

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the role of individual consumer variables, such as health concern, involvement, perceived risk and perceived self-efficacy, in the intention to consume functional foods. Drawing on a review of existing literature and empirical studies, we analyze how these psychological factors influence consumer attitudes and behavior towards these products. The results highlight the importance of these variables in understanding and predicting the acceptance of functional foods.

KEYWORDS: Functional foods, consumption intention, health concern, consumer involvement, perceived risk, perceived self-efficacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The functional foods market has experienced significant growth worldwide, reflecting growing consumer awareness of the link between diet and health. These products, enriched with beneficial components beyond their basic nutritional value, are designed to improve health and reduce the risk of disease. In Morocco, this trend is no exception. The Moroccan consumer, increasingly exposed to information on health and well-being, is showing a growing interest in food products that offer additional benefits. However, despite this apparent interest, the adoption and intention to consume functional foods varies considerably within the Moroccan population. This variability can be attributed to a multitude of factors, among which individual consumer variables play a prominent role.

Moreover, the link established between food consumption and health requires, for the understanding of choices, the mobilization of disciplines that apprehend food beyond its basic biological and nutritional functions, by integrating social, psychological, symbolic and other dimensions...

This is why, in the present research, we are interested in consumers' food attitudes, in order to identify elements of understanding of the processes that orient consumers towards a demand for foods with a strong health image. The aim of this research is to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying the Moroccan consumer's intention to consume functional foods. More specifically, we seek to determine how individual variables such as health concern, personal involvement, perceived risk and perceived self-efficacy influence attitude and, consequently, intention to purchase these products. Although the international literature has extensively explored these concepts, their application and relevance to the Moroccan socio-cultural and economic context remains little studied. This research therefore aims to fill this gap by providing insights specific to the Moroccan market, enabling players in the agri-food industry to develop more targeted marketing strategies and products better adapted to the expectations of local consumers. This article provides an in-depth understanding of the influence of these variables on the intention to consume functional foods, based on an analysis of existing research and an empirical study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHÈSES

1. Functional foods and consumer behavior

A large number of explanatory models of nutrition-health behavior have their roots in the classic socio-cognitive models of health psychology. Two theoretical frameworks in particular have attracted the greatest interest from marketing researchers: the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975) on the one hand, and the Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) model on the other.

The main frames of reference in the field of health psychology, namely the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), are generally used as a framework for work on functional foods.

Poulsen (1999), for example, mobilizes the concepts of attitudes, beliefs towards the purchase of functional foods

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

(naturalness, price, taste, dosage, effect, manufacturer competence, subjective consumer knowledge, etc.) and subjective norm (opinions of family, friends and colleagues towards this purchase) in his TRA model to explain the intention to purchase a variety of fortified products. Patch et al (2005) and O'Connor and White (2010) use the TPB model to shed light on the dynamics between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and intention (product purchase or trial). For the first study, attitude towards the perceived efficacy of functional foods (belief in the positive consequences of consumption) is the key determinant of intention to consume functionally-oriented health foods. For O'Connor and White (2010), attitude towards products (good/bad, effective/ineffective, etc.), subjective norm (agreement of important people to consume the product periodically) and risk perception (risk of potentially negative health effects) explain behavior change and intention to try products by non-consumers.

De Jong et al (2005) integrate the contributions of different socio-cognitive models in identifying the psychosocial determinants of functional food adoption. The authors introduce classic attitudinal variables, social pressure and perceived behavioral efficacy, while taking into consideration concepts such as health-related locus of control, risk perception and stages of change. In their model, they highlight the importance of attitudinal cost-benefit evaluations (based on product quality and perceived efficacy, perceived health risks and alternatives) and personal characteristics (curiosity, variety seeking and uncertainty) in the functional food choice process.

The Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) model is also a preferred framework for analyzing the consumption of functional foods. Henson, Masakure and Cranfield (2008), using lycopene-enriched functional foods to reduce the risk of cancer, evaluated the influence of health threat assessment (men's vulnerability to prostate cancer risk and perceived severity of risk) and assessment of the effectiveness of preventive actions in consuming the reinforced foods. They found a positive correlation between these two factors, on the one hand, and the propensity to consume lycopene-enriched foods, on the other, confirming in this way the ability of the PMT model to predict behavior.

We can also cite the work of Park et al. (2011a) and Cox, Russel, Koster (2004), which demonstrate the importance of feelings of self-efficacy. Park et al. (2011a) confirm that, within the overall PMT model, the feeling of being able to provide a response to one's health risks by consuming functional foods is the only dimension that modifies both the intention and behavior of nutrition-health consumption. These results support the findings of Cox, Russel and Koster (2004), who also highlighted the primary influence of perceived efficacy of functional food behaviour.

