

# **“Bagels and doughnuts...round food for every mood”**

## **Food Advertising Discourses**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The relationship between food and mood has been discussed for many years. This paper aims to extend that debate by exploring how food advertising, a key source of consumer information about food, utilises and implies varied associations between food and mood.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The research combines a textually oriented analysis with an analysis of the visual images in a sample of typical food advertisements drawn from women’s magazines.

**Findings** –Although healthy foods have the potential to enhance mood this is not often used as a key advertising message. Conversely, advertisements for foods that can depress mood frequently adopt messages of happiness and wellbeing.

**Research limitations/implications** – This exploratory research provides an initial investigation of advertising discourses of food and mood at a snap shot in time. Based on the findings derived from this limited sample, further research is suggested which would provide a more comprehensive survey of food advertising.

**Practical implications** – The research is of value to food promoters in suggesting that they review food messages and the use of emotional appeals in the light of developing scientific research on the link between food and mental wellbeing.

**Social implications** – The growing interest in promoting mental-health and wellbeing means that consumers and governments are keen to understand the relationship between food and mood and its potential influence on consumer food choices.

**Originality/value** – Existing debate has focused on scientific or socio-cultural knowledge of the relationship between food and mood. There is less research available on whether an association between food and mood is suggested in food advertising. This paper addresses that gap and finds that further research is warranted.

**Keywords** – Promotion, food, mood, advertising appeals, mental health and wellbeing.

**Paper type** – Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

Chandler's quote from the US TV comedy 'Friends' illustrates our cultural understanding of the relationship between food and mood, demonstrating that we often choose foods for emotional support and psychological comfort (Freeman and Gil, 2004) rather than for nutritional benefits alone (Marshall 2005). Some foods such as coffee and chocolate are recognised as 'feel-good fares', but other foods can have a long-lasting influence on general mood and mental wellbeing (Cornah, 2006). There is now a growing body of scientific research linking food to mental health. A significant international study in 2009 identified a direct link between the consumption of a healthy diet and positive mental wellbeing (Akbaraly et. al.2009) and there is consistent evidence that an unhealthy diet is a 'key *modifiable* risk factor' for some mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and dementia (Jacka, et. al. 2014, 1) (our emphasis). With the annual cost of mental ill health in the UK estimated at £105 billion (Centre for Mental Health, 2010), there are calls for direct action to address mental health with nutrition-related policy and initiatives (Jacka, et.al. 2014) and for nutrition to become a factor in mental health promotion (McCulloch, 2006).

In recent years, the public have been well informed of the physiological health risks associated with a diet which is high in saturated fat, sugar and salt and low in fruit, fibre and fresh vegetables. There is much less public awareness of the effect of food on emotional wellbeing and mental health (Dunne, 2010). A National Opinion Poll survey of the public's perception of the association between food and mood found that much of the UK public is unaware of the link between unhealthy food and mental health, and even more unaware of the impact of healthy foods on mood and feelings (Cornah, 2006). Communicating information to the public about foods that promote mental, emotional and physical wellbeing is therefore a key recommendation of the research by the Mental Health Foundation (Cornah, 2006).

The public derive their knowledge of food from a variety of sources including food advertising. Commercial advertising can contribute to consumer food knowledge and choice behaviour (Brennan et.al. 2008) and communicate health messages more widely than typical public health messages (Ippolito and Mathios, 1991). Commercial advertisers have referenced the physiological health benefits of foods since 1984 (when Kellogg's first promoted the association between dietary fibre and reduced risks of cancer), and these claims are highly regulated to ensure that food advertising does not "...undermine progress towards national dietary improvement by misleading or confusing consumers" ([www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)). However, although there have been research developments around the relationship between food and mental, rather

than physical, health (Ioakimidis et. al. 2011, Hendy 2012, Gardner et.al. 2014), there is little research on whether commercial food advertising promotes any association between food and general mood and mental wellbeing. In this paper, we contribute to the discussion of food and mood by considering commercial food advertising as a significant influencer of consumer food choice and consumption. Specifically, by examining a snapshot of food advertisements in women's magazines over a single period, our aim was to explore whether food advertising, either implicitly or explicitly, suggests an association between certain foods and consumer moods. We first briefly set out the theoretical basis of the study, explaining the ways in which advertising is thought to influence the consumer. We then identify competing discourses of food and mood which have the potential to create confusion amongst consumers and to obscure messages which may be beneficial to their mental health and wellbeing.

