

Consumer perspectives and attitudes in the EU

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Food Safety and Consumer Behaviour

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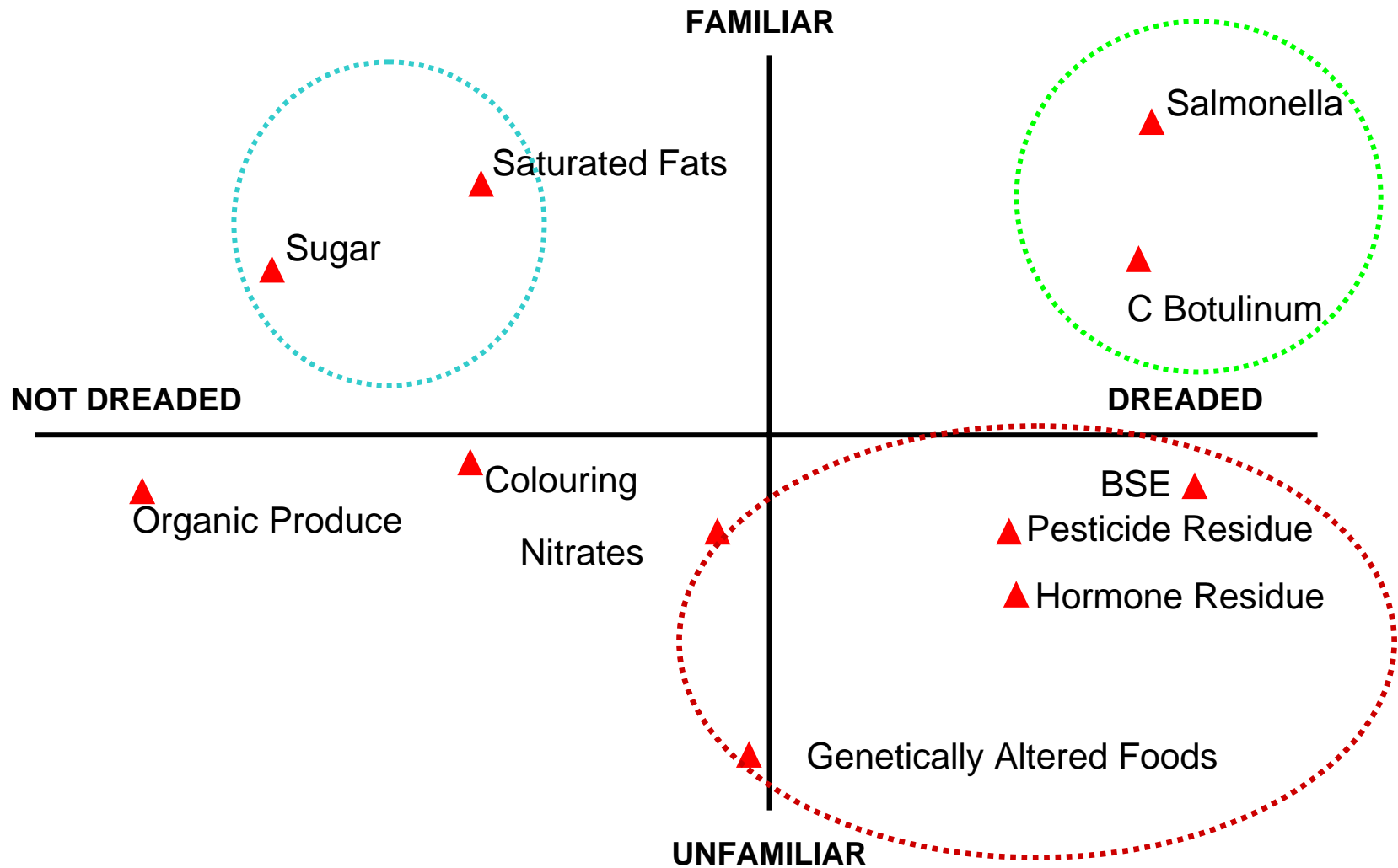
Key questions about consumers and food risks

