Promoting a healthier, younger you: the media marketing of anti-ageing superfoods

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Abstract

The growing availability of products labelled 'superfoods' has been a major marketing success story. While little scientific evidence supports the claims regarding the health enhancing, age defying benefits to be derived from the consumption of superfoods, marketers have been able to effectively promote these products for what they promise. This article explores the pedagogic role performed by media in marketing 'superfoods' in the contemporary context of food normlessness ('gastro-anomy'). Using Foucault's ideas on the workings of power and governance, and drawing on data from an analysis of Australian media items on superfoods published between 1995 and 2014, the article reveals the techniques by which superfoods are promoted as the means for fashioning a healthier, younger self. It's argued that 'superfoods' is an ill-defined, ambiguous category, whose marketing is assisted through the confounding and confusing of news and advertising in media coverage, and the extensive use of promissory statements, scientific claims, and personal forms of address that connect directly with audiences. We conclude by observing, that the media are likely to be the source, rather than the solution to personal anxieties about diet and health, and that this should inform the efforts of health promoters and food regulators in the future.

Introduction

Supercharged food - eat yourself beautiful by Lee Holmes (2014) is an Australian cookbook that states that 'if you think beauty is only skin deep think again'. According to Holmes (2014) eating and drinking anti-ageing superfoods offers a 'personal guide to achieving inner and outer health'. So-called superfoods are an increasingly important part of a rapidly growing global anti-ageing industry. This industry has evolved into a diffuse range of products and services that are marketed as 'anti-ageing', and that assume that the consumer should take responsibility for choosing and treating themselves. It is one that relies heavily on the marketing of promise - of wellbeing, youthfulness, vitality and self-transformation – rather than clinical evidence of effectiveness and safety, which is mostly lacking.

Using Foucaultian ideas on the workings of contemporary power and governance, this article explores the crucial role performed by the media in the marketing of anti-aging superfoods in the age of 'gastro-anomy' (Fischler 1980). 'Gastro-anomy' was coined by Fischler to describe what he saw as an emergent trend in modern society; namely a growing state of normlessness regarding food, where individuals are left with a proliferation of competing socio-cultural norms about what one should eat and how to conduct themselves, including 'when, how and how much they should eat' (Fischler 1980: 948). In Fischler's view, such normlessness was a consequence of industrial-scale food production and processing and the associated loss of 'nutritional wisdom', and entailed the absence of authoritative rules regarding eating behaviour, along with the growing influence of numerous extra-familial and community factors on culinary patterns (Fischler 1980). Schneider and Davis (2010) demonstrate how marketing by the food industry now fills the gap in normative regulation. They suggest that 'the food industry in conjunction with nutritionists and other "experts" attempts to fill the "collapse of normative regulation" [citing Warde 1997:31] by allaying anxiety and offering self-regulatory practices as solutions (e.g. eating lite and fat free)' (Schneider and

Davis 2010: 31). Schneider and Davis (2010: 32) go on to argue that food consumption is shaped by a 'diets-making complex' made up of partnerships between actors in the food industry, public health authorities, nutritionists and some research scientists (citing Dixon and Banwell 2004). Our paper builds on this work by considering the pedagoic role played by media discourses on diet in the responsibilisation of citizens (O'Malley's (2009) term) and the promotion of practices of self-care that tend to serve marketing goals. Drawing on data from a critical discourse analysis of Australian news articles on superfoods published between 1995 and 2014, we identify the specific mechanisms by which the media encourage this responsibilisation and self-care. To begin, we offer some preliminary comments on the market and marketing of 'superfoods' within the context of gastro-anomy and introduce the key concepts that inform our analysis, before presenting our methodology and the details of our argument.

Background

Superfoods in the age of gastro-anomy

According to Roberfroid (2002), an awareness of how nutrition can affect ageing and health can be traced back to the early twentieth century. However, since then, there has been a shift away from concerns about adequate nutrition, such as avoiding nutritional deficiencies, to concerns with *optimum* nutrition (Nestle 2013; Roberfroid 2002). 'Superfoods' are among those foods that are promoted on the basis that they provide optimum nutrition and hence have health-enhancing value. Superfoods are also portrayed as a popular anti-ageing option due to the relative ease of accessing products so labelled and the lesser investment of time required compared to invasive interventions such as cosmetic surgery. The marketing of superfoods on the basis of their particular health-enhancing properties has received some official support (EUFIC 2012). In the US, food claims that express or imply a relationship to human health-related conditions or disease, however, must be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before entering the market and are