## **2. Theoretical Underpinning: The Influence of Advertising**

There are a number of ways in which advertising can influence the food choices of consumers. Firstly, advertising can increase awareness of particular foods and brands so that consumers search for them. Secondly, advertising can build consumer expectations of the sensory and non-sensory benefits of food such as the social and symbolic value associated with its purchase and consumption. Thirdly, advertising can influence the perceived relative value of the benefit of foods with messages emphasising taste, for example, over health (Chandon and Wansick 2012). The message presented depends on whether advertisers decide to provide factual information on the product (information-based appeals) or to appeal to the emotions of the consumer (emotion or feeling-based appeals) (Fill, Hughes and De Francesco 2013).

Food advertising messages, particularly those related to the promotion of foods high in fat, sugar and salt, are subject to close scrutiny (Ofcom 2010). Advertisers are prohibited from making factual claims that they are unable to prove, but advertising frequently works through implicit suggestion so that it can be difficult to “reduce advertising claims to truth or lies” (Hackley and Hackley 2014, 242). Consequently there is a risk of vague, confusing claims (Brennan et. al. 2008) and those that “push the limits of what science could support” (Byrd-Bredbenner and Grasso 2001, 38). But beyond determining whether advertising claims can be scientifically proven, it is also necessary to determine how these messages are understood by the consumer (Chandon and Wansick 2012).

Advertising is a system of meaning creation encompassing the inherent properties of a product and the way in which these properties *can be made meaningful* to the consumer (Williamson 1987) (our emphasis). Consumers do not passively receive advertising messages, but instead they

interact with advertising as active participants in meaning-making (McCracken 1988). Advertising messages prompt consumers to recognise similarities between their everyday lives and the promoted product by drawing on knowledge of the meanings “that are resident in each consumer’s culturally constituted world” (Sheehan, 2014, 23). Advertising takes these meanings, puts them into the context of brand marketing and reflects them back, “...so that consumers can perform cultural practices symbolically through the consumption of marked brands” (Hackley and Hackley 2014, 289). Advertising therefore can influence mood not only by promoting foods which are scientifically known to influence mental health by having a physiological effect on the brain (as in Cornah 2006) but also by using advertising messages to remind consumers of feel-good association linked to their consumption of food in the past.

### **3. Discourses of Food and Mood**

Around any topic there are a variety of different discourses, conveying different ways of representing the topic and different ways of constructing reality (Baker 2006). Cook et. al. (2004) argue that there exists a plurality of voices around food debates, characterised by frequent contradiction and confusion. In addition, variations in language and terminology abound. For example, while Jiang et. al. (2014) identify a clear lexicon of emotion surrounding food messages, others suggest that terms such as ‘mood’ and ‘emotion’ are often used interchangeably, although ‘mood’ is considered to be of longer duration and described as positively or negatively valenced (Garrido 2014, McStay 2011). Here we explore these different voices as competing discourses. Such discourses can find their way into consumer understanding, emphasising different aspects of that reality and are therefore influential in how consumers understand the relationship between food and mood.

#### *3.1. Scientific discourses of Food and Mood: Food as ‘Feeding the Mind’.*

Foods are represented as having a long-term influence on mood and wellbeing “...because of the impact they have on the structure and function of the brain” (Cornah, 2006, 6). Not only does food impact on mood and general wellbeing, but it also contributes to the prevention and management of specific mental health disorders. Early work on the relationship between food and mood indicated a link between reduced fat consumption and increased anger (Wells 1998). Subsequent work has shown an affirmative link between consumption of omega-3 fatty acids and positive mood (Appleton et. al. 2007, Beezhold et. al. 2010). Fish in particular, with its high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, has been recognised as beneficial to health, potentially contributing to low levels of depression, memory loss and anxiety (Maddock et. al. 1999, Appleton et. al. 2007, The Economist, 2010). Rodgers (2001) also supports this but suggests that

the relationship between diet and depression needs further exploration. Westover (2002) found an association between high consumption of sugars and depression while Appleton (2007) noted links between low income and the exclusion of mental health promoting food products that can magnify the relationship between eating certain foods and depression.

Interestingly, Beezhold et. al.'s (2010) research found that, despite a diet low in omega-3, strict vegetarians do not suffer from high levels of depression. This they attribute to the inclusion of other nutrients in their diet that, in simple terms, have an anti-inflammatory effect similar to omega-3 fatty acids. The sample group's emphasis on healthy diet and lifestyle was also recognised as contributing to lower levels of depressive illness. Gould et. al. (2008) identified a range of foods purporting to have mental health benefits; foliates and B vitamins are linked to feelings of well-being, balancing carbohydrate, sugar and fat consumption contributes to the control of depression and fatty acids found in fish, shellfish, fruit and berries offer positive benefits to children's cognitive functions and reduce levels of anxiety.