- How do *experts* and *consumers* differ in perceptions of food risks and risk management activities
- What are the *barriers* to effective risk communication?
- What are the *information needs* of consumers and how does this vary between *individuals* and *cultures*?
- How do peoples' attitudes change in *different contexts*
- How does *consumer* confidence in food safety and evaluation of *food safety management practices* change over time?
- How do the public react to information about ***risk uncertainty***?
- How do we understand ***risk variability*** across different population groups

Risk Perception

- The **psychology of risk perception** drives public risk attitudes
 - *An **involuntary risk** over which people have no control is more threatening than one people choose to take*
 - *Potentially catastrophic risks concern people most*
 - *Unnatural (technological) risks are more threatening than natural ones*
- **Ethical representations** and concerns are emerging as an important determinant of consumer decision making
- Perceptions that the **“truth” is being hidden** increases both risk perception and distrust in regulators and communicators

Assessing perceptions of food risks - Results of survey research



Risk Analysis Framework; improving trust through increased transparency?

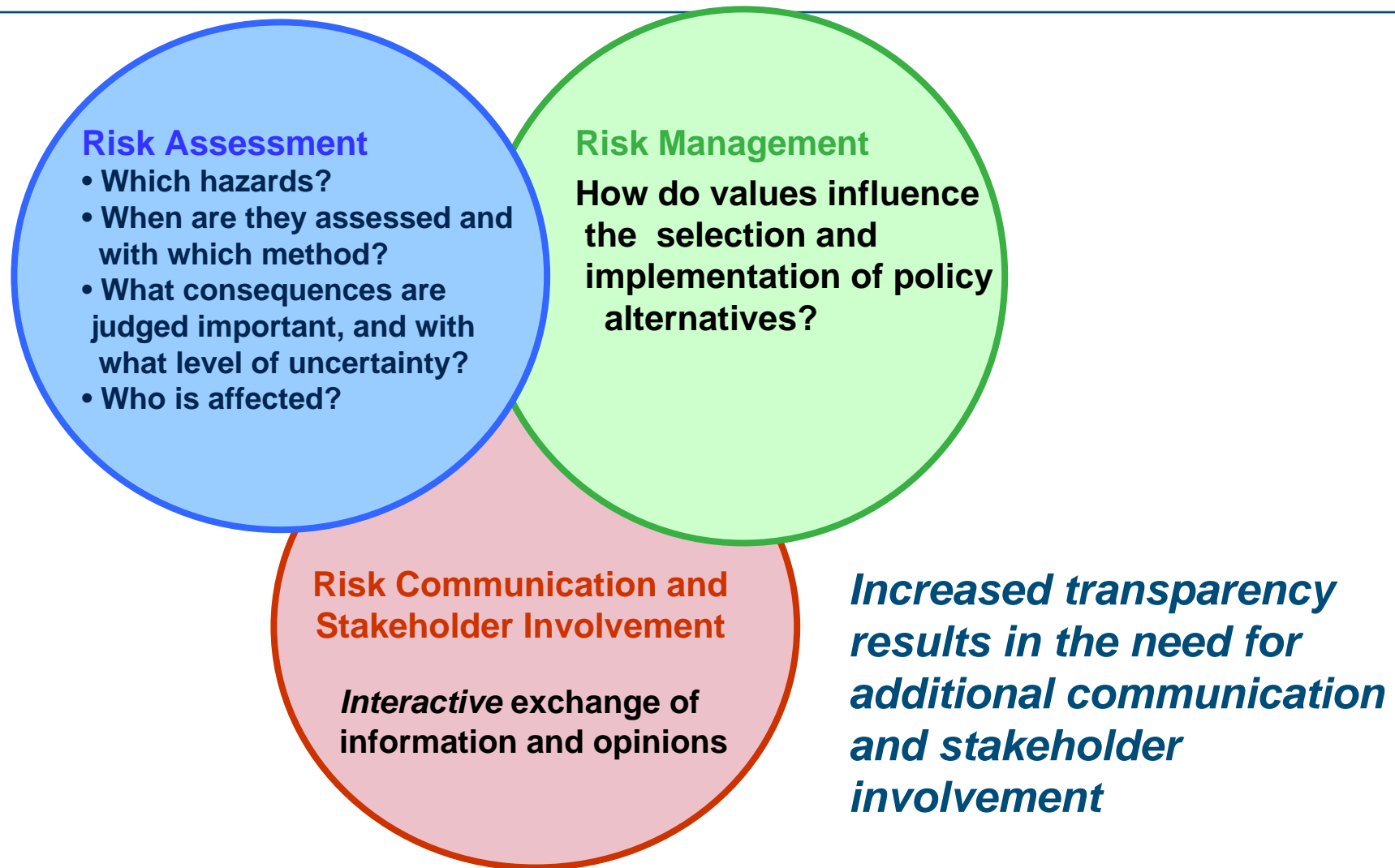


(after WHO, 1998)

Public distrust in the process of risk analysis

- The ***signal potential*** of various risk incidents has demonstrated that risk management is “out of control”
- Increasing availability of ***accessible specialist information*** (for example, via the Internet).
- Public reliance on the ***decisions of expert or elite groups*** is no longer a tenable way to conduct risk analyses
- The rise of the “***consumer citizen***”, means that societal disquiet with risk management and risk assessment may be expressed through consumer preference and choice ***in the marketplace*** (“**To buy or not to buy**”)

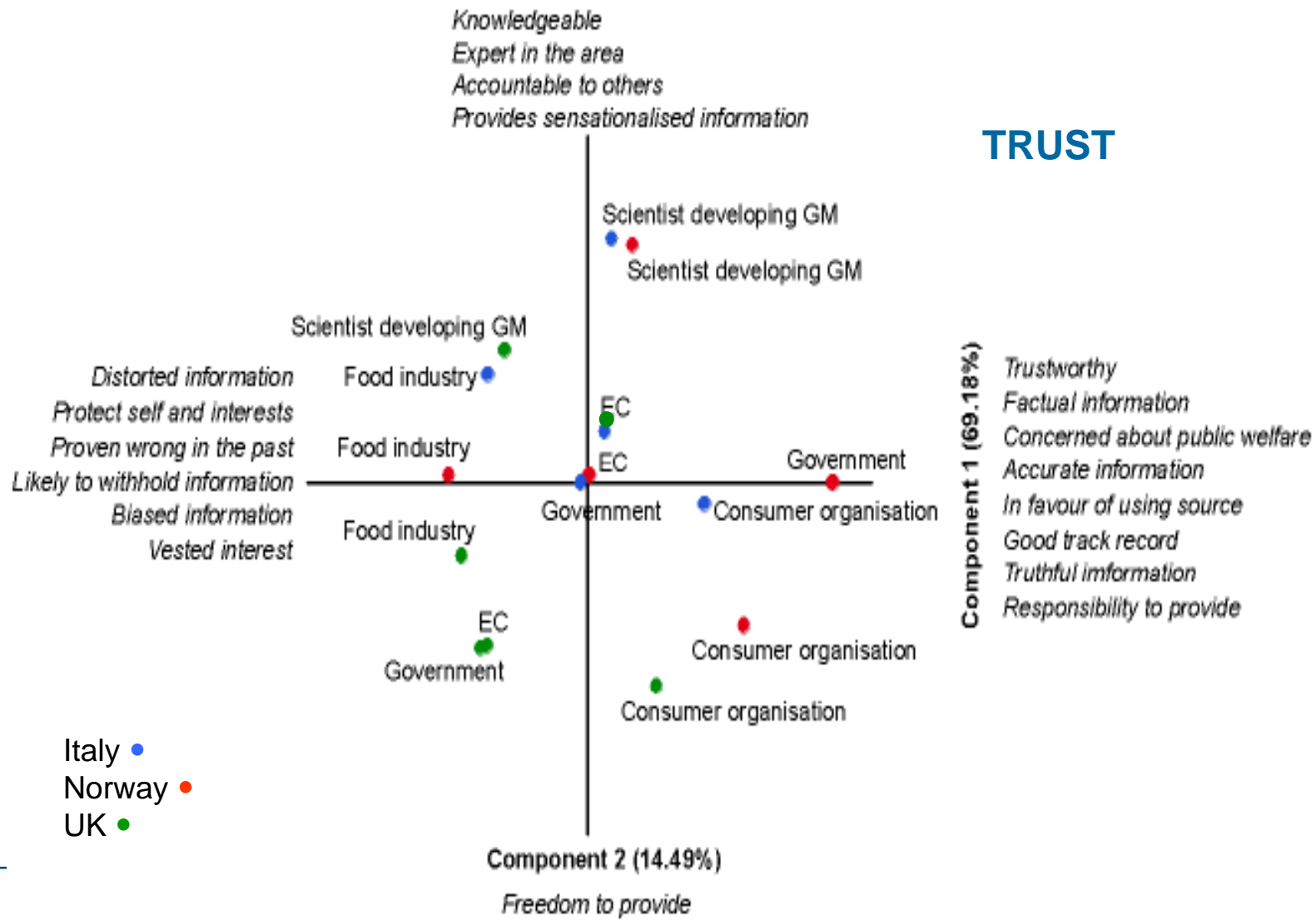
Risk Analysis Framework; improving trust through increased transparency?



Some additional effects of increased transparency in risk analysis

- Does *increased transparency* increase consumer confidence?
- Decreased transparency will **reduce** confidence (“what is being hidden?”)
- Increased transparency may also decrease confidence unless there is **proactive communication** about various factors inherent in risk management and risk assessment :
 - **Uncertainties** (of different types, e.g. measurement **versus** who is affected)
 - **Methodological issues** (e.g. probabilistic **versus** deterministic risk assessment)
 - **Variabilities** across populations
 - **Values** used in the decision-making process (**management and assessment**)
- EXPLICIT co-operation between natural and social sciences

Cross Cultural Differences –Trust and information Sources about GM Foods



Consumer Confidence in Food Safety Management

- What drives consumer confidence in food safety?
- What factors drive changes in confidence?
- What consequences might arise?

Consumer Trust in Food Safety Risk Management

- Who *trusts* whom to provide information and protect consumers?
- Does this vary *cross-culturally*?

Key factors influencing consumer perceptions of food risk management



(Van Kleef et al., 2005 - EU SAFE FOODS project, CT-2004-506446 WP4 social representation study)

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- But should we be discussing *risk – benefit* analysis??

The social amplification of risk

- External events may influence public risk perceptions, through
 - amplification (increase)
 - attenuation (decrease)

Did this happen in Europe in the case of GM foods ?

The genetically modified tomato paste – accepted by consumers (1996)