guided by the principle of 'significant scientific agreement' (FDA 2009; Scrinis 2013: 175). In the EU there is even stronger regulation, with regulator pre-approval on the basis of of 'generally accepted scientific data' (European Commission 2006) required for all health claims on food labelling. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) often requires the 'golden standard' of evidence, the randomised control trial. In Australia, the law now requires systematic scientific reviews of the evidence to establish causal links between a food and health effect before a health claim can be made on food, although industry is allowed to 'self-substantiate' many claims rather than requiring regulator pre-approval (see Authors 2016; FSANZ 2013).

Lunn (2006) suggests that there is no official definition of 'superfoods', but the term is used to encompass foods that possess a number of different properties. Originally superfoods were considered to be part of the umbrella of 'functional foods' - a term used to describe foods that purport to have health promoting and/or disease preventing properties over and above their generally accepted nutritional value (Lunn 2006:172). Weitkamp and Eidsvaag (2014) state that the sale and consumption of products labelled 'superfoods' is increasing – which seems to be linked to their promotion as such. For example, sales of blueberries doubled in the period 2005-2007 following advertising claims that they were superfoods (Weitkamp and Eidsvaag 2014:872). Superfoods, such as Goji berries from the Himalayas or Açai berries from the Amazon, are often marketed as having a connection to exotic 'untouched' places. It is claimed that in countries where superfoods are eaten on a regular basis, there is an observance of lower rates of disease, compared to those countries where superfoods are consumed less regularly (Lunn 2006:172).

A potentially new market segment to which superfoods may appeal is that of the 'worried well' (Authors). [The Authors] suggest the health anxiety of the 'worried well' is in part due to recent neoliberal ideologies pervading societies that shift the blame for failing health care systems on to service users. But health anxiety is not merely about the failure of health system, it is also

aspirational as individuals seek to avoid or manage risks and optimise health. Choosing the right food can be an element of health anxiety, which is made up of a group of concerns such as 'healthiness', fears of fat, sugar and sodium, along with obsessions about exercising, ageing and mortality (Authors). Indeed, Warde (1997) suggests that so-called 'healthism' contributed to the interest and increased consumption of certain foods.

Writing in the 1980s, Crawford (1980:368) identified healthism as a new consciousness and social movement concerned with holistic health and self-care, rather than with therapeutic intervention. Healthism is a powerful ideology that creates an illusion that individuals can control their own existence, and that taking personal action to improve health will be enough to address complex public health needs (Crawford 1980:369). Healthism within a neoliberal context situates the problem of health and disease at the level of the individual and promotes a concept of control: 'I can't change the world, but at least I can change myself' (Crawford 1980:377).

Fischler's (1988) notion of 'gastro-anomy' neatly captures the sense of confusion and even alienation that individuals experience in relation to the origins of their food, or normlessness in relation to the eating of food, in a globalised neoliberal food economy. In the absence of unambiguous food rules and knowledge about how food is produced, Schneider and Davis (2010a) argue that gastro-anomic consumers look to experts to redefine their knowledge about food and its consumption; however, within the contemporary food market, accredited experts, research scientists, the food industry, the media provide often competing guidance. Our contention is that media perform a crucial pedagogic role in this context, by employing techniques of persuasion – comprising promissory statements, a distinct form of narrative, and the use of authoritative language and mode of address – that are oriented to responsibilising individuals in ways that are broadly consistent with marketers' goals.

The media has become a potent communicative power in contemporary social life, so much so that it becomes a place where social meanings and experiences are generated, debated and evaluated (Craig 2004). Bourdieu (2000) has also attributed a similar power to the media, especially the advertising industry, which constructs for consumers the ideal lifestyle, moving them to actively acquire and consume products. Schneider and Davis (2010a) suggest that the media (including advertising) rather than traditional social institutions (such as the State or religion) play a key role in teaching consumers how and what to consume. In seeking to understand the mechanisms by which this pedagogy occurs, we have found the ideas of Foucault and his followers regarding the operations of contemporary power and governance to be especially useful.

