from the longitudinal design which allows for a follow-up interview with the same group of participants, this research was able to further discuss how consumer trust in food may change in the personal transition from inexperienced to experienced consumers. As revealed in the literature, as well as in this research, the initial trust built prior to consumption may need to be confirmed by the direct interactions and knowledge gained in actual consumption (McKnight et al., 1998), in which case consumers' satisfaction becomes significant in such confirmation of trust.

In previous studies, some scholars have proposed that trust and satisfaction are mutually influential to each other following a "trust - satisfaction - post-trust - long-term trust" subsequence across pre-purchase and post-purchase stages (Kim, 2012; Kim, Ferrin, & Rao, 2003). However, this research has found, from the second interviews, that the relationship between satisfaction and trust in food brands could be more subtle in real consumption scenarios. In this research, at the pre-consumption stage, participants expected the product to meet the baby's need, not only providing comprehensive nutrients but also suiting the baby's body condition and preference of taste, i.e., being well accepted by the baby. In the actual consumption, according to the levels of how these two expectations were met, three types of

trust confirmation were identified in this research. The pre-consumption expectations and their relationship with post-consumption satisfaction, trust, and purchase decisions are illustrated in Figure 14.

In the first case, mothers were satisfied with the product performance, their expectations were met, and their initial trust was confirmed. The confirmation of trust after expectations being met is in line with traditional accounts on trust regarding its development over time with repeated interactions (e.g., Rempel et al., 1985). As an outcome of satisfaction and trust, the consumer may repeat their purchase with this infant formula brand and participate in positive WOM of this brand among other mothers, especially inexperienced new mothers.

Figure 14: Expectation, Satisfaction, Trust, and Purchase Decision



In the second case, mothers reported that their expectations were not fully met by the chosen infant formula as their baby developed an allergy, eczema, or other symptoms of discomfort. However, interestingly, their trust in the brand remained, even though their expectations were not fully met. Essentially the brand and product had not been proven as untrustworthy, and no concrete proof of other quality problems had arisen (Lewicki et al., 2006). In this case, the initial trust in the brand and the consumer-brand relationship may remain in a suspended status until further positive proofs are achieved to confirm the initial trust, or negative proofs arise to revoke the initial trust. Yet the consumers' functional needs still have to be met, thus, as a result at the behavioural level, consumers have to switch to other brands, going through a similar

choosing process as the previous brand. For example, institutional protection was still necessary as most participants limited their next choice within the range of foreign brands, and many still sought for WOM recommendations among their social networks.

There is a third case whereby participants reported an ambiguous evaluation regarding their level of satisfaction of the product performance after consumption. Due to the credence nature of food properties (Darby & Karni, 1973), some consumers may fall into uncertainty regarding whether their expectations have been fully met or not, and this may result in difficulty in confirming their trust in the food brand and its product. Consequently, as participants who experienced uncertainty after actual consumption, consumers in similar situations may develop the tendency to drift between brands as a strategy of risk diversification.

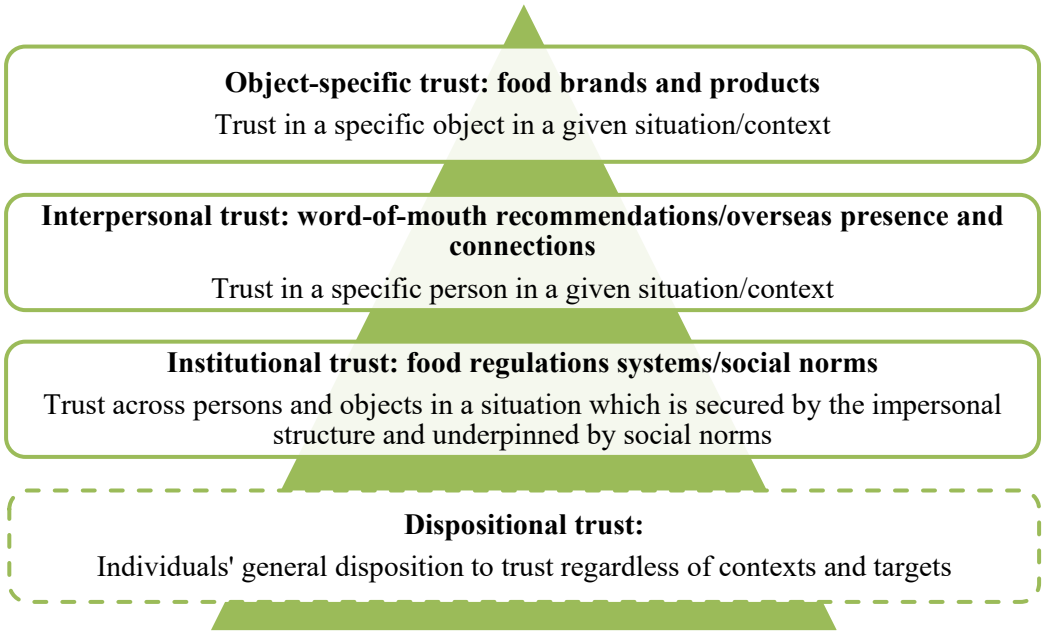
6.1.4. The Social Construction of Trust in Food

Although it is the actual food products that consumers acquire for basic living and hedonic experience, this research reveals that food brands and products do not work alone on trust in food without the food regulation system as well as broader social relations, neither can the specific trust in food brands and products be separated from the social context. Recently, a number of studies have paid attention to the interrelationships between consumers and different actors of food provisioning systems. For example, Chen's (2013) empirical work in China has tested that trust in government is significantly related with trust in manufacturers, farmers, and retailers, and trust in different actors contributes to the overall trust in food differently. Lassoued and Hobbs (2015) have also suggested that consumer trust in food brands is mediated by trust in the food system. However, the majority of these studies in the food consumption contexts have taken a micro-perspective on trust and focused mainly on the direct interactions and causal relationships between various variables, and thus "a wider view on trust which systematically includes contextual factors" is called for by scholars (Bachmann, 2011, p. 205).

