

An Evidence-Bounded Framework for a Proposed Functional-Coffee Launch: The Costa Coffee Case

Shuo Ai*

Durham University, Durham, England

**Corresponding author: Shuo Ai.*

Abstract

The current paper explores the requirements that would be necessary in an early marketing plan of a Costa Coffee functional coffee portfolio before it could inform a launch decision. In the proposal, it is connected to a well-known beverage as a source of beauty, energy, and recovery after exercise, but its product statements and commercial goals are planning factors, not evidence. Documentary case analysis is based on comparison between the proposal and the studies regarding the acceptance of functional foods and claim communication, modern UK recommendations, and the record of approved nutrition and health claims. The analysis is based on the steps that lead up to a launch formulation and claim screening, compatibility with consumer needs, concept validation, and a limited pilot. Demographic stereotypes give way to need states. The identified targets are still provisional key performance indicators since baselines, measurement procedures, and decision rules have not yet been established. The evidence map that comes out of this process ties together product development, public language, consumer testing and pilot monitoring. It shows what the requirements of a defensible next decision should be, not performance in the market or a specific health impact on a product.

Keywords

functional coffee, health claims, consumer acceptance, need-state segmentation, documentary case analysis

1. Introduction

A functional food is a regular food or drink that has some physiological or nutritional advantage. The design needs to be developed through a combined approach to formulation, consumer research, marketing communication and regulation [1, 2]. Coffee already occupies familiar consumption occasions. Functional ingredients can still change the anticipated taste as well as perception on the drink as a credible carrier of the suggested benefit. A benefit should be demonstrable, intelligible and applicable to the targeted occasion before its introduction and it is essential to demonstrate this.

The source case is a hypothetical strategic marketing plan for a Costa Coffee functional-coffee range. It presents two concepts: Beauty Coffee, with collagen and antioxidants for women aged 25–35 interested in health and beauty, and Energy Recovery Coffee, with vitamins and plant extracts for active consumers after exercise. A later product description also mentions plant protein and electrolytes for the recovery drink. The

plan proposes a four-week launch sequence: short Instagram and TikTok videos, tasting events in London and Manchester, beauty and fitness influencer posts, and final-week introductory offers and app-based loyalty points. It names an 8% sales-share target for the first three months, 100,000 social-media interactions, and a 4.5/5 satisfaction rating. These were the plan's stated objectives, not reported outcomes; it provides no final formulation, consumer results, sales series, sensory data, or pilot protocol.

Evidence on consumers provides a firmer basis for those decisions. Acceptance may be influenced by beliefs, knowledge, trust, price, anticipated taste, past experience, health motivation, and carrier-benefit fit [3-6]. Health information can influence interest, but the direction and magnitude of the response depend on the product, audience, design, and wording [7, 8]. Another limitation is the fact that the United Kingdom has certain regulations: commercial health claims need approved wording and adherence to their requirements, whereas foods must not have disease-treatment, prevention, or cure claims [9, 10].

The present paper discusses the ways in which the credibility of claims, suitability of consumers, and the limits of health-related claims in Great Britain can be used to structure the introduction of a functional coffee. A documentary case study is employed to come up with a four stages decision model and a claim to evidence approach matrix. Neither output is an indicator of sales or buyer reaction. Rather, they are both indicative of the measures and assessments that should be done prior to a launch claim or sales objective informing a decision.

2. Literature and Conceptual Framing

2.1 Acceptance is Conditional on Consumer and Product Context

Evidence on functional-food acceptance suggests that consumer responses depend on product context, not only on demographic profile. In one of the earlier studies, the belief in benefits, knowledge, and family health context were more important than purely socio-demographics [3]. A subsequent scoping review sorted the identified determinants into the product, socio-demographic, psychological, behavioural, and physical features, but also revealed significant differences across different products and situations [6]. The findings of one category or country cannot thus be extrapolated into a UK coffee chain situation.

Food carrier and anticipated consumption experience are important too. It was found that consumers would be more likely to consider a functional food if the carrier had an appropriate health image and they trusted the food industry [4]. Credibility of a claimed functional effect may be linked to desire to buy or pay, though taste expectations and product recognition might remain significant factors [5]. Studies on beverages also show that information may change the liking or perception, however sensory properties may limit acceptance [11, 12]. Product information should then be evaluated together with the drink, not as an isolated advertisement message.