Technologies of the Self

According to Foucault (1989:11), the modern subject is articulated by two kinds of technology. The first are technologies of power, especially the mechanism of power known as disciplinary power that seeks to regulate the conduct of others via processes of surveillance, discipline and normalisation. The second are technologies of the self, whereby individuals develop a sense of self through 'individualised forms of self-regulation' (Coveney 1998:461). For Foucault (1988), technologies of the self, concern the relation individuals have with themselves, their 'care of the self', such as the ways they institute self-discipline.

Our contemporary era has been profoundly shaped by technologies of specifically *neoliberal* governance. According to Foucault, neoliberal forms of government not only involve the direct intervention of the state, but also the development of indirect techniques for leading and controlling individuals without being responsible for them (Lemke 2001:202). The strategy of rendering subjects as being individually responsible entails shifting the locus of responsibility for social risks, such as illness, poverty and unemployment not to the domain of society but rather to 'self-care'. Therefore a key feature of neoliberalism is the conceptualisation of individuals as being responsible,

moral and economic rational actors. Responsible moral subjects are those who possess a rationality to assess costs and benefits of a certain act. Alternatively, 'choice' is conceived as an expression of free will, and hence a self-determining decision (Rose 1999).

Neoliberalism complicates Foucault's notion of technologies of the self, as neoliberal subjects are not merely '"free to choose", but *obliged to be free'* to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice' (Rose 1999:187 original emphasis). This freedom of choice is a different freedom to that pertaining in the past as it is a freedom to realise our potential and our dreams through reshaping the way in which we conduct our lives (Lemke 2001). However, the question arises: how do individuals exercise this choice where rules are unclear and/or in flux—as is the case with much contemporary dietary advice? To whom do they turn for advice and guidance in regards to 'care of the self'? It is our contention that media discourses, such as those pertaining to superfoods, perform a crucial public pedagogic role in this context, in offering guidance in relation to practices of self-care and -transformation oriented to the attainment of a future healthy self (Giroux 2004). However, it is a guidance that is ineluctably shaped by the imperatives of marketing.

Methods

We collected a sample of articles (English-language only) from Australian media on superfoods and anti-ageing. This included news media, advertising, blogs and 'infotainment'. Our sample period of 1995 to 2014 was selected because the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a burgeoning market in anti-ageing treatments; there were found to be few references to anti-ageing treatments before 1996. Our search keywords were restricted to: anti-ageing/anti-aging*, stop ageing/aging, superfoods, antioxidants (a well-known anti-ageing molecule that seeks to neutralise free radicals that cause cell damage and are implicated in many diseases, such as cancer), and various combinations of these words. A range of material was sought from various databases: Proquest Newstand, Factiva,

Passport, Informit, Trove (a resource of archive material held by National Library of Australia), Lexis Nexis, and the Google search engine.

A total sample of 176 articles was obtained after exclusion criteria were implemented. Articles were screened to confirm relevance to the research theme and use of keywords. The samples were sorted by year. The period in which stories of anti-ageing superfoods were most frequent (46.5%) was between 2009 and 2013. Articles were also classified and coded by type of media: Advertising (n = 39) (22.1%), Blogs (n = 5) (2.8%), Infotainment (n = 90) (51.1%), and News (n = 42) (23.8%). By infotainment we mean light-hearted stories in a magazine style, often connected to some form of product, such as a cookbook or other product for sale.

The main media sources, which made up 79.4% of the collected items, were the *Sunday Herald Sun/Herald Sun*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The readers of these media sources can be characterised as generally being affluent and aged 45 and over, with higher than average household earnings, and well educated with tertiary qualifications (News Corp Australia 2015; Fairfax Media,2015, 2015a). The main consumer groups are women with children, who access the media online or through mobile phones, and older high net worth men in the corporate sector who read the print version of the newspapers (News Corp Australia 2015; Fairfax Media 2015, 2015a).

We used critical discourse analysis to uncover the implicit and taken-for-granted values, assumptions and origins of seemingly neutral, self-evident media texts, and how they relate to dominant ideologies and power in discourses (Van Dijk 2005; Olausson 2004). By discourse we mean a 'group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can both be identified by textual and verbal communications and located in wider social structures' (Lupton 1992:145). Critical discourse analysis allows one insights into the social production of texts and adds a linguistic approach to understanding the relationship between language and ideology, and focuses on the way in which

theories of 'reality' and relations of power are encoded in aspects of language such as syntax, style, rhetorical devices and semiotics within texts (Lupton 1992).