Taking a social constructionist approach, this thesis provides a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of the establishment and development of consumer trust in food by placing the consumer-food relationship in a wider social context. This research finds that food regulation, interpersonal relationships, and the food brand/product contribute to the institutional, interpersonal, and brand/product dimensions of trust in food respectively.

Furthermore, within a given social context, these factors interact with each other to collectively shape the overall consumer trust in food over time. Based on the empirical findings emerging from this research data, and drawing from trust literature, this thesis proposes a social construction framework to depict the roles and interrelationships of these three major factors and the three corresponding types of trust in the establishment and development of overall consumer trust in food (Figure 15).

Figure 15: A Social Construction Framework of Trust in Food



As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the role of institutional trust in food is overarching and fundamental for the given social context, the influence of interpersonal trust in food is more relational in nature, and the trust in food brands and products is object-specific (Chen, 2013; Kim & Tadisina, 2007; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Although these three types of trust may be weighted differently in different situations, or due to individuals' different dispositions to trust, they work collectively to shape the overall trust in food. The structure of this social construction of trust in food is relatively stable according to the distinctive role of each contributor in each different domain. For example, some participants have reported relying more heavily on WOM recommendations from acquaintances, yet it does not necessarily mean that these consumers are totally ignorant of the brand names, and brand performance. Equally, although some participants have claimed self-research on brand

information being sufficient for initial trust, information from people around them still functions as complementary evidence to the judgement formed from self-research.

It is also worth noting that a fourth contributor exists - dispositional trust (the bottom layer in the dotted box in Figure 15) which refers to the extent to which a person may generally trust across different situations and persons or objects (Simpson, 2007). This dispositional trust was not discussed in this thesis because the role of individual differences in building trust in food is out of the scope of this research. Yet based on extant literature, the researcher argues that dispositional trust also has a distinctive role to play in the social construction of trust in food, and this shall be reflected in future research.

At the stage prior to first consumption, when personal experience with the target food brand and product is limited, or even unavailable, institutional trust based on a robust food regulation system lays the foundation of trust towards food products in this market at a general level. Consumers can further develop initial trust in certain food brands that are recommended by trusted acquaintances who share their experience with those brands through WOM communication. In addition, trusted overseas contacts may serve as trusted purchase channels to ensure the genuineness of the actually purchased items so that concrete trust in the specific product can be secured as well. After actual food consumption has taken place and personal experience with target brands and products accumulated, consumers gain more direct evidence regarding the trustworthiness of a brand. At this post-consumption stage, consumers may be less dependent on the institutional and interpersonal trust with regards to the evaluation of the target brand. However, the institutional protection from food regulation still functions backstage while communication with other experienced consumers may also be sought after in consumption practice.

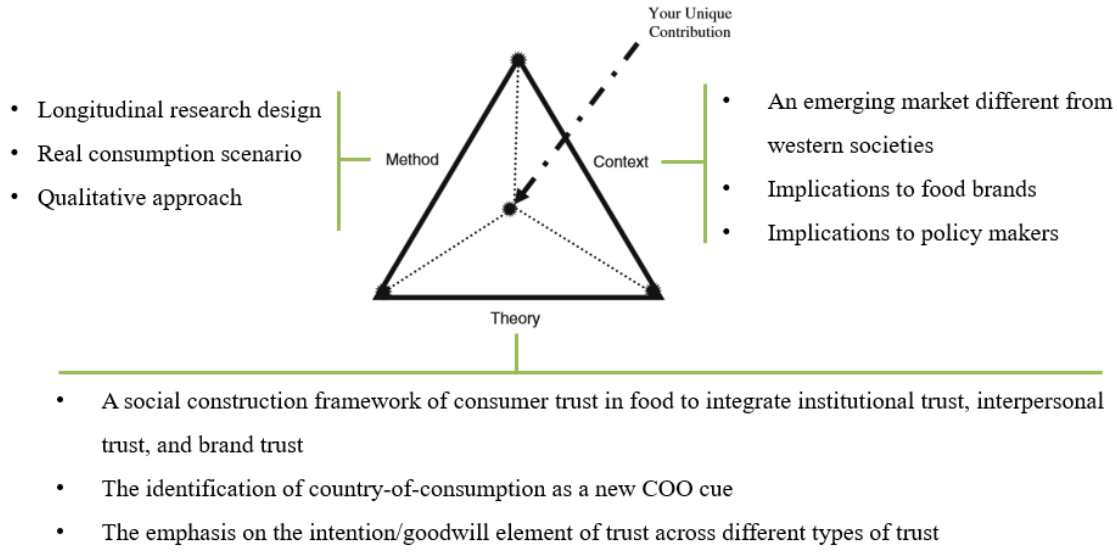
In this social construction framework, the institutional trust, which is based on food regulation and underpinned by social norms and shared values of the given social context, overarches a general level of trust in food across varying food brands and products under such regulation. Interpersonal trust derived from personal social networks compensates the lack of direct experience with specific food brands and products, and can further be transferred to that specific food brands and products, while the connections between the brand and the trusted person are strong enough. Personal, direct experience with the food brand and product, which

is gained after actual consumption, leads to a more specific and concrete level of trust in food. In conclusion, consumer trust in food at institutional, interpersonal, and brand-specific level is socially constructed through food regulation, interpersonal relationships, and the food brand and product in the given consumption context.

6.2. Research Contributions

As suggested by Ladik and Stewart (2008), the theoretical contributions of research can be addressed in three domains, i.e. theory, method, and context (Figure 16). This research makes several important contributions to academic knowledge about consumer trust in food with regards to the theory and the methodological approach of study. Building on the understanding of the research context, the thesis further offers practical implications for the food industry and policy makers at both national and international levels.

