FOOD FOR THOUGHT: CONSUMERS' RESPONSES TO SUPERFOOD
PRESENTATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

BY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence consumption choices and behaviour. By gaining a deeper understanding of responses to visual cues, insights will be generated into superfood and food presentation, allowing the importance of healthy food presentation to be further understood. This understanding is especially important given the concern over health issues such as obesity in the developed world. Ten in-depth semi-structured interviews using photo elicitation (with a total of 40 participant images and four researcher-provided images) were conducted and analysed via theoretical thematic analysis. The study found the superfood movement has been fuelled by the digital space, and accepted and embraced by contemporary consumers with high food involvement. These consumers place importance on the non-materialistic aspects of superfood consumption, emphasising the hedonic experience and symbolic value. Visual cues, such as bright, vibrant colours, white plateware and natural crockery, ingredients, interesting and colourful garnishing and a background story, all influence a food image to be perceived as more attractive. The study suggests that the exposure to countless glamourised digital images may be changing contemporary consumers' food relationships, perceptions, expectations and how we interact with food. Such findings add to theory by identifying responses to the superfood movement, exploring the context of the digital landscape, and highlighting the relationship between superfoods, digital images and utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic consumption. This study suggests to policy makers the need for more regulation online and to focus on the non-materialistic elements and nutritional elements when encouraging healthy consumption. For brands and influencers in the food industry, more emphasis should be placed on the non-materialistic elements of consumption, while still including utilitarian elements such as food's nutritional value.

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1.0 Introduction and Problem Definition

Health and healthy eating is a growing international concern with obesity being described as a worldwide epidemic; 52% of the world adult population are classified as overweight and obese (World Health Organisation, 2008). New Zealand is classified as the third most obese country in the world (OECD Health Statistics, 2015), with around 32% of its adult population classified as obese and 35% classified as overweight (Ministry of Health, 2015). Obesity is an abnormal accumulation of body fat that consequently influences morbidity, disability and quality of life (Chan & Woo, 2010). The main reason for obesity is the unbalanced intake of calories compared to the amount of calories expended (Witkos, Uttaburanont, Lang, & Arora, 2008). This may be related to the increasing number of people consuming away-from-home meals, such as meals at cafés, restaurants and fast food joints (Kant & Graubard, 2004), as away-from-home meals are higher in fat, saturated fat and sodium and lower in calcium, fibre and iron than at-home meals (French, Story, Neumark-Sztainer, Fulkerson, & Hannan, 2001). The increased calorie intake is an essential element when understanding why body weights are increasing in all developed countries and across all age groups (St-Onge, Keller, & Heymsfield, 2003; Todd & Mancino, 2010). Consuming energy-dense and nutrient-poor (EDNP) food is a leading risk factor for developing chronic non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases (heart attacks and strokes), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes (Stuckler, McKee, Ebrahim, & Basu, 2012). Having a healthy diet is an important way to optimise individuals' nutrition to reduce disease risk and maximise good health (Marlett, 1992). To have and maintain a healthy diet, research suggests individuals should focus on consuming a wide range of vegetables and fruit (Marlett, 1992) in particularly dark, leafy-green vegetables, and deep yellow/orange fruit (Van Duyn & Pivonka, 2000). The recent 'superfood' trend appears to be promoting foods which may deliver such food choices.

In this same climate of health risk, we are also in a world where 'everything' is digitised (Ernst and Young, 2014). It is therefore important to recognise the digital space and how it plays a role in individuals' food consumption. Food companies are increasingly using integrated sensation-rich marketing campaigns to reach people through multiple online and offline channels (Cairns, Angus, & Hastings, 2009). This has resulted in individuals being exposed to considerable levels of unhealthy food advertising (Alvy & Calvert, 2008; Kelly, Bochynska, Kornman, & Chapman, 2008) and food-related hedonic cues, influencing individuals to overconsume (Spence, Okajima, Cheok, Petit, & Michel, 2015). Wansink (2006) found that being exposed to food stimuli can influence a change in consumers' consumption behaviour, particularly influencing individuals to consume certain food. Digital media has also been found to influence consumption patterns, perspectives (Belk, 2013; Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Stuckler et al., 2012) and preferences (Scully et al., 2012).

One important element in influencing an individual's liking for a food is its "physical appearance" (Zellner, Lankford, Ambrose, & Locher, 2010, p. 575). Previous studies have demonstrated how visual aesthetics, such as the colour and texture (Spence, Levitan, Shankar, & Zampini, 2010; Spence et al., 2015), cutlery and plateware (Piqueras-Fiszman, Alcaide, Roura, & Spence, 2012; Wansink, 2007) and the overall assortment and presentation of meals (Hurling & Shepherd, 2003; Zellner, Loss, Zearfoss, & Remolina, 2014) can influence consumers' consumption behaviours.

Previous literature has stated that a sustained public effort will be needed to drop alarming obesity rates. Healthy food options need to be easily and readily available, identifiable and affordable to people across all demographics (age, race, income) and geographic locations (urban, suburban, rural) (Story, Kaphingst, Robinson-O'Brien, & Glanz, 2008). Previous literature also has suggested that the commercial food industry needs to provide more attractive lower-energy alternatives in an effort

to entice individuals to make healthier consumption choices (Kant & Graubard, 2004). However, very little research has considered the digital space, and focused on how foods' visual aesthetics could help play a role in influencing individuals to make healthier consumption choices. In addition, little literature has examined the recent promotion of superfoods, especially how prevalent they are in the digital space.

The purpose of this study is to understand how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence consumption choices and behaviour. By gaining a deeper understanding of responses to visual cues, insights will be generated into superfood and food presentation, allowing the importance of healthy food presentation to be further understood. This will help generate ideas that can make healthier food more appealing, subsequently influencing consumers to make healthier choices. This thesis will proceed with a review of the literature, followed by conceptual development. The methodology will then be explained followed by the findings, discussion and implications for theory and practice.

2.0 Literature Review

This study was informed by literature in three areas: (1) utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic consumption, (2) digital media and (3) food literature. It was important to investigate these three interlinking elements, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of how visual cues in the presentation of healthy food online influence individuals' consumption choices and behaviour.

2.1 Utilitarian, Symbolic and Hedonic Consumption

Modern society has influenced many changes in consumers' consumption behaviour. Now "people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean" (Levy, 1959, p. 118). This statement illustrates the difference between utilitarian consumption (consuming goods for a functional use) and symbolic consumption (consuming goods for what this may convey about the self). In terms of food consumption, it is understandable that consumers would buy food for what food can do (utilitarian functions such as nutrition), for what it symbolises (for example status or culture) or for hedonic reasons (to derive pleasure).

This transition in our rationales for consumption was also supported by Lewis and Bridger (2011) who illustrate the differences between traditional and contemporary consumers and their consumption motivations. Lewis and Bridger acknowledge the division between the old and new consumers, suggesting their differences in utilitarian and symbolic motivation. Traditional consumers' or old consumers' behaviour is based on conformity, convention and the desire for convenience and low cost. They relate strongly to utilitarian consumption as their food preferences and habits are defined as conservative and culinary traditions are maintained across generations (Lewis & Bridger, 2011) and they are a part of late majority when food trends are at stake (Dagevos, 2005).

In contrast, contemporary consumers' consumption is not solely determined by utilitarian elements but more aligned with symbolic and hedonic consumption. These consumers are more focused on identity, moral judgements and well-being, Pine and Gilmore (1999) discovered that "no longer do customers purchase goods merely for their functional use but also for the experiences created during purchase and use" (p. 100). Now "fun and fantasy, image, and imagination, dreams and desires, are key factors of contemporary consumer behaviour" (Dagevos, 2005, p. 33). Dagevos (2005) supports this describing contemporary consumers as consumers who search for value-added extras in terms of intangible assets, including "uniqueness, originality or authenticity, warm-hearted attention, sincerity, or integrity" (p. 36). Dagevos (2005) also illustrates how contemporary consumers' consumption is largely influenced by elements of symbolic consumption, such as "aura, personality, image or message of products, producers or places of consumption" (p. 36). Dagevos (2005), Levy (1959) and Lewis and Bridger (2011) all suggest the importance of exploring utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic consumption literature when exploring contemporary consumers' consumption practices.

2.1.1 Utilitarian consumption

Utilitarian goods are predominantly functional and instrumental (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). They are defined as consumer goods for which consumption is driven by cognitive reasoning; they are goods that are consumed for a specific, well defined goal (Strahilevitz & Loewenstein, 1998). Utilitarian goods can be characterised by cognitive or reasoned preferences that determine consumer choice, compared to hedonic goods that are categorised by emotional preferences that determine consumer choice (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999; Wertenbroch, 1998).

Although contemporary consumers place large importance on symbolic and hedonic consumption elements (Levy, 1959; Lewis & Bridger, 2011), it is still

important to consider the obvious element of utilitarian consumption to understand food consumption.

2.1.2 Symbolic consumption

In contrast to utilitarian consumption, symbolic consumption refers to the meanings conveyed by goods or other consumables, such as cultural practices, leisure activities and entertainment (Mansvelt, 2011). These goods and consumables can act as symbols, acting as an outward expression of an individual's self-concept and connection to society (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). For a good or consumable to act as a symbolic communicative device, it must achieve social recognition. Social recognition is attained when the product's symbolic meaning is established and understood by segments of society; the necessity for any group to understand a common or shared symbol depends on the particular way the goods are classified. Classification systems are "society's means of organising and directing their activities in an orderly and sensible manner" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, pp. 24-25). Symbolic social classification of a good permits the individual to relate themselves directly to it, matching their self-concept with the symbolic meaning of the good. The individual's feedback given from others regarding product symbols results in the decision of whom the individual is at that point in time. Then the individual can make changes or minor adjustments in the products they use to communicate information to others, to reach their desired role (Solomon, 1983). Once the individuals reach the desired role, self-support and self-enhancement is achieved (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967).

In this way, consumption is determined by the interaction of the purchased product's symbolic meaning and the buyers' self-concept (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Solomon, 1983). Previous research has demonstrated that the product or brand image can define an individual's self (Solomon, 1983) and be a way to promote an individual's self-concept to stop depersonalisation (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). The symbolic properties of a product

may be more important to the consumer than the benefits provided by the functionality of the product purchased (Duesenberry, 1949).

Academics have found that symbolic consumption extends to the consumption of food, as food consumption can never be comprehensively understood if only looking at the nutritional (or utilitarian) level; the symbolic properties must be taken into account (Bardhi, Ostberg, & Bengtsson, 2010). Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) found support for symbolic meaning in food consumption noting that "any food item may become a conveyor of meaningful messages because symbolic framing is rooted not in the attributes of the food itself but in the expected function of food, namely, to please, reward, appease" (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007, p. 432). Therefore, the food's utilitarian 'attributes' are noted, but the emphasis is on the symbolic meaning. Similar to Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007), other literature has demonstrated that a food product's symbolic meaning has the power to modify consumer perceptions of food, behaviour towards food and food choice (Bardhi et al., 2010; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Roper, 2009; Stead, McDermott, Mackintosh, & Adamson, 2011; Wills, Backett-Milburn, Lawton, & Roberts, 2009). Consistent with symbolic consumption literature, authors have demonstrated that consumers' food choices are influenced by the messages these choices send with respect to the consumers own self-identity. Consumers will consume food products that they believe are congruent to the information they want to communicate to others (Schor & Ford, 2007; Wills et al., 2009). Similarly, Stead et al. (2011) note that the emotional and symbolic value of food consumption has been given little exploration in literature, and find that teenagers use food choices to help construct a desired image, as a means of judging others and to signal their conformity with acceptable friendship and peer norms.

2.1.3 Hedonic consumption

In considering symbolic meaning, authors also suggest that a consumer's perceptions of the value of food may depend on the hedonic value it holds

(Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). Hedonic consumption is defined as "those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multi-sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experiences with products" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). Research here acknowledges the several sensory channels (multisensory, fantasy and emotions) used by consumers to perceive and experience products (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Multi-sensory acknowledges the tastes, scents, smells, tactile impressions and visual images used by individuals to perceive and experience products. Individuals do not only react to multisensory impressions by external stimuli by encoding the senses, but react by generating their own multisensory images within themselves. For example, when individuals smell a perfume this may cause them not only to perceive and encode the scent but also generate an image within themselves that involves "sights, sounds and tactile sensations" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). Fantasy refers to the fantasy imagery that individuals' experience when responses are constructed by a multisensory image that is not drawn directly from a previous experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Emotions represent "motivational phenomena with characteristic neurophysiological, expressive and experimental components" (Izard & Buechler, 1980, p. 93), including feelings such as fear, jealousy, joy, rapture and rage.

Similar to symbolic meaning, hedonic meaning plays a significant role in contemporary consumers' purchasing decisions. As noted by Lewis and Bridger (2011), "Today a majority of consumers have largely exhausted the things they need to purchase and are focusing instead on what they want to buy, that is, opportunities and experiences that make their lives happier, richer and more rewarding" (p. 2).

In the food domain, hedonic consumption has an interconnecting relationship with symbolic consumption. Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) in particular, note that the symbolic meaning of food consumption is often in the pleasure with which it is associated. While the hedonic consumption of food is recognised, literature has also demonstrated that external factors can either enhance or decrease consumers'

attention toward or away from the hedonic experience when consuming food (Nowlis, Mandel, & McCabe, 2004; Nowlis & Shiv, 2005). These external factors consist of expectation of taste (Wansink, Park, Sonka, & Morganosky, 2000), the packaging (Mizutani et al., 2010), cognitive information about food (Lee, Frederick, & Ariely, 2006; Siegrist & Cousin, 2009) and the subjective experience of hunger (LeBel, Lu, & Dubé, 2012).

2.1.4 Aesthetics

The idea that the visual elements of food may influence hedonic consumption brings attention to aesthetics. Aesthetics play an important role in symbolic and hedonic consumption. Authors have noted how the aesthetics and design of a product can provide the consumer with physiological pleasure (Alba & Williams, 2013), therefore it is important to acknowledge visual aesthetics when discussing hedonic consumption. Norman (2004) suggests three levels for processing and understanding products and product features. The first level is the visceral level, where responses are generated primarily regarding the product's visual features. The second level is the behavioural level, where the function, performance and usability is in focus. The third level is the reflective level, where meaning and interpretation is generated. All levels can be pleasurable for the consumer. For example, an iPhone provides enjoyment to the consumer by the attractive design and how user friendly it is. Norman's (2004) processing levels demonstrate that consumers can attain psychological pleasure from the visual aesthetics of the product.

Visual products aesthetics are defined as characteristics that construct a product's visual form. This includes elements such as colour, materials, ornamentation, proportion, reflectivity, size and texture (Lawson, 1983). The products' visual aesthetics are reliable for the fundamental connection in the development of a consumer-product relationship (Hollins & Pugh, 1990), as visual imagery is the first point of contact between the consumer and product (Noble & Kumar, 2010). In examining the connections between visual aesthetics, hedonic consumption and

symbolic consumption, Noble and Kumar (2010) suggests that visual aesthetics can act as metaphors, that is product designs that mimic a creature or an object either subtly or blatantly (Cohen, Curd, & Reeve, 2016).

In particular, visual appearance of products are often designed to symbolise their personalities. Designs with more personality provide the consumer with higher symbolic, self-expressive value (Keller, 1993) and an emotional connection with the consumers (Noble & Kumar, 2010). Charters and Pettigrew (2003) similarly note how the visual aesthetics have the ability to carry symbolic meaning and create hedonic experiences. Charters and Pettigrew (2003) studied perceptions of wine quality through focus groups and interviews and discovered that the effects of aesthetics can occur on a continuum from mild to profound experiences.

Very few researchers have investigated the potential connections between symbolic consumption, hedonic consumption and visual aesthetics in the food domain. Previous literature has demonstrated the importance of a food product's visual aesthetics (Hurling & Shepherd, 2003; Michel, Velasco, Gatti, & Spence, 2014; Piqueras-Fiszman, Giboreau, & Spence, 2013; Zellner et al., 2014; Zellner et al., 2011), however these studies have mainly taken a quantitative approach, investigating specific elements of aesthetics in isolation, such as colour, texture, neatness and artistry. This highlights the needs for researchers to take a more exploratory and holistic approach when investigating food aesthetics. This is also supported by Baumgartner (1993), who suggests that individuals' perception of products are generated either holistically or analytically depending on the situation and the individual. Product perceptions were found to be more holistic in situations where cognitive resources were limited and in situations that occur in everyday consumer behaviour (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Baumgartner, 1993). This suggests that food aesthetics could be perceived more holistically as consumption is a regular occurrence.