Recent research has further clarified the relationship between food consumption and how we feel. In a study focusing on a wide range of healthy and non-healthy food groups, Akbaraly et. al. (2009) found direct links between diet and mental wellbeing. The study, conducted over 5 years by food scientists and psychologists in France and the UK, found evidence of a direct link between the consumption of junk food i.e. processed food that is high in sugars and fats, and subsequent levels of depression. They found that the group of respondents who consumed healthy foods, that were not highly processed and which had relatively low levels of sugars and fats, experienced much lower levels of depression (Akbaraly et. al. 2009). This finding is not new but it represents a more direct linkage between a diet of healthy foods, relatively unprocessed and low in sugars and fats, and mood than previous studies had proposed. However, while it is acknowledged that the physiological and nutritional benefits of food influence mood, consumer understanding of food is much more multi-faceted and influenced by other discourses beyond science.

### *3.2. Socio-cultural discourses of Food and Mood: Food as 'Nourishing Body, Mind and Soul'.*

The nourishing benefits of food can contribute to mood through an emotional connection to a consumer's personal, social and cultural history. These 'comfort foods', such as, famously, home-made chicken soup, often have actual nutritional benefits but their meaning lies in their evocations of caring, their sense of familiarity or association with a significant event (Wansink and Sangerman 2000). Locher et. al. (2005) suggest that it is these physical, psychological and emotional effects, nourishing the body, mind and soul, that makes food distinct from other

comfort providers. Although experts warn against using food to manage mood (Freeman and Gil 2004), food is nevertheless frequently used for psychological comfort. Whether comfort foods actually improve mood is contested, with some studies showing that they improve mood but no more than any other liked foods (Wagner et.al. 2014). However, as a recent BBC radio programme has demonstrated, in the case of refugees forced to leave their countries, food provides a link to their culture and their past and in doing so, provides spiritual comfort (bbc.co.uk. 2015). In selecting comfort foods consumers often ignore health and nutrition concerns although their choices are often relatively natural, homemade or healthy. Gamble et. al. (2010) point to women's preference for healthy 'mood foods' such as fruit-based products to alleviate stress. Kim et. al. (2006) however suggest that consumers are more likely to choose healthy options when in a good mood and less healthy, more hedonic foods when in a depressed mood. Furthermore, happier people will not only choose the healthier options but also tend to consume less than sad people (Garg et. al. 2007). The relationship between food and mood is therefore bi-directional, where food can alter mood and mood can likewise influence food choice (Christensen and Brooks 2006).

### *3.3. Contradiction and Confusion in Discourses of Food and Mood.*

Consumers receive information from multiple sources, with food producers, scientists and policy makers all suggesting which foods are 'good' or 'bad' for us. For consumers, contradictions and confusion abounds: chocolate is promoted as joyful, yet can be harmful and addictive (Costa and Belk 1999); children are persuaded to eat their vegetables through the offer of a sweet treat (Casotti 2004). Consumers are tasked with interpreting unfamiliar terminology (e.g. probiotics, omega-3) and steering clear of products involved in the most recent food scare (e.g. salmonella, genetic modifications). The increasing power of the food marketers (Moore 2006), along with a growing suspicion of scientific food claims (Coutant. et. al. 2011) has contributed to a state of consumer confusion, lack of trust and a questioning of both products and of the motivation of manufacturers and retailers

In consumer society, marketing discourse is powerful (Fairclough 2003), so what is emphasised by marketers in promoting foods is significant. For example, while the functional attributes of foods were foregrounded in advertising of the 1980's and 90's, the emphasis has switched to the pleasure of consumption (Gray. et.al. 2003). Advertisers choose how they wish to present their message. They can choose to draw on scientific discourses, emphasising the *proven* physiological effect of specific foods (e.g. fish) which can in turn lead to a positive mood. They could also hint more *subtly* at the feel-good associations of certain foods (e.g. chocolate)

reflecting a cultural understanding of comfort foods. This leads us to explore the advertising discourse of food and mood, to question whether food advertising in women's magazines implies an association between food consumption and particular mood. Furthermore, mindful of Ambler's (2006) caution that food promotion should not be viewed separately from its socio-economic and cultural context, we attempt to link our findings to the macro level by considering the wider discourses about food upon which advertisers continue to draw.

#### **4. Methods**

Women's magazines are frequently used to research consumption practices (Scanlon 1995, Fischer 2000, Martens and Scott 2005) and are known to influence food tastes and consumer knowledge about food (Warde 1997). Women aged 25-64 predominate in food consumption decisions (Kim et. al. 2009, Casotti 2004) and take responsibility for ensuring the well-being of the family (Carrigan, Szmigin and Leek 2006). As such, magazines aimed at women are considered a suitable site for analysis of food advertisements (Parker 2003).