Figure 16: Contribution Domains



(adapted from Ladik & Stewart, 2008)

6.2.1. Theoretical Contributions

The main theoretical contribution that this thesis has made is towards an integrative understanding of consumer trust in food. Within a social construction framework, the present study drew on a diverse aggregation of trust theories in the extant literature and incorporated

broader social factors in the empirical work to comprehend the trusting relationship between the consumer and food. Prior research on trust in food, following an institutional or interpersonal approach, has either focused on the role of food regulation and regulator (e.g., de Jonge et al., 2008), or the direct interaction between the consumer and the food provider (e.g., Wang et al., 2015), or has simply identified and discussed different types of trust in food (e.g., Knight et al., 2007; Lindgreen, 2003). There is little work addressing trust in food as a phenomenon which requires a holistic investigation of a wide range of factors from different but integrative perspectives. This thesis, based on empirical findings, synthesises theories of institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and brand trust to propose a dynamic social construction model of trust in food which extends current knowledge of trust in food with regards to the different types of trust and their interrelationships in shaping overall consumer trust. Thus, a more comprehensive picture of trust within the context of food consumption is outlined in this study.

Another contribution to theory offered by this thesis is the identification of COC, which adds to the body of existing COO literature. COO addresses the emerging reality of the globalisation of food processing and consumption where national countries lack the capacity to effectively control and monitor global flows of food (Zhang et al., 2015a), and it implies that trust in food is a phenomenon covering the whole journey of food from farm to table. Furthermore, this study highlighted that the overall COO effect on trust in food is not simply an outcome of a cognitive stereotype or a halo effect (Han, 1989). Rather, it has an institutional foundation based on the consumer's confidence in the impersonal structures of that country which ensures a sense of security for the consumer. Finally, previous studies on COO have mainly focused on the association of a country with regards to the production of a product, from ingredients to design, manufacture, and assembly, etc. The identification of COC in this study further extends current knowledge of COO to associate a country with the consumption of a product, making the COO theory more complete to reflect the product cycle from production to consumption.

This thesis also makes a third contribution to the understanding of interpersonal trust in food. In existent literature, a large body of study has investigated consumers' interpersonal trust in food providers within contexts of AFNs. While interpersonal interactions with specific food supplier/seller is emphasised in the AFNs context, this thesis reveals the significant impact of interpersonal trust in people beyond the food supply chain on overall consumer trust in food.

In addressing the differences between the context of this research and AFNs in the literature, this thesis explains why trust in persons out of the food supply chain becomes important in a context where institutional trust in food is under suspicion for high involvement processed food categories. The thesis also discusses and explains how a trust transference mechanism has made this interpersonal trust in people beyond the food supply chain influential on shaping overall consumer trust in food. This finding contributes to current literature of both relationship marketing and trust in food by extending our knowledge of how interpersonal trust in people beyond the food supply chain, or out of the relationship marketing circle, could impact on overall consumer trust. More specific discussion on how this finding contributes to the context will be presented in section 6.2.4.

This thesis makes a fourth contribution to the literature on trust theory by highlighting the importance of the intention/goodwill element of trust in food, in particular with regards to the food regulation system and the food brands. While institutional trust emphasises the impersonal structure as a safeguard to the trustor (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; Zucker, 1986), the food regulator's concern of the public wellbeing has also been addressed in some studies (e.g., de Jonge et al., 2008). This thesis not only provides empirical evidence for the significant role of the government's care for the consumer but also reveals that the social norms and shared values are also important aspects for consumers to evaluate how much the government may be concerned about their interests. Similarly, for trust in a food brand and its product, this research identifies two types of brand motivations in relation to why a brand would treat consumers with goodwill.

Overall this study advances marketing theory by enriching our understanding of the marketing paradigm of trust research – contributing to both the relationship marketing framework and the brand trust framework, which are majorly micro level. The social construction framework of consumer trust in food proposed by this thesis sheds light on understanding the comprehensiveness of trust in food in modern societies, by taking a meso-level approach to include broader social factors into the framework.

6.2.2. Methodological Contributions

The main methodological contribution of this thesis was made by the use of a longitudinal research design to collect primary data for the exploration of consumer trust in food within an ongoing consumption experience. Despite the agreement of many scholars that trust is a dynamic process rather than a static individual psychological status (Lyon et al., 2012; Rousseau et al., 1998), little longitudinal work has been done to capture the temporal elements of dynamic trust development. In the marketing discipline, there is also little longitudinal work to investigate how consumer trust may evolve over time. This thesis collected two sets of interview data with the same group of consumers prior to and after their actual consumption of infant formula had taken place. In the comparison of consumer responses at two different periods of the consumption process, this thesis highlights that institutional trust, interpersonal trust, and trust in the brand/product interplayed differently to shape overall trust in food before and after direct experience with the food item was gained.

Another contribution to the methodology of this thesis is the use of a real consumption scenario, i.e., infant formula consumption in urban China, as the context of exploration. While experimental settings are largely used in consumer behaviour research, methodological concerns regarding the manipulation of stimuli in these types of studies have also been raised among scholars (Usunier, 2011; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Employing hermeneutic analysis to interpret the consumption stories collected from real consumers in actual consumption practice, therefore, offers a more in-depth and insightful understanding of the complexity of trust phenomenon.