2.2 Food and Digital Media

The extensive technological changes that have occurred over the past 30 years and continue to change have reformed how businesses ought to operate, consumers' expectations for businesses (Ernst and Young, 2014) and consumers' consumption behaviours (Belk, 2013; Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016; Kim, Gupta, & Koh, 2011; Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Passamonti et al., 2009; Spence et al., 2015). In a world where many aspects are digitalised, businesses need to develop digital strategies, and rethink their business and operating models to deliver end-to-end responses (Ernst and Young, 2014). It is extremely important for businesses to evolve and grow with new digital media platforms and devices to meet the technological demands and expectations of contemporary consumers. Contemporary consumers are innovators and trend setters, and are largely responsible for the fast-moving changes in today's and tomorrow's consumer culture (Lewis & Bridger, 2011). If companies do not change their business models and business perspectives to keep up with technological changes and fast-moving consumer culture they will lose relevance (Ernst and Young, 2014). Belk (2013) has additionally demonstrated how the digital world has changed the relationship between online and offline personas, resulting a change in consumption behaviour to define the self in the digital age. Such changes provide insight into the possibility that digital media might have changed individuals' relationship with food and how they interact with food online.

The digital world has also meant that individuals are exposed to countless food images. In 2016, 81% of individuals in developed countries (International Telecommunication Union, 2016) and 89.4% of New Zealand's population had access to the internet (Internet Live Statistics, 2016). Having access to the internet provides individuals with numerous platforms that expose them to an immeasurable number of food images in the matter of mere seconds. The countless food images on the internet have escalated with the movement of individuals' taking and uploading "high-definition and digitally-enhanced food images" (Spence et al.,

2015, p. 54) on digital media. In 2013 there were 800,000 images on Instagram with the hashtag #food (Cookbook, 2013); this has increased to over 230,000,000 food images in 2017. The few studies that have examined the movement of photographing food have mainly focused on the act of uploading and sharing food images. Very few authors have focused on individuals' responses to digital food images and the effects of this. Authors have discovered that consumers upload glamorised food images on digital media to enhance their social image, as images can communicate symbolic meaning to others (Kim et al., 2011). Similarly, Holmberg et al. (2016) discovered through observing food images on Instagram that the majority of food images functioned as objects in the individual's identity creation. These images were displayed in a way that indicated that a great deal of care and attention went into the presentation, representing a part of an individual's online self-reputation. Holmberg et al. (2016) also found that the majority of these food items were seen to be functioning as symbols, symbolising an occasion, an activity or a feeling.

In line with symbolic consumption, authors have similarly found that the hedonic experience is also present in food images online. Holmberg et al. (2016) explored how adolescents communicate food images on Instagram, finding that the majority of these images referred to positive general feelings and emotions, while very few referred to the functionality or other utilitarian elements (Holmberg et al., 2016). Similarly, researchers have found evidence of hedonic consumption related to food images on other online platforms, with images expressing consumers' emotions, feelings and identities. These platforms consisted of online communities, blogs (Lynch, 2012; Simunaniemi, Sandberg, Andersson, & Nydahl, 2011) and social image based platforms (e.g. Instagram and Pinterest) (Coary & Poor, 2016; Holmberg et al., 2016).

Previous research has lightly touched on behavioural and psychological consequences of individuals being surrounded by large quantities of food images online (Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Spence et al., 2015; Wansink, 2006). However,

little research has qualitatively examined in-depth the consequences of being exposed to glamorised food images online and responses to components of digital food images selected as attractive. Ouwehand and Papies (2010) discovered that being exposed to food cues can influence a change in consumer behaviour, with overweight individuals exposed to tempting food cues displaying a more powerful urge to eat high-calorie food compared with average weight individuals. Similarly, Wansink (2006) demonstrated how influential food cues on digital media are by revealing that 70% of American households have been previously influenced by social media to eat certain foods. Furthermore, researchers have suggested that when individuals participate in digital grazing, exposing themselves to food images can trigger visual hunger (Spence et al., 2015). Digital grazing is a concept used when individuals gain enjoyment from looking at food images on media, which consequentially provokes visual hunger. Visual hunger is defined as a "natural desire, or urge, to look at food" (Spence et al., 2015, p. 54), which is likely to be an evolutionary adaption, as our brains have learnt to like the look of food as it would likely result in consumption. Spence et al. (2015) proposes that this psychological motive is the reason why various food media platforms have become increasingly successful in this digital age and that the countless visual food cues in the marketplace play a significant role in why consumers are overconsuming (Spence et al., 2015).

2.3 The Influence of Food Presentation

While the previous sections have noted literature on consumption and food cues on digital media, this section notes previous research that focuses on specific food cues in food presentation. The overall assortment and presentation of food is crucially important, as consumer's perception of food is dominated by its visual appearance (Hurling & Shepherd, 2003; Michel et al., 2014; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2013; Zellner et al., 2014; Zellner et al., 2011). Little food literature has taken a holistic

approach when exploring food presentation as authors have mainly focused on the micro or isolated elements of food presentation in experimental studies. Elements found to result in positive assessments of the food include white plateware, which influences individuals to perceive an increase in flavour, sweetness and liking scores (Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2012; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2013; Stewart & Goss, 2013), while black plateware or background could also increase flavour intensity and liking scores (Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2013). The larger the plateware or serving size can increase an individual's satisfaction (Van Kleef, Shimizu, & Wansink, 2012). Authors have noted that more intense colours lead to an increase in flavour intensity (Delwiche, 2012; DuBose, Cardello, & Maller, 1980; Norton & Johnson, 1987; Spence et al., 2010), a higher perception of sweetness (Johnson & Clydesdale, 1982; Johnson, Dzendolet, & Clydesdale, 1983; Johnson, Dzendolet, Damon, Sawyer, & Clydesdale, 1982), greater attractiveness of a dish (Zellner et al., 2010) and how refreshing a drink is (Zellner & Durlach, 2002).

While the above give clues to various elements which may be influential, the majority of food presentation research has been conducted in a controlled environment, such as a laboratory. Although this is known to provide more accurate findings, it does not acknowledge how consumers assess products holistically and form a global impression of the entire product (Noble & Kumar, 2010). This is important, as consumers can evaluate holistically, that is, "multidimensional stimuli are initially processed as unanalysed wholes" (Melara, Marks, & Potts, 1993, p. 1114). Such controlled environments do not capture food you might see available at food providers. Examples of authors who have attempted to take a less micro approach to food presentation include Delwiche (2012), who suggested that the gloss, evenness and shape of a meal can change consumers' perception of taste, smell and flavour. Michel et al. (2014) found that the artistic plating of food can influence consumers to perceive the plate as complex, artistic, more flavoursome and have a higher willingness to pay before and after tasting the dish. Zellner et al. (2014) discovered that attractively presented food can influence an increased judgement of better flavour, increased preference and increased acceptance of

healthier food. Zellner et al. (2014) also discovered how neat food presentations can lead to increased preference, more flavoursome judgement of the food, a higher evaluation of quality and the perception that more care was taken in the preparation of food (Zellner et al., 2011).

Thus, while digital media changes consumption behaviour, very little food literature has considered how digital media has affected individuals' online and offline relationships with food. Therefore, it is important that research into food presentation considers and examines the influence of such changes.

2.4 The Superfood Movement

Healthy food can be interpreted in many different ways, as numerous elements shape individuals' perspectives on healthy food (Croll, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2001; Paquette, 2005). With healthy food covering such an extensive area this research will specifically focus on the recent food trend: superfoods. This thesis will refer to this as the 'superfood movement'. This is consistent with the current use and reference in the media (Shearman, 2014), and is also used as it implies more of a long-lasting 'trend' which has momentum. There is little evidence of research focusing on this recent food movement, yet it has been embraced by a strata of the financially well-off around the world (Sikka, 2016). A superfood is defined as "a nutrient-rich food considered to be especially beneficial for health and well-being" (Oxford Dictionary). For example, some seemingly accepted superfoods include blueberries (for their antioxidants), kale (for its high nutrient content) and chia seeds (for their high source of omega 3 ALA and protein). However, there is no scientific evidence that justifies claims that superfoods boost physical performance and intelligence, have anti-aging powers and are able to lift depression (Tetens, 2011). While the lack of support for the health claims is acknowledged, this study

takes the view that superfoods are generally healthy, and thus may be considered as healthy foods.

The popularity of the superfood movement spreading rapidly around the world may be explained by the advances in digital communication. With the increasing number of digital and social media platforms, communicating to one another has never been easier; now messages, photos and videos can be sent instantly throughout the world via countless media platforms (Carty, 2015). Technological advances have changed the theory of collective behaviour (Smelser, 2011), subsequently changing how social movements are created. Carty (2015) proposes, in reference to Smelser's (2011) collective behaviour framework, that the numerous digital platforms mean that social movements can accumulate and spread quickly due to communication opportunities in the digital age. While this research does not examine the superfood movement as a social movement, the idea of a fast, efficient diffusion of information being consumed and accepted by a large group of people is applicable to the 'superfood movement'.

Based on the above discussion, this research seeks to understand how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence individuals' consumption choices and behaviour. In order to gain a greater understanding, symbolic consumption, digital media and food presentation will be investigated, as these are influential elements in individuals' food perceptions and consumption behaviour. This research will specifically investigate the responses of individuals who have high involvement with food (referred to as 'foodies'). By exploring the foodies' selection of and responses to digital superfood images, insights will be generated into superfood and food presentation, allowing the importance of healthy food presentation to be further understood. This will help generate ideas that can make healthier food more appealing, subsequently influencing consumers to make healthier choices.

3.0 Conceptual Development

Based on the literature examined, this section identifies the specific research questions to which this study is oriented.

Authors have suggested the importance of exploring utilitarian elements, as well as symbolic and hedonic elements when exploring contemporary consumers' food consumption (Dagevos, 2005; Levy, 1959; Lewis & Bridger, 2011). Authors have also highlighted how contemporary consumers are increasingly spending more time on the digital space, exposing themselves to large quantities of food stimuli, subsequently influencing overconsumption (Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Spence et al., 2015; Wansink, 2006). The lack of literature exploring consumers' interaction with the superfood movement highlights the need for greater attention in this area. In examining how individuals respond to images of superfoods online, it is first necessary to understand how consumers respond to superfoods. Therefore, the first research question is:

1. How do contemporary consumers respond to the notion of superfoods?

As previously noted, researchers have found that consumer perceptions are influenced by micro elements of a dish, including cutlery, plateware, serving size, texture, colour and overall assortment and presentation (DuBose et al., 1980; Johnson & Clydesdale, 1982; Johnson et al., 1983; Johnson et al., 1982; Norton & Johnson, 1987; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2012; Piqueras-Fiszman et al., 2013; Spence et al., 2010; Stewart & Goss, 2013; Van Kleef et al., 2012; Zellner & Durlach, 2002; Zellner et al., 2010)

As well as examining micro elements in food presentation, some researchers have taken a more encompassing approach when investigating elements of food presentation. For instance, researchers have discovered that the glossiness, evenness and shape of a meal (Delwiche, 2012), the artistry (Michel et al., 2014),

overall impression of attractiveness and neatness of the dish (Zellner et al., 2011) and overall assortment and presentation (Hurling & Shepherd, 2003; Zellner et al., 2014) can increase consumers' overall consumption experience.

These studies emphasise the importance of visual cues, yet acknowledge that there is little research that takes a holistic approach when exploring food presentation. Taking a holistic approach when investigating aesthetics is important, as individuals holistically assess products with multiple-stimuli (Baumgartner, 1993). There is also little evidence to suggest that studies have taken a qualitative approach in further exploring why consumers prefer certain aspects of food visuals in the context of the overall food presentation, or in exploring the response to digital images/media. This highlights a research opportunity to investigate how individuals are interacting with food through media platforms and how this impacts their consumption behaviour, perceptions and expectations. Therefore, the second research questions follow:

2. A) What elements in digital presentation of superfoods are contemporary consumers attracted to?
2. B) How does the contemporary consumer interpret the elements in digital presentation of superfoods?

While it is clear that consumers respond to elements in digital food images, contemporary consumers now focus more on emotions, desires, images and meaning (Dagevos, 2005) rather than utilitarian value (Lewis & Bridger, 2011). Thus, the symbolic meaning of food is suggested to hold power (Bardhi et al., 2010; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Roper, 2009; Schor & Ford, 2007; Stead et al., 2011; Wills et al., 2009).

The previous chapter demonstrated the relationship between symbolic consumption, hedonic consumption and aesthetics. However, very little research acknowledges this in regard to the food domain and nothing is evident with respect

to superfoods. Previous literature does suggest that factors such as taste, packaging, information and hunger may enhance or decrease the consumers' attention to or away from the hedonic experience when consuming food (Lee et al., 2006; Mizutani et al., 2010; Nowlis et al., 2004; Nowlis & Shiv, 2005; Siegrist & Cousin, 2009; Wansink et al., 2000).

There is little evidence to suggest that research has explored utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic consumption and the aesthetics of superfood images in the digital space. Highlighting this literature gap is important as it acknowledges how the speed of technology advancements can swiftly outdate research knowledge. Therefore, the third research question is generated:

3. To understand contemporary consumers' superfood choices and responses to attractive superfood presentations reveal aspects of utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic consumption.

Digital media is a significant part of contemporary consumers' lives, where multiple digital media platforms are frequently used to express emotions, feelings and identities through food consumption (Coary & Poor, 2016; Holmberg et al., 2016; Lynch, 2012; Simunaniemi et al., 2011). Very little literature has examined how contemporary consumers use the digital space in regards to food consumption. Literature has demonstrated that digital grazing and the consequences of this play a significant role in contemporary consumer life (Spence et al., 2015). It is important to understand how the contemporary consumer is using the digital space in relation to food, as this will provide a greater depth of understanding of contemporary consumers' relationship with food online.

Being exposed to countless food images can change consumers' behaviour and perspectives (Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Wansink, 2006). This suggests that digital media has the power to alter consumer behaviour and perceptions of food consumption. Digital media may familiarise consumers with certain visual

aesthetics and subconsciously change consumers' expectations and perceptions, as the more a consumer is exposed to a product through advertising, the more familiar they become with it and the more likely they will accept it as a social norm (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo, 2001; Nichols, Raska, & Flint, 2015). This suggests that consumers' expectations of food presentation may change through being exposed to countless glamorised food images online. There is little evidence to suggest that previous research has studied how digital media and, more specifically, viewing digital images of superfoods, may impact consumers' food presentation expectations. Therefore, the fourth research question follows:

4. To explore how contemporary consumers, use the digital space to interact with food online and how this may influence their expectation of food presentation.

4.0 Research Approach

This section provides an explanation of the philosophical perspective, methodological approach and methods of data collection and analysis. Additionally, it includes checks to ensure the study's trustworthiness and authenticity.

4.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm can be viewed as a set of basic beliefs that interconnect with 'ultimates' or 'first principles'. It represents a 'worldview' that defines an individual's 'world', their position in it and "a range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Put more simply, a research paradigm is a "basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The chosen paradigm represents philosophical assumptions, shaping the researcher's stance taken in relation to the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the methods used in the process (methodology) (Creswell, 2012). This research will use constructivism as its chosen paradigm (also known as interpretivisim (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994)). Constructivism is defined as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). This is consistent with the aim of qualitative research to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, p. 4) and constructivism is aligned with this.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The constructivist ontology focuses on understanding and reconstructing the constructions that the participants and the interviewer initially hold (Hirschman, 1986; Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Therefore, this research approach concentrates on understanding a social phenomenon from a context-specific perspective. The researcher must understand that reality is constructed through culture, history,

society (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000) and personal experiences, constructing multiple meanings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) make this clear by stating that "our individual personal reality – the way we think life is and the part we are to play in it is – self-created. We put together our own personal reality" (p. 73). From a constructivist notion, the researcher's role is to understand multiple realities from the individuals' perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Golafshani, 2003) and to acknowledge that reality is constantly changing (Hipps, 1993). Such realities are created in the minds of individuals rather than being an external singular entity (Hansen, 2004). Ponterotto (2005) emphasises that the most crucial ontological distinction between constructivism and other research paradigms is that the researcher cannot conclude an objective reality from the participant who is processing, experiencing and labelling the reality. The subjective reality is influenced by the context of the situation, the individual's perceptions and experiences, the interaction between the researcher and the individual and the social environment (Ponterotto, 2005).