The data consisted of food advertisements published in a selection of 12 women's magazines from a single period in October and November 2010. Half of the magazines were women's weeklies while the others were monthly publications (see Appendix 1). A total of 54 food advertisements, including those for confectionary, were published in this magazine sample, decreasing to 37 different advertisements when repetitions were removed. While we followed existing food advertising studies by Fay (2003) and Kim et. al. (2009) in adopting print magazine advertising, specifically women's magazines, as our source of data, our study differed in terms of its aims and approach. Fay (2003), Kim et. al. (2009) and additionally Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) conducted detailed content analyses of food advertising, identifying, counting and coding the themes present in large samples of advertisements. Our intent was not however to quantify the themes occurring across a large number of advertisements. Instead, based on the assumption that advertisements imply and communicate cultural assumptions about food consumption, we closely analysed a small sample of advertisements in order to reveal and to question which discourses are dominant and which are marginalised (Fischer 2000).

In order to determine the advertisements to be selected for close analysis we initially conducted a qualitative review of the message inherent in our 37 advertisements (See Appendix 2). We categorised these advertisements according to our judgement of whether their primary advertising appeal was emotional /feeling-based or informational. We subdivided the sample further according to the particular type of emotional or informational appeal adopted (Clow and Baack, 2007), identifying the use of four different emotional appeals and three informational

appeals (See Appendix 2). Once the primary advertising appeal and sub-categories had been identified, the same categories were subsequently used to identify secondary appeals where possible.

Following this initial identification of the primary and secondary appeals across all the food and food-related advertisements in these publications, we then randomly selected four advertisements for detailed analysis. The small number of advertisements reflects other similar discourse studies (see for example Fischer 2000) and the exploratory nature of the research. The four advertisements (for chocolate, pizza, spreadable fats/dairy and meat products) represent a range of different food products on the hedonic – functional food spectrum, a typology frequently used in food marketing. This categorisation depends on whether the foods are consumed primarily for sensory pleasure or as a functional solution to a consumption problem such as the need for convenience (Kim et. al.2009). In addition, these four advertisements equally represented the advertisers’ adoption of emotional and informational message appeals.

As print advertisements are “multi-semiotic manifestations of discursal meaning(s)” (Lazar, 2000, 177), we combined a textually oriented analysis, paying close attention to the linguistic features of the text (Fairclough 2003), with an analysis of the visual images to achieve a more complete analysis of the discourses. Again following Fischer (2000), our analysis is organised around the identification of mood-related themes. We aimed to identify the discourses within the selected advertisements, noting the explicit and implicit claims made regarding the relationship between the food product and mood. In doing so we examined how linguistic choices combine with visual imagery to convey particular messages of the association between food consumption and mood. We present our findings below.

## **5. Findings and Discussion: Advertising Discourses of Food and Mood**

### *5.1. Dominance of positive emotional appeals*

We identified a dominant discourse of the pleasure of food consumption across our wider sample of 37 food advertisements, as previous research has indicated (Gray et. al. 2003). Almost two thirds of these (25 advertisements) emphasised emotion (denoted by E in Appendix 2), suggesting happiness (EH), tradition (ET), glamour (EG) or indulgence (EI). Only 12 advertisements in our sample emphasised information (denoted by I), foregrounding nutritional benefits (IN), taste (IT) or culinary facts (IC).

However, drawing on Akbaraly et. al.’s (2009) study of the link between food and mental wellbeing, we note that those advertisements that adopted a predominately emotional/happy

appeal, with the exception of the baby milk, promote products that are potentially unhealthy and deemed ‘damaging’ by the Mental Health Foundation. Similarly the majority of the foods that were promoted with an emotional/traditional appeal, encouraging feelings of nostalgia and well-being, were also foods that are best consumed in moderation (Cornah 2006). Primary appeals of emotional/glamour and emotional/indulgence were identified in five advertisements promising hedonic gratification. Three of these foods could be classified as unhealthy (pizza) and damaging to mental health (alcohol and chocolate) while two of the foods (breakfast cereal and bottled water) can more easily be categorised as healthy. Advertisements for bottled water also adopted informational/nutrition messages, as did advertisements for a cholesterol-lowering spreadable fat and one of the advertisements for crisps. Arguably the healthiest foods, a soya- based protein (soya is identified by the Mental Health foundation as aiding depression and sleep problems) and a tomato cooking sauce were promoted with informational/culinary appeals, rather than emphasising their contribution to mood. Based on this sample, we contend that advertising for many foods which are known to be good for us, both physically and mentally, lacks a positive mental health message while, conversely, many foods which are generally considered to have a detrimental impact upon our mental health and wellbeing are promoted as treats to make us feel better. These points are further illustrated in following analysis of the advertisements for chocolate, pizza, spreadable fats/dairy and meat products below.