2. Utilitarian and hedonic attitudes

Attitude plays a central role in understanding consumer behavior. Many research studies, mainly from psychology, are attempting to improve the relationship between attitude and behavior through new conceptual approaches such as the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned action. The evaluation of consequences has a direct effect on the subject's attitude and therefore on his or her intention, particularly with regard to the consumption of functional foods, a link that has been highlighted by several research studies (Roux, 2007).

Furthermore, the study of consumers' perception of health foods must also take into account the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions. Our research therefore aims to study consumer perceptions by taking these two dimensions into account. Moreover, we feel that research has often focused on product categories that are already established in the market.

Attitude measures in relation to functional foods probably provide an appropriate tool for predicting acceptance of functional foods. Urala (2005) points out, however, that there is a lack of edited attitude measures aimed directly at functional foods.

In marketing, attitude is considered the best predictor of consumer behavior by most analytical models (Filser, 1999). Although there is much debate about the structure of attitude, the main theory in use today in the marketing literature (Dubois, 1990) describes attitude in terms of three components: cognitive, affective and conative. Recent literature has alluded to the hedonic and utilitarian components of attitude (Ahtola 1985), linking the hedonic attitude to affective consumption resulting from sensory evaluation, and the utilitarian to the functional attributes of the product.

While work on functional foods has focused on the utilitarian dimension of food, it's only recently that we've begun to approach health foods from the angle of pleasure (taste and flavor) and its importance for the consumer (Krystallis, Maglaras and Mamalis, 2008; Verbeke, 2006). As Peters and Rappoport (1988) point out, research into food behaviour cannot be limited to functional aspects, as these products can be the source of positive or negative emotions (Giner-Sorolla, 2001).

Thus, hedonistic consumption is motivated by the desire for amusement and sensory pleasure, while utilitarian consumption is the result of a functional need linked to products considered practical and necessary.

On this subject, Olson and Reynold (1983) distinguish between two types of attributes: the functional qualities of a product and the hedonistic benefits it brings.

On the other hand, the hedonic benefits of a food are more concerned with the more subjective aspects, whereas utilitarian benefits

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

are suited to objective and direct aspects of a food, such as nutritional value (Dubé, Cervellon and Jingyuan, 2003).

Recently, Ramanathan and Williams (2007) developed a study claiming that the consumption of hedonic products is a complex experience in terms of emotions: the consumer can therefore feel both “good” and “bad”. The utilitarian option can also generate both positive and negative emotions.

We can also cite the work of Park et al. (2011a) and Cox, Russel, Koster (2004), which demonstrate the importance of feelings of self-efficacy. Park et al. (2011a) confirm that, within the overall PMT model, the feeling of being able to provide a response to one's health risks by consuming functional foods is the only dimension that modifies both the intention and behavior of nutrition-health consumption. These results confirm the findings of Cox, Russel and Koster (2004), who also highlighted the primary influence of the perceived efficacy of functional food behaviour.

3. Influence of individual variables

Research into consumer acceptance of health foods has extensively explored the relationship between person- related variables and the choice of these foods. With this in mind, we will discuss the effect of the following individual variables in the model of attitude formation towards functional foods: health concern, involvement, perceived risk and perceived self-efficacy.

a. Effect of health concerns

Health preoccupation is a determining factor in the adoption of healthy eating behaviours. Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant effect of health concern on health food consumption (Labrecque, L., et al. (2007)). The intention to consume functional foods thus varies according to the consumer's degree of motivation or indifference towards his or her health (Park, J., et al. (2011)). Previous research has shown that individuals with high health consciousness display a favorable attitude towards foods with a health-enhancing image that meet their health expectations. Similarly, it has been observed that highly health-conscious consumers positively judge the usefulness of low-fat foods and assign them a high hedonic appreciation score (Kähkönen, K. (2000)). These observations lead to the following hypothesis:

H1. Health concerns positively influence consumer attitudes towards functional foods.

H1.a. Health concern positively influences consumers' utilitarian attitude towards functional foods.