4.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology focuses on the nature of knowledge and what it deems to be true (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The constructivist epistemology focuses on "individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111), meaning that knowledge is socially constructed and may change depending on the environment (Crotty, 1998; Golafshani, 2003). It is crucial that research guided by a constructivist perspective acknowledges that everyone has a unique experience of the world and that each individual experience must be treated equally as they are all "truthful" and "meaningful" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). The investigator and the participant are assumed to be interactively linked during interviews, so that the findings are created as the investigation progresses (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and capture and describe the individual's 'lived experience' (Ponterotto, 2005).

In terms of the present study, and consistent with literature examined, the constructivist perspective reflects how the digital world is constantly evolving, influencing our relationship with food and how we interact with food to also constantly evolve and change (Belk, 2013). Being exposed to countless food images on digital media can influence changes in individual's 'realities' and 'experiences' (Belk, 2013; Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Scully et al., 2012; Stuckler et al., 2012).

4.1.3 Methodological perspective

A methodological perspective can be regarded as an "intricate set of ontological and epistemological assumptions that a researcher brings to his or her work" (Prasad, 1997, p. 2). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) constructivism adopts a hermeneutic dialectical methodology, where the nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among the researcher and participant. The various constructions are interpreted using "conventional hermeneutical techniques" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) and are compared and contrasted through dialectical interchange. These methods (interviews, observations and analysis of existing texts) ensure an adequate dialogue between researcher and participant in order to collaboratively construct a meaningful reality (Angen, 2000). The overriding aim in a constructivist methodology is to distil a "consensus construction" that is more "informed and sophisticated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) than any of the previous constructions, including the researcher's construction. The following research design has been constructed to align with constructivism.

4.2 Research Design

This design of this research consists of qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews using photo elicitation. The following will provide justification and details for the chosen design.

4.2.1 Justification for a qualitative approach

Previous literature has predominantly used a quantitative approach when investigating visual aesthetics in food presentation. Yet, as noted previously, this has not facilitated an examination of a holistic response to food images, inviting acknowledgement of context and especially examining the influence of digital images. The present research will undertake a qualitative approach, so that findings can build on previous quantitative literature, by providing more meaningful explanations of response to multiple visual cues. This approach is consistent with authors who note how a qualitative approach enhances and enriches an understanding of the

events themselves and the context of the event (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A qualitative approach is also appropriate when the concepts under investigation have little supporting empirical work (Deshpande, 1983). This is relevant to the present study's investigation of superfoods and contemporary consumers' interaction with food through media platforms, as there is very little evidence to suggest that previous research has investigated these fields.

4.2.2 Justification for the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a method of data collection in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions of another person (a respondent). Interviews can be conducted either face-to-face or by telephone (Polit & Beck, 2006). In-depth interviews should be intimate and personal encounters in which open, direct, verbal questions are used to stimulate detailed narratives, stories and descriptions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In-depth semi-structured interviews were the chosen data collection method, as it allowed for the researcher to participate in the research process with the participants to ensure that they are producing knowledge that is reflective of the participant's reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Additionally, in-depth semi-structured interviews have the ability to provide detailed raw data through communicating with others. Language is considered the most important resource for account as it has the ability to present explanations, descriptions and evaluations in detail and in infinite variety (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). As previous research is mainly quantitative and focused on the micro elements of visual presentation, the interviews add consumer voices to the existing quantitative literature, helping to generate deeper and more meaningful understanding.

In-depth semi-structured interviews also provide the respondents with a more comfortable and relaxing environment in which to express their honest experiences and feelings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), and allow the researcher a degree of freedom to further investigate the respondents' experiences and feelings, which can enhance the richness and quality of the raw data (Cohen, 2006).

In addition, in-depth semi-structured interviews are consistent with the constructivist paradigm in which intense researcher and participant interaction is essential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Only through the intimate interaction and deep-reflection can deeper meaning be discovered (Ponterotto, 2005).

4.2.3 Justification for the use of photo-elicitation

Photo-elicitation is based on the simple concept of inserting a photograph, taken or chosen by the participant, researcher or others in a research interview (Harper, 2002). Photo-elicitation was used to improve the quality of the interview, as images have the ability to stimulate memory, reduce misinterpretations and provoke higher quality and more informative views of previous experiences, thoughts and feelings (Harper, 2002). Images stimulate more deeply into human consciousness than words, as the part of the brain that processes images uses more capacity than when processing words (Harper, 2002). Not only does photo-elicitation provide more meaningful raw data, but it provides data that words alone cannot obtain (Harper, 2002; Petermans, Kent, & Van Cleempoel, 2014).

With photo-elicitation producing more meaningful data and multiple forms of data, the method of choice is aligned with Guba and Lincoln's requirements of constructivist inquiry research by inviting multiple data collection methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) encourage the use of uncommon units of measurement and suggests that research be approached with different styles and methods that can produce multiple forms of data.

Photo-elicitation was also used as it is unobtrusive and more familiar compared to in-depth interviews. Images enable participants to be less hesitant and to potentially provide more detailed direct responses (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015; Collier, 1957; Collier & Collier, 1986; Creswell, 2013; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Warren, 2005)

4.2.4 The interview process

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted following DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) key features of semi-structured interviews:

- Scheduled in advance at the selected time.
- Location should be normally outside everyday events.

- Organised around a set of predetermined interview questions.
- Other questions are generated from the participants' narrative.
- Last normally between 30 minutes to several hours.

The interview guide consisted of twelve open-ended questions and four consistent food images. The images consisted of two sets of two images. Each set depicted the same superfood product, but displayed in a different way (please see Appendix 8.1 for interview guide and appendix 8.3 for set images).This gave the researcher freedom to probe the respondents' experiences and feelings, thus enhancing the richness and quality of the raw data (Cohen, 2006). To generate detailed and quality information, the interviews lasted between 1 hour and 2.25 hours.

As noted, photo elicitation was used during the interviews.

In this instance, this research used two different forms of photo-elicitation that incorporates multiple visual research approaches identified by Petermans et al. (2014).The first form of photo-elicitation encouraged the participants to bring their own images to the interview, with the freedom to choose the source of the image. This provided participants with a unique way of expressing their feelings, lifestyle, consumption, preferences and so on (Petermans et al., 2014), and a unique way of communicating to the researcher (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). The second form of photo-elicitation included the use of the researcher's pre-prepared photos. These set images, consistent between participants (used for all participants) were then used as data themselves, with the images acting as symbols and signs, and as stimuli, to stimulate information from participants. The use of both methods allowed the researcher access to tools to expand on questions and generate a deeper understanding on the specific visual elements the participant found attractive.

4.2.4.1 Prior to the interview

Potential participants were initially contacted and provided with a formal information sheet. Once they agreed to take part in the study, participants then took a short questionnaire that measured their involvement with food online and offline. (Please refer to appendix 8.2 for food involvement questionnaire). The food involvement scale was taken from Bell and Marshall (2003), who had previously adapted the personal involvement inventory scale to focus on food involvement. This scale was further adapted to include the involvement of food online, as this

was excluded from previous authors (Bell & Marshall, 2003). Adapting the scale to include online and offline involvement of food was crucial for this study as it explored the use of digital space in regard to digital grazing. Responses between one and two, were considered to be highly involved with food and therefore could take part in the interview.

After the selection process, the location of the interview was arranged. The locations ranged from being held in a university library to their own personal homes. Although the participants had the freedom to choose where they felt the most comfortable and relaxed, the chosen location had to be private and quiet. A week before their arranged interview time, the researcher contacted the participants to explain the topics that would be covered in the interview. In addition, participants were asked to bring four images of superfoods which they found attractive and which were presented in a way that the participant might see in a display setting at a food outlet.

4.2.4.2 During the interview

Prior to the formal interview beginning, participants were asked to review the information sheet and sign the consent form. Any questions concerning the research were answered at this time. Once this was complete the interview could begin. The researcher recorded the interview on their phone. Using a phone as a recording device provided a more discreet way of recording the interview, as Whiting (2008) reports that participants may feel inhibited by the presence of a recorder.

Conducting extensive interviews enabled the researcher to submerge themselves into the participants' realities Lincoln and Guba (1985), allowing deeper meanings to be brought to the surface (Ponterotto, 2005). Throughout the interviews, the researcher verified their interpretation by occasionally summarising what had been said in the interview (Thomas, 2006). The interviews were structured around DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) four phases of an interview: apprehension, exploration, co-operation and participation. These phases ensured that a trusting relationship and 'rapport' were built with the participant, ensuring they would talk freely and in detail (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

At the apprehension stage, interviews started with the researcher and participant engaging in a casual conversation about their relationship with food. This generated a more relaxed environment for the participant, as the initial stages of an interview can feel strange and uncertain (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview guide enabled the researcher to ask broad open-ended questions followed by prompts and clarifications. This process is crucial in the apprehension stage, where participants may be not familiar with sharing their experiences, feelings and opinions with another, and therefore reply vaguely (Whiting, 2008). Prompt questions also allow the interviewer to maintain the flow of the interview and ensure that key issues have been addressed (Whiting, 2008). The predetermined prompt questions present in the interview guideline, were phrased to ensure that the researcher's expectations had no influence on participant responses.

In the exploration phase, participants engage in more in-depth descriptions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Asking open-ended questions encouraged participants to reflect on their identity and contemplate and identify their own feelings (Warren & Karner, 2005). Individuals were asked to talk about the images they brought along to the interview.

In the co-operative phase, participants had reached a comfort level, permitting more free discussion (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). At this stage, more comprehensive and thought-provoking questions were asked, as the participant could provide in-depth and rich descriptions (Whiting, 2008). Participants were asked to respond to the set images, the first image shown was the superfood presented without any garnish. The researcher then asked questions and prompted participants with question seven and eight in the interview guide. The second image in the same set was the same food presented with garnish. The researcher then repeated questions seven and eight in the interview guide. This process was repeated for both sets of images.

In the participation phase, the greatest rapport is developed between the researcher and participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). For the participation phase to be reached, interviews had to have been operating for a certain amount of time, as shorter interviews can hinder this process (Whiting, 2008).

The conclusion phase of the interview was reached when the researcher believed that data saturation had been met. Once data saturation had been reached the researcher concluded the interview by thanking the participant and asking them to fill out a short form to gain the participant's demographic information. Each interviewee was then provided with a $20 gift voucher to a local café. Whiting (2008) emphasises that it is important for researchers to be aware that the gift should not provide incentives resulting in accusations of bias. Therefore, the gift was not revealed until the end of the interview to ensure this did not result in bias.

Throughout the interview and in particular at the end of the interview, the researcher wrote down their thoughts and feelings and noted non-verbal actions of the participants. This reflective diary was beneficial to the researcher and the study as it recorded the participants' non-verbal actions and it helped identify the strengths and weaknesses of the interviewer. This process was a key element for the researcher as it allowed them to develop their personal interview skills (Whiting, 2008).

4.2.4.3 After the interview

After the interview was conducted, the interview was transcribed verbatim, either by the researcher (seven interviews) or a professional transcription service (three interviews). Participants' images were also inserted into transcripts to ensure the interview were captured accurately. Participants were given the option to review the transcript for accuracy, and finally, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms, to ensure confidentiality.

4.2.5 The participants

This research focused on New Zealand contemporary consumers. Specifically, it investigated ten individuals who had high involvement with food and belonged to the contemporary consumer segment. Each participant brought an average of four food images to the interview, and responded to four food images provided by the researcher. This resulted in ten participants and a total of eighty individual image discussions.

Table one below displays participants' media platforms used to source images, the number of images they individually brought to the interview, demographic information and their food involvements scores.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Name of Participant (pseudonym):	Platforms Used:	Number of Images:	Gender:	Age:	Occupation:	Food Involvement Scale Scores:
Danny	Google	2	Male	23	Uni-Student	1
	Instagram	1				
Moana	Own Image	1	Female	20	Uni-Student	1
Ruby	Instagram	12	Female	20	Uni-Student	1
Sammy	Instagram	4	Female	20	Uni-Student	1
Hunter	Own Image	2	Male	24	Entrepreneur	2
	Google	1				
Dona	Instagram	4	Female	22	Radio Host	1
Ruby-Jean	Pinterest	2	Female	23	Personal Trainer	1
Mathew	Instagram	4	Male	17	High-School Student	1
Henry	Instagram	4	Male	22	Uni-Student	2
Olivia	Own Image	1	Female	21	Young Professional	1
	Pinterest	2				
Total number of Images		**40**				

Contemporary consumers are defined as consumers who are born in the period when internet became widely available and have adapted to the use of internet in their decision making (IGI Global, n.d.). Contemporary consumers were chosen because their eating practices are

becoming a focus of public concern, due to the dangerous consumption of fast foods and snacks and engagement in unhealthy lifestyles (Hunt, Fazio, MacKenzie, & Moloney, 2011). Contemporary consumers are also known as new consumers, innovators, early adopters and trend setters (Dagevos, 2005), therefore they would be more likely to be familiar with food movements, such as superfoods, compared to old or traditional consumers. Influencing contemporary consumers to make healthier choices may create a "trickle-up" effect and influence their parents to make healthier food choices (Luxury Society, 2011). Thus, influencing contemporary consumers to make healthier choices may lead to a reduction in unhealthy eating practices, subsequently reducing alarming obesity levels.

Additionally, contemporary consumers were chosen because they are regarded as digital natives, who have "spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computer, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones and all the other toys of the digital age" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Because this study explored the role of the digital space in digital food presentation, it was critical for participants to frequently use and understand the digital media platforms in order to gather detailed and valuable raw data (Johnson, Sharkey, Dean, McIntosh, & Kubena, 2011).

The need to investigate contemporary consumers also necessitated selective and snowball sampling, as these selection processes ensured that participants were passionate about the topic selected. Interviewing passionate participants is important in terms of data quality, as it allows extraction of detailed and interesting findings and is directly associated to constructivism (Blackler & Brown, 1983; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

4.2.6 Selection of cases

In qualitative research, sample selection has a distinct impact on the ultimate quality of the research. The sampling strategies will be described in detail so that interpretation of findings is comprehensive and other researchers would be able to replicate this study. The sampling design used in this study consisted of two types of purposeful sampling: selective sampling and snowball sampling. A crucial element of qualitative research is to purposefully select participants who will best help create a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling, according to Patton (1990), the "logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in the selecting information-rich cases for

study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling" (p. 169). Information rich cases are participants who are interested and knowledgeable in the research area from past experiences (Patton, 2002). Such participants are individuals who are articulate, reflective and willing to share with the interviewer (Morse, 1991).

Selective sampling was used to choose the first participant. This participant was chosen according to the needs of the study (Morse, 1991). Selective sampling refers to a decision made prior to beginning of a study to sample subjects according to a preconceived, but reasonable, initial set of criteria (Sandelowski, Holditch-Davis, & Harris, 1992). The specific criteria were contemporary consumers who were highly involved with food.

Snowball sampling was also used in conjunction with purposeful sampling. With snowball sampling, participants who have already been selected for the study are asked to recruit or identify more participants who are appropriate in terms of the selection criteria, that is contemporary consumers who are highly involved with food online and offline (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Once interviews were concluded, the researcher asked if they knew anyone who was a contemporary consumer that was highly involved with food. All participants provided suggestions, and the researcher then contacted the potential participants and asked if they would like to participate in the study. Snowball sampling was not only used for recruitment, but also used to narrow down the range of variation in the sample so that similarities could be focused on (Palinkas et al., 2015). By focusing on similarities within the sample, consistent insights could be generated in terms of the research questions.