6.2.3. Contributions to Context

The importance of research in emerging markets has gained increasing attention among scholars in the last decade. Burgess and Steenkamp (2006), for example, have urged for the conducting of more research in emerging markets to advance marketing science and practice, asserting that emerging markets “present significant departures from the assumptions of theories developed in the Western world that challenge our conventional wisdom” (p. 337). Furthermore, contemporary theories of trust are also mainly developed in the Western world, which may not be necessarily applicable to the Chinese context without taking into account the

major differences between China and Western societies, given that trust is a context-specific construct (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

This research, conducted in the context of infant formula consumption in urban China, has characterised China as a fast-developing economy with rapid societal changes which has also been significantly influenced by Western culture and the process of globalisation. Differing from some Western countries, where trust in the government's food regulation is largely taken for granted (Henderson et al., 2010), the lack of trust in the Chinese Government's food regulation is prominent, and the emphasis on improving institutional trust in food is equally prominent.

Also, findings from this research indicate that Chinese consumers tend to resort to close social networks and kinship groups for external validations, in the atmosphere of widespread distrust in both governmental food regulation and food industry players. With regards to how interpersonal relationships can facilitate trust in food, this thesis offers novel understanding which is different from the common approach of building face-to-face interactions between consumers and food chain actors through AFNs in the western practices (Feagan & Morris, 2009). These findings, as compared to prior research done in Western contexts, have contributed to the current knowledge of trust in food by addressing how the dynamics of trust have been shaped differently by the social-cultural embeddedness of an emerging market.

6.2.4. Practical Implications

This research was conducted in the context of China, a fast-developing country and economy which has a close connection with, and significant influence on, the global market. Findings from this context may shed light on extant literature about trust which is more Western-dominant. This thesis also provides several practical implications to the domestic and overseas food brands with regards to how to nurture consumer trust, as well as suggestions for policymakers at both domestic and international levels in relation to the public concern about trust in food.

6.2.4.1. Implications for food brands

The findings of this thesis shed light on how food brands may leverage consumer trust in business practice. The findings show that, although participants expressed low levels of willingness to buy the infant formula of domestic brands that are manufactured overseas, they perceived these overseas processed products as more trustworthy than domestically made ones. This implies that it is worthwhile for domestic food brands to adopt higher food standards and to seek overseas institutional endorsement from reputable institutions/organisations to balance the relatively low perceived reliability of domestic food regulation. Such a strategy may not instantly make the brand a choice for the consumer, however, it releases positive proofs of the competence of the brand, so that increases the possibility of the brand being one of the potential options for a consumer. Given that China is considered less favourably than developed countries as the COC for food products like infant formula, it is suggested that domestic food brands pay attention to enhancing the transparency of any handling of food products taking place in China, in order to eliminate consumers' concerns. Furthermore, this research indicates that a sense of responsibility is one of the most sought-after characteristics that consumers anticipate from a trustworthy food brand, particularly in situations where negative events occur. Thus, marketing communication must convey elements which may demonstrate how the brand demonstrates concern for the health and wellness of its consumers, and why the brand is motivated to act in that way.

For overseas food brands, which are considered more trustworthy than domestic brands to some extent for Chinese consumers, the role of COC in consumer trust building suggests that overseas brands must be careful when entering a market where the food standard is considered lower than that of the COO. Demonstrating the commitment to the same high food standard in all markets may be beneficial for the overseas brands with regards to overcoming the negative influence from the perceived low local food standard while communicating care about consumers at the same time. Also, avoiding processing in countries of low perceived food standards may help to maintain a high-end brand image and reduce consumers' perceived potential risks associated with those countries.

6.2.4.2. Implications for policymakers

This thesis offers practical implications to policymakers by highlighting the importance of both the regulatory power of food regulation and the moral obligation of the government in building consumer trust in food. For policymakers, it is undoubtedly important that the impersonal food-related standards, rules, and laws must be in place. This is to ensure the compliance of, and thus the improvement of, the soundness and effectiveness of the regulatory system which may increase the perceived competence aspect of trust in food, as already emphasised in previous studies (de Jonge et al., 2008; Henderson et al., 2010). More importantly, however, policymakers have to demonstrate sincerity and act with genuine care towards consumers' interests in food regulation. Thus, consistent propaganda of improved food regulation and public communication of its effectiveness are required as a way to deliver proofs of both the competence and goodwill of the government in order to promote public trust in food. Nevertheless, as previous research has indicated, people tend to dismiss evidence of potential trustworthiness once they are distrustful of the other party (Ekici, 2004), therefore it could be a long term effort for policy makers to elevate the positive perception of the food regulation once it has severely failed the public's expectation.

In addition, this thesis also contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of food regulation in the construction of consumer trust in food at the international scope, by the identification of COC as one of the essential COO cues to influence trust in food. In a time of globalisation, consumers' evaluation of the trustworthiness of a food product is associated with multiple countries which have been involved in any stage of the food product from ingredients to consumption. It implies that more collaboration between countries towards a more integrative cross-border food regulation is necessary as food producing, processing, and consumption have linked multiple countries together.

6.2.4.3. Implications for other contexts and food categories

Two of the major findings in this research, the identification of COC, as well as the important role of interpersonal trust outside the food chain in building overall consumer trust in food, are relatively bound to the unique context of urban China where institutional trust is considered low, with the case of infant formula, a high-involvement category of processed food. Although not claimed to be generalisable or transferable as an interpretivist work, these findings may be

inspiring for other contexts and food categories if the social construction framework of trust is taken as a guidance to look into the dynamics of trust building in contexts with other characteristics.

In countries where food safety is considered a public concern due to lagging food regulation and institutional dysfunction, salient profit motives, high profile food scandals and the spread of food-borne diseases, institutional trust in food is expected to be low. In such cases, for food categories with high perceived risk and high involvement, such as other baby food, functional food, and supplements with health claims, recommendations and experience sharing from familiar people who are of personal social networks and beyond the food chain may influence initial trust for first-time consumers given that institutional trust is insufficient to offset high risk. Where possible and available, imported food products in these categories from countries with higher food safety reputation may also be sought after by consumers.