### *5.2 Chocolate as Emotional Indulgence*

The advertisement for Divine’s Dark Chocolate Ginger & Orange bar draws on long-standing cultural connotations of chocolate consumption as hedonic, sensual and pleasurable, frequently associated with mood enhancement, epitomised in 1960’s Cadbury’s Flake advertisements encouraging women to lose themselves in “moments of indulgence” (The Mail 2008). Proclaiming “*Let zesty orange and spicy ginger zing into your life. Make the moment Divine*”, the layering of multiple synonymous words (zesty, spicy, zing), along with the indirect reference to the Spice of Life (idiom referring to something that makes life worth living) implies that this chocolate will add spice to one’s ordinary life, lifting mood in the process. Visually, symbolic hearts feature in the background and the letter ‘v’ of Divine is a stylised representation of a heart. This implicitly positions the product as a gift-of-love to oneself, a message that resonates with existing non-food advertising storylines which encourage consumers to indulge and treat themselves (e.g. L’Oréal’s ‘We’re Worth it’).

Admittedly, this advertisement *may* be interpreted differently. Divine is a social enterprise, giving cocoa farmers a Fairtrade price and an influence in the running of the company

(Divinechocolate.com). This brand knowledge can influence consumers to purchase Divine over other chocolate alternatives (Chandon and Wansick 2012). Feeling good therefore may be derived from the knowledge of one's social contribution rather than a personal hedonic indulgence. For some consumers, this message is more meaningful (Williamson 1987) despite not being explicitly promoted in the advertisement. Indeed, neither can we criticise this advertisement for making a false claim - the promise of happiness may be associated with the consumption of a product that is potentially unhealthy and with no long term positive mood effects, but chocolate consumption *is* identified as delivering a short-term boost to wellbeing and 'enthusiasm for life' even if this is deceptive in the longer term (Cornah 2006).

Nevertheless, unlike advertising for other products which are known to have a detrimental effect on health, such as alcohol, what is missing here is an acknowledgement of the negative side of chocolate consumption such as its association with eating disorders, stress, guilt and ambivalence (Durkin and Rae 2009, Costa and Belk 1999). The evidence on the link between chocolate and mood however is mixed, with reports identifying positive health benefits (Keen 2001) and others finding mixed emotional impacts (Macht and Dettmer 2006) so it is perhaps unsurprising that advertisers rely on the feel-good associations. Yet, we found that advertisements that could legitimately adopt alternative arguments, such as convenience or taste, also chose to focus on hedonic, indulgent messages that imply a "feel good" effect, as illustrated in the Dr Oetker's pizza advertisement below.

### *5.3. Pizza as indulgent gratification*

Emotion-based appeals are also used by products usually categorised as functional. In a Dr Oetker pizza advertisement, a more hedonic experience is fore-grounded in the language of romance and indulgence, while the information-based appeal of convenience (Gray et. al. 2003, Kim et.al. 2009) is relegated to the background. Despite being made in the UK by a German – owned food company, the advertisement draws heavily on pizza's Italian origins, the passion of the Italians, the country's artisan culture and national colours. The advertisement promotes an association between positive emotions and consumption with words in the semantic field of love (smitten, adore, passion) and echoed in the text for the website address called 'pizza for passion'. The distorted version of the idiom 'once bitten, twice shy' in the text "Once bitten, forever smitten" is a play on words which links the physical consumption of the product with a romantic experience and suggests immediate gratification. The product is factory-made, frozen and found in the chilled cabinets of supermarkets, yet the advertisement reflects instead the cultural meaning of the product (Hackley and Hackley 2014) and the social and symbolic value

associated with its purchase and consumption. (Chandon and Wansick 2012). Frozen pizza could be categorised as an unhealthy commodity being highly processed with little whole food content. These foods are, according to Akbaraly et. al. ((2009) also linked to depression. Such foods have replaced diets based on fresh foods and those with less fat, sugar and salt (Moodie et.al 2013). Furthermore, trans-fats, vital for efficient brain function, are prevalent in ready meals (Cornah 2006) and do not contribute positively to health and mental wellbeing.