The ten interviews and 80 image discussions were deemed appropriate as the interviews were dedicated to obtaining detailed quality data, rather than focusing on the data quantity. Mason proposes that qualitative research should focus on building convincing analytical narrative constructed of richness, complexity and detail rather than statistical logic (Mason, 2010). Therefore qualitative research is focused on the voices of consumers to create more meaning and understanding of previous research (Grant, 1988). Consequently the sample size is not an important element in the research validity, as the insights are not generalisable beyond the sample (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), however the sample size must be large enough to attain 'data saturation' (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The researcher ensured each interview reached data saturation by following DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree's (2006) interview phases.

In addition, the use of photo-elicitation, open-end questions, and a reflective diary helped to enhance the interviewer's skills and facilitate the gathering of rich and detailed data.

An additional justification for the use of ten interviews is via the constructivist paradigm, where often only a handful of participants are interviewed, but for long periods of time to better understand the phenomenon in the minds of the individuals who experience it (Ponterotto, 2005).

4.3 Data Analysis

Overall, thematic analysis was used to analyse, identify and report emerging themes across the ten interviews, as it organises and describes the data set in rich detail, and interprets relevant elements of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). A theme is defined by capturing an important part across the data set in relation to the research questions and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As discussed by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis reports the interviewees' experiences, meanings and realities of how visual cues in the presentation of superfoods influence individuals' food choices. It also fuels a reflection of the individual's reality and unravels the surface of reality. Thematic analysis has a theoretical freedom; it provides a useful and adaptable research tool that can generate detailed and rich account of data.

The analytical process involved arranging data to identify patterns in semantic content, summarising and interpreting the data set. The research was analysed making use of the qualitative analysis software, NVivo (version 11). The following provides the steps this study took when conducting theoretical thematic analysis based on Braun and Clark (2006). Within these steps, Spiggle's (1994) fundamental manipulation operations were used to construct a coherent conceptual explanation and strengthen the data analysis and interpretation. These operations include *categorisation, abstraction, comparison and integration*. (Spiggle, 1994).

In the first step, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data. Transcribing is a fundamental part of this, but the researcher also immersed themselves in the data set by 'repeatedly reading' over the transcripts, until the researcher became familiar with the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each transcript was read several times with

the audio file playing to ensure no mistakes were made, and to assist the researcher in familiarising themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In step two, transcripts were sent to relevant participants for them to read over and have an opportunity to make changes. Member checks are crucial when ensuring the data's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In step three, transcripts and accompanying images were loaded into NVivo.

In step four, initial codes were generated. This was done through identifying semantic content relevant to the research questions and overall research objective. This initial coding structure was then entered into NVivo.

Step five involved the coding of all transcripts and the implementation of *categorisation*. A systematic approach was taken when coding in an effort to give a full and equal amount of attention to each transcript. Categorisation was carried out by identifying a segment or unit of data that belonged to, represented or was an example of a general phenomenon and then categorising it into new or existing codes. As the researcher coded each transcript, notes on the participant were documented, such as similarities and differences between interviewees, key opinions and gestures. These notes were referred to as case summaries (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug, 2001).

In step six, the researcher reviewed the codes in an iterative process, with the use of *abstraction*. Abstraction further developed categorisation, as it categorised previous categories into more general conceptual classifications (sub themes and main themes). The researcher also developed visual maps (outside of NVivo) of main and sub themes to assist in the identification process.

Step seven involved the implementation of *comparison*. Comparison explores the similarities and differences across incidents within the data. Each incident is compared to other incidents belonging to the same category. As the analysis proceeds, categories and themes are refined so that they form "coherent patterns" and the "validity of individual themes" is considered (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91). This step also involved coding additional data that may have been

missed in earlier steps and recoding current themes. Recoding the data is expected because it was an "ongoing organic process" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91).

In step eight, the researcher defined and named the themes. This included refining the visual maps created earlier, and identifying if the themes have sub themes. This step also implemented Spiggle's (1994) *integration*.

Throughout data analysis, the researcher implemented *iteration*. Iteration means researchers do not implement specific research stages in a consecutive manner, but move back and forth between stages (Spiggle, 1994). After each interview was analysed separately, the researcher developed main themes and then each interview was reviewed. Here, the back and forth motion was between each interview (the part) and the set of interviews (the whole). In the analysis of a single interview, the back and forth motion was between the passages of the interview (the part) and the interview (the whole). Iteration aids induction by allowing the development of emerging themes/categories/conceptual relationships for further exploration. It also permits a more unified interpretation of the data by encouraging the back and forth motion between part and whole.

In step nine the researcher wrote the report, to tell the "complicated story of (the) data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93) in a comprehensible way, so that the reader is convinced of the validity of the research.

4.4 Checks to Ensure Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Assessing the trustworthiness and authenticity of data is crucial in constructivist research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When seeking to evaluate whether the data obtains trustworthiness and authenticity, the present research was planned and assessed based on the framework provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Denzin and Lincoln (2011), who highlight the necessity of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

Credibility refers to accurate interpretation and representation of the participants' views or the truth of the data (Polit & Beck, 2012). The credibility criterion assesses whether the researcher

has represented multiple constructions accurately (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study applied Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) suggested techniques that increase the probability that credible findings would be produced. These techniques include, prolonged engagement, persistent observations and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007).

The extended duration of the in-depth semi-structured interviews with photo elicitation enabled the researcher to prolong the engagement between participant and researcher. This allowed the researcher to build trust, and to be more immersed into their reality. This is extremely important from a constructivist standpoint and to insure the credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

With the researcher belonging to the same generation as the participants, the researcher was not a "stranger in a strange land" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302). Therefore, the researcher was already an accepted member of their generation, reducing personal distortions. This is crucial when assessing the credibility of the data as it is "not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302). The prolonged engagement and intimate interactions meant that the researcher could also detect perception distortions and selective perception.

Various modes of triangulation were used throughout the research process, including data collection and data analysis. During data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation were used, providing the researcher with two sources of information. During data analysis transcripts of interviews were analysed alongside food images, allowing the researcher to verify the data's contextual validation. Throughout both data collection and data analysis, member checks were used continuously. Member checks were used throughout the interviews in an effort to establish the credibility of the raw data. This allowed the interviewer to verify their interpretation by asking the interviewee if their interpretation was correct and by occasionally summarising what has been said in the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Thomas, 2006).

Transferability refers to assessing the external validity of research based on its ability to generalise to the wider population. While qualitative research does not focus on obtaining generalisability, it still aims for transferability. Patton (2002) describes transferability as "speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not

identical conditions" (p. 584). Transferability was obtained in this research by documenting a rich description of the participants and the context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), generating strong foundations for relevance in a wider context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and ensuring sufficient detail and precision to allow for judgements (Schram, 2003). Purposeful sampling procedures were also conducted, as interviewing only information rich cases maximises the depth and range of data that can be obtained by participants (Patton, 2002).

Dependability focuses on whether the findings are consistent and dependable with the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Although qualitative studies normally cannot be replicated, as the research normally doesn't cover enough variation in subjects and experiences to provide a high level of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the research process still ensured the complexity and the context of the phenomena to be explored thoroughly. It is still important for all research to be reliable in terms of its accuracy, consistency and predictability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcriptions of interviews were available for participants to check. Additionally, the researcher documented detailed accounts of how the data was interpreted and analysed. Merriam (2002) describes this step as offering transparency of method, as the rationale of the researcher's choices and decisions are documented.

Confirmability refers to the notion of repeated evidence either from participants and documented evidence observed or obtained from primary information sources. For research to obtain confirmability, direct and often repeated affirmation of what the researcher had experienced, seen or heard in respect to the phenomenon under investigation is necessary. However, from a constructivist standpoint, the goal is to ensure that the results are accepted as the subjective knowledge of the researcher that can be traced back to the raw data and that they are not a product of the observer's worldview, disciplinary assumption, research interest or theoretical assumptions (Pickard & Dixon, 2004). To achieve this, the researcher implemented an audit trail, demonstrating that the constructions generated emerged directly from the raw data, confirming the findings and establishing the evidence (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). Although, from a constructivist standpoint, a researcher will affect the findings, it is important to demonstrate that the researcher's bias has not unduly influenced the research outcome. This is done through demonstrating that the tacit knowledge has not been transferred from the researcher to the findings in a way that means the meaning has changed (Pickard & Dixon, 2004). The data collection and data analysis process has been discussed in previous sections in depth to enable the transparency of generating findings to be observed and confirmed by other

readers. In addition, the use of triangulation in data collection and analysis adds to the confirmability and reliability of this research.

Authenticity has emerged from the constructivist paradigm. It involves a set of criteria (fairness, catalytic authenticity, educative authenticity, ontological authenticity and tactical authenticity) that guides the constructivist researcher to a set of actions (balance of perspectives, learning by the participants and researcher, shared knowledge and social action). If the researcher fails to meet these conditions, the quality of the research is questionable (Manning, 1997). Authenticity is composed of five types; catalytic, educative, fairness, ontological and tactical (Erlandson, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Not all types of authenticity are relevant in studies, as it depends on the context of the study and participants viewpoints and needs (Manning, 1997). This study has implemented ontological, educative, fairness and tactical authenticity.

The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews, maintaining an openness of purpose and developing a trustful researcher-respondent relationship, encouraged the participants' conscious experience of the topic (ontological Authenticity). The use of member checks within the interview helped to broaden respondents' understanding not only of themselves (ontological authenticity) but of their expressed constructions (educative authenticity) (Erlandson, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Informed consent, member checking, prolonged engagement, in-depth observations, reflexivity and peer debriefing were all used in the research process to reflect encourage "a balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 79), (fairness). For research to reflect fairness, all participants must have had an equal chance to express their voice during data collection and the research must demonstrate a balanced perspective of the many voices and constructions present in the context. This was sought in the present research. Consent forms, in-depth-interviews, member checks and the assurance of confidentiality helped to achieve tactical authenticity (Manning, 1997). A study reflects tactical authenticity when the respondents and participants understand their role as knowing subjects with the power to transform their world (Freire, 1970).

4.5 Ethical Considerations, Confidentiality, Consent and Risk

In all research, ethical issues regarding the protection of a researcher, a participant, the integrity of the study and the reputation of the academic institution are of utmost importance. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the University Human Ethics Committee prior to any research being conducted.

Participants were informed both verbally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their names and answers to questions would be strictly confidential. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by replacing participants' names with a pseudonym before the interviews were transcribed in order to protect anonymity.

Participants were also informed both verbally and in writing that the information they provided would be held for a period of three years at a secure location at the tertiary institution, after which period all the data would be destroyed.

In addition, before the interview took place, participants were informed both verbally and in writing of their rights as participants and given the opportunity to ask questions. Informed consent was provided by the participants prior to the interviews to protect both participants and researcher.

This study did not have any significant ethical or privacy risks due the conversations being informal and conversational in nature.

5.0 Findings

This section provides the key findings as a result of the analysis of the interviews and images. Overall, every participant demonstrated that the recent health movement had influenced them and their peers to become more motivated to attain a healthier lifestyle. Specifically, participants were becoming more conscious when consuming food, as a result changing to healthier mind-sets and consumption behaviours. The more specific findings which emerged are detailed below, organised by the relevant research question.

5.1 Contemporary Consumers' Responses to Superfood

Research Question One: *How do contemporary consumers respond to the notion of superfoods?*

All participants were aware of superfoods and associated superfoods with positive nutritional value, but many were also sceptical. All participants demonstrated that through the superfood movement they and their peers had become more aware and focused on the nutrient properties of food, consume more nutrient-rich food and had learnt that such food could positively affect their mind-sets. They associate superfoods immediately with health as is evident in the quotes below:

> *"Ummm well most of the people I know like superfood and healthy eating and that sort of stuff has come really in. Most of the people I've met have gotten into it and live a really healthy lifestyle and exercise."* – Sammy

> *"I believe eating superfood is a great opportunity to get a lot of minerals and vitamins into your diet and often these are hard to get into your body."* – Mathew

One participant associated a superfood diet with the ability to overcome life-threatening illness, stating that the superfood movement *"really shows how superfoods can change people's lives"* (Ruby).

Participants demonstrated a positive association with the superfood movement, as it influenced participants and peers to consume healthier food and lead healthier lifestyles. One participant stated that the superfood movement focused on the 'positive stuff', others elaborated:

> *"If it is the superfood then people are going to try prioritise eating over the other foods then it's not really bad for you. I think some [superfood] are really, really great and knowing more about the educational properties… it can be beneficial because it can help your health."* – Moana

> *"This [superfood] movement is a really good indication we're becoming more aware and knowledgeable about food, it's really beneficial to our society."* – Olivia

While the positive aspects of the superfood movement were predominant in the narratives, many participants remained sceptical. Many felt that the proclaimed benefits had been glamorised through social media, influencing individuals to believe the power of superfoods extends to increasing weight loss and reducing the importance of exercise. For example, Henry said:

> *"A lot of people in our generation actually believe that superfood and eating healthy is a way out of exercising."*

> *"Yeah, I think that's the whole thing of superfoods. I think they've also been quite glamorised. Obviously, they're still healthy. I think they're almost glamorised to the point where they're like a miracle pill type thing, they'll help you lose weight. Whereas, they're not. They can help you live a healthier life but they're not, I think, as powerful as social media can make them out to be."* – Ruby-Jean

Participants who were more critical of the superfood movement than other participants also noted the danger associated with the information of superfoods available on social media.

> *"But yeah like I think the [superfood movement] is good because they help people learn and they help people to understand what's good and bad. But not for someone that's like a sheep, where they just follow and believe everything they see."* – Ruby-Jean

"When you think of those food terms [superfood] you are thinking of someone that looks really healthy and they look really good and they work out all the time and they eat this food and people do think that's the full story and so you only get half the picture. Then they make decisions around food that possibly aren't healthy, like just eating these kale salads, like what they see only on Instagram. While actually that [Instagram] person is probably eating other things to balance out their diet in the background that may not be blog worthy." – Hunter

Scepticism surrounding superfoods was associated with a lack of authenticity. Participants felt that the authenticity was in question due to the lack of scientific evidence, the potential for profit and the potential for social media influencers to glamorise superfoods.

Firstly, participants acknowledged the lack of supporting scientific evidence for superfoods' proclaimed benefits, as indicated in the quotes below:

"I think the superfood movement is a big movement and there is no scientific evidence to suggest that they are superfoods." – Ruby

"It is quite interesting I think the way in which they say every month this is a new superfood. I question if there is a lot of authenticity again around what has the proclaimed benefits of them." – Danny

Secondly, some participants felt that the superfood movement was a marketing scheme, a movement created by companies in an effort to fill a gap in the food industry and an opportunity for companies to increase their profits. Hunter noted the expensive prices of superfoods, commenting:

"... sometimes I think this is the whole health food craze, that people get all crazed up and firms can make a lot of money out of making substandard food items."

More directly Henry stated:

"I don't think it should be labelled superfoods, it's just a marketing ploy."

Overall, while the majority of participants questioned superfoods and the movement, all participants continued to consume superfoods and the majority wanted to eat them more frequently.

> *"Superfoods are just like definitely marketing ploy and um yes but I do eat superfoods and I do try [to] eat more superfoods."* – Henry

> *"Superfoods are just a marketing ploy and when I look up a menu and it has a meal called superfood something, at the end of the day that's just a way to differentiate the food products. This actually works really well, if something is called superfood, I think 'well this has to be better than the other options' and that's when I will purchase it."* –
Dona

5.2 Key Elements in Digital Images of Superfoods

Research Question Two (A): *What elements in digital presentation of superfoods are contemporary consumers attracted to?*

For this study, participants were invited to bring along online-sourced images of superfoods that they had found attractive, and were also asked to comment on a series of set images. In analysing the responses, key elements of presentation were identified as having a positive influence: colour, cutlery and plateware, ingredients, garnish, and the background story.

Colour

Colour was one of the most frequent rationales for participants either liking or choosing the food images. Participants were drawn to bright and colourful images of superfoods. For example, see images 1– 8, in Appendix 8.4.