Fresh produce is a food category different from processed food in that the supply chain is generally shorter with less players involved. Also, it is easier for consumers to observe and experience the quality of fresh produce, whilst also having more chance to personally interact with the supplier/seller in contexts such as farmers markets, or wet markets. For fresh produce of higher value, such as organic vegetables and fruits in China, trust in people outside of food supply chain may be likely to be important as a connection between the first-time consumer and the supplier/seller to build initial trust, which is similar to high involvement processed foods like infant formula. After this initial connection, in the case of processed foods, there is little possibility for each consumer to directly interact with the manufacturer in future purchase and develop personal relationship with any specific manufacture. However, for fresh produce, once the direct interaction between the consumer and suppler/seller has established, it is more possible that personal satisfaction and ongoing interactions between the two parties would become more concrete to develop and maintain consumers' trust in food purchased from this supplier/seller. Thus, maintaining good reputation and taking advantage of WOM could be practical for fresh produce suppliers/sellers to promote consumer trust in this regard.

In countries where institutional trust in food is relatively high and stable, such as New Zealand and Australia, food safety is more a "taken for granted" guarantee (Henderson et al., 2010). In these countries, WOM from trusted people both within and beyond the food chain, might be

more likely to influence brand liking as opposed to brand trust, and food products of local origin might be also more favoured by local consumers.

6.3. Limitations

All research is subject to limitations, and several limitations are present in this research. First, the concept of trust is complex in nature, and limitations may have arisen because of the diversity of trust conceptualisation in the extant literature. However, as noted previously, this thesis does not aim to develop a "one-for-all" conceptualisation of trust which is applicable to varying situations and contexts. Rather, this study is more concerned about the process of the development of consumer trust in food by looking into the interactions between the consumer, the food, and broader social factors. Different conceptualisations of trust, therefore, could be drawn on to illuminate the holistic social construction process of trust through different dimensions, provided that these conceptualisations of trust are consistent in capturing the essential elements of trust.

The second limitation of this research concerns the generalisability of the research findings due to a set of operational constraints. This study employed purposive sampling to obtain participants, a technique which usually gives access to a limited group of the population. The use of the snowballing technique in recruitment could also have further limited the variety of participants. It is acknowledged that the findings of this research are not directly generalisable to the larger population. However, qualitative research does not aim for generalisation to population, but to contribute to social theory in its exploration of the underlying social structures that "form part of the context of, and the explanation for, individual behaviours or beliefs" (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston, & Morrel, 2013, p. 353). This research does not intend to generalise its findings. Instead, the goal of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the social construction of trust in a food consumption setting, and therefore, purposive sampling and snowballing were beneficial in obtaining participants who met the criteria predetermined by the researcher, and who were able to provide thick information regarding the phenomenon being inquired.

In addition, only one specific food category, i.e., infant formula, was investigated in this research, and the research context was selected as a single setting in urban China. This may

also compromise the generalisability of the research findings to different product categories and different social-cultural contexts. Yet, neither understanding of the differences among different food categories nor comparison between different countries is in line with the purpose of this research. For an in-depth understanding of consumer trust in food, infant formula as a high-involvement food product is appropriate for the exploration of trust because the significance of trust may be prominent in such a consumer-food relationship. Given that trust is context-specific (Bhattacharya et al., 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), findings from the unique urban China context may enrich the current Western-dominated trust theory.

Finally, it is widely accepted that in interprevist research, the researcher's subjectivity and potential bias should be acknowledged (Cavana et al., 2001). Potential biases may be found in the researcher's latent preassumptions due to personal knowledge and experiences, and the subtle differences in cultural, geographic, and demographic backgrounds between the researcher and the participants. To minimise the impact of such subjectivity and potential bias, discussions with, and feedback from, PhD supervisors were frequently sought as the research was progressing from research design, to interview guideline development, data analysis and interpretation, and finding presentation.

6.4. Future Research

There are several opportunities for future research to extend the present study. In light of the limitation stemming from the constraints of sampling, recruitment, and research context, future research is recommended to explore consumer trust in food across different product categories with varying groups of consumers in different social-cultural contexts, so that the findings of this study can be tested and extended further. For instance, the comparison between processed food and fresh produce, the comparison between high perceived risk foods and low perceived risk foods, etc. It will also be very insightful to compare the differences and similarities of the social construction of trust in food in different contexts/countries, with a particular focus on the comparison between the structure of institutional trust and interpersonal trust in food in each context/country. For example, according to Fukuyama (1996), within Asia, China and South Korea are featured as low-trust societies whilst Japan is featured as high-trust society, hence a comparison on how the structural differences of various types of trust may impact on

consumer trust in food among these Asian countries may contribute to further understanding and knowledge of trust.

Personal traits are an important factor for trust building, especially for dispositional trust. Due to the research scope, however, individual differences and demographic variables were not specifically addressed in this study. How different individual orientations to trust may interact with other types of trust to form the ultimate overall trust in food is also unknown. Therefore, future research to incorporate dispositional trust may extend the present study to a more inclusive account of the social construction of trust in food.

While food regulation systems, interpersonal relationships, and the food brand and product were identified as the most significant factors to the construction of consumer trust in food, according to data analysis of this research, there may be other influential social factors as in different food categories and social contexts. For example, the role of mass media, social media, experts, food innovation and technologies, consumer organisations, and other third-party organisations, are worthy of further exploration with regard to their contribution to trust in a given context. Although these factors have not emerged in the present study, they may play more significant roles in other social contexts. It could also be meaningful to explore why some factors are more influential in some contexts than others.

6.5. Final Conclusion

In conclusion, the key purpose and overall objective of this thesis were to explore the social construction of consumer trust in food and its development over time in a fast-changing modern society where food safety is a prevalent public concern. By adopting a qualitative approach and employing in-depth interview as the research method to collect primary data within the context of infant formula in urban China, this thesis has responded to the research object, and answered the two research questions regarding the factors which are involved in trust building and how these factors interact with each other in the process of trust building in food. Three key contributors, i.e., food regulation, interpersonal relationships, and food brands/products are linked to the institutional-, interpersonal-, and brand-related trust which individually and collectively shape the overall consumer trust in food.