#### *5.4. The promotion of taste over nutrition*

The third advertisement promotes the supermarket Sainsbury's Bistro range of steak and pork in a quasi-editorial feature with a predominantly informational appeal. The visuals show two simply but stylishly prepared meat dishes that promise freshly cooked, juicy meat with text that lingers on words such as "succulent", "mouth-watering", "tender", "flavoursome", emphasising the quality of the food and the experiential pleasure of consumption. The foods promoted (beef and pork) are essentially healthy (Cornah 2006), (pork for example contains tryptophan and zinc which can help with depression), but overtones of ease and luxury are added in the manner of their preparation. While the core ingredient may be 'good' it has been presented in a way that is perhaps too 'rich' to be considered as an every-day element of a healthy diet. Although the dominant message here is the promise of tastiness this is supported by a secondary message reassuring consumers that these products are easy to cook and offer a restaurant quality experience. Further informational text reassures potential customers that the Bistro range has been fully tested, offers variety and will provide a solution to the consumer's catering and culinary needs. The advertisement also conveys indulgence with hints of the restaurant meal, formal table settings, accompanying wine, all suggesting a treat or a special occasion (Casotti 2004). This is accompanied with the text that reads "The new Taste the Difference range is designed to give you the eating-out experience at home" rather paradoxically suggesting that consumers perceive home cooked food as less good than that purchased in a restaurant. The advertisement avoids any direct reference to the mood enhancing potential of consuming high quality protein and instead prioritises taste over any possible health messages (Chandon and Wansick 2012). Any promise that the product will make the consumer feel good is based on the assurance that Sainsbury's can be trusted to provide 'dining out' quality food, thus removing the stress and anxiety from cooking and entertaining, rather than a suggestion that eating the product will improve mood.

#### *5.5. The promotion of physical health benefits rather than mental wellbeing.*

Benecol is a range of functional foods with ingredients alleged to have direct health benefits (see [www.benecol.co.uk](http://www.benecol.co.uk)). This advertisement featured a headline message in the form of a rubber stamped message that explicitly states “High cholesterol is a major risk factor for heart disease. Benecol lowers cholesterol”. This infers that the healthy message has been endorsed by an official or expert with the authority to validate the “science” of the claim. The scientific and medical emphasis is further reflected in the advertisement’s clinical, unambiguous and formal choice of text and images. Colours are white and cool aqua blue which have medical associations and the use of white space emphasises the serious and scientific nature of the message. The advertisement shows a range of Benecol products (spreads, yogurt and yogurt drinks) thus emphasising the variety of ways health-enhancing Benecol may be consumed to keep heart disease at bay. The products are positioned directly below the stamped claim, adopting the rhetorical structure of problem/ solution i.e. a declaration of the health risk (problem), then a textual and visual demonstration of how Benecol provides a solution. The advertisement adopts scientific language, referring to “stanols”, a group of chemical compounds found in plants that have been shown to reduce cholesterol levels in the blood (Law 2000). This positions Benecol as a scientific product with proven benefits and increases its credibility. Additional imagery plays on the inclusion of fruits which are associated with health (Gould et. al. 2008), the use of powerful words “light”, “dairy free” and “proven” and the use of a stylised heart shape around the leading edge of the brand name “Benecol”, symbolising the health benefits for the heart as a physical organ (rather than symbolising ‘love’ as in the Divine example). Advertisers frequently adopt scientific evidence about the relationship between food and *physical health* to promote their products (Brennan et.al. 2008). Yet, the association between food and *mental health and wellbeing*, which could be adopted in this case, is avoided.

For many food products, the relationship between consumption and health is a confusing one. The Benecol range presents an interesting paradox; it is closely linked with dairy products (spreadable fats) that have a negative association with health, as well as those dairy products that are associated with a healthier approach to eating such as yoghurts and yoghurt drinks. Benecol, which includes “stanols” to reduce cholesterol, represents a medically beneficial way to consume such products, but it is interesting to note that the emphasis on benefits plays entirely on the physical, medical positives rather than its possible contribution to mood. There are some products however, such as Activa, a dairy product that claims to enhance digestive function, which do emphasise a contribution to mood and wellbeing in its promotional campaigns. Any improvement in emotional wellbeing seems to be derived from the reassurance of selecting a

scientifically enhanced product and a mitigation of some of the guilty associations of dairy products.