> *"I picked it because one, it's so colourful."* – Ruby-Jean (Image 1 Appendix 8.4)

> *"I choose this image because I really like the contrasting colours."* – Ruby (Image 2 Appendix 8.4)

Colours signalled the taste and flavour of the food, while 'dull' colours signalled to participants the food product being 'boring' or 'flavourless', influencing them to not like the food image. This was particularly prominent when participants were shown images of superfood without garnish.

"It doesn't really look like there's really much flavour going on there. It just looks quite plain and bland as it's just one colour." – Ruby (Image 1A Appendix 8.3)

"There are only two colours, and like if I was thinking comparing to the images I brought along, it's really plain … Flavourless." – Moana (Image 1A Appendix 8.3)

Not only did the colour influence the perception of taste, it also lead participants to feel that the food item was more 'healthy' or 'nourishing'. All participants' narratives demonstrated that 'bright' and 'vibrant' food colours signalled how 'healthy', 'refreshing', 'natural' or 'fresh' the food product was, while 'dull' colours or colours that were not associated with the food's natural palette signalled that the food product was 'unhealthy', 'bad', 'unnatural' or processed food.

"It's so colourful, everything about it looks so nice, it looks so good for you, there is nothing in it that you would look at and be like that could be bad." – Ruby-Jean (Image 1 Appendix 8.4)

"Because I and other people associate specific colours with natural products and raw products and that colour isn't natural. It's like for an example when M&Ms brought out the individual colours, no one wanted to purchase the blue colour as you can't really associate any healthy food with blue." – Henry

"You know when there is a lot of colour in the food and natural colour… you know that the food is a lot more closer to its natural state… food that doesn't resemble such bright colours indicates to me that's it's not natural, you know it's a little bit more refined, it's just not as good for you." – Dona

Cutlery and plateware

All participants demonstrated that cutlery and plateware were important elements in food presentation. Participants' narratives revealed that cutlery, "white" plateware or "hand-crafted" and "natural" crockery had the power to enhance a participants' overall judgement of the dish.

> *"I'm way more inclined to try it if it's in a nice bowl. I always like try using all mum's pottery, I reckon it looks way nicer."* – Moana

> *"The cutlery, makes it looks really cool. And I think it looks cool, that's why it looks nice!"* – Sammy (Image 3 Appendix 8.4)

Cutlery and plateware also can signal how 'healthy' or 'natural' a product is, how the food product would taste and information about the food provider.

> *"You can convince people that it's a raw and natural product through crockery."* – Henry

> *"So, I definitely think crockery …. has the ability to enhance or devalue someone's taste before you even eat it."* – Moana

> *"Pottery is important because it reflects where it has been made, who's making it and what kinda place it's in."* – Mathew

Ingredients

Not surprisingly, some participants picked images of food they would like to eat, for example, Ruby states, *"it's just all my favourite food in one."*

Consistent with the nutritional benefits noted by participants of superfoods, they also picked images in which the visible ingredients represented nutrition. For example,

> *"I like raw cheese cake, I know its dairy free which is really good and it's also gluten free, which means it's good for my IBS. And it just looks delicious and it would give me a bit of energy."* – Dona (Image 2A Appendix 8.3)

All participants who were health conscious found it important to be able to easily identify all the ingredients in the dish, as a signal of transparency.

> *"You can see all the little bits, it's not hiding anything, you know what you're eating."* – Moana (Image 1B Appendix 8.3)

> *"I like it done like that so you know what's in it. I don't like having things that I don't know what's in it because I don't want to put bad things into my body, this whole image shows everything that's in it."* – Mathew (Image 4 Appendix 8.4)

Garnish

Improving the vibrant colours of food presentation and ensuring the ingredients are visible is often done via garnish, consisting of flowers, herbs, nuts, seeds and fruit. This may well be why respondents also seemed to have a more holistic and positive response to garnished food. Consistent with the ingredients, the garnish if edible would provide another ingredient, supporting the participants' view that it was 'healthier'.

> *"It looks sooo much better! Because of the fruit."* – Olivia (Image 2A Appendix 8.3)

> *"[Garnish] makes it look so much better, like more detail and more artsy."* – Mathew (Image 2B Appendix 8.3)

> *"I think this is interesting… they have just shoved some nuts and what-not on top, but it does look nice though. It does. It looks more healthy."* – Hunter (Image 1B Appendix 8.3)

Participants also illustrated that over garnishing could degrade a dish. This was apparent with participants' responses to the set of images.

> *"This image is really busy, so maybe take the flowers off."* – Ruby (Image 2B in Appendix 8.3)

Participant comments suggested that the garnish could signal the amount of 'care' and 'thought' that had gone into creating the dish.

"The ones with the garnishing look way better, tastier, the people have actually cared about the presentation, and if they have cared about the presentation they care about the food as a whole." – Mathew (Image 1B and 2B Appendix 8.3)

The idea of care taken suggests that participants wanted to know about the process of preparation and the attitude the food provider had. This connects with the next finding that the selection of images was often based on the associated background story.

Background story

The majority of participants selected images firstly from a source that they felt connected to. Thus, the background story, though not visually evident in the image, was vital and was a part of the selection process. Participants expressed interest in who made the food, their lifestyle and personality, and the extent to which the participant felt a connection to the individual/food provider behind the image. Out of a total of 40 participant images, nine of the participants brought along 31 images that had background stories.

Participants tended to follow food influencers or food providers that they 'related' and 'connected' with, as they aspired to be similar and these people enabled them to believe that they also could attain a healthy lifestyle. For example, Olivia noted, *"I associate myself with their brands and their values I think it led me to choose this image."* Maggie explained how her connection to a local sister duo who provide health-relevant information has influenced and taught her how to take control of her health. Similarly, Ruby mentions the sister duo and notes her admiration for them and how the background story influenced her to choose the image.

"I like Julia and Libby, this is why I clicked on the photos. I like what they promote, I actually read a lot of their blogs. Julia is a nutritionist/dietician, she's got a science degree and she really helped me understand a little bit about my gut health actually. And they also promote exercising all the time, like if you read what they are doing all the time, it's amazing. I just do really like the branding they have as healthy sisters, how they have made a change and how they give their advice freely on the internet... I really like them." – Dona (Image 5 Appendix 8.4)

"I would love to be Julia and Libby. I wouldn't have chosen this image, probably if I didn't know if they had a great story of not having that health before and then reaching their ideal health and actually reaching that great feeling after reaching that point in health and help people do it. Ideally I would like to help people once I reach my (health) goals." – Ruby (Image 2 Appendix 8.4)

Many participants discussed the origin of the food image, such as famous chefs, influencers, bloggers and food providers as if they personally knew them. Participants demonstrated that it was important to learn about the background story and information about the food provider or individual so that they could 'relate to', 'connect' and 'admire' them. When a connection was formed, participants responded more favourably to images as the images had considerably more weight and carried more meaning. All participants held the background story and food presentation with equal importance. For example, Sam's quote highlights the personal connection made to one blogger, noting not just the food, but the blogger's lifestyle:

"This is like a home account, she's a Gisborne girl and so am I! Do you know Ricardo Kristie? He's a famous surfer and she's his girlfriend and they have two kids and they have plant-based diets ... I just find it really cool following her lifestyle, she talks about her journey into it I guess so behind that I'm thinking 'omg look what she's making?' Yeah, I kinda admire what she's doing in a certain way ... like a lot of things she shares she says how she made it for dessert, and it's really cool. Yeah, like not that I know her [laughs], but the connection, obviously, she's from Gisborne and stuff is like cool, it makes you think 'omg she's like a normal person, not just Instagram famous." – Sammy (Image 6 Appendix 8.4)

Another respondent, Dona, emphasised the importance of knowing the person behind the blog:

"I look to know there is someone actually behind [the account] and then you can kinda connect with them. Because you can be like 'this person is like me because they're doing this as well.' I also watch their Instagram story all day and I watch them go and do exercise, yoga, work and then watch them have a yummy lunch. So, you kind of get this whole story about them and you get to know them more and so you think, 'I can [lead a healthy lifestyle], this is realistic and achievable. If they can do it, why can't I?'"

All participants followed food influences and trusted their information and advice. The more critical participants who found images outside of a known source took extensive steps to gather more information to determine whether the information was trustworthy. Ruby-Jean here mentions how she visits the food influencer's multiple communication channels to analyse their trustworthiness.

> *"So, I go Instagram and I go 'what's going on here' and then they are all about yoga and eating and I like if they have a website I would go on their website and then if they have a blog I would go on the blog and it always have stuff like more food and more exercise. So that's how I learn more about them through heaps of their different channels. I've even read a couple of books that are realigning to people I follow on the internet because I've read their previous blogs and posts and thought they were really interesting. The people I have done that with and quite a bit of background research on them because I want to know, that they are certified and that they know a little bit about what they are actually doing."*

These findings demonstrate how a food image can act as a window, allowing the participant to capture a glimpse of the background story. These findings also convey the importance participants place on the background stories and how the connections between participants and food providers/influencers give the image more meaning.

Superfood Evaluation Process

A key part of evaluating the elements in the images was how critical the participant was of the superfood movement.

Many participants differed in their evaluation process of determining whether a food item was classified as a superfood. Participant narratives demonstrated that participants who were less critical of the superfood movement were less critical in their superfood evaluation process, while participants who were more critical of the superfood movement were more critical in their superfood evaluation.

Participants who were least critical in their superfood evaluation used visual cues to whether a food product was a superfood.

> *"I think it looks yum. It looks very like, again, a superfood, raw, on trend."* – Danny (Image 2B Appendix 8.3)

> *"I know many people just look at the food product and judge it by what it looks like and don't really take into account the nutritional content."* – Hunter

Participants who were less critical in their superfood evaluation believed that if food products were called a superfood it actually was a superfood.

> *"I don't actually know what's in it, but like if it's called a superfood cake, then it must be a superfood cake."* – Mathew

These participants would identify one superfood ingredient in the food item, and consider the whole food product a superfood.

> *"I would say that this isn't a superfood, can you please explain what ingredients are in here? Brazil nuts? [interviewer responded yes] Ohhh I guess then it's deemed as a superfood cake."* – Moana (Image 2A Appendix 8.3)

> "*Yep [indicating it is a superfood]. Because lentils are a superfood."* – Ruby (Image 7 Appendix 8.4)

> *"This is a superfood because of the blueberries, really good for your mind and stuff."* – Danny (Image 2A Appendix 8.3)

Participants who were more critical in their evaluations of superfood would identify a superfood if *all* the ingredients in the food product were classified as a superfood. For example:

> *"I would say some bits are [superfood], but I wouldn't say the whole meal itself is a superfood. Like there are probably a few nuts and fruit in there that is considered a*

superfood but I wouldn't say yoghurt is considered a superfood." – Olivia (Image 1B
Appendix 8.3)

Participants who were more knowledgeable of food and had previously worked in the food industry were found to be extremely critical in their superfood evaluation. These participants evaluated superfood by assessing the ingredient's nutrients and this was what signalled to the participant that it was a superfood. For example, Hunter who has previously worked as a chef highlighted how superfood must be high in nutrients:

> *"What I would call a superfood is something that's nutrient rich and dense. So, something like an iceberg lettuce isn't a superfood because it's low in nutrients. Although low in calories, it may be deemed a healthy food, but it's not a superfood."*

5.3 How Consumers Interpret the Visual Elements

Research Question Two (B): ***How does the contemporary consumer interpret the elements in digital presentation of superfoods?***

While the previous question focused more on the visual elements, this section shifts the focus to consider in more depth responses to these elements. All participants demonstrated that food presentation (colour, ingredients, garnish, plateware and backstory) plays an influential role with their interpretation of superfood images. Participants tended to take an initial holistic approach when assessing the presentation of superfood images. More specifically, the food presentation influenced their preconceived ideas about the flavour, perceived value, anticipated experience and assumptions about the food provider.

As previously noted, the more attractively the food was presented, the more participants believed the food item would taste better. The participants' narratives also noted that the more unattractive the food was presented the worse they felt it would taste.

> *"I definitely think that there's a lot of visual cues that we get that can tell us how good the food is, like if your steak's a weird colour you're like, 'I don't really want to eat*

that.' Whereas if they cooked it and presented it, so it showed off the caramelised parts of it you'd be like, 'Yeah, that's going to taste so much better!' I think [presentation] is definitely a really important part." – Danny

"Looks and presentation of food are important because you can look at something, if it's bad you can trick yourself into thinking that the food will taste bad … so the mind is really important. Like going to restaurants and they plate the food up bad, it kinda puts you off the whole experience." – Mathew

In addition to influencing the expectation of taste, more attractively presented food appeared to be assessed as holding a higher perceived value and a more positive anticipated experience. For example, Ruby-Jean explained that she would pay more for food that looked attractive:

"If I got served this I would be over the moon, I would lose the plot and if it costed me $25 I wouldn't care! Because that looks so nice! Everything about that is aesthetically pleasing." (Image 1 Appendix 8.4)

Danny, in discussing a trip to a new restaurant, noted that the portions were tiny but that:

"They were all presented so beautifully that it changed how I thought about food. You're like, 'I've had something like this before but this is so different and presented so beautifully that it's a whole different experience.' I think it elevated it more."

Consistent with this, but on the negative side, less attractively presented food was assessed as lowering the perceived value and anticipated experience.

"If I saw something and the presentation didn't look nice at all, then I will probably would pretty quickly disregard it, like not want to try it, even though it might taste nice, I'd try find somewhere that actually looked nice." – Sammy

"But just take it like you could have the exact same ingredients cooked the exact same way and taste the exact same and serve them up two different ways, one just flopped on the plate like you would at home served up and different areas like bam bam meat here and veges here. Versus at a restaurant where it is nicely plated up with some eatable

or nice garnishing. When you serve it to the person one will think that one of the dishes is worth a lot more than the other in terms of paying $30 for this meal compared to $15 right? So, of course restaurants need to present food beautifully so that they can glorify what they are serving people and so it makes them perceive it's worth a high value." – Hunter

These findings illustrate the interconnecting link between the participants' preconceived idea of how the food would taste, food presentation, and perceived value. Attractive presentation indicated better taste and better value.

The previous section noted that presentation could signal an amount of care. In this study, all participants expressed that more attractive food presentation suggested that more 'pride', 'effort', 'care' and 'thought' had gone into producing the food. The less attractive the food presentation was, the less they assumed 'care' and 'pride' had gone into producing the food.

"I think the most successful cafes are like the ones that have really passionate people behind them, quite often they make really good food as it's like an expression of who they are. So yeah, if I saw a café that didn't really have good-looking food then I would think they wouldn't have a lot of care of what they are doing." – Moana

"When I go out to eat or look at a picture where I'm going to go out to eat, I look at the presentation because it's like they care, they make nice food and if they don't care they will just slop it onto the plate. If you have a chef that doesn't care they will just put it on the plate and not worry about it ... When you get presented really nice food and to me that's really important ... When I see this on Instagram like an image that's presented amazingly I think wow they care, their staff cares, it looks nice and I think that's super important." – Ruby-Jean

5.4 Superfood Images and Utilitarian, Symbolic and Hedonic Consumption

Research Question Three: *To understand contemporary consumers' superfood choices and their responses to attractive superfood presentations reveal aspects of utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic consumption.*

Utilitarian Consumption

This section captures the two main elements of utilitarian consumption present in this study. One, participants considered the nutritional properties that would 'nourish' their bodies and, two, participants considered the functionality and practicality of presentation.

Health conscious participants illustrated that food high in nutrients was an important element when assessing how attractive a food image was and when selecting what food to consume. Extreme health conscious participants would not consume any food that is not high in nutrients as it would not 'nourish' their bodies.

> *"Well my sole focus is on nourishing my body, if something doesn't nourish my body then I won't eat it at the moment."* – Dona

Both health and non-health conscious participants considered the functionality of food presentation to be an important element of the overall dish. The functionality of the food presentation was only discussed when participants believed the presentation was 'impractical' to eat, that is if participants were not 'easily' or 'neatly' able to eat the food or were not easily able to experience all the flavours of the dish in one tasting. Consequently, if the participants considered the dish or food image presentation to be impractical, they would be less attracted to the food.