In undertaking our critical discourse analysis approach we firstly paid attention to the *thematic and schematic structure* – which themes and topics were given prominence through statements, discussions, questions and arguments (Van Dijk 2005). For example, following Olausson (2004), note was made of headlines and introductory paragraphs, as this is where articles' key themes are expressed. Second, we observed the *style* - such as claims made, information that is implicit or taken for granted or dependent on a certain worldview, descriptions of events, actors, and sources used in articles. Finally, we documented the use of *rhetorical devices*, especially regarding the positive and/or negative benefits of anti-ageing treatments (Van Dijk 2005).

Findings

Despite the diversity of content in our media sources, all media articles tended to advocate the consumption of 'anti-ageing superfoods' on that basis that they would help enhance one's health and wellbeing. However, different media gave emphasis to different themes of anti-ageing. Advertisements tended to highlight the benefits of such products and their inherent properties. The blogs relied on opinion-based articles that outlined the lifestyle benefits of anti-ageing superfoods, but also instructed readers on how to prepare, cook and eat them. The infotainment media, which were most common, were magazine style articles that sought to outline the benefits, properties and transformative use of anti-ageing superfoods. Within the infotainment sources, stories involved product tie-ins, which served to advance the narrative of the story and market the product advertised. For example, some outlined the benefits of anti-ageing superfoods, such as kale, linking them to a recipe such as an excerpt from a newly released cookbook. News media sources, on the other hand, tended to examine anti-ageing superfoods with regard to their underlying anti-ageing

properties that were underpinned by science. Our findings highlight the role played by the media as de facto advertisers of superfoods, which are marketed for their health promoting qualities.

Superfoods as health promoting

Superfoods are portrayed in our media sample as health-promoting products that can protect one from illness and prevent disease. Further, media state or imply that the consumption of superfoods is the means to achieving 'a younger, healthy you'. Media serve to establish a connection between the consumption of anti-ageing superfoods and health and youthfulness in the following ways. First, they use promissory statements that connect products with individuals' ability to protect themselves from various illnesses and diseases and/or to delay or reverse ageing. Second, they adopt a distinct language (namely, the use of the personal pronouns 'you' and 'your') that establishes a direct connection between products and audiences, who are assumed to possess their own needs and desires and are accountable for their own health and wellbeing. Thirdly, they include references to science or use scientific language to add legitimacy to the claimed value of products or properties (for example, the anti-ageing properties of superfood). And, finally, they often employ celebrity endorsement, to both engender reader interest and to lend credibility to the product/s being discussed or promoted.

Contemporary health ideologies state that prevention is better than cure – a position supported by the aforementioned healthism movement that proposes that individuals should take responsibility for improving their health and wellbeing. Diet is an area of self-care where individuals are seen to have some control over their self. Superfoods are food products that are believed to be high in essential health nutrients, as Goodyer (2011) states in a news article:

> Superfoods are rich in health-promoting antioxidants. They're all part of the 'good versus evil' story we know by heart: antioxidants are the heroes protecting us from free radicals - nasty molecules causing oxidative stress in our cells and contributing to ageing and disease.

The health promoting effect of anti-ageing superfoods can even help protect the consumer from cancer, as one story states:

> Cauliflower: the future of cancer treatment: Remember this word: 'sulforaphane'. It's what helps give vegetables such as cauliflower, broccoli and cabbage their… 'distinctive' smell when cooked, but it's also the chemical that has been shown to target and kill cancer cells, leaving normal cells unaffected…But consuming sulforaphane-rich foods on a regular basis is a simple, safe and affordable way you can reduce your cancer risk (Sunday Herald Sun 2010).