H1.b. Health concern positively influences the consumer's hedonistic attitude towards functional foods.

b. Effect of consumer involvement

Consumer involvement, defined as the level of interest in a product, is a major condition for the attractiveness of functional foods (Labrecque, L., et al. (2007)). This relationship has been validated by several studies that stipulate that the propensity to consume functional foods, as well as the perceived usefulness of health claims, depends on the degree of consumer involvement in this product category (Dean, M., et al. ,2012). The positive influence of involvement on hedonic value has also been confirmed in studies of low-fat products (Kähkönen, K. ,2000). A high degree of involvement and attention to the product contributes significantly to the prediction of hedonic responses and, consequently, to food acceptance. These elements allow us to formulate the following hypothesis:

H2. Involvement in the product category positively influences consumer attitudes towards functional foods.

H2.a. Involvement in the product category positively influences the consumer's utilitarian attitude towards functional foods.

H2.b. Involvement in the product category positively influences the consumer's hedonistic attitude towards functional foods.

c. Perceived risk effect

Perceived risk, defined as the level of uncertainty felt by an individual about possible losses related to product attributes and the consequences of purchase or consumption, plays a key role in shaping attitudes towards a product. This risk is omnipresent when purchasing food products, and more specifically for health foods (Niva, M.; 2008). Perceived risk tends to influence the sensory dimension, resulting from sensitivity to the food's sensory properties. A risk to taste performance may thus lead consumers to overestimate potential negative effects (Gallen, C. (2005). Studies have shown that hedonic appraisals deteriorate as a function of the perceived risk involved in consuming the food (Lenglet, F. (2005). As sensory risk is immediately revealed, unlike health- related physical risk, it has an intense impact on the evaluation of functional food quality and the determination of consumer attitudes. Hence hypothesis:

H3. Perceived risk negatively influences consumer attitude towards functional foods.

H3.a. Perceived risk negatively influences the consumer's utilitarian attitude towards functional foods.

H3.b. Perceived risk negatively influences the consumer's hedonistic attitude towards functional foods.

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

d. Effect of perceived self-efficacy

The literature has extensively examined the relationship between feelings of self-efficacy and the consumption of a product with specific functionalities (Cox, D. N., & Bastiaans, E. W. (2007). The impact of self-efficacy seems to be strongest when it comes to the acceptance of functional foods. A high degree of perceived self-efficacy engenders more attention and commitment to consumer actions and experiences, leading to positive perceptions and attitudes. The ability to judge the quality of a product is not limited to utilitarian functional characteristics, but also concerns its hedonic sensory properties (Ravoniarison, C. (2012). The feeling of self-efficacy, according to Bandura (Bandura, A. (2006), affects both positive anticipations aimed at utilitarian expectations and hedonic expectations resulting from the taste of the food product. These considerations lead us to the following hypothesis:

H4. Perceived self-efficacy positively influences consumer attitudes towards functional foods.

H4.a. Perceived self-efficacy positively influences the consumer's utilitarian attitude towards functional foods.

H4.b. Perceived self-efficacy positively influences the consumer's hedonistic attitude towards functional foods.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To verify the hypotheses formulated, an empirical study was carried out among adult consumers interested in food products and their impact on health. For the purposes of this investigation, a sample of 300 participants was randomly generated. This sample is representative of a general population in terms of the distribution of basic socio-demographic variables (age, gender, level of education, income), although these variables are not the main focus of the analysis.

a. Measuring instruments

The key variables in this study were measured using multi-item scales, inspired by instruments validated in the literature and mentioned in the source document. All scales were designed to be measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

- Health Concern (HC): Measured by 3 items, adapted from Labrecque et al. (2006) and Ravoniarison (2012), with an expected reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) greater than 0.80.
- Involvement (IMP): Measured by 3 items, adapted from Strazzieri (1996) and Ravoniarison (2012), with an expected reliability greater than 0.85.
 - Perceived Risk (PR): Measured by 6 items (3 for importance of issue, 3 for probability of error), adapted from Kapferer and Laurent (1985), with expected reliability greater than 0.70.
 - Perceived Self-Efficacy (PSE): measured by 2 dimensions (confidence in judgment, perceived competence), adapted from Ravoniarison (2012), with expected reliability greater than 0.90 for each dimension.
 - Attitude towards Functional Foods (ATT): Measured by 10 items (5 for utilitarian attitude, 5 for hedonistic attitude), adapted from Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann (2003), with an expected reliability greater than 0.80 for each dimension.
 - Intention to Consume (IC): Measured by 3 items, adapted from Baker and Churchill (1977) and Ouédraogo (2007), with an expected reliability greater than 0.80.

b. Data analysis methods

Analysis steps include:

