Benefit Communications - How and when to communicate the science

Innovative Products

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Marketing functional foods

- Functional foods an important direction for growth

- What is a functional food?
  - Any food product with ingredient based added health value?
  - EU legislation – only approved ingredient-health relations
Food Marketing

- Focus on hedonism
  - Natural, traditional
  - Happy atmosphere
  - And good taste...
Pharma Marketing

■ Serious business

■ Mostly business to physician marketing

■ To solve nasty problems, not to increase joy

Cod liver oil – medicine or functional food
Success of functional foods

- Commercially and in terms of increased public health, success of new functional foods critically depends on
  - Consumer uptake of the innovative products
  - Consumer loyalty / repeated purchases

- In the food sector
  - Traditional, hedonistic, to some extent sustainability, low risk, ease of use

- In Pharma
  - Benefits, evidence, to offset (stereotypical) foul taste...
If we assume the consumer makes a decision based on weighing of different benefits and risks...

Just add beliefs about benefits, that have a high weight.... and the attitude towards your functional food will be great...

\[ A_b = \sum_{i=1}^{n} W_i X_{ib} \]

The classic Fishbein attitude formula (1975)
Communicating about functional foods

- Intuitive, affective interpretation will colour perceptions of both risk and benefit

- Benefits essential, but giving information on just benefits may give rise to distrust

- Trust is essential as there is no immediate (observable effect)

(Finucane et al 2000)
Trust sounds easy but is not

- Information from a trusted source will lead to benefit and risk perception and hence acceptance

- Whomever tells us something that aligns with our prior opinion is the one we trust
Where lie the benefits of functional foods

- Future benefits – Temporal discounting
  - Benefits at high level of abstraction

- Functional food benefits: Counter intuitive
  - Natural and traditional seen as food benefits
  - Technological, new, and unknown as food risks (e.g. Fife-Schaw and Rowe, 2000)
**Construal of opinions on functional foods**

- Abstractly construed opinions are likely to be positive.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>High/abstract/reasoned</th>
<th>Low/concrete</th>
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<tr>
<td>Long term health effect</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
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<td>Unnatural</td>
<td>Temporal Risk</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
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<td>Taste</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>Experience</td>
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But how abstractly do we think in the Supermarket?
How to communicate?

- Communicating about the risks and benefits
  - Increases trust, and the impact of benefits

- For new technologies this may lead to increased ambivalence, the perception there are good and bad parts to the product...

- ... and polarisation (Fischer et al submitted)
Attitudinal Ambivalence

Attitude

Negative

Non Ambivalent

Highly Ambivalent

Positive

Fischer et al Submitted
Combined information or Risk-Benefit information

- 2009 study in the Netherlands on communicating about the Quality adjusted life years (QALY) attributed to regular consumption of fatty fish (N=325)

- 2 (integrated versus separate information) x 3 (positive net effect, zero effect, negative net effect) design

- Usefulness of QALY measure when deciding to eat more fatty fish
When considering health effects that are positive or neutral – the separate reporting of benefits and risks is preferred.

For negative net effects, people prefer a single measure.
Discussion

- Attitude formation for innovative products based on risk benefit information is a complex issue.

- Straightforward application of a calculating end-user (or rational actor) cannot account for differences found, not even if risk information is seen as more indicative.
Discussion

- Fundamental differences between risk and benefit information processing point towards different information needs.
- Communications about pro’s and con’s increases trust of the source.
- More complete disclosure of pro’s and con’s required for net positive products than for bad products.
- **BUT:** For innovative products such combined information may lead to polarisation and increased ambivalence.
  - Ambivalence can be on arguments, but there may also be ambivalence between feeling and knowing.
Innovative Functional Foods

- Build in desirable and concrete end-user benefits
- These benefit should not only be rational arguments but also hedonic and affect
- Provide honest and competent answers about what you are doing, what you don’t know, and what the downside might be to build and maintain trust
- Do not expect miracles, a long term, uncertain health effect is not considered a huge benefit by most consumers right now
Thank you