As this story and other stories note, the power of superfoods lies in their potential not just to promote health but to modify the body so as to enable it to 'kill cancer'. In Australia and New Zealand, such claims are contrary to food and labelling standards (Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2015). Nonetheless, such claims are typical of the promissory discourse that links the consumption of superfoods with the prevention of illness and the achievement of ideal health. For example, the eating of watermelon is said to be rich in vitamins and antioxidant nutrients 'that help keep skin healthy and youthful, and protect you from age-related illnesses' (Guy 2013). Other superfoods, such as the spice Tumeric are seen to benefit health and youthfulness: 'Turmeric is the main ingredient in curry powder, so eating curries more often will help promote a healthier, younger you' (Guy 2013). The magazine *Prevention* (2013) makes a strong connection between beauty and youthfulness, with one article stating that sardines are a superfood that are 'full of anti-ageing, beautifying benefits...promote glowing skin and maintain skin's elasticity, preventing sagging and making you look more youthful'. As we explore later in this section, the quotes above use pronouns like 'you' and 'your' that directly address the reader/consumer who is assumed to be a responsible, health conscious citizen. The connection between the consumption of superfoods and youth, beauty and health is so prominent that even cookbooks highlight the connection, for

example, Lee Holmes (2014) advocated the use of superfoods in her cookbook *Supercharged Food: eat yourself beautiful*.

The promise of health, wellbeing and vitality is not necessarily that of eating and enjoying the anti-ageing superfood, but rather consuming the underlying nutrients in the food, such as antioxidants, omega-3 acids or resveratrol. Therefore, many of the media items make the distinction between the superfood and what the superfood contains, thereby providing an excellent example of 'nutritionism' – an ideology that characterises and understands food and diets in terms of their nutrient and biochemical composition (Scrinis 2008). Scrinis (2008) states that 'nutritionism' has come to dominate nutrition science, government programmes and the food industry, and undermines or replaces other ways of engaging with the relationship between food and the body. In an age of gastro-anomy, nutritionism has become a central ideology in the public's understanding and relationship to food and health. For example, we can observe this nutritionism in relation to anti-ageing superfoods, such as resveratrol which is found in red wine. Resveratrol is said to play a 'vital role in good health by maintaining a healthy, youthful genome… Resveratrol also produces other effects that keep cells, tissues and organs youthful and functioning healthily… [and] provides the same anti-ageing benefits as caloric restriction' (O'Neill 2006).

While much of our discourse analysis of the media's portrayal of anti-ageing superfoods as health promoting tends to suggest that healthy citizenship is defined by 'choice', the semiotics of these health claims suggest that it is assumed that the individual *will* take responsibility for their health. The language (or rather speech) used in the collected media, particularly infotainment articles, uses a direct form of address that hails the individual, via the use of personal pronouns. For example, superfoods 'reduce *your risk* of disease (Women's Health and Fitness Magazine 2014); '*Your diet* will help…keep some of the signs of ageing at bay' (Herald Sun 2010); and '*Arm yourself* against premature ageing by including these five anti-ageing foods in *your diet'* (Guy 2010; emphases

added). These forms of address are directed to the consumer/reader to call them into action to take responsibility for their food choices. The forms of address are directed at the consumer to take control of *their* choices, as it is *they* who are at risk and who should assume responsibility to act if they desire health, youth and beauty. Superfoods are framed as a path to these ideals through their consumption.

While our discourse analysis tends to suggest that healthy citizenship is defined by 'choice', this choice is underpinned by a belief in educated and rational action. The language of scientific legitimacy is used through the adoption of an affirmative language to create support for the consumption of anti-ageing superfoods. For example, news media stories stated that 'Science has confirmed' (Prevention 2013) or 'a study published in the journal Science revealed' (Guy 2013). On other occasions, the media articles appeal to 'laboratory studies' or 'clinical trials' to assert that the consumption of superfoods for health was not merely marketing, but a 'fact' based upon science. These discourses appeal to the legitimacy of science by referring to the names of relevant scientific and medical journals and organisations, such as 'The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition concluded…Scientists from St George's University of London found' (Prevention 2013). We suggest that such examples appeal to what Bourdieu (2000) terms symbolic and cultural capital within the economy. By this we mean that by referring to a prestigious scientific or medical journal, the claims made about anti-ageing superfoods are ascribed social status and given legitimacy and are more likely to be believed by consumers who may lack the necessary scientific literacy to make their own judgement.

Despite many of the anti-ageing superfoods being asserted as scientific fact, much of the research behind these 'facts' are based upon animal models rather than clinical trials involving human subjects. Animal tests, it has been suggested, do not provide accurate predictors of potential human impacts because between humans and animals there are significant genetic, molecular, and

metabolic differences and that during testing ‘animals are often exposed to doses of chemicals thousands of times higher than humans would ever be exposed to, sometimes leading to dubious results or repeated testing’ (PCRM 2015). Thus we would suggest that the language of science is an important marketing strategy. It is important in the marketing of superfoods that they are associated with nutrients, such as anti-oxidants, as it gives the superfoods more appeal and likely enhances their consumption.