- Descriptive statistics: Calculation of means, standard deviations, minimums and maximums for all variables.
- Reliability Analysis: Calculation of Cronbach's Alpha for each scale to check the internal consistency of items.
- Correlation Analysis: Calculation of Pearson correlation coefficients between all variables to assess bivariate relationships.
- Multiple Regression Analysis: To test hypotheses H1 to H4, multiple linear regression models were used. Utilitarian attitude and hedonic attitude were used as dependent variables, and health concern, involvement, perceived risk and perceived self-efficacy as independent variables. Standardized regression coefficients (beta), p-values and adjusted R-squares were examined to assess the strength and significance of relationships.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) for all variables in the study. The means of independent variables (health concern, involvement, perceived self-efficacy) are relatively high, while perceived risk has a lower mean, which is consistent with a general population. Dependent variables (utilitarian attitude, hedonistic attitude, intent to consume) also show adequate variability.

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Health concern	4.48	1.38	1.00	7.00
involvement	4.04	1.42	1.00	7.00
Perceived Risk	3.21	1.42	1.00	6.90
Perceived Self-Efficacy	4.99	1.36	1.00	7.00
Utilitarian attitude	3.01	1.01	1.00	5.58
Hedonistic attitude	2.23	0.98	1.00	5.35
Intent to consume	1.95	0.82	1.00	4.98

b. Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Correlation coefficients indicate the strength and direction of linear relationships between pairs of variables. Values close to 1 or -1 suggest a strong positive or negative relationship, respectively, while values close to 0 indicate a weak or no linear relationship.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Variables

	Health concern	involvement	Perceived Risk	Perceived Self-Efficacy	utilitarian attitude	hedonistic attitude
Health concern	1	-0.0782935	-0.0687968	0.0784928	0.431561	0.26804
involvement	-0.0782935	1	0.0736569	-0.0307994	0.227006	0.38356
Perceived Risk	-0.0687968	0.0736569	1	-0.00715171	-0.3185	-0.350
Perceived Self-Efficacy	0.0784928	-0.0307994	0.00715171	1	0.349118	0.27109
utilitarian attitude	0.431561	0.227006	-0.3185	0.349118	1	0.41743
hedonistic attitude	0.268049	0.383567	-0.3507	0.271094	0.417437	
intention_consumption	0.282883	0.2257	-0.293002	0.214289	0.580612	0.47904

c. Interpretation of Variances

The variances of the aggregate variables are presented in Table 3, which gives information about the data dispersion for each variable. High variance indicates greater heterogeneity of responses within the sample, while low variance suggests more homogeneous responses. For example, health concern (variance = 1.91) and involvement (variance = 2.01) show moderate variability, which is desirable for independent variables as it allows to better observe their impact on dependent variables. Attitudes (utilitarian and hedonistic) and consumption intention have slightly lower variances (between 0.67 and 1.01), indicating some convergence of responses around the mean for these constructed. This spread is sufficient to allow meaningful regression analyses, as it ensures that models are not based on overly uniform data, which could obscure actual relationships. Overall, the observed variances are consistent with the nature of the variables studied and support the validity of subsequent analyses.

Table 3: Variances of Variables

Variable	Variance
Health concern	1.91
Involvement	2.01
Perceived Risk	2.01
Perceived Self-Efficacy	1.84
Utilitarian attitude	1.01
Hedonistic attitude	0.95
Intent to consume	0.67

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

d. Multiple Regression Analysis

The results of multiple regressions are presented below. Two models were tested: one for the utilitarian attitude and one for the hedonistic attitude.

➤ Regression Model for the Utilitarian Attitude

The regression model for utilitarian attitude (Table 3) is significant (F-statistic = 102.8, $p < 0.001$) and explains 45.4% of the variance in utilitarian attitude (R-squared = 0.454). All predictors are significant ($p < 0.001$) and in the expected sense:

- Health Concern ($\beta = 0.297$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences utilitarian attitude, supporting H1.a.
- Involvement ($\beta = 0.207$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences utilitarian attitude, supporting H2.a.
- Perceived Risk ($\beta = -0.220$, $p < 0.001$) negatively influences utilitarian attitude, supporting H3.a.
- Perceived Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences utilitarian attitude, supporting H4.a.