> *"This image of food [image 2B], I know it's layered and I know with one spoon I could easily attack it and eat it and get all the flavour. But I know I wouldn't be able to do that in the chia pudding, [image 1B] without everything going everywhere, and in that sense the presentation is less practical than this one [image 2B]."* – Olivia (Image 1B and 2B Appendix 8.3)

> *"I do get a bit frustrated with the overly foodie blogs, sometimes I get really frustrated with things like smoothie cups, when they are like layered and I'm just like … 'how do you eat that?' Like practically thinking 'how am I going to eat that.'"* – Ruby-Jean

The emphasis on functionality also extended to garnish. Participant narratives highlighted the importance for flowers used in food presentation to be edible, or else it was considered not practical.

> *"Are the flowers eatable? [Interviewer responds yes] Because that really impacts it. It's annoying, like I don't like having to pick things off or having to wonder whether or not I can eat it."* – Hunter (Image 2B Appendix 8.3)

These findings demonstrate that although participants are increasingly valuing symbolic and hedonic consumption elements, they also place importance on utilitarian elements such as nutrients and functionality of food presentation.

Symbolic Consumption

Each participant illustrated the significant value they place on symbolic food consumption in their daily lives. Participants discussed how food consumed by an individual can symbolise information about an individual, for example an individual's personality, self-worth, age, lifestyle, education, values and upbringing. This is evident in the following:

> *"So, for me food definitely tells me a lot about the person and about who they are."* – Sammy

Olivia, in talking about food images generally, noted,

> *"I could tell you what their emotions are, what their values are, tell you whether they are interested in free trade and pursuing [a] more sustainable lifestyle or if they are just quite ignorant to the fact that food production can be sometimes quite unsustainable and things like that. So, I think I can tell you some of their motives if you look into it and about their personality."*

"What you eat and the food you are into, are the things that are very much tell who you are as a person and what your background is and where you have been and where you have grown up." – Hunter

"I like definitely think what you eat, is a reflection of how you are raised." – Moana

Previous findings noted the importance of the background story. Considering this along with the ideas of the self-concept suggests that the participants aligned the story behind the image with their own self-image or ideal self-image. This alignment influenced participants to choose the image.

"If I liked [their image] and chose [their image], then it reflects the kinda way the way I think, and the way I want to be and the lifestyle I want to live." – Olivia

"When I see [their image] I'm like 'awww that's so healthy, I wanna try be like that and I make similar things to this', so I guess seeing anything healthy for me makes me want to be more like that as I want to be healthy and fit and have a nice lifestyle." – Sammy (Image 6 Appendix 8.4)

The symbolic consumption of food images that participants relate to carries forward into participants' own activities and posts, where they represent their ideal self in a similar manner. Here, participants confessed to only presenting their 'healthy', 'colourful' and 'attractive' food online.

"To show that even though I'm living away from home and still a student and don't have the biggest budget or whatever, that I still eat well and know how to cook and know what good food is type of thing ... giving that whole perception." – Danny

"I think I actively try and cook especially nicer food and I often will only post the meals that I cook that are particularly pretty. I posted a baked risotto with feta crumbled on top because it looked really pretty because of the colour and now everyone thinks I eat like that all the time. And I'm like, 'yes, that's what you should think.' And then I don't [laughs]." – Moana

Participants also discussed that although superfoods are 'very expensive' they and their peers purchase them not only for utilitarian reasons but also as a symbol of their health values and their healthy lifestyle. The symbolism participants associated with images of individuals consuming superfood includes characteristics such as 'healthy lifestyle', or being 'athletic', 'fit', 'trendy' and 'skinny'.

"If you have a [superfood] like that which is relatively small product but it's priced at $6 or $7 dollars ... people can't fathom that that would be worth that amount of money. Which really it isn't and really the only reason you're buying it is that it's healthy and all the health benefits that comes with it, like being associated with a healthy lifestyle, healthy food and interacting with superfoods." – Hunter

"Usually if someone orders something along those lines [superfood], I'll know or I'll assume I know that they live a really healthy lifestyle." - Sammy

"It would definitely be someone, I don't want to say skinny [laughs], but like healthy skinny type of skinny and look like a well-rounded person. I don't know it's just like yeah that sort of person, yeah like skinny and fit." - Mathew

Hedonic Consumption

All participants' narratives demonstrated the prominence of hedonic consumption elements in terms of the food images. Participants emphasised how food is closely connected with their emotions and has the power to control how they feel. For participants, consuming food is not about survival but about the hedonic experiences that food can offer.

"I enjoy eating good food, and I think that's like a foodie thing, like I know people can just eat because it's to fill them and to survive, but I find myself eating food all the time just because I really enjoy it and what comes with eating good food." – Danny

"I eat what I want to eat if it makes me happy, if you know what I mean. If it makes me feel good, feel good I mean physically, mentally and what not. So, I guess my relationship with food is trying to seek out food that fulfils that need for me." – Olivia

While participants noted the association between superfood and nutrition. Here, it was evident that consuming healthy food had the ability to positively influence a participant physically, mentally and emotionally. When participants consumed healthier foods or superfoods they felt 'better', 'healthier', 'happier', 'excitement' and 'great'.

> *"More and more people are jumping on the health band wagon and when they eat like this you feel so much more healthy."* – Henry

> *"I definitely feel better when I'm eating food that I know that are nourishing my body and often those foods are superfoods."* – Ruby

Participants also demonstrated when they ate 'unhealthy' or 'bad' food it had the ability to influence a participant's physical, mental and emotional health.

> *"When I eat something that isn't nutrient dense or like takeaways or something like that, I definitely do feel bad about myself, not even physically, like sometimes I don't even feel that tired but sometimes about an hour after I will. Most of the time I do feel emotionally vulnerable after I do that sort of thing, I feel pretty gutted in myself."* – Dona

Earlier findings noted the positive association between presentation elements and participants' responses, but in terms of experiencing pleasure, the visual cues extended to these feelings as well. Participants illustrated that emotion was strongly associated with presentation. When a food image was presented attractively participants are more likely to be emotionally connected to it. In comparison, when a food image was presented unattractively, participants were less likely to be emotionally connected to it and therefore did not enjoy it as much.

> *"I think it's a really attractive image, it makes me excited, it makes healthy food look actually yum ... not boring."* – Ruby-Jean (Image 8 Appendix 8.4)

The exception of this was with two participants who did not place extreme importance on food presentation. These participants felt that the flavour of the dish could compensate for the unattractive presentation and make participants feel neutral towards the dish and food provider.

Participants who placed a high importance on food presentation also placed high importance on aesthetics in other areas of their life, such as their appearance, households and possessions. These participants demonstrated higher levels of critique over food presentation and high food presentation expectations.

> *"People expect things to look nice and when they look nice you're happy, you come away feeling happy because it fits in with my life. Maybe if I was messy slop and just didn't care type of person maybe I wouldn't care because I would be like, 'it's food I just want to eat', but I like things to look nice, I don't like going out looking like crap so I don't want to eat crap food."* – Danny

> *"I'm really image conscious, I don't like to be known as someone that is untidy or someone that isn't aware of trends and how things are and it's like I place high importance on how my food looks and I also place the same importance on making my bedroom look nice. I just think that it is important like it makes me feel better. Like when I have food it makes me feel better, when I have a clean room it makes me feel better, I just feel better."* – Ruby-Jean

Such findings demonstrate how participants' responses to attractive superfood presentation reveal the importance of utilitarian, hedonic and symbolic consumption.

5.5 Consuming Digital Images and Shifts in Expectations

Research Question Four: *To explore how contemporary consumers, use the digital space to interact with food online and how this may influence their expectation of food presentation.*

The final research question in this study shifted the focus slightly to take into account the digital environment in which these images were selected and with which the participants interacted. In examining the interview responses and accompanying images, it was evident, firstly, that all participants engaged in digital grazing and, secondly, that digital grazing influenced perceptions and judgements of food, the food provider and their own culinary activities.

Digital grazing

As noted in the literature, digital grazing is a concept used when individuals gain enjoyment from looking at food images on media (Spence et al., 2015). As noted in table one in section 4.2.5, various media platforms were used to source attractive superfood images. All participants were digitally connected to food, demonstrating evidence of digital grazing and all found the process of finding attractive food images easy and enjoyable. They grazed by posting images of food, following food bloggers, celebrity chefs, health and wellbeing advocates and food providers, and watching food programmes. They grazed on various media platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram, television, YouTube and food blogs. The most prevalent platforms used were Pinterest for 'inspiration' and Instagram for 'pleasure', 'happiness' and to discover new food providers and food products.

> *"I use Pinterest, because it's just really nice visually. I use Instagram because you can find new places to eat. Pinterest is a bit more inspirational so you can't really find new places that you want to go to eat, but on Instagram things pop up, showing you new places or new types of foods or somewhere you have to go."* – Olivia

The duration of grazing differed between participants. Two participants only grazed for functional and purpose-orientated reasons, such as finding a recipe, menu or a food provider's media account.

However, most participants grazed daily on multiple media platforms. These participants' comments suggest that they grazed 'everyday' because it provided them with hedonic value.

> *"I get enjoyment out of finding new recipes."* – Ruby

> *"I definitely do get satisfaction out of seeing good food photography."* – Moana

Participants also grazed to actively discover new food providers and to get recommendations and reviews. They do this by viewing food images on food providers' accounts or others' accounts that have images of the food provider's food.

> *"You can just tell by looking at pictures on Instagram, like have they got good images of their food? Are there people tagging them in photos? When you look up their hashtag*

do you see them? Because if people aren't taking pictures you're just like 'do you have good food?' Because if people have good food, they will take pictures or comment on the cafés pictures like 'oh my god love this place or love their food.'" – Danny

"I'm a bit of an Instagram fanatic. Like I will go on the café's page or else I will go on the tags and tag the place, and look what other people who have been there had." – Dona

The majority of participants relied on food images online to make judgements about food providers. Attractive high-quality food presentation/images signalled to participants how appealing the food provider may be, enticing them to visit the food provider and even suggesting what to order. For example, the participants below noted how they made these judgements:

"A new café opened up down the road and we drove past and you couldn't really see anything and I was just like 'ahhhh that looks dodgy'. Then someone posted a picture of their food that she had eaten there and I was like 'omg that looks amazing, where was it?' and it was the café that we had driven past that looked dodgy. And so, then I went on their Instagram and was like 'omg this is amazing' because they had all these beautiful pictures of their cabinet and the food they were serving and so I was like 'we have to go here!'" – Ruby-Jean

Other participants noted that looking for images was a purposeful activity, to gather information in order to make a judgement:

"I definitely go to Instagram if I want to look up a specific [food provider], I've heard of as often they post photos of the meals and stuff, so I will go and look to see what they look like." – Moana

"If we were looking for something to eat, I'd check it out on Instagram to see what it's like before we go. So normally I wouldn't choose a café from walking down the street, it would be chosen from social media." – Ruby

The less that is known about the food provider, the more the individual grazed, seeking out images as evidence to support or reject a decision to go to the food provider. Participants suggested they do this especially when out of their area, to reduce the risk of having a bad experience.

> *"To be fair when I want to go out to a really nice place I look at their food images, in particular I tend to do it often when I'm overseas, but not so much when I'm in NZ. Because you have less confidence with the food overseas, you can easily go a lot more wrong with food overseas than when in New Zealand."* – Hunter

> *"Maybe I would if I went overseas or out of Wellington. I feel like perhaps I know enough in Wellington that I have the options to choose from already … If I was overseas, maybe, and wanted to go to a nice café and we had no idea where to go, I might search #foodporn or something for [cafés] near me."* – Danny

In addition, all participants grazed for inspiration for new recipes and new food products or food providers to try.

> *"I love to go Pinterest because I love finding [food] that I am going to make.*" – Olivia

> *"I use Pinterest a lot to search for food inspiration."* – Mathew

> *"I'm always looking at recipes, what new food to eat, where I can go, always reading blogs about what people have tried and there is always an Instagram story or some kind of snapchat of someone talking about what they have just made or someone going out for something yummy."* – Ruby-Jean

Participants grazed to educate themselves more about 'food', 'superfoods' and 'diets'. This was consistent with earlier findings that the superfood movement had increased information on the nutritional value of foods – especially superfoods.

> *"I love reading up on food or sometimes I read up on diets, like I like seeing perspectives on what to eat and see how people restrict themselves and see celebrities' diets and stuff."* – Moana

"I would go on Instagram and look up the people, people that are known to have good fitness accounts and the people known to be fit because these people are like doing fitness stuff and putting recipes of healthy food up and what they are doing and what to feed your body. So, I started to then go onto heaps of different blogs as well." – Sammy

Expectations for presentation

Another outcome of grazing is the increased food presentation expectations participants experience towards food providers but not always for themselves.

All participants demonstrated that their food presentation expectations had increased for food providers after being exposed to glamorised food images on media platforms. Many participants compared the images they were exposed to during the interview to images they had brought along and images they had previously seen on media platforms.

"I do follow a lot of cafés, food bloggers, and celebrity chefs, as well. I like to fill my life with good-looking food. Then I feel really depressed because I'm like, 'Ohhh, my food isn't that good' or 'I'm having not so good food tonight.'" – Danny

Not only do participants' food presentation expectations increase when viewing glamorised food images online, but their expectations also increase for food providers to maintain the level of presentation observed on their media accounts. When participants view an attractive dish on a food provider's account, the same quality of presentation is expected in 'real life'. When these expectations are not met, participants who place an extreme importance on presentation felt 'disappointment', 'disheartened' and 'less trusting' of the brand.

"You're sort of trusting that the images [online] and the nature of what they put [on their account] is authentic and it is truthful. You just feel a bit disheartened and then you won't feel very trusting of the brand … if I don't trust it, then I am not going to want to continue going there if you think that you're going to get this inconsistency every time you go, then there's no real incentive to go … I think inconsistency definitely needs to be avoided." – Olivia

> *"It would especially annoy me if I've seen it on a café's Instagram, because they obviously have taken one picture of a meal that actually looks nice and have put it up and lied. And I know people do it on Instagram all the time and it's just like 'no! You are lying!' If they did that once [for their online account] they should just spend 10 seconds extra and do it again [with the food they serve]. I get really frustrated."* – Ruby-Jean

Participants who placed less importance on food presentation experienced a less negative response:

> *"If I eat it and it's really nice I get a little less annoyed because I'm like 'it was still really really yummy.'"* – Sammy

> *"I'd probably initially give them the benefit of the doubt, be put together badly that one day, or I'd be like, 'Oh, well they clearly would have put a lot of extra effort into making the one that goes on their page looking better than the one they give to every customer.' I'd probably wouldn't feel too badly. I probably wouldn't be like, 'No, never coming here again.' I probably wouldn't order that particular menu item again unless I was with a friend who ordered it and it looked really good that time."* – Hunter

These findings reveal that although largely, there was a positive notion towards the superfood movement, there was still scepticism surrounding superfood's healing abilities and nutritional information. It also suggests the key attractive elements in the digital presentation of superfood were colour, cutlery and plateware, ingredients, garnishing and the background story. These elements influenced preconceived ideas on flavour, perceived value, anticipated experience and assumptions about the food provider. Superfood choices and responses were largely influenced by superfood's hedonic experiences and symbolic value, although elements of utilitarian consumption still played an important role. Participants revealed that the digital space plays a large role in their food relationships, increasing their consumption of food online, subsequently influencing a change in their perception of what 'healthy' looks like in food and in people, and increasing food presentation expectations.

6.0 Discussion

This research set out to gain a deeper understanding into how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence food choices. The analysis of interviews and images has meant a number of findings have emerged. This section elaborates on the key findings in light of the literature which informed the study.

6.1 Superfood and Digital Media

Superfood movement

A key theme was that the superfood movement was prevalent in contemporary consumers' consumption. They appeared knowledgeable and interested in superfoods in part via digital media, but remained sceptical at the same time. All participants were aware of superfoods, consumed superfoods and were influenced by their prevalence in the media. There is little literature which examines superfood specifically, or which considers 'healthy food' more generally. There is also little literature that explores new trends in food, such as superfood. By exploring contemporary consumers this research has shed light on the superfood movement and a segment of the population that have healthy lifestyles, enabling a deeper and more meaningful understanding of how participants engage in the superfood movement and see this as an important part of their healthy lifestyle.