## **6. Conclusion**

These findings suggest that despite evidence of a relationship between unhealthy food and mental health conditions such as depression (Akbaraly 2009) many food products continue to be promoted using subtle, emotional appeals inherently linked to positive moods. Despite healthy food having the potential to enhance mood this is not used as a key advertising message. Conversely, foods that, if consumed to excess, are likely to lead to higher rates of depression frequently adopt emotional appeals promising happiness and wellbeing. This includes chocolate for pleasurable indulgence and pizza for hedonic gratification. Similar findings have been noted by Roberts and Pettigrew (2007) in children's food advertising, where advertisements for crisps and fast-foods were found to communicate enhanced mood benefits. Advertising for healthier products, such as high protein meat, continues to emphasise the pleasure of consumption while the messages around Benecol focused on physical health benefits with no reference to possible contribution to mental health and wellbeing.

None of the advertisements analysed above *explicitly* promoted food as contributing to mental health and wellbeing. Instead food advertisers drew on broader cultural discourses to support their promotion messages (Hackley and Hackley 2104). By relying upon the cultural acceptance of food to comfort (Locher et. al. 2005) and the use of emotional claims advertisers are able to subtly position a wide range of food products as mood-enhancing. Beyond food advertising, mood claims are frequently made for other products (e.g. beauty products) where the consumer is repeatedly told to 'treat yourself' because 'you're worth it'. Consumers are familiar with these existing storylines and advertisers are therefore able to draw upon the familiarity and social acceptability of such mood related advertising discourses to enhance the reception of their own food-related messages. Thus, existing discourses shape and influence how consumers interpret others.

One could argue that it is the job of scientists and nutritionists to communicate food and mood information. However, persuasive advertising discourse is more powerful in a consumer society (Fairclough 2003) and scientists often struggle to communicate to the public in language that can be understood by consumers (Cook et. al. 2004). Indeed, like the advertisers explored above, scientists hold the view that the public only engage emotionally with food messages (Cook et. al. 2004). As a result, clear information about the link between food and mood is not effectively communicated to the consumer by either source.

We suggest that marketers may wish to re-examine their approach to food advertising in the light of increasing scientific evidence on the relationship between food and mood. The recycling of existing advertising discourses of hedonic satisfaction results in food advertisers not always capitalising upon the possibilities for communicating the mood enhancing benefits of products. Much as increasing levels of obesity have given rise to criticisms of food promotion and of the way advertisements 'model' behaviours around food (Roberts and Pettigrew 2007), concerns about mental health and well-being will likewise eventually impact upon what is considered acceptable advertising practice. Interest in the topic is evident in the UK government's move away towards collecting details of national well-being and addressing nutrition directly in mental health reviews (Department of Health 2011). To address issues of well-being in society the promotion of food and mood must be an issue for further consideration.

Ultimately, what we eat is a matter of personal choice; advertisements do not cause consumption behaviours, and to suggest otherwise discounts an individual's personal decision-making and choice (Mueller 2007). However, advertising is able to influence the knowledge and behaviour of its target market (Ambler 2006) and therefore has a role to play in the communication of mental health messages. One aspect of this is the avoidance of mood-enhancing emotional appeals in unhealthy food advertising; the other, an increased emphasis on communicating the mental-health and wellbeing benefits where they exist for more healthy foods.

Although our findings have led us to conclude that advertisers have been slow to respond to social change, we concur with others who suggest that food advertisers can be part of a solution to social ills (Harker and Harker 2008). Unlike scientists, advertisers communicate well with the public in their own language. Food advertisers therefore have a positive and influential role to play, alongside governments and the scientific community, in increasing consumer knowledge of the relationship between food consumption and mental health and well-being.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1: Sample Magazines**

<b>Magazine</b>	<b>Weekly or Monthly</b>	<b>Date of publication</b>	<b>Total No. Pages</b>	<b>No. of Food Adverts</b>
Bella	W	26.10.2010	64	3
My Weekly	W	23.10.2010	60	0
Essentials	M	Nov. 2010	156	5
Take A Break	W	28.10.2010	64	1
Company	M	Nov. 2010	212	1
Red	M	Nov. 2010	332	10
She	M	Nov 2010	212	6
Good Housekeeping	M	Nov 2010	260	10
Best	W	26 Oct 2010	68	4
Woman's Weekly	W	26 Oct 2010	68	1
Woman's Own	W	25 Oct 2010	76	6
Easy Living	M	November 2010	210	7
TOTAL				54

