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Current Perspectives on BMC for Large-Scale Food Fortification

Narrative Dynamics in Food Fortification: Analysing Perceptions and Engagement with LSFF and BMC

September 2025

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Executive Summary

This report explores the narratives shaping perceptions of Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF) and Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC), examining how different stakeholders understand, evaluate, and engage with these technologies. While LSFF remains one of the most effective interventions for addressing micronutrient deficiencies and BMC offers promising opportunities to improve nutrient stability and delivery, broader industry engagement has been more limited than anticipated. The report finds that this challenge is driven not only by scientific, technical, or regulatory considerations, but also by competing narratives that influence how stakeholders perceive risks, benefits, and opportunities.

The analysis identifies a significant divergence between the perspectives of public health and scientific communities and those of industry stakeholders. Public health actors tend to frame LSFF and BMC as evidence-based solutions to malnutrition and part of a broader social responsibility agenda. By contrast, industry stakeholders primarily assess these technologies through considerations of regulatory certainty, consumer perception, market demand, economic feasibility, and long-term business viability. This difference in narrative framing has contributed to misunderstandings and reduced engagement.

The report further highlights how broader political and economic shifts in Europe are reshaping the context in which LSFF and BMC are discussed. Increasing emphasis on resilience, competitiveness, strategic autonomy, and innovation is changing the language through which policy priorities are communicated. As a result, narratives centred exclusively on development assistance or humanitarian responsibility are becoming less effective in securing support from policymakers and industry leaders. Positioning LSFF and BMC within broader discussions on food security, innovation, economic resilience, and strategic investment is likely to create stronger engagement.

The report identifies four prominent narrative communities that shape discussions around food fortification and food additives: those who prioritise natural foods and are sceