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Nutrition knowledge, attitudes and practices of food industry professionals

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Abstract

Food industry professionals may be influenced by various factors in their decision to make changes in food products to enhance nutritional value. This study used the Social Cognitive model to examine these factors. The factors considered included nutrition knowledge, attitudes towards nutrition, confidence in one's own knowledge to improve nutritional quality in food products, and the perception of the company's and the consumer's views in the development/marketing of nutritionally improved products. The study was carried out in two stages, firstly a self-administered questionnaire, followed by depth interviews. Of the 199 self-administered questionnaires distributed to food industry professionals, 46 (23%) were returned via mail or internet. Frequency distributions were calculated and regression analysis was conducted to analyze the model. The depth interview schedule was designed to explore in more depth the information gathered from the self-administered questionnaire. Twelve respondents who completed the self-administered questionnaire volunteered to participate in interviews.

Overall, it was found that more than two-thirds of food industry professionals surveyed carried out work practices related to enhancing the nutrition content of foods. Most commonly they had reduced fat and sodium in their food products. Nutrition knowledge and confidence in one’s own ability to improve nutritional quality in food products were found to be related to work practices enhancing nutrition, but these relationships were mediated through perception of the company's concerns about nutrition. Personal attitudes towards nutrition, however, had little effect on nutrition related food practices at work, which may be because respondents just follow what the company wants, or it may be that there are other important factors which were not examined in this study. To conclude, the main influence of nutrition consideration as part of the product development process is the company's policy, thus if the government wants to see changes in the nutrient composition of foods one approach would be to promote nutrition policies in food companies, e.g. providing financial incentives.
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