This movement has been powered by the digital space. Authors have noted how technological advances have meant communication is swifter in this digital age (Carty, 2015; Smelser, 2011); these communication advances are reflected in the findings. All participants found digital images easily and all engaged in the digital grazing of superfoods each day. The knowledge and information on superfoods appears to be more rapidly disseminated due to technological advancements and digital grazing. Very little literature has explored consumers' interactions and digital media's relevance in the superfood movement.

Superfood questioned but still influential

While feeling they were a part of this movement, participants questioned the nutritional value of superfoods and their excessive prices. This questioning is aligned with the idea of authenticity, and resonates with research that notes the health benefits of superfoods are not

evidence-based as few studies demonstrate superfoods' health powers (such as anti-aging, disease fighting) (Tetens, 2011). On the other hand, superfoods are known for their nutritional properties, as they are typically fruit and vegetables (Sikka, 2016). Questioning superfoods' authenticity is consistent with contemporary consumers' behaviour, placing importance on authenticity (Lewis & Bridger, 2011). These findings suggest that this critique is relatively normal and that critiquing happens at the level of digital grazing (i.e. consuming a visual image). Although participants believed superfoods' prices to be excessive they continued to purchase superfood. This is also consistent with contemporary consumers' behaviour, as authors note how contemporary consumers do not use product prices as necessarily nor automatically deciding factors (Lewis & Bridger, 2011). In the end, participants felt the physical and mental health value they would acquire from consuming superfoods was more powerful than the doubt regarding superfoods' claims. These findings suggest that contemporary consumers' healthy consumption practises may be fundamentally based on non-materialistic aspects, exhibiting the notion of dematerialisation (Dagevos, 2005); this is a recurring theme in this study.

6.2 Presentation and Emotional Response

Another key theme in this study relates to the emotional responses to the images. Consuming superfood images online evoked an emotional response and provided the participant with 'gratification', 'pleasure' and 'happiness'. Emotional connections were evident between the participants and the background story behind the image, the assumed food preparation, and the visual presentation. Such findings are aligned with previous research that notes "no longer do customers purchase goods merely for their functional use but also for the experiences created during purchase and use" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, p. 100). These emotions play a fundamental role in the consumption of the images; this further indicates that participants are focused on the non-materialistic aspects of consuming healthy food. This dematerialisation consumption behaviour is also reflected in Dagevos's (2005) depiction of contemporary consumers where he describes how the "emerging emotional economy highlights the evocative, ethical or aesthetical meaning of consumer goods, practices and patterns" (p. 34) and how consumer culture has shifted from 'real goods' to 'feel goods' (Slater, 1997). This research extends Dagevos's (2005) and Slater's (1997) notion of dematerialisation to the food industry.

Superfood's preparation and presentations evoke emotional connections

Previous literature has mainly focused on presentations isolated elements and some authors have attempted to take a less micro approach highlighting characteristics such as neatness (see section 2.3). This research demonstrates how individuals take an initial holistic approach when assessing superfood presentation and suggests key attractive elements such as 'bright' and 'vibrant' colours, 'white' or 'handcrafted' crockery, visible superfood ingredients, colourful and interesting garnishing and a back story all play important roles in how attractive images are.

The existence of these elements lead participants to assumed that more 'care', 'time' or 'thought' had gone into the preparation and presentation of attractive images. This resulted in more meaningful and deeper emotional connections between the participant, food image and food provider. These connections were described as 'admiration' or 'love' for a food influencer. When participants had such connections with the food item or food provider, they were more favourable towards the dish and felt like they would enjoy it more. These findings reflect Hollins and Pugh (1990) and Noble and Kumar (2010), who demonstrated the importance of a product's visual aesthetics as it is the first point of contact between the consumer and product and it is reliable for the fundamental connection in the development of a consumer-product relationship. This research extends this literature and demonstrates how they are applicable in the food industry. Noble and Kumar (2010) additionally state that visual aesthetics with more design have more 'personality', creating more of a connection between participant and product. This provides insight into why consumers may connect with attractively presented superfood images as they may have more 'personality' than images that are not attractively presented. Again, suggesting the importance of aesthetics and the notion of dematerialisation in food consumption.

Specifically in the food literature, authors have noted that attractively presented food has the ability to influence an increased judgement of better flavour, increased preference and increased acceptance of healthier food in a digital context (Zellner et al., 2014). This study adds to literature by revealing how attractive food presentations can reflect the product's 'personality' and create emotional connections, resulting in increased preferences and an increase in perceived enjoyment. Little food literature, has demonstrated how food preparation

and attractive presentation can create these emotional connections, as previous studies have mostly focused on the micro elements of food presentation, as demonstrated in section 2.3.

Background stories evoke emotional connections

All participants demonstrated that they found images more attractive because of the meaningful background story behind the image and that emotional responses were evoked by these stories. The emotional responses resulted in participants experiencing additional gratification and feeling stronger positive associations with the food providers or food influencers. These connections also meant that the participants had a significant amount of trust in the brand or food influencer, persuading them to believe in all the information they display. For example, participants frequently assumed the food products were healthy if they were displayed on the accounts of brands or influencers that endorsed health and wellbeing. Background stories were an influential element in participants' food preferences and consumption behaviour. This is aligned with contemporary consumption behaviour, as authors have noted that these consumers are sensitive to experiences and associations that pluck their heartstrings and create emotional connections (Lewis & Bridger, 2011). Authors have also noted that external factors such as cognitive information about the food can enhance consumers' attention to the hedonic consumption experience (Lee et al., 2006; Siegrist & Cousin, 2009). In this research, the background story acts as cognitive information, specifically suggesting that contemporary consumers may get these experiences and associations via background stories, from which a single food image may be selected. Little research has specifically demonstrated the importance and influential powers background stories have on contemporary consumers in regards to food consumption.

6.3 Symbolic Consumption

Food's symbolic properties play a fundamental role in participants' virtual and physical food consumption. Authors have noted how sometimes food's utilitarian 'attributes' are noted, but the emphasis is on the symbolic meaning (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). This is reflected in the findings, as, although participants noted the need for nutrition and practical presentation (utilitarian), they emphasise superfoods' symbolic values and hedonic experiences.

Superfoods convey detailed information

A key finding here was how superfoods could reflect detailed information about the individual consuming the product, such as an individual's cheerful personality, self-love, healthy lifestyle and high education. Although previous literature has noted food's ability to carry symbolic meaning online (Holmberg et al., 2016) and offline (Bardhi et al., 2010; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Roper, 2009; Stead et al., 2011; Wills et al., 2009), very little literature has demonstrated the extent of this information in regard to healthy/superfood consumption.

Healthy foods and superfoods are health, social and wealth statuses

Another key finding here is how healthy foods or superfoods have become health and social statuses. Consuming healthy food or superfoods signifies an individual's healthy lifestyle which achieves respect and admiration from peers, while unhealthy food can degrade an individual's health status by signifying their unhealthy lifestyle to participants. This may be due to society becoming more educated about the importance of healthy eating. Authors have noted similar findings with the obesity epidemic, as society is exposed to alarming headlines such as "NZ's Adult Obesity Rate Tops 30%" (Jones, 2013) and "Obesity Epidemic At 'Crisis' Point" (Heather, 2014) and, as people have become more educated in the detrimental impacts of obesity, has justified a national "war on fat" (Farrell, 2011, p. 9). This war has induced a moral panic about the "guilt" of one who "causes" such a catastrophe, which then leads to "extraordinary and discriminatory actions on the basis of health and wellbeing", such as fat shaming (Farrell, 2011, p. 9).

A related finding is the acknowledgement by all participants that superfood are highly priced. This could suggest that superfoods may hold a wealth status as well as a health and social status. This may be due to the general impression (in developed worlds) that eating healthy is expensive and that eating unhealthy food is more cost-effective, and therefore in developed countries generally low-income families purchase energy-dense and nutrient-poor food products (Janssen, Boyce, Simpson, & Pickett, 2006).

These findings do not support literature that states healthy food have negative connotations and would be an emotional and social risk for young people (Stead et al., 2011); they demonstrate quite the opposite in fact. The current study suggests positive connotations associated with superfoods, for the contemporary consumer. This finding also adds to the literature concerning

food and status. Previous study revealed how healthy food can act as a wealth and social status (Raine, 2005), while the current study suggests the addition of *health* status.

Symbolic value increases the superfoods monetary value

Another key finding here is how the symbolic value of superfood products influences an increase in the product's monetary value. Participants were willing to pay superfoods' excessive prices because of the information it conveyed to others and how the symbolic meaning was congruent to their ideal self. Authors have noted that consumers will consume food products they believe are congruent to the information they want to communicate to others (Bardhi et al., 2010; Schor & Ford, 2007; Stead et al., 2011; Wills et al., 2009). This finding emphasises the non-materialistic aspects of superfood, as participants bought superfood for not just what they do but for what they mean and the experiences obtained during the purchase and consumption. These findings support previous literature that demonstrates contemporary consumers place importance on the non-materialistic aspects of consumption, such as what products mean (Levy, 1959) and the experiences gained from consumption (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

6.4 Utilitarian Elements

Although symbolic and hedonic properties played fundamental roles in participants' food relationships and consumption behaviour, it is still important to acknowledge and explore utilitarian consumption, as participants placed importance on nutrition and functionality.

Superfood's nutritional properties

Health conscious participants focused specifically on food's nutritional properties and how superfoods could nutritionally benefit them. Although authors have noted how contemporary consumers emphasise symbolic and hedonic aspects of consumption more than utilitarian aspects of consumption (Lewis & Bridger, 2011), these findings suggest that utilitarian consumption may increasingly play an important role in consumers' consumption behaviour as healthy eating and the superfood movement become more practised and accepted.

Functionality of presentation

Participants often placed importance on the functionality of food presentation and garnish by occasionally questioning if they could 'easily eat' the dish. This suggests a fine line between a dish being attractively garnished and over garnished. These findings are important, as although participants are exposed to countless glamorised food images and expect a certain level of presentation they still expected and placed importance on functionality. With food being considered more like art and food presentations becoming increasingly extravagant, it is still important for food stylists, chefs and food influencers to consider the functionality of the food presentation. Utilitarian consumption may increasingly play an important role in contemporary consumers' consumption behaviour as healthy food movements become more broadly embraced and encouraged.

Literature generally has credited contemporary consumerism to be based on fun and fantasy, image and imagination, dreams and desires (Dagevos, 2005). However, this research demonstrates that, although they do place importance on symbolic and hedonic consumption, utilitarian consumption still plays an important role. Very little literature has focused on utilitarian consumption; this research shines light on the importance of focusing on symbolic, hedonic *and* utilitarian consumption in regard to healthy eating and superfood. These findings also add to a more detailed understanding of how utilitarian consumption aspects are assessed by contemporary consumers. This research reveals the detailed assessment of digital images, where participants looked for cues about the functional and nutritional aspects and therefore utilitarian components. Holmberg et al. (2016) who have previously examined food images on Instagram, only explored 14 year olds' personal food images uploaded to their accounts, but did not explore food images in general, the process of digital grazing and consumers' responses.

6.5 The Health Halo

While previous research has identified the specific influence of presentation elements (such as colour or neatness) on food preference, a key finding of this research is that the elements or visual cues such as colour, ingredients, garnishing and background story all had the ability to create a kind of 'health halo' around the food as a whole. This refers to the well-known halo

effect, where there is a "tendency in rating to be influenced by general impression or attitude when trying to judge separate traits" (English, 1934). Health halo effects were frequently revealed when participants digitally grazed, discussed images in the interview or discussed consuming food from food providers.

Health halos induced by bright and vibrant colours

Bright and vibrant food colours influenced participants to perceive that the food product was healthy. Similarly, Madzharov, Ramanathan, and Block (2016) reveal how colour lightness of food serves as a visual stimulus that influences a consumer to have a more pleasurable consumption experience and influences an increased quantity of consumption. This finding further provides insight that bright and vibrant colours induce health halos in a digital context.

Health halos induced by healthy ingredients and healthy garnishes

Participants demonstrated how identifying individual healthy ingredients and healthy garnishes (such as nuts) influenced them to perceive that the entirety of the food product (such as cake) was healthy. Although authors have noted how symbolic information (such as natural sugar instead of sugar) is an influential element that can influence individuals' health perception (Sütterlin & Siegrist, 2015), little literature has noted the finding here, that visual identification of a single 'healthy' ingredient or garnish in a digital image can induce this health halo.

Health halos induced by an image's background story

The background story noted earlier demonstrated how it can be an emotional trigger; here it can trigger a health halo. Participants perceived food products to be healthy when presented by food influencers or food providers associated with health and wellbeing. Although authors have noted how brand names or category names can influence an individual to perceive a food product to be healthier than it really is (Raghunathan, Naylor, & Hoyer, 2006; Suher, Raghunathan, & Hoyer, 2016), little literature has demonstrated how food providers, food brands, food influencers or background stories in a digital context can influence consumers' perceptions of the healthy nature of the food. These findings illustrate how vulnerable participants are to the influential powers food providers and food and wellness accounts have over participants' health assessments.

Overall, these health halo findings indicate that participants may base their health assessments on single visual cues and/or the stories behind the image. As the world continues to become

more digitally inclined, exposure to food stimuli will only increase. This may have detrimental impacts on participants' health as health halos may distort participants' health assessments.

6.6 Digital Grazing Outcomes

As stated earlier, a part of the superfood movement was driven by digital grazing and all participants engaged in digital grazing. With digital grazing playing an evident role in participants' daily lives, participants' pre-consumption behaviour, food presentation expectations and perceptions of health and healthy food have changed.

Digital grazing in regard to food providers

One main change digital grazing had influenced is how participants discovered new food providers. While participants searched for food images via multiple digital pathways, ultimately all participants only took note of food providers whose images demonstrated attractively presented food. Another key change digital grazing had influenced is how participants chose what food provider to consume from. Similar, to finding new food providers, as explained before, participants only considered consuming from food providers with online profiles with attractively presented food.

These findings demonstrate how participants used food presentation online as a visual assessment, ultimately deciding if the food provider was suitable and whether to go to the food provider. These findings highlight the importance of food providers having an online account with attractive food images in order to be relevant and to engage and connect with consumers. Authors have noted that adolescents' place importance on food presentation on social media (Holmberg et al., 2016) and that digital grazing may result in over consumption (Spence et al., 2015). This research is the first to demonstrate how participants used digital grazing, how this changed participants' pre-consumption behaviour and how this change will affect food providers. Such findings ultimately demonstrate that digital grazing is evolving how participants interact with food. More specifically, digital grazing is changing expectations for food presentation and perceptions of health and healthy food. This is further explained in the following sections.

Participants' food presentation expectations

Another effect digital grazing appears to have increased is expectations for food presentation. Participants have been exposed to countless glamorised food images through digital grazing, which influenced an increase in participants' online food presentation expectations. Participants expect 'beautiful', 'colourful', 'thoughtful' and 'functional' presented food in images, and in the actual provision of a restaurant. Participants' increased food presentation expectations were mostly only relevant for food providers and were less relevant to themselves at home. More specifically, participants expect food providers to maintain the level of presentation that is observed on their media accounts when they provide the food at their premises. When expectations were not met (such as a participant who observed a food product on a food provider's digital account and then ordered it at their premises, and the food product was not presented as attractively as they had observed in the image online), participants who placed an extreme importance on presentation felt 'disappointment', 'disheartened' and 'less trusting' of the brand and some would not consume from the food provider again. These findings are relevant in this digital age where majority of food providers and brands have an online presence. The findings demonstrate the importance for food providers' online presence to genuinely portray the actual food produce offered. However, there is little evidence of this elaboration in the literature to date.

Authors have previously noted how being exposed to food images on digital media has the power to alter consumer behaviour by influencing overconsumption (Ouwehand & Papies, 2010; Wansink, 2006). This research demonstrates the importance of specific elements of presentation (colour, plateware and cutlery, ingredients, garnish, backstory and functionality) online and the influential ability that these glamourised food images have, as consumers expect such presentation in real life. This research illustrates how glamourised images, and the attention to presentation (resulting in emotional responses), has meant that consumers expect food to continually be presented in this way.

