

THE DARKER SIDE OF FUNCTIONAL FOODS

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- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1OyQn2STk0
&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1OyQn2STk0&feature=related)

DEFINITION

- Functional foods are defined as fortified or enhanced foods that provide a health benefit beyond basic nutrition via the addition of health-value ingredients.
- For a food to be regarded as functional, it must be demonstrated that it beneficially affects functions in the body that is relevant to either an improved state of health and wellbeing or to a reduction of risk of disease.



BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

- Functional foods can be found among most product categories (e.g. soft drinks, yoghurt, confectionary, dairy and cereals).
 - Sales of functional foods have been reportedly growing far more quickly than foods sales as a whole.
 - The recession has NOT slowed down the expansion of this market.
 - By 2013 the sales of functional foods are expected to reach a value of at least US\$90.5bn.
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BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

- Marketers of functional foods aim to persuade consumers that the consumption of these foods will ensure their wellbeing and reduce the likelihood of a number of serious diseases.
 - For example, Omega 3 fatty acids have been acclaimed for their assistance in cancer prevention, cardiovascular disease prevention, improved immune function, improved brain health and anti-inflammatory function : Many foods, including bread, milk, eggs, margarines and cereals are now being fortified with Omega 3 to encourage people to buy these products as opposed to the non-fortified versions.
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BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

- There are two main categories of functional foods:
 - Those that have been proven to provide genuine health benefits (e.g. pro-biotic yoghurts; cholesterol lowering spreads). I label these ***nutritionally-rich functional foods***.
 - Those that while being fortified lack any real nutritive value (e.g. Chocolate-flavoured cereal bars; high-fibre biscuits; zinc fortified breakfast cereals, vitamin supplemented sweets). I label these ***nutritionally-poor functional foods***.





CURRENT RESEARCH

- Empirical research the consumption of functional foods is in its infancy . Most research focuses on investigating consumer attitudes towards and acceptance of functional foods.
 - Other research:
 - The popularity of such functional foods is attributed to consumers' increasing interest in the preventative value of foods.
 - More nutritionally-savvy consumers are believed to use these foods as preventative consumption or self-medication.
 - Extant research suggests that consumers of functional foods show more interest in healthy eating and health in general.
 - Research believes that consumers buy functional foods to derive health benefits.
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BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

- Not enough research focuses on the following issues:
 - Why consumers purchase and consume functional foods. While it is believed that consumers buy these foods for health benefits, there is not enough research to corroborate this.
 - The role that functional foods have in the consumer's diet.
 - The influence of these foods on the consumer's wellbeing.
 - Research into functional foods
 - tends to sidestep the fact that there are 2 different categories of functional foods.
 - tends to focus almost exclusively on nutritionally-rich functional foods.
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MY RESEARCH: STARTING POINT

- Why do people consume functional foods?
 - What other reasons (aside from health reasons) can explain functional food consumption?
 - Do functional foods always enable the consumer to lead a healthier life?
 - While sales of functional foods have been spiraling, sales of fruits and vegetables have been steadily decreasing. Is it possible that functional foods enable consumers to include nutrients in their diets without having to eat more fruit and vegetables?
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MY RESEARCH: PROPOSITIONS

- Some people consume functional foods to “cancel out” a less healthful activity.
 - Functional foods enable consumers to include nutrients in their diets in more ‘pleasurable’ ways.
 - The addition of functional foods enables consumers to justify a generally unhealthy diet by diverting their focusing to the nutritive benefits of the functional foods added to their diet.
 - Nutritionally-poor functional foods enable consumers to eat tasty foods without any resulting feelings of guilt, i.e., the fortification of junk or unhealthy food enables consumers to justify its consumption.
 - The nutritive ingredients added to functional foods enable consumers to justify the consumption of larger amounts of these food products.
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THEORIES UNDERPINNING MY RESEARCH

- *Guilt Theory*: Hedonic consumption, which includes the consumption of those foods which provide pleasure but no nutritive value, create in consumers a sense of guilt. Consumers will always attempt to reduce any feeling of guilt and use any number of mechanisms to do this.
- *Justification Theory*: One of the easiest way to reduce guilt is through cognitive reconstrual or justification. This allows any purchase decision to be looked at more positively and enables consumers to maintain cognitive consistency.

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative Research: Self-completion diaries & in-depth interviews.
- 34 'diary interviews' were conducted with members of staff of a medium-sized UK university.
- A two-tiered purposive sampling technique was used to recruit:
 - an email was sent round to all members of staff aimed to find people solely or partly responsible for the family shopping.
 - The interested parties were then emailed back with a detailed definition of functional foods and a list of examples, and asked whether such products form part of their regular shop.
- Participants were asked to keep a shopping diary during four consecutive shopping trips and list down any functional foods that they purchased, briefly detailing what motivated the purchase
- Follow up in-depth interviews were conducted.

RESULTS

○ **Boosting an Unhealthy Diet**

- Many consumers felt that their diet could do with some improvement, yet expressed doubts as to their ability to make substantial changes in their diets.
 - The most common concerns articulated by these participants were the lack of fruit, vegetables and fibre in their diets and the intake of too much ready-made (pre-prepared) food.
 - Many of the respondents believed that adding functional foods to their diet enabled them to at least partially modify this deficiency.
 - Food added included both nutritionally-rich and nutritionally-poor functional foods.
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RESULTS

○ **Substitutive Consumption: Substitution of Nutritionally-Rich foods.**

- Consumers long for health and wellbeing and realise the importance of food to achieve this – however many feel that adhering to the Food Pyramid Guide is difficult.
 - Some consumers use functional foods to replace naturally healthy foods such as food and vegetables.
 - Such substitutions involve both nutritionally-rich and nutritionally-poor functional foods.
 - Consumers do not seem to care where the nutrients come from as long as these form part of their diet.
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RESULTS

- **Substitutive Consumption: Substitution of Nutritionally-Poor foods.**
 - Eradicating unhealthy but flavoursome food from their diet is extremely difficult for most people.
 - Many consumers are pleased that they can substitute favourite (but unhealthy) foods with equally tasty but fortified alternatives.
 - Fortified unhealthy foods (e.g. biscuits, chocolate etc.) permit people to give in to their food desires without resulting in excessive feelings of guilt.
 - The added nutritive ingredients in functional foods enable consumers to justify the consumption of fortified 'junk-foods'. Eating favourite foods while feeling reassured that these have been enhanced with nutritive ingredients.
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RESULTS

- **Compensatory Consumption**
 - Food is a great source of pleasure and consumers often buy food for reasons other than its nutritional value.
 - Few consumers are willing to give up the unhealthy foods that they love in exchange for a healthier lifestyle.
 - Functional foods are used to compensate for overconsumption or unhealthy consumption. Some participants felt that eating fortified foods is effective in negating the detrimental effects of unhealthy foods.
 - Both nutritionally-rich and nutritionally-poor foods are utilised.
 - The addition of functional foods enables consumers to have it all, i.e., food that gives them pleasure and food that works hard to cancel out any detrimental effects.
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RESULTS

- **Functional Foods as a Viable Alternative**

- Functional foods enable people to eat what they want, often in greater quantities.
- Functional foods appear to provide a viable alternative to people who want to consume a healthier version of an unhealthy food. But:
 - fortified unhealthy foods are still unhealthy and thus still a concern for the long-term wellbeing of the consumer
 - the notion that these foods are the “healthier version” encourages people to eat more of them:
 - by focusing on the ‘healthier’ aspect, consumers are more likely to purchase and consumer these foods



Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