## Appendix 2

**Table 2: Initial Analysis of Advertising Appeal**

Food Advert	Primary Appeal	Secondary Appeal	Summary of key message content/theme
Coco pops - Breakfast cereal (x3)	EH	IN	“Choc n roll”. Fun, happy, wholegrain, fibre, vitamins
Hellmans - Mayonnaise (x5)	EH	IT	New Hellman’s with a spark – firework theme (Nov 5 <sup>th</sup> ), “Bring out the best”
Dr Oetker – cake decorations	EH	IC	Whoopie pies, fun. “It’s the little things that make Christmas great”.
Aptamil – baby milk (x2)	EH	IN	Happy mum and baby. New challenges; New milk, a link to information is provided
Tickler – extra mature cheddar cheese	EH	IT	Quirky, a reward, fairy story theme. A “precious2 food.
Divine - chocolate	EH	EI	Pleasure, indulgence, experience and love plus information on taste, orange and spice with a focus on bringing a “zing” into your life.
Pringles – crisps (x2)	EH	–	Fun, a link with the “Glee” TV programme. “90 reasons to be Gleeful”
Ribena - cordial	ET	IN	British, black currants, fruit and no added sugar, full of berries
Sponge - Simpsons	ET	IC	Traditional sponge pudding, easy to cook, enjoyable melt in the mouth puddings.
Dr Oetker – marzipan	ET	IC	A play on words, “We’ve got Christmas covered. Beautifully”, traditional mini cakes.
Beef & lamb – generic British meat	ET	IC	Simple, good food, all is well after a hard day’s work, a weekend treat every day, use of the British Food tractor logo.
Ribena - cordial	ET	IN	“Your daily dose of vitamin C”, sunshine, natural, full of berries.
Splenda – sugar substitute	ET	IN	Low calorie, sugar substitute. Family theme, love. “It’s the little things that make a big difference” .
Wyke Farm’s Extra	ET	IT	Tradition, nostalgia, quality, the cheese is as good

Mature Cheddar cheese			as “Grandfather’s day”
Rice Krispies – breakfast cereal	ET	EH	Family, tradition, Fun to make cakes using Rice Krispies.
Patersons shortbread	ET	–	Traditional, old fashioned. Image of shortbread on a plate, a quarter page advertisement
Walkers - crisps	ET	IN	Local potatoes, the best, finest ingredients
Matchmakers – chocolate (x3)	EG	EH	Movie stardom theme! Linked to a film/cinema offer
Moet - Champagne	EG	EH	Scarlett Johansson – glamour and beauty, aspirational, double page advertisement.
Special K – breakfast cereal	EG	IN	“Love your shape” focus on the model’s figure no image of food. Confident and positive
Pellegrini - water (x2)	EG	–	“Live in Italian” – stylish, minimalist, black and white images.
Dr Oetker – pizza (x2)	EI	IT	“Once bitten forever smitten”. A treat, link to “passion” and taste claims
Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference - Smoked salmon,	EI	IT	A treat, a quality product, gently smoked over oak. Value for money. Image of the product.
Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference - Pizza	EI	IT	Simple but excellent quality, authentic ingredients, delicious taste.
Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference - Parma ham	EI	IT	Simple message and image of the product, matured, sweet and smoky, a treat.
Perfectly clear - water	IN	EH	Fruity, fresh, “Perfectly clear”, sugar free, low calorie.
Powerade – sports drink	IN	–	Sweat out, zero in. Fitness, no sugar, no calories, link to the Olympics.
Benecol Light – spreadable fat (x2)	IN	IC	Medical message and theme, “Benecol lowers cholesterol”
Walkers	IN	ET	Simple theme, finest ingredients, only oil and seasoning added
Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference – Pork and beef range	IT	IC	Pork and beef products presented in an editorial style, excellent quality, focus on taste sensations.
Dolmio – tomato sauce (x2)	IC	ET	Use in baked potatoes. Easy family food. Chance to win a family trip to Italy.
Quorn – vegetarian meat	IC	-	“Its not a novel, but its recipes are” focus on a cook book promoting the use of Quorn, linked to good

substitute			home cooking.
Quorn - vegetarian meat substitute	IC	IT	Informational, promoting Quorn cook book, focus on “mouth-watering” recipe ideas
Dolmio – Bolognese sauce	IC	ET	Easy, simple family food – spaghetti Bolognese, plus a chance to win a trip to Italy
Crisp’n Dry – cooking oil	IC	IT	Cook to perfection, good to great food
Dolmio – pasta sauce	IC	ET	Easy, simple family food –meat balls, link to additional information
Quorn - vegetarian meat substitute	IC	IN	Implied healthy eating, cook book promotion, nutritional focus.

### Advertising Appeals and messages

<b>Emotional Appeals</b>	<b>Informational Appeals</b>
EH – Emotional, happy, fun	IN - Informational, nutritional and/or medical
ET – Emotional, traditional, nostalgia, old-fashioned where this implies natural, family	IT – Informational, taste
EG – Emotional glamour, style	IC – Informational culinary, how to use
EI – Emotional indulgent, treat	

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