



Superfood or superficial? Analysing the accuracy of superfood health claims on social media

J. Barsby¹, J. Cowley¹, R. Burton² and T. Bianco-Miotto¹

¹*School of Agriculture, Food and Wine, The University of Adelaide, Urrbrae, SA, Australia and*

²*School of Agriculture, Food and Wine, The University of Adelaide, Urrbrae, SA, Australia*

'Superfoods' is a term that is frequently used in social media to describe a food that contains beneficial nutrients that may help human health, however many of these 'superfoods' do not have robust scientific evidence to support these claims.⁽¹⁾ Influencers on social media often use the term 'superfoods' to promote products on Instagram or Facebook, however, the average consumer would not be equipped to identify which 'superfood' claims are real. This results in consumers purchasing foods that they hope will improve their health. Our study looked at the nature and accuracy of superfood claims on the most common social media platforms (Google, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram). We searched these social media platforms for posts and grouped them into health claims, product marketing, articles and miscellaneous. It was found that the majority of claims came from YouTube and Google, whereas other social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter predominantly used the term superfood to advertise a specific product. We identified over 300 claims from Google and YouTube and randomly chose 40 to be assessed by a selection of academic professionals to determine the level of accuracy of the claims using a 7-point scale. Our analysis showed that the level of accuracy of Google claims was higher than YouTube, however, neither group is seen to be higher than 'somewhat accurate' indicating that there are clear gaps in the knowledge provided to the general public. This study provides the foundation for identifying how the term 'superfood' is used and depicted by the general public. By determining how accurate these superfood claims are to the public, we can start to identify which areas require additional work to inform consumers so they can make the healthiest choice.

Reference

1. Kedzior SG, Bianco-Miotto T, Breen J, *et al.* (2019) *Reprod Biomed Soc Online* **9**, 48–63.