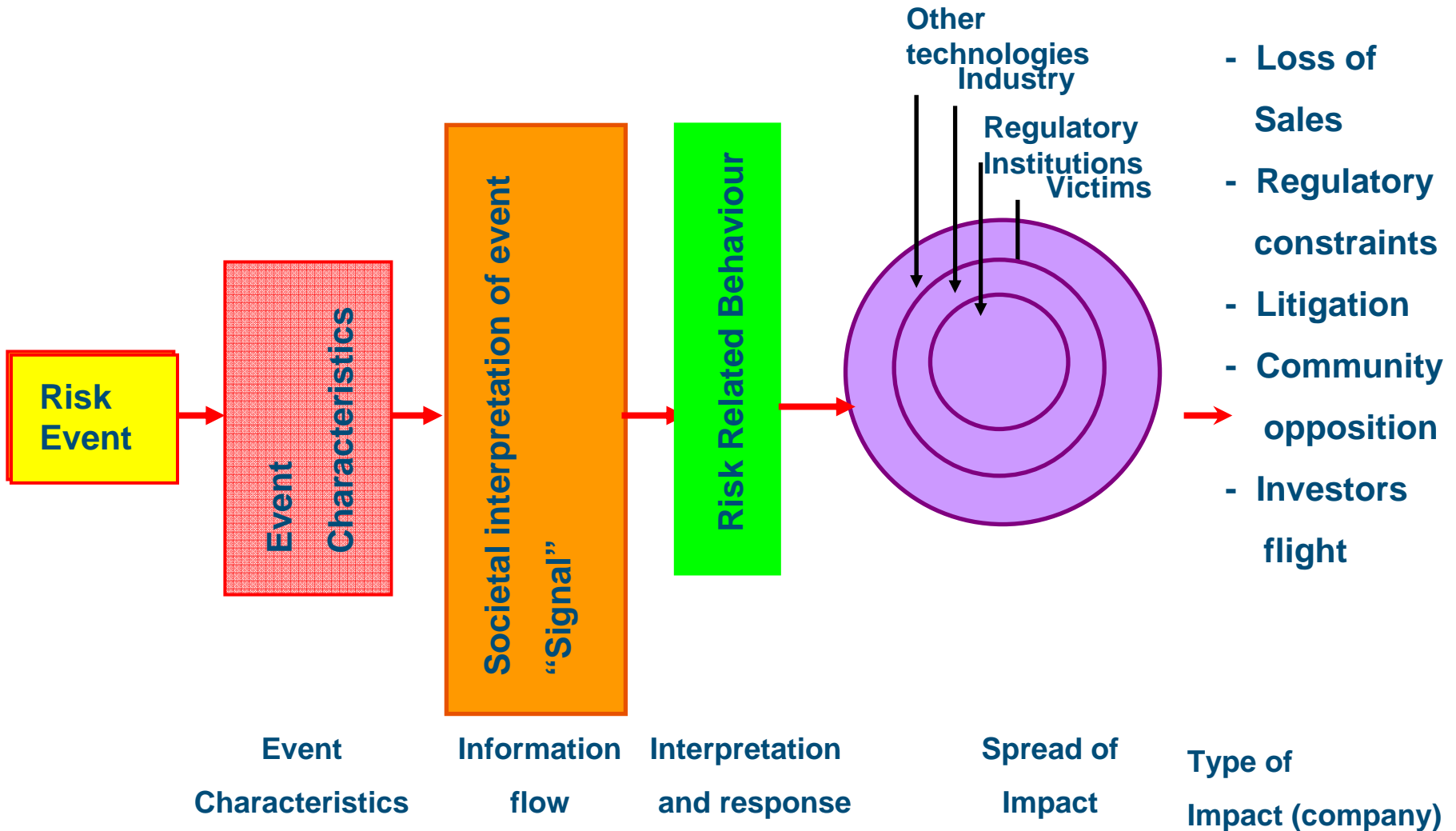
- Consumer choice (voluntary consumption)
- Consumer benefit
- No interest to media



Clearly labelled
therefore traceable

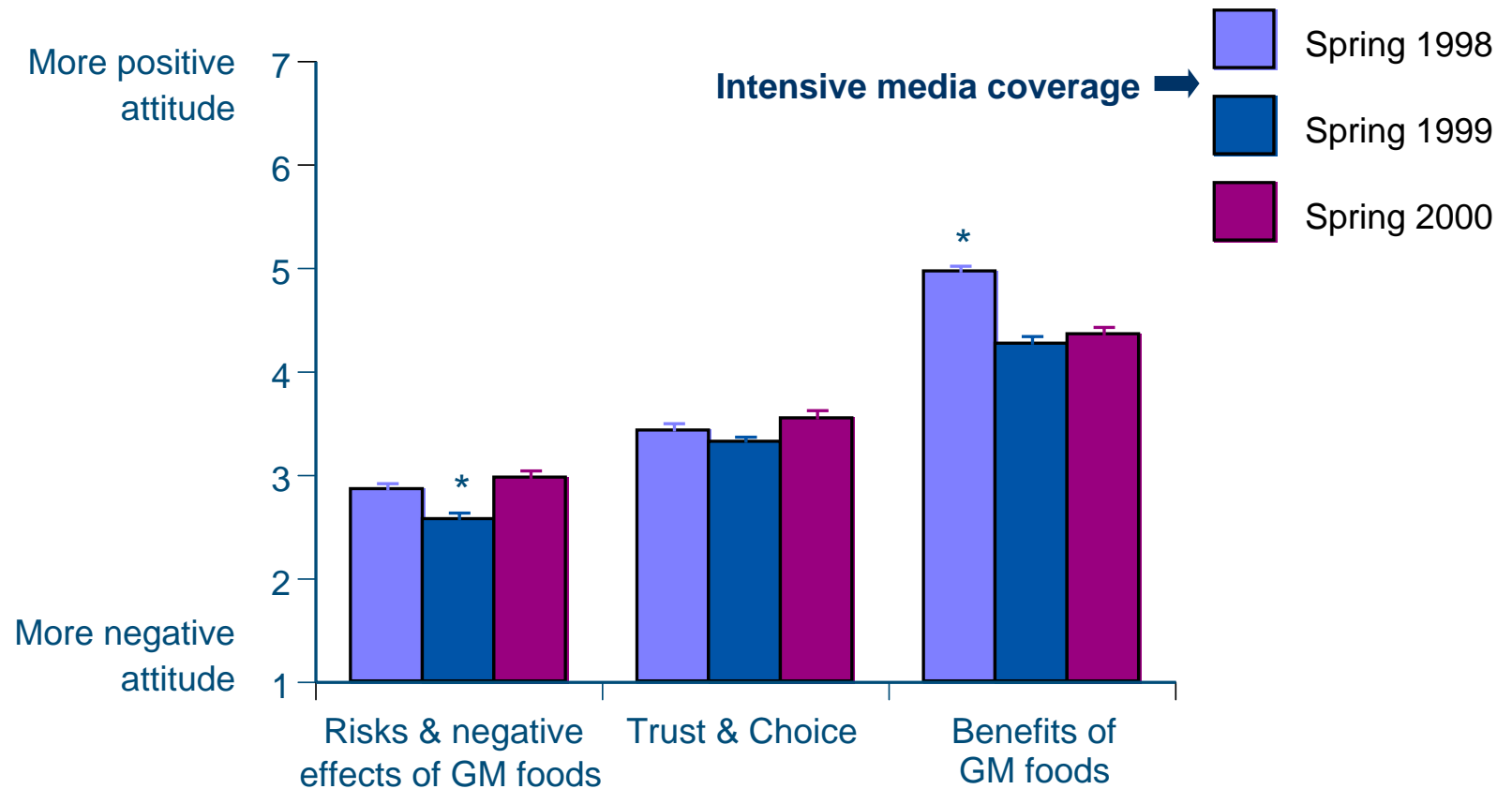


The social amplification of risk





Social amplification of risk
Change in UK consumer attitudes

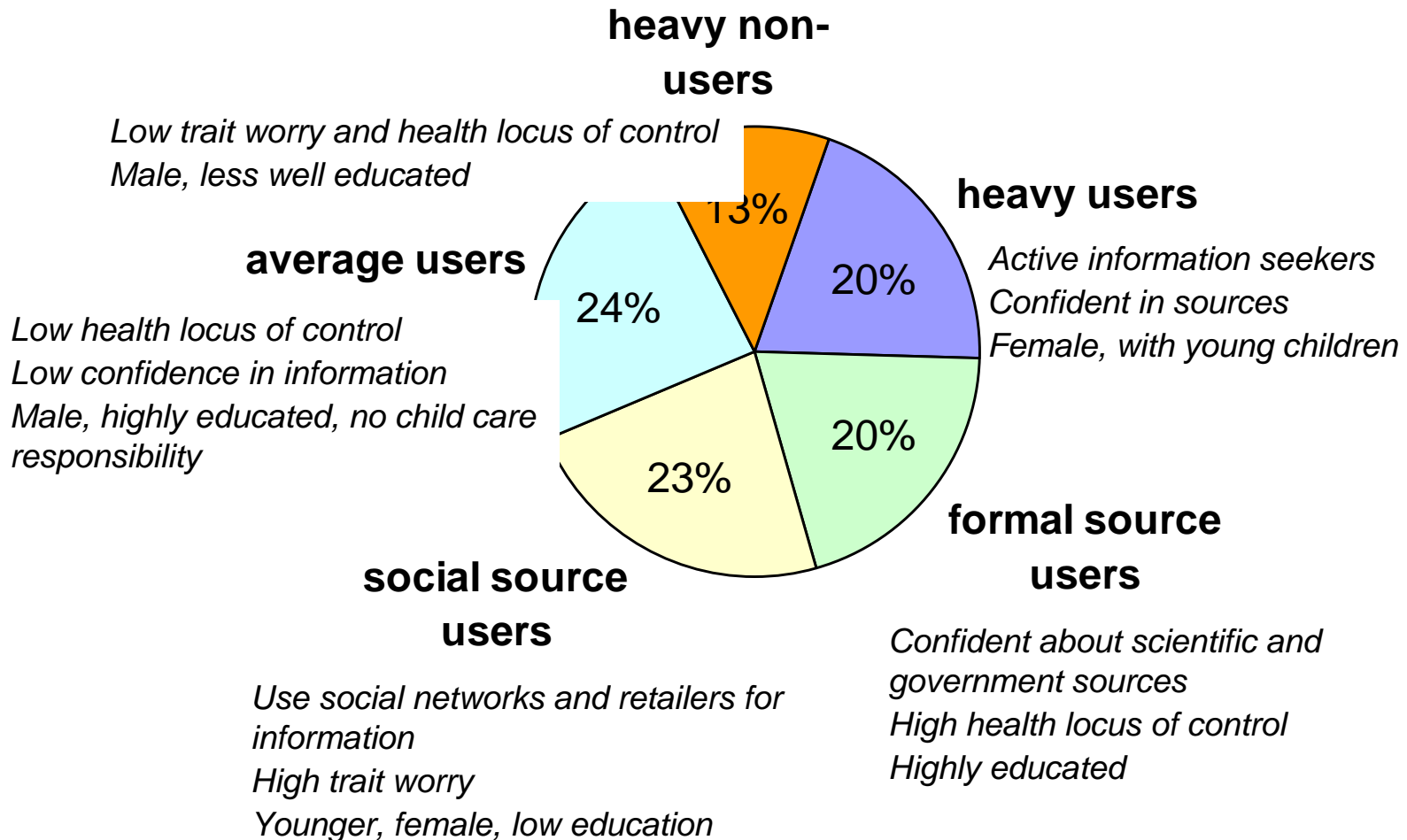


(Frewer *et al.*, 2002)



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- Individual differences in health beliefs and information needs

Individual Differences in Seeking Food Safety Information



(Kornelis, Frewer and de Jonge, preparation)

Conclusions (1)

- As natural science knowledge about **risk variability** increases (for example, as more is known about individual susceptibilities to risks through advances in genomic research), there will be increased need for **targetted communication** for those at risk (for example, **obesity** or **unhealthy food choices** on one hand, **nutrigenomics** on the other)
- New consumer concerns will arise as new technologies emerge (e.g. **post-genomic technologies, nanotechnology**)
- Risk-**benefit** communication important

Conclusions (2)

- Communication needs to focus on risk-benefit trade-off
- Individual differences in acceptance of bioactive ingredients



Thank you!

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