Table 4: Regression Results for Utilitarian Attitude

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Error Std.	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.350	0.208	1.681	0.093
Health concern	0.297	0.024	12.175	< 0.001
Involvement	0.207	0.024	8.732	< 0.001
Perceived Risk	-0.220	0.024	-9.277	< 0.001
Perceived Self-Efficacy	0.241	0.025	9.718	< 0.001
R-squared	0.454			
F-statistic	102.8			
Prob (F-statistic)	< 0.001			

➤ Regression Model for Hedonic Attitude

The regression model for hedonic attitude (Table 4) is also significant (F-statistic = 100.1, $p < 0.001$) and explains 44.7% of the variance in hedonic attitude (R-squared = 0.447). All predictors are significant ($p < 0.001$) and in the expected sense:

- Health Concern ($\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences the hedonistic attitude, supporting H1.b.
- Involvement ($\beta = 0.296$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences the hedonic attitude, supporting H2.b.
- Perceived Risk ($\beta = -0.301$, $p < 0.001$) negatively influences the hedonistic attitude, supporting H3.b.
- Perceived Self-Efficacy ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.001$) positively influences hedonistic attitude, supporting H4.b.

Table 5: Regression Results for Hedonic Attitude

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Error Std.	t-value	p-value
Constant	0.302	0.199	1.518	0.130
Health concern	0.203	0.023	8.777	< 0.001
Involvement	0.296	0.023	12.678	< 0.001
Perceived Risk	-0.301	0.023	-12.875	< 0.001
Perceived Self-Efficacy	0.198	0.024	8.361	< 0.001
R-squared	0.447			
F-statistic	100.1			
Prob (F-statistic)	< 0.001			

The results of this empirical study largely confirm the hypotheses formulated, thus reinforcing the conclusions of the existing literature concerning the influence of individual variables on consumers' attitude towards functional foods.

Firstly, health concern showed a positive and significant influence on both attitude dimensions (utilitarian and hedonistic). This is in line with the work of Labrecque et al. (2007) and Park et al. (2011), who point out that health-conscious individuals are more likely to adopt favorable eating behaviors, including consumption of functional foods. Consumers who value their well-being perceive not only the functional (utility) benefits of these foods, but also the pleasure (hedonic) associated with a healthy diet.

Secondly, the consumer's involvement in the category of functional foods also has a positive and significant impact on utilitarian and hedonistic attitude. These results corroborate the studies of Tuorila and Cardello (2002) and Dean et al. (2012), which highlight the central role of personal commitment in the acceptance of these products. A strongly involved consumer is more likely to seek information, evaluate product attributes and develop a favorable attitude, both rational and emotional.

Thirdly, perceived risk has a negative and significant influence on utilitarian and hedonistic attitude. This observation is consistent

Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

with the research of Volle (1995), Niva (2008) and Lenglet (2005). Consumers who perceive risks (e.g. taste, efficacy or safety) are less likely to adopt functional foods. The negative impact on hedonistic attitude is particularly relevant, suggesting that fears related to sensory experience can be a major barrier to acceptance, even if the health benefits are recognized.

Finally, perceived self-efficacy exerts a positive and significant influence on both dimensions of attitude. These results are in line with the work of Cox and Bastiaans (2007) and Ravoniarison (2012). Consumers who feel empowered to make healthy food choices and achieve their health goals are more confident and develop a positive attitude towards functional foods. This confidence translates into a better appreciation of the utilitarian aspects (perceived efficiency) and hedonic ones (pleasure in consuming foods that contribute to their well-being).

V. CONCLUSION

This research has highlighted the predominant role of individual variables health concern, involvement, perceived risk and perceived self-efficacy in determining the attitude and intention to consume functional foods. By better understanding these psychological dynamics, companies can develop more effective marketing strategies and products that are better suited to consumer expectations.

The results of this study have important practical implications for functional food manufacturers and marketers:

- Targeting and Segmentation: It is essential to target consumers based on their level of health concern and perceived self-efficacy. Differentiated communication campaigns can be developed for these segments.
- Communication of Benefits: For health-conscious consumers, it is appropriate to highlight the specific and proven benefits of functional foods. For those with high self-efficacy, the message that they are capable of making the right choices needs to be reinforced.
- Management of Perceived Risk: It is crucial to reassure consumers about the safety and sensory quality of products. Tastings, clear information about ingredients and manufacturing processes, as well as positive testimonials can help reduce perceived risk, especially hedonic risk.
- Consumer Engagement: Developing strategies to increase consumer engagement, for example, through information platforms, online communities or loyalty programs, can strengthen their positive attitude and consumer intent.

However, this study has inherent limitations in analyzing individual variables only without considering product and situational variables. Future research exploring the interactions between these individual variables, as well as integrating contextual factors (cultural, economic) and product-related variables (taste, price, availability) could enrich the understanding of the intention to consume functional foods. Finally, the impact of technological innovations and new health claims on the perception and acceptance of functional foods represents a promising line of research.

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Intention to Consume Functional Foods: The Role of Individual Variables

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