Based on these findings, this thesis offers an integrative social construction framework of trust to incorporate different contributors and their linking types of trust to explain how overall consumer trust in food establishes and evolves over time in a logical and meaningful way. As examined in this research, these three contributors and three types of trust connect and interplay with each other at multiple levels through fundamental social structures to interpersonal social networks and specific food brands. Furthermore, this thesis reveals that both the competence and the intention dimensions are equally important to the active functioning of each type of trust in food. Additionally, these contributors are indispensable to each other in this framework to make trust complete, but not necessarily should they be weighted evenly or equally in different contexts of trust construction. Therefore, it is important for both theory and practice to acknowledge these interrelationships which reflect a more comprehensive account of how consumers make sense of food in contemporary societies characterised by suspicions and risks. Ignoring any of these contributors and their interrelationships can result in a missing piece of the full knowledge of trust in food. For example, it is difficult to understand why WOM may work in some situations but not the others if the presence of institutional trust is not acknowledged. A company's effort to restore consumer trust may be ineffective if the institutional and interpersonal environment are not taken into account, and a government may get half the result with twice the effort in improving food regulation if it is not perceived as caring for the public.

In light of the prevalent public concern for food safety, and the progress of food globalisation, this research has provided invaluable insights and implications for trust theory and research methodology, food brands, and policymakers. Acknowledging the limitations of this thesis due to various constraints with sampling, recruitment, context, and scope, etc., it is hoped that future research will build on the findings and the social construction framework to generate more generalisable knowledge of consumer trust in food.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of Ethics Approval

Office of the Vice-Chancellor
Finance, Ethics and Compliance

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Level 10, 49 Symonds Street
Telephone: 64 9 373 7599
Extension: 87830 / 83761
Facsimile: 64 9 373 7432

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

11-Jan-2016

MEMORANDUM TO:

Dr Denise Conroy
Marketing

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 015757): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled **An Exploration of Consumer Trust and Brand Selection: Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China**.

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 11-Jan-2018.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: **015757** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators

University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Marketing
Prof Margo Buchanan-Oliver
Miss Caixia Gan
Dr Richard Starr Jr
Dr Michael Lee

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project,please complete the online proposed changes and include any revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

5. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Longitudinal Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Project Title: An Exploration of Consumer Trust and Brand Selection: Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China

Interviewer: Caixia Gan

This is an interview guide for a longitudinal study which includes two interviews with the same group of participants. Each interview is expected to last 60 minutes, and the follow up interview may be undertaken approximately 6 months after the initial one.

Initial Interview Outline

(when prospective parents are in the 7-8th month of first pregnancy)

This is a list of potential questions that the researcher may or may not ask, or may ask in different ways according to the actual situations during the interview.

Stage 1: Introduction, purpose of project, confirmation of audio-recording and photo taking, use of data, use of transcription.

Stage 2: Questions and probes

1) Do you intend to include infant formula feeding and why?
2) What does infant formula mean to you, your baby, and your family? (probe)
3) If you have a trusted infant formula brand (or brands) that you intend to feed your baby with, can you describe in detail how you decided on your preferred brand(s)? If you do not have a trusted brand at the moment, can you describe in detail how you think you will select a brand for your baby in the near future?
4) What do you expect from the preferred infant formula brand(s)? Why are these qualities important to you?
5) What does a trusted infant formula brand mean to you? What would you do to assure that a brand is trustworthy and, what would you be willing to pay for this trusted brand?
6) Can you think of any ways this brand could violate your trust in it?
7) Should this happen what do you think you will you do, and how do you think you may feel if this violation happens?

8) Do you think it may be possible for you to rebuild your trust in this brand? Why and how (probe)?
9) Do you trust any infant formula brands that have been negatively reported? (probe)
10) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to add that you have not already mentioned?

Stage 3: Closing. Thank the participant. End of interview.

Follow-up Interview Outline

(at the time when the baby is 3-5 month, approximately 6 months after the initial interview)

The follow-up interview basically explores the same topics with the initial interview, with a focus on the differences of perception and experience that may emerge from the changing personal situations, social environment and consumption context over time.

Stage 1: Introduction, purpose of project, confirmation of audio-recording and photo taking, use of data, use of transcription.

Stage 2: Questions and probes

1) Tell me about feeding your baby - are you feeding your baby as you planned when we met last time? (probe)
2) What does infant formula mean to you, your baby, and your family? Compare with last interview and probe why changes happen if any.)
3) What infant formula brand are you feeding? Probe qualities, reasons etc. (Compare with last interview and probe why changes happen if any.)
4) Have your expectations of your preferred brand(s) been met or unmet in any way? (Probe for more information)
5) Do you still trust the brands you identified as trusted in last interview? (Probe why)
6) Any special events/incidents that have affected your trust in infant formula brands since last interview? (Probe how and why)
7) Have you ever felt that your trust in a certain brand was violated in any way since last interview? (Probe how and why; Probe how to deal with this situation if any.)
8) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to add that you have not already mentioned?

Stage 3: Closing. Thank the participant. End of interview.