2.2 Credibility Depends on Wording, Evidence, and Comprehension

Consumers encounter health-claim wording in specific purchase contexts. Format, knowledge, trust, and the purchase setting shape how the wording is perceived [7, 13]. Studies on functional products document both interest in health-related qualities and concerns regarding enrichment and regulatory language [14]. An auction experiment involving a functional snack showed that a detailed presentation of health information changed willingness to pay [8]. This finding provides an actual problem with the idea of testing a functional-coffee concept, which is not a sales prediction.

The credibility also has a production-side base. Functional-food development reviews are related with market communication and substantiation, safety, formulation, and legislative requirements [1, 2]. Formulated products studies can explain why information and sensory evidence need to be decoupled: a given carrier may be used to support viability, liking, or perception, but it does not give the permission to use broad health-effect language to talk about another product [15]. The operative distinction is thus evidence-to-claim fit: communication is limited by the evidence regarding the actual formulation and by the allowed conditions of use.

2.3 The Great Britain Claim Boundary

The UK regulations formally divide them. A nutrition claim refers to a positive nutritional characteristic, and a health claim is used when the claim states, suggests, or implies that there is a relationship between food or its component and health. A health claim may be made only where it has been registered on the Great Britain Nutrition and Health Claims Register and all the conditions of its use are fulfilled [9, 10]. General health references also require attention. Food marketing should not claim that a particular product can treat, prevent, or cure illness. The guidance and register do not confer legitimacy on an unreviewed formulation; before release, the final recipe, serving size, labelling, advertising, and channel content should be evaluated by specialists.

All these references combined can be used to identify three conceptual connections. The credibility of the claim is based on substantiation and understanding; the consumer fit is dependent on need state, carrier compatibility, sensory experience, trust, and price; and the evaluation of launch relies on measures measured by a specified protocol. No one of these links is sufficient to imply realised adoption. They are valuable because they put into order the questions preceding a responsible launch.

3. Methodology

The source material is a hypothetical strategic marketing proposal for a Costa Coffee functional-coffee range. In addition to product and promotion decisions, it uses segmentation, targeting and positioning, Porter's Five Forces, and Maslow's hierarchy to describe its market logic. It also proposes biodegradable packaging, a premium but accessible price, retail placement near urban centres, gyms, and beauty clinics, online availability, first-time buyer discounts, and loyalty rewards. This paper treats those elements as stated planning choices, not company actions or evidence of market response.

The literature review included 13 scholarly articles and two recent reports published by the UK Department of Health and Social Care. Source selection focused on four questions: functional-food acceptance; carrier-benefit fit and sensory expectations; health-claim validity and comprehensibility; and regulatory requirements in Great Britain. The bibliographic information and DOI were verified with the help of the publisher or bibliographic records, whereas official government websites were used to provide the regulatory content. All other records that were irrelevant to these questions, partly filled in, promotional pages, and unsupported items were deleted. It is a targeted documentary review of the proposal, not a systematic review or meta-analysis.

The source statements were divided into context, proposed actions, proposed measurements, and unsupported outcome assertions. This was followed by the audit mapping the benefit language to the evidence strength and to the GB classifications of nutrition claims, authorised health-related claims, non-specific health-related claims, and forbidden medical claims. It redefined demographic groups into need states identified by usage time, health attitudes, claim understanding, trust, sensory needs, and price sensitivity. A validation source, indicator, and decision consequence were also associated with each proposed action. Figure 1 and Table 1 indicate the final sequence.

The analysis does not encompass any of the following: primary consumer or commercial observations, assessed final formulation, or claim-specific compliance ruling. The output provided is an audit trail, i.e., every statement in the proposal has been matched with the evidence that can be used to evaluate it and the judgement that it would make.

4. Case Analysis and Proposed Framework

4.1 Reframing the Product and the Audience

The proposal has two product positions: beauty and exercise recovery. It describes Beauty Coffee with collagen and antioxidants, and Energy Recovery Coffee with vitamins and plant extracts; elsewhere, the recovery concept is described with plant protein and electrolytes. Those differences identify formulation choices that the source plan has not settled. None of the completed recipes, safety analysis, evidence document, or approved text were associated with the two labels of the drink. An ingredient does not establish a health effect in the finished beverage, so formulation activities remain distinct from any claim of effectiveness.