Our analysis also suggests that, within the context of gastro-anomy, the media presents itself as an authoritative information source. News media stories appeal to the scientific literature in its claims and stories about superfoods, but sitting alongside these claims are high-level health claims that indicate that superfoods can cure individuals of illness and disease. Despite legislation in Australia and New Zealand disallowing the marketing of high-level health claims (Food Standards Australia New Zealand 2015), regulation of these claims has been difficult to enforce. This can be partly explained by regulators’ failure to appreciate the subtle ways in which health claims are marketed via the media.

Media as de-facto advertising

As argued, in the age of gastro-anomy the media play a key pedagogic role, in responsibilising citizens. However, they are responsibilised in ways that tend to be consistent with marketing goals. As Akerlof and Shiller (2015) argue, markets are ‘inherently filled with tricks and traps’ designed to deceive and manipulate, especially through creating stories that connect with those of consumers. Consumers bring their own stories to their engagements with media, which advertisers exploit through their creation of new narratives, especially ones of promise (e.g. improved health and wellbeing), often using science or scientific language to buttress claims, so as to *persuade* (Akerlof and Shiller 2015: 46-53). From our discourse analysis we would suggest that media in all its forms serves in the de-facto marketing of products and services to consumers, via the extensive use of

stories that serve to connect with audiences with products. This can be seen in relation to the articles classified as infotainment, which constituted 51.1% of media items collected.

A central marketing trope within infotainment is the designation of superfoods as products possessing special properties, such as antioxidants, that can turn a 'bad food' into a food that is 'good' and 'healthy' for the consumer, due to its underlying special properties. The use of the 'good' versus 'bad' trope in media provides a means for distinguishing between the 'healthy' self and the 'unhealthy' other; that is, those who consume the former type of food are implicitly assumed to also be 'good' citizens who demonstrate their capacity to adopt 'healthy living' as a civic virtue (Petersen and Lupton 1996: 64-72). This contrasts with those articles that have exact rules and instructions of 'food to avoid'. Many of these articles state that consumers should avoid certain foods at all costs, such as those possessing sugar, salt and fats, and especially trans-fats. However, an example of the selling of 'unhealthy' foods as 'superfoods' can be found in the many media items advocating the consumption of chocolate – a product demonized in media, and more generally. According to the narratives within these items, chocolate (especially dark chocolate high in cacao) is actually a superfood that is 'good for you', rather than a restricted food:

> This chocolatey super food has been scientifically proven to lower blood pressure and insulin resistance, increase the resistance of bad fats, boost the immune system and lowers inflammation, a common link between many chronic diseases. This is a really easy super food to get started on as it still enables us to have our little chocolate hit without getting the guilt (Warren n.d).

Endorsement of pseudo-scientific claims associated with anti-ageing superfoods was found to be another core aspect in the blurring between media and advertising. Many of the infotainment articles in our analysis involve a product tie-in – meaning that they have the appearance of a news story, but at the end of the article there appears a reference to the article's material coming from a

newly released book. For example, Mireille Guiliano's bestseller *French Women Don't Get Fat*, suggests that the 'naughty foods we ingest can often have positive physical, as well as psychological, effects. Wine contains antioxidants; red wine contains proven anti-ageing properties' (Ostrow 2005).

The use of celebrity endorsement to sell pseudo-scientific claims about the benefits of anti-ageing superfoods was also found to be common. This was demonstrated in various infotainment articles that advertised the many anti-ageing superfood books by Dr Nicholas Perricone, which included titles such as *Forever Young: the science of nutrigenomics for glowing, wrinkle-free skin and radiant health at every age; Ageless Face, Ageless Mind: erase wrinkles and rejuvenate the brain* and *Dr Perricone's 7 Secrets to Beauty, Health and Longevity: the miracle of cellular rejuvenation*. Dr Nicholas Perricone's pseudo-scientific claims about superfoods were central to the superfoods marketing campaign of Australian company Amazon Power (n.d.) that sells their Açai berry superfood products:

> Yale University Medical School graduate and best-selling Author Dr Nicholas Perricone declared the Açai berry one of the most powerful 'Super Foods' in the world. Oprah described Açai as 'one of the most nutritious and powerful foods in the world'. The New York Times reported 'this Brazilian fruit is rich in antioxidants, and amino acids, and it is also thought to be one of the most nutritional fruits from the Amazon Rain Forest'. And finally, Vogue Magazine named Açai as 'the next big workout cocktail' (Amazon power n.d.).