Appendix 3: Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

BUSINESS SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING

Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland Business School

Level 4, Owen G Glenn Building
12 Grafton Road, Auckland, New Zealand
+64 9 923 5335

The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142, New Zealand

CONSENT FORM

This form will be kept for a period of six years

Project Title: An Exploration of Consumer Trust and Brand Selection: Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China

Name of Student Researcher: Caixia (Ivy) Gan
Research Supervisors: Dr. Denise Conroy, Dr. Michael Lee
Contact email address for researcher: i.gan@auckland.ac.nz

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- My participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I will take part in a semi-structured interview, and a follow up semi-structured interview approximately six months after the initial interview.
- I agree to the researcher audio-recording the interviews.
- I agree / do not agree to the researcher taking photographs during the interviews.
- I understand that I can have the audio recorder or camera turned off at any time during my participation in this research without giving a reason.
- I understand that the audio-recordings of interviews will be transcribed by the researcher, and translated into English by the researcher or a professional translator who will sign a confidentiality agreement before getting access to the transcripts.
- I understand that I have the right to request a copy of the information that I provide to the researcher.
- I understand that I have the right to review and make any edits or omissions to the transcripts of my own as I see fit, within two weeks of receipt of the transcripts.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time without giving a reason, and to withdraw my interview data up to one month after each interview.
- I understand that the data will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis, including related presentations and possible publications.
- I understand that information reported or published will not identify me as its source.
- I understand that the data will be kept securely and separate from the Consent Form.
- I understand that the hard copies of data will be securely kept in a locked cabinet at The University of Auckland during the project and shredded when the project is completed; An electronic backup of the data will be kept securely on a password protected computer at The University of Auckland for six years, after which the data will be permanently deleted from the computer.
- I wish to receive a summary report of the research, which can be emailed to me at this email address: _____, within two months of the completion of this research project.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on [11-January-2016] for three years. Reference number [015757].

Appendix 4: Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

BUSINESS SCHOOL
DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING

Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland Business School

Level 4, Owen G Glenn Building
12 Grafton Road, Auckland, New Zealand
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The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142, New Zealand

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Longitudinal Semi-Structured Interview Participants

Project Title: An Exploration of Consumer Trust and Brand Selection: Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China

Name of Student Researcher: Caixia (Ivy) Gan
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Research Supervisors: Dr. Denise Conroy, Dr. Michael Lee
Principal Investigator: Dr. Denise Conroy

Researcher Introduction

My name is Caixia (Ivy) Gan and I am currently working towards a PhD degree at The University of Auckland Business School. I am being supervised by Dr. Denise Conroy and Dr. Michael Lee.

Project Description

The goal of this research is to explore how Chinese consumers build and rebuild trust in brands in the context of infant formula consumption, and further study how trust in the brand impacts their brand selection and consumption behaviour.

Invitation to Participate

I would like to invite you to take part in this research as prospective Chinese parents who live in urban China areas, and intend to infant formula-feed your baby within the first 6 months after childbirth. If you choose to participate, you will be involved in two semi-structured interviews. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decline this invitation to participate without penalty.

Project Procedures

I would like to conduct two semi-structured interviews with you at a place you see fit. The second interview will be approximately 6 months after the first one. The expected time commitment of each interview is 60 minutes. I would like, with your permission, to audio record the interviews and take photographs during the interviews. You can have the recorder and camera turned off at any time without giving a reason. After interviewing, the recordings will be transcribed by me, and translated into English by me or a professional translator. You can require a copy of the photographs, recordings, transcripts and translations made of you via email contact with me. You can make any edits with the transcripts that you see fit and return your revisions to me within two weeks of receipt of the transcripts.

Approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on [11-January-2016] for three years. Reference Number [015757].

Data Storage, Retention, Destruction and Future Use

The data you provide in this project will be used in my PhD thesis, including related presentations and possible publications. The electronic form of data will be kept secure on a password-protected computer at The University of Auckland for the duration of the project. All electronic data will be kept for six years since the completion of the project, after which the data will be permanently deleted from the computer. All hard copies of the data generated during the project will be securely kept in a locked cabinet at The University of Auckland, and will be serurely shredded at the completion of the project.

Right to Withdraw from Participation

You have the right to withdraw from the interviews at any time without giving a reason. You may also ask for your interview data being removed from this study up to one month after each interview.

Confidentiality

The preservation of confidentiality is paramount. To protect your confidentiality, if the information you provide is reported/published, it will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. If a professional translator is involved in translating the transcripts made of you, a confidentiality agreement will be signed by the translator.

The interviews do not involve any risk to you. To thank you for your time and participation, you will receive a $20 gift voucher at the end of each interview, or a courtesy gift if you decide to withdraw from the interview. Upon the completion of the project, if requested, I can email you a summary report of the project within two months. This summary report will detail the rationale, results and conclusions of the study.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me or the Principal Investigator, Dr. Denise Conroy.

Yours sincerely,

Caixia (Ivy) Gan

CONTACT DETAILS AND APPROVAL

Student Researcher Name and Contact Details	Supervisor Name and Contact Details	Head of Department Name and Contact Details
Caixia (Ivy) Gan Department of Marketing, The University of Auckland Business School i.gan@auckland.ac.nz	Dr Denise Conroy Department of Marketing, The University of Auckland Business School d.conroy@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 923 7286	Prof Margo Buchanan-Oliver Department of Marketing, The University of Auckland Business School m.buchanan-oliver@auckland.ac.nz +64 9 923 6898

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand. Telephone +64 9 373-7599 ext. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz.

Approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on [11-January-2016] for three years. Reference Number [015757].

Appendix 5: Translator Confidentiality Agreement

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau
NEW ZEALAND

BUSINESS SCHOOL
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The University of Auckland Business School

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The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, 1142, New Zealand

TRANSLATOR CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Project Title: An Exploration of Consumer Trust and Brand Selection: Infant Formula Consumption in Urban China

Student Researcher: Caixia Gan

Research Supervisors: Dr. Denise Conroy, Dr. Michael Lee

Contact email address for researcher: i.gan@auckland.ac.nz

Translator:

I agree to translate the transcripts (from Chinese to English) for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and her supervisors.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Approved by The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on [11-January-2016] for three years. Reference number [015757].