Participants' perceptions of what 'healthy' looks like

While digital grazing has increased knowledge of health and superfoods, the downside to this is that participants felt food influencers (associated with the images) and people who would eat these superfoods would be 'skinny' and 'fit'. This finding suggests that this outcome of digital grazing may have had a detrimental impact on perceptions of health and healthy consumption, reinforcing these stereotypes. All participants' food images looked similar and were all sourced

from a food or health accounts that were mainly associated with 'young' and 'attractive' women. While there are countless images available online, they somehow seem to be self-restricting to a certain 'type' of image, associated with a 'type' of influencer. This is reflected in participants' similar images of superfoods and healthy consumption. This finding also may provide insight into why some participants determined how 'healthy' an individual is by how skinny and fit they appeared to be. This is consistent with suggestions that individuals react to external stimuli by not only encoding the senses but by generating their own multisensory images within themselves (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The participants generated similar images of what 'healthy' looks like, suggesting a convergence on perhaps an unrealistic image of what they need to eat to look 'healthy'.

Authors have demonstrated how digital media platforms, in particular, social media can have detrimental impacts on individuals' body images (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Jones, 2001). This research provides an insight into how health and food accounts may also be having detrimental impact on consumers' image of health, as these accounts are depicting what 'healthy' is thought to look like and reinforcing these stereotypes. Very little literature, if any, has highlighted how food accounts are depicting the image of health and the possible detrimental impacts, revealing the need for health and wellness accounts to be regulated.

Overall, this digital grazing discussion demonstrates that participants' interaction with food has evolved as technology advances. Authors have previously noted how companies need to change their business models and perspectives to advance with technological change and fast-moving consumer culture or they will lose relevance (Ernst and Young, 2014). This is reflected in the findings as they provide insight for food providers to reflect on participants' evolving food relationships and food presentation expectations to maintain relevance.

7.0 Implications, Limitations and Future Research

7.1 Implications for Theory

This research adds to the body of literature by making three key contributions: it identifies responses to the superfood movement, it explores this in the context of the digital landscape, and it highlights the connection between superfoods, digital images and utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic consumption. This study also suggests there is a dematerialisation of superfood consumption.

To begin, this study examined responses to the superfood movement, a recent movement that has not been given attention to date. Specifically, this research suggests that this movement has not only been accepted but embraced by a segment of the population. At the same time, scepticism surrounding superfoods' nutritional value remains. Through investigating the superfood movement, a greater understanding of trends associated with healthy food can be further understood; this may help generate ideas on ways to counteract health issues such as obesity.

The study examined responses to digital images of superfoods; this is vital in the current digital age. Furthermore, the digital environment appears to be fuelling the movement as digital grazing influences the food we see and the food we expect. The countless glamourised images available online are shaping our perceptions on health and our presentation expectations. Additionally, this research identifies how it is not just the visual elements that shape perceptions and expectations – the colour, ingredients and plateware – but the stories and the people behind the image. All of these elements combine to send utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic signals. That is, the consumer makes a judgement of the food and its preparer – its nutrition and 'eatability', the care taken to prepare it, and health status they would attain by eating it. This resonates with the idea of dematerialisation, a concept not previously associated with food consumption. These consumers placed greater emphasis on emotional connections, the backstory, 'feel good' response to the images and healthy consumption, and less on the actual 'materials' visible in the image.

Overall, this research suggests food images need to be considered via a combination of approaches encompassing all of utilitarian, symbolic and hedonic meaning to acknowledge the more holistic view that consumers take. With digital grazing and connections with food providers or influencers playing such a significant role in participants' food consumption, digital media holds tremendous power and potential, emphasising the importance of online food influencers and their backstories as key influences in food and health assessments.

With the constantly changing technological landscape, research and theory need to acknowledge the rapidity by which trends such as the superfood movement can take hold and gain ground among consumers. This may become a more common phenomenon, with trends/movements in other food areas and other visual-orientated products moving swiftly, as digital communication is able to be so rapidly disseminated.

7.2 Implications for Policy

The notion of dematerialisation suggests that campaigns encouraging healthy eating should focus on emphasising non-materialistic elements of consumption, such as mental health and wellbeing benefits from maintaining a healthy lifestyle, the presentation element and the backstory element. Not only do contemporary consumers place importance on non-materialistic elements, they also place importance on the nutritional information and the health benefits superfood and healthy food provide. Therefore, health campaigns also need to emphasise healthy food's nutritional information and the physical health benefits associated with maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

On the other hand, this study's findings have also demonstrated the dangers of the health food movements powered by digital media that policy makers need to be aware of. With superfood acting as a health status, policy makers need to be mindful of the impact this may have on the less-publicised health food. Consumers may be less willing to purchase such foods as they have little media attention and feel they must consume expensive superfoods to be healthy. Now, with the consumption of unhealthy food being frowned upon, and although this may ultimately influence people to consume fewer unhealthy food products, it also may influence individuals

to shame others who do not consume these 'healthy' foods and influence these individuals to experience lower self-image.

Policy makers also need to be aware of how healthy food movements such as superfood can act as a wealth status. This may mean that individuals from a low socioeconomic background may feel that consuming healthy food may be unattainable. Therefore, when policy makers are creating campaigns to encourage healthier eating for families in low socioeconomic situations, campaigns should not focus on 'superfoods' per se (as they are often highly priced), but on affordable healthy foods.

With health halos playing such a significant role when participants interact with food online, it is important for policy makers to note what criteria contemporary consumers may be basing their health assessments. Visual health assessments have the ability to distort participants' perception of how healthy the food product is, which may have long-term detrimental impacts on consumers' health. For example, a high-fat, high-sugar cake, though made with walnuts and goji berries, may be seen as a healthy food, but in fact is not. This calls for policy makers to create campaigns that educate consumers on how to construct more thorough and accurate health assessments. Such campaigns could focus on educating consumers on the importance of reading and understanding products' ingredient lists. Policy makers could also create regulations that require simpler food packaging so that consumers could easily understand ingredient lists. Policy makers could also create regulations around food products needing to present a health food rating on packaging. Although there is a health-star rating system present on some New Zealand and Australian packaged foods, this system is voluntary. Therefore, this calls for a more regulated and mandatory health food rating.

The prevalence of digital grazing in the findings demonstrates how it plays a significant role in participants' evolving ways of interacting with food. These findings demonstrate how digital media has the ability to change presentation expectations and participants' perceptions of health. These findings also demonstrate the trust created when participants connected with a brand or food influencer online, resulting in health halos on everything they endorsed. Policy makers should explore the idea of regulating food influencers endorsing food products online and what can or cannot be said about food's nutrition.

7.3 Implications for Practice

Brands in the food industry need to be aware of the notion of dematerialisation with contemporary consumers. Their emphasis in advertising and marketing should focus on incorporating the non-materialistic aspects (such as mental health benefits and backstory) of healthy consumption and creating meaningful connections, as contemporary consumers are placing significant importance on such elements. This managerial implication is not only relevant in the food industry, but may be relevant in the fashion, homeware and design industries.

It is still important for companies in the food industry to realise that although contemporary consumers place significant importance on the non-materialistic elements of consumption, they still place importance on utilitarian elements of consumption. Food stylists, chefs, food providers and food influencers still must focus on the functionality and create practical food presentations that meet and exceed contemporary consumers' increased food presentation expectations. Food brands, food providers, food influencers also need to note the importance of the nutritional elements of superfood with health-conscious consumers. This could mean their advertising, marketing or menus could be focused more on superfoods' nutritional information and value.

Health halos can be used in the food industry for brands and food providers to reinforce how healthy their food product is. Health halos can be induced through many ways, such as bright colours, identifiable healthy ingredients, food influencers and background stories that capture health and wellness. Food brands could use healthy food influencers their target market is engaged and connected with, to induce or reinforce consumers' perception of how healthy the product is. Food brands and food providers selling healthy food or superfood should make sure their background story truly captures health and wellness, as background stories can have a considerable impact on whether a health halo is induced.

Digital grazing is now a significant part of contemporary consumers' lives and plays a considerable role in their relationship with food and how they interact with food in the digital age. Food providers and brands need to be active online and interacting with their consumers by posting arrays of quality images and displaying captivating background stories that emphasise health and wellness for consumers to consider their brand as healthy. As digital

grazing exposes consumers to countless glamorised food images, this subsequently means that consumers' food presentation expectations have increased for food providers especially. Now brands and food providers need to place extreme importance on the aesthetics of their food products online and offline. Not only do they need to meet the increased food presentation expectations, but they also need to ensure that what the consumer consumes on the food brand's/provider's online account is consistent with what they experience when they consume the actual food product.

7.4 Limitations

The chosen methodologies provided an exploratory basis that allowed the research to gain an in-depth understanding of how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence individuals' food choices. The main difficulty with this methodology is to select a wide range of suitable cases that maximise the opportunity for new information to be obtained. This research selected a range of contemporary consumers that had high involvement with food, however, a study with wider social demographic characteristic may offer a more holistic view of the understanding of consumers' responses to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and their food choices. In addition, all cases selected were of New Zealand European ethnicity. It may be useful to create a study that explores a wide range of cases that reflect cultural, ethnical and socio-economic diversity as this may provide new insights.

This research conducted theoretical thematic analysis based on Braun and Clark's article (2006) and within these steps used Spiggle's (1994) fundamental manipulation operations to construct a coherent conceptual explanation and strengthen the data analysis and interpretation. While measures were taken to ensure objective interpretation and trustworthiness, the fact that one researcher conducted the thematic analysis means that intercoder consistency and reliability is unattainable (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). However, a single researcher was essential in the present thesis.

In addition, this research may have been subjected to research bias, as participants may have responded in accordance with what they believed the researcher wanted to hear or to

create/maintain an image as 'good citizen' in front of the interviewer. This subject may also have been subjected to social desirability, as participants may have answered questions in a way they thought of as socially desirable, and therefore overstated their superfood presentation responses, and the use of digital grazing and its consequences. While interviews were conducted in a professional manner, encouraging participants to give open, honest responses, this remains a potential limitation.

7.5 Further Research

While this research has successfully explored the research objective and gained answers to the research questions, the findings and discussion highlight the need for further research in this area. As discussed above, one of the main limitations of this study was the range of the types of cases studied. Future research should consider a larger quantity and more diverse spectrum of cases when further exploring how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this may influence individuals' food choices.

This research demonstrated how food movements, such as superfood, can help influence a change in our health perceptions, the way we interact with food and our relationship with food. Further research should explore other food movements that are gaining popularity, such as the raw, organic and vegan food movements. This will further provide insight into contemporary consumers' constantly evolving food relationships.

With digital grazing influencing a significant change in the way these contemporary consumers interact with food, their relationships with food, perceptions of health and expectations for presentation, additional research should further investigate the psychological and behavioural consequences of this grazing activity.

The strong notion of dematerialisation in healthy consumption calls for additional research to further explore the significant non-materialistic elements of healthy consumption. This will help enhance a deeper and more detailed understanding of the contemporary consumer and provide more ideas of ways to help encourage healthy consumption practices.

In conclusion, this research generated a deeper understanding of how consumers respond to visual cues in the digital presentation of superfoods and how this influences consumption choices and behaviour. The digital world impacts on how we behave. The plethora of nutrition information, recipes and ideas couched in glamourised food pictures are influencing consumer responses. It means that we are potentially both better educated on food, but may have incorrect perceptions that are overly influenced by the presence of a single goji berry! In addition, our food consumption may be shifting to the non-materialistic elements, shifting focus to 'feel goods', but also shifting food consumption to an online 'activity', for example digital grazing. Digital grazing appears to be playing a significant role in how we may be interacting with food. The research suggests that, at least for superfoods, digital media may be changing how and what we consume, what we expect to see in restaurants, and what we think of when we think of health. With the need for greater information on nutrition, to counteract such trends as the alarming obesity rates increase, the digital space appears to hold value, but it is not without its limitations.

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8.0 Appendices

8.1 Interview Guide

1. Tell me a bit about you and food … What is your relationship with food?

2. Do you think what you eat can tell someone something about you?

3. What are your thoughts on superfoods? Tell me what you know about superfood …

4. Let's talk about the pictures you brought here today. So why don't you choose one, and let's talk about it. (Participant chooses one, or if they don't have a preference, one is chosen at random.)
   a. Tell me a bit about why you choose this image?
   b. Do you think this image reflects you? - who you are? – says something about who you are as a person?
   c. Prompts: what did / didn't you like about it? (Confirm, clarify, explore)
   d. Prompt: Do you see this as 'healthy food'? Do you think it's a superfood?

5. If you saw this food in a display setting – say in a cabinet on display at a café, do you think you would you purchase it for yourself? Prompt: Why? Why not?
   a. What kind of person do you think would choose something like this?

6. Where did you get this image? (If not already noted)
   a. Prompt: why they sought that out, whether a particular person posted it, and did that have an influence on their choice?

   *Repeat questions 2 – 5 for other images

* For following questions, show participant the image without the presentation, then show participant the image with the presentation.

7. What do you think about this image? (Confirm, clarify, explore)
   a. Prompt: What do you like/don't like about this image? (Confirm, clarify, explore)

b. Prompt: Do you think this would taste nice?

c. Prompt: Do you see this as 'healthy food'? Do you think it's a superfood?

d. Prompt: What do you think about how it is presented?

8. ***After the participant have seen both images:**
   i. What food image do you prefer? (Why)
   ii. What one do you think is healthier? (Why)
   iii. What one would you be more likely to purchase if you saw it presented at a café, restaurant or food stall? (Why)

9. Do you tend to look at images of food on social media? (Prompt for evidence of digital grazing, prompt for platforms used, apps, Instagram, news, etc.)

10. In general, do you pay attention to how food is presented?

11. If you were buying food from either a café, restaurant or food stall (anywhere where food is displayed for a customer to purchase), do you think the food presentation is important in your decision making/food choice?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

8.2 Food Involvement Questionnaire

1. Please place a tick in the box indicating how closely the words capture your feelings about food.

Food is:

Important to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Not important to me
Of concern to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Of no concern to me
Means a lot to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Means nothing to me
Matters to me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Doesn't matter to me
Think about it often	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Think about it seldom
Exciting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Unexciting
Fun	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Not fun
Reveals something about me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Reveals nothing about me
Tells me something about another person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Tells me nothing about another person
I use digital media to gain new food knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I don't use digital media to gain new food knowledge
I use digital media to look at food images	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I don't use digital media to look at food images

I use digital media to find new places to eat	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I don't use digital media to find new places to eat
I use digital media as a source of inspiration for food presentation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	I don't use digital media as a source of inspiration for food presentation

8.3 Researcher's Set Images Used in the Interview

IMAGE 1A: **IMAGE 1B:**

IMAGE 2A: **IMAGE 2B:**

8.4 Examples of Some Participants' Images
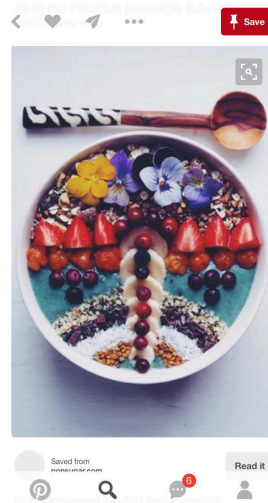
Image 1
Image 2
Image 3

Image 4

Image 5

Image 6

rawandfree Eli & Milo had fun making these
delicious messy jars today.. layers of chia |
strawberries | coconut flakes and thick n
sweet berry smooooothie 🍓🍓🍓
#goodfoodforkids

load more comments

nudespice Nice photos 😊 what do you think
of some of our recipes? 🍴

rawandfree They look sooo good!!
@nudespice

vladisvillage Amazing, I want one 😎

karolinajaneczko It looks sooo goood

anamorenalopes humm que deli

nzmhmmd @paris64s

pa2shs @nzmhmmd 👌👌

_amanda_bradshaw They did so good !!
These look great 💕💕💕

1,053 likes

JUNE 20, 2016

Add a comment…

Image 7

PHOTO

bambambaklava

♡ ◯ ↗

♥ 15,177 likes

bambambaklava Chana Masala (Chick Peas in a spicy sauce) from my hands. One of my favorite things. 🤙 #Fuckthatsdelicious

Image 8

📌 Save

Saved from
hanna metromode se

Visit

📌 33