Advertisers are acutely aware of the impact of the endorsement of products by celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey. At its peak, the Oprah Winfrey show contained infomercials, and product

placements that resulted in brand power through its large viewer base which attracted 12 million viewers per episode (Berfield 2011).

As we outlined in the previous sections, superfoods are sold to consumers on the promise of better health, youth and beauty. The health and pseudo-scientific claims about the nutritional benefits of anti-ageing superfoods, are about selling an experience – a premium product for those willing and able to afford to consume them and able to buy into the dream of self-transformation that is marketed to the consumer. Celebrity endorsement of the pseudo-scientific claims about the benefits of anti-ageing superfoods suggests this transformational potential: that is, by consuming the advertised product, one too may obtain the vitality, health and beauty that celebrities achieve. However, many superfoods are non-exceptional products, easily accessible and inexpensive, yet are greatly amenable to mass advertising. Consumer advocacy publication *Choice* outlined a feature on superfoods, which was one of the few stories critical of superfoods, and thus worth briefly citing in our closing comments. As *Choice* stated in their comparison of the properties of superfoods, such as goji berries with more regular fruit such as apples:

> To gain the equivalent amount of antioxidants found in a red delicious apple, you would have to consume five 30 mL serves of goji juice costing you a hefty $10. And it would take five 30 mL serves of noni juice, costing $7.50, to get the same amount of antioxidants as that found in a single navel orange. Clearly, on a serve-by-serve basis, many common fruits such as strawberries and apples, contain more antioxidants than heavily marketed 'superjuices', and are far cheaper (Crowe 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article used Foucaultian ideas on the contemporary workings of power and governance to explore how the market for superfoods is created and sustained in an age of food normlessness or

'gastro-anomy'. Drawing on data from an analysis Australian media items on superfoods published between 1995 and 2014, the article identified the marketing techniques that have enabled 'superfoods' to be successfully promoted during this period. It was suggested that these techniques serve to reinforce the responsibilisation of consumers, which is assisted through the confounding (and confusing) of the distinction between information ('news') and persuasion ('advertising')—especially evident in the infotainment genre, but also apparent to varying degrees in other media—and the extensive use of promissory claims, scientific claims and language, celebrity endorsement, and a personal form of address (e.g. use of the personal pronouns 'you' and 'your') that serves to connect audiences to products.

Health authorities view the media as a key communicative tool for the provision of public health information and advice regarding diets and offer information through print and electronic (including online) media that is intended to guide citizens in 'healthy choices' regarding diets (Authors). However, 'the media' is increasingly diverse and interconnected and, in the online environment, comprising emails, blogs and social media, has become the means for connecting producers and consumers and the promotion of products whose value and safety may be uncertain. In this context, it is hardly surprising that health promoters and food regulators often struggle to know how best to communicate information that will advance the public's health. Despite this, health authorities' recognition of the de facto marketing role of media (with the exception of explicit advertising) has been relatively little acknowledged to date (Schwitzer et al. 2005). The commercial reality is that virtually all media are reliant on advertising which inevitably shapes both the form and content of stories (Herman and Chomsky 2002). Given this, the media are likely to be the source of rather than the solution to personal anxieties about diet and health.

Thus, while citizens may seek to live their lives according to the ideals of healthism in expectation of reducing their health anxieties, their engagements with the media may reinforce a sense of unease

and contribute to an unhealthy obsession with ‘healthy eating’. As Giroux (2004) explains, public pedagogy comprises a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for material and ideological gain. The deleterious consequences of the self-objectification and consumption patterns associated with the striving for an idealised healthy, younger self should be, but rarely is, the focus of policy and regulatory initiatives. In an age of ‘ambient risk’, ‘health anxiety’ and ‘anxious patienthood’, characterised by pervasive risk and uncertainty, it is hardly surprising that citizens may subscribe to healthist ideology and turn to the media in the effort to manage their fears (Rosenberg 2009). However, the question arises, in doing so does this contribute to their anxieties and, if so, how should policymakers and regulators respond?

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