Appendix 6: Coding Examples

Excerptions	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
IG: What do you think a baby formula brand that you trust should look like? What are the requirements for you to trust it? MARY: The first point is to guarantee its…For example, Aptamil and Karicare, for a long time, and once there was some news saying there was a problem with either Aptamil or Karicare, a problem not caused by intentionally adding elements, anyway. I think if something was intentionally added into the baby formula, even once, I won't trust it ever again. But {in this case}, the baby formula was slightly contaminated by the machine, and that company managed to deal with this incident properly. So the first point, it's not an issue caused by people, so it's forgivable. Because everyone may make mistakes, and it's not an intentional mistake. So I trust it because it has always been …. And NZ has very strict requirements of baby formula. It has been doing well in protecting its babies and women. So I trust the policy of this country, and another one, I trust that the policy will regulate corporations. Unlike in China, it's the same whether we have such policies or not. In foreign countries, the policy would be enforced and implemented, and it can make the company close down if the company doesn't work it out. Therefore, truly trusting this company may be mainly because of the trust in the policy of this country, as it indeed pays attention to protecting its babies. Foreign countries care for women and babies relatively well. From this point of view, I prefer foreign {brands}. Additionally, that incident was not intentionally man-made, rather, it was a contamination caused by machine or whatever else. IG: Are you talking about the Fonterra false alarm in August 2013? Karicare has recalled at that time. MARY: Probably yes. The most important thing it that it recalled at once and made some compensations to consumers. I kind of can't remember it, but you reminded me. Now in China, take Johnson& Johnson as an example, which is noisily argued recently. It has recalled products in foreign countries, yet in China, you still see Johnson & Johnson everywhere. It doesn't care at all whether it may affect the babies when you use it. So in foreign countries, once a problem is discovered, recall will be actioned immediately. From this I know I can trust this brand, as long as I don't get a counterfeit in China -- I believe this corporate won't practice counterfeiting and ruin its own reputation for such a minor {profit}. I believe as this brand has run for so long -- as you know, it's not easy to build a business now, and how important it is to build the reputation, and you know, once it is ruined, it has to pay too great a price to rebuild it. I think usually it won't do so.	• unintended accident • trust violation • intended contamination • unintended accident • forgivable mistake • company reaction to accident • food regulation • care for mothers and babies • policy enforcement • punishment of non-compliance • trust in the company/brand • trust in food regulation • care for mothers and babies • unintended accident • Company reaction to accident • Company acts differently in different countries • Care for babies • Company reaction to accident • Trust in the brand Brand intention: self-protection & reputation maintenance	• Intention: ➢ company/brand: unforgivable intended contamination V.S. forgivable unintended mistake ➢ food regulator: care and protection of consumers • Food regulation ➢ regulatory aspect ✓ strict requirements ✓ policy enforcement ✓ punishment of noncompliance ➢ intentional aspect ✓ care and protection for mothers and babies, consumers • trust in the brand/company ➢ Reputation ➢ Intention ➢ Reaction to accidents ➢ Supported by trust in food regulation	• Institutional trust based on food regulation ➢ Regulatory - ability ➢ Intentional – goodwill • Trust construction ➢ Institutional trust: a foundation of brand trust

Appendix 7: Coding System

Categories	Codes
personal experience/knowledge	personal brand experience
	personal knowledge
	consumer involvement
	information sources
interpersonal relations	familiarity and intimacy
	peer similarity
	mother's identity
	overseas connections
	suspicion with unfamiliar others/daigou
WOM communication	actual experience sharing
	experience/recommendation - peer-friends/colleagues
	experience/recommendation from old generations
	experience/recommendation from relatives
	mother's group discussion/recommendation
concerns of counterfeit	Third-party counterfeits
	Food fraud/contamination
dysfunctional domestic food regulation	past experience of food safety incident
	domestic food safety status
	suspicion of domestic food regulation
	ignorance of responsibility/duty
	Collusion between government and businessmen
	Attitudes towards new infant formula regulation/rules
food regulation - competence	food inspection
	food standards/rules/laws/policy/requirements
	enforcement and implementation, execution
	punishment of non-compliance (price of law-breaking)
	Agri policy and management

Categories	Codes
government's intention/care/concern	policy priority
	care/protection of consumers
	Environmental protection
Social norms and shared values	Social norms
	Shared values
	National characters/spirits
	Craftsmanship
	evil human nature
corporate/brand intention	corporate ethics and conscience
	corporate culture and value
	corporate social responsibility
	corporate management
	brand self-discipline
	Brand self-protection
	Profit-driven
	brand double-standard in different countries
brand/product reliability	corporate food standard
	Company/brand history
	Product safety and quality
	product negative publicity
	Company/brand reputation
purchase channel	buy on behalf - from overseas contacts
	buy on behalf - from unknown/unfamiliar others
	supermarket/departmental store
	baby & mother's shops
	online - haitao
	local online platforms
product COO features	Domestic brand/hybrid brand manufactured in China
	foreign brand manufactured/sub-packaged in China
	originally imported foreign branded products
	foreign branded products sold in overseas market

Categories	Codes
COO - location	brand's country of origin
	place/country of manufacture
	country of milk source
	place/country of repackaging
	reputation/performance in overseas market
	foreign brands in China
	Chinese brands in overseas market
COO - advantages	advanced food technologies
	robust food regulation
	Economic status
	Natural/breeding environments
Prior consumption	Credence features of infant formula
	(big) brand effect
	Brand/product reviews
	brand/product expectation
	initial trust in brands/products
Post consumption	Product performance
	baby's responses to infant formula
	post-consumption satisfaction
	Confirmation of trust
	Uncertainty of product evaluation
	repurchase of brands
	change of brands
food incidents/recalls	trust violation
	brand/company reaction
	forgivable incidents
	unforgivable incidents
	transparency in reaction to food incident
	Compensation for food incidents
	Unintended accidents
	Intended contamination

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