The source segmentation identifies women aged 25–35, especially urban consumers interested in health and appearance, for Beauty Coffee. It identifies fitness and recovery consumers aged 20–35 for Energy Recovery Coffee; the source describes this group as male-dominated while noting growing female participation. The proposed occasions are a morning or afternoon beauty routine and post-exercise recovery. These categories can guide recruitment, but they do not explain acceptance by themselves. Demographics, beliefs, health motivation, knowledge, trust, expected taste, and carrier compatibility may also matter [3, 5, 6]. The need states should therefore be tested rather than assumed to be observed Costa segments.

4.2 Four-stage Evidence-bounded Launch Logic

Claim and formulation screening precede consumer testing. A product team would initially record all the ingredients, serving size, the suggested wording, and the channel they are going to use. Scientific and regulatory reviewers would then classify each statement as compositional information, an authorised health claim subject to conditions of use, a general health reference linked to an authorised specific claim, or unauthorised medicinal language [9, 10]. The notion that would not pass such a screen would be reworded or stated in neutral terms.

The second step considers consumer fit without efficacy assumption. Concept research would examine the understanding and credibility of the wording and whether participants perceive the ingredient-coffee combination as compatible with the usage occasion. The distinction between labelled and unlabelled product assessment needs to be made since information has the ability to alter expectations and perception [11, 15]. Sensory experience and price response inform the same decision: a claim cannot rescue an unacceptable drink.

Concept validation is the first opportunity at the third stage to actually test the proposal as opposed to testing the rhetoric. A preregistered concept or sensory protocol would determine recruitment criteria, comparison conditions, sample-size rationale, outcomes and analysis before recruitment. It would also establish the results that should be used to continue, revise, or discontinue, but keep null and negative results. The conclusions would still be bound to the claims, formulations and messages studied.

The fourth stage is a limited pilot. The original plan uses three headline objectives: an 8% share of Costa Coffee sales in the first three months, 100,000 social-media interactions, and a satisfaction rating of at least 4.5/5. These are stated plan targets, not evidence. Commercial, digital, and satisfaction indicators need a fixed baseline, time frame, denominator, collection procedure, and decision rule before they can inform a launch decision. The evaluation should also separate raw interaction numbers from comprehension, qualified reach, and purchase behaviour.

The control points of a launch decision are shown in Figure 1. When the wording is not allowed or consumers cannot comprehend it, a concept goes back to revision. The transition to the pilot phase can also depend on a written protocol.

Figure 1: Decision gates of the proposed Costa Coffee functional coffee case. Before any test of compatibility of the formulation and wording with the requirements of the consumers as well as validation of the concept, screening is necessary: only then should a bounded pilot be carried out. All the gates may necessitate revision or cessation prior to a large-scale implementation

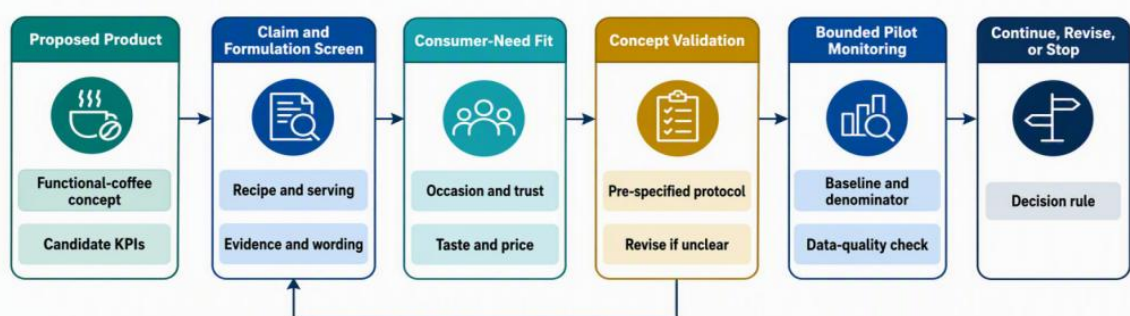


Table 1 operationalises the framework by linking each managerial decision to the evidence that could challenge it. The matrix does not provide any findings. It does not permit an appealing claim, a high exposure

count, or a headline rating to stand as evidence of consumer value. It also gives the right of stopping or revising as appropriate consequences, which is important when a suggested advantage turns out to be unclear, inconsistent or unsupported.

