

Functional foods are seen as healthy: But taste and pleasure matter too!

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Health benefits are the key message of functional foods bearing health claims. Actual food choice, however, is influenced by various other motives. Scientists from the University of Belgrade and IPSOS Strategic Marketing researched the effect of food choice motives, nutritional knowledge, and the use of food labels on consumer attitude towards foods with health claims. The expectation of a functional food benefitting one's health is strongly influenced by a person's trust in food labels. At the same time, consumers also expect functional foods to be tasty and pleasant in the sense of enhancing one's mood.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the six Western Balkan countries Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia with a total of 3,085 participants. Each national sample was representative of the population. The questions comprised of a list of food choice motives, nutritional knowledge, trust and use of labels, and attitudes towards functional food.

Different underlying food choice motives influence consumers' attitude towards functional foods with health claims. The most influential motives as identified in European literature are health & natural content, sensory appeal, mood, purchase & preparation convenience, price, weight control, familiarity, and ethical concern.

In their analysis, the researchers in Belgrade found that mood, sensory appeal and the perceived health benefit influenced participants' attitude towards a functional food the most. Furthermore, health benefit was strongly influenced by trust in claims and familiarity with food labels. Most respondents agreed that the use of food labels is beneficial because it leads to a healthier food choice. At the same time, however, they stated that purchase behaviour was restricted by time and effort. The interviews showed that consumers trust the nutrition information on-pack more than their own nutritional knowledge about what is in the product.

In this study, functional food was generally perceived as positive. The study further revealed that functional food is not only associated with health effects, but respondents also linked it to a certain sensory appeal. Based on these findings, the authors emphasise the importance of the hedonic value of a product (i.e., tasty and pleasant) in communicating the benefits of functional foods. As health effects of functional foods are still perceived as the key feature by many consumers, specific health effects as well as benefits and perceived threats from use should be communicated clearly. In addition to this, the researchers suggest to also consider sensory appeal as a prime motive in food choice.

The study confirms previous findings showing that attitudes towards functional foods are dependent on consumers' knowledge of the specific effect. As the health motive is strongly influenced by trust in labels and familiarity with labels, there should be a common European approach to establish consumer



understanding and confidence in food labelling and health claims in particular. Further research could include the analysis of actual consumption of functional foods as well as a wider range of product categories and health claims.

For further information

Žeželj, I., Milošević, J., Stojanović, Ž., Ognjanov, G. (2012) [The motivational and informational basis of attitudes toward foods with health claims](#) *Appetite*, 59(3):960-967.