Table 1: The claim-to-evidence implementation matrix of the proposed case. The indicators are all prospective and need a protocol prior to using them

Decision	Required evidence	Proposed indicator or source	Decision consequence
Claim and formulation screen	Final recipe, serving conditions, substantiation file, current register check	Documented scientific and regulatory review	Remove, narrow, or reformulate any statement that lacks support or permitted wording.
Need-state and message fit	Pre-specified concept test across relevant usage occasions	Comprehension, credibility, perceived fit, trust, and price response	Revise the concept when participants misunderstand the wording or reject the carrier–benefit combination.
Sensory and expectation fit	Labelled and unlabelled product assessment with a stated comparator	Liking, expectation gap, aftertaste, and reasons for rejection	Reformulate or stop when communication raises expectations the product experience does not meet.
Commercial pilot	Defined stores or channels, baseline period, denominator, and transaction audit	Sales mix; the original 8% figure is an unvalidated target candidate	Continue, revise, or stop only under a decision rule specified before the pilot.
Digital communication	Platform definitions, campaign exposure, fraud checks, and linkable outcomes	Qualified reach, comprehension, and conversion; 100,000 interactions is an unvalidated target candidate	Do not infer adoption or credibility from raw interactions alone.
Post-purchase assessment	Verified-purchase sampling, response-rate reporting, and a fixed scale	Satisfaction distribution and complaints; 4.5/5 is an unvalidated target candidate	Interpret with response bias and uncertainty; investigate adverse or misleading experiences.

5. Discussion, Managerial Implications, and Limitations

The case changes the point at which marketing planning takes place. The source schedule can be retained as a sequence of learning opportunities: awareness videos in Week 1; store tastings, including London and Manchester, in Week 2; beauty and fitness influencer activity in Week 3; and introductory offers and loyalty-point activity in Week 4. It also proposes free samples at gyms, yoga studios, and health fairs. These activities can support discovery and trial, but they cannot by themselves substantiate a product benefit. The formulation and the strongest permitted wording should be assessed first; consumer research then examines whether that wording is understood and suitable for the drink, occasion, sensory experience, and price. Compliance is therefore part of concept development rather than an end-stage copy-edit.

The broad health orientation is also too broad to specify a target market. Functional food studies consistently show conditional and heterogeneous responses [6, 7]. Trust may support purchase, whereas unfamiliar ingredients, poor carrier fit, taste concerns, and scepticism may limit acceptance [4, 5, 12]. The mechanisms can be exposed through need-state recruitment; gendered labels can convert an untested stereotype into a segmentation decision. Adequately planned research might however report and compare demographics without necessarily using them to predicate motivations beforehand.

The process starts with the decision relationship, not the demographic label. To form a media programme or KPI it is necessary that an offered benefit should have its own formulation, allowable wording, plausible use situation and test plan. In this context, it is linked to the claims, communication and goals instead of considering them as the equal parallel workstreams. It does not forecast customer behaviour but rather questions the presence of the prerequisite evidence. The same audit may be carried out prior to the existence of consumer or commercial information.

A claim ledger can link each proposed statement to a source, a consumer test, and a revision criterion. In the initial design, it illustrates how recipe, serving size, channel, scientific, regulatory and commercial choices

are interrelated but change is still affordable. It divides exploratory objectives and operational commitments. Sales-share, interaction count, or satisfaction scores only become usable when their denominator, baseline, collection window, and action threshold are determined. The ledger enriches product development and regulatory guidance through identifying assumptions that need evidence before further market investment.

The framework can be most helpful during the initial stages of launch development when there has been little to no investment in the market. It explicitly indicates the relationship between formulation, claim wording, comprehension by consumers, and pilot metrics. Because the source proposal is hypothetical and the supporting studies concern different products and settings, this analysis cannot predict market demand or assess compliance for a final formulation. Its regulatory coverage is limited to Great Britain. The next stage is scientific and regulatory review of the final concept, preregistered concept and sensory testing, and a bounded KPI pilot with clear baselines and decision rules.

6. Conclusion

Viewed as a documentary case study, the Costa Coffee proposal comprises a series of interconnected launch decisions rather than evidence of product impact. Need-state segmentation directs consumer work to focus on use occasions, claim knowledge, trust, sensory expectations, and price response, not on speculated demographic reasons. Consumer-fit work is preceded by concept validation and a limited pilot, screening formulation and claim; at every stage there is an opportunity to revise or withdraw. Commercial objectives are kept in the form of planning numbers until they have been defined in terms of baselines, denominators, measurement procedures and decision rules. The framework combines scientific justification, Great Britain health-claim requirements, consumer research, and managerial control in one sequence. It supports a controlled next decision, with final claims and commercial choices left to specialist review, preregistered studies, and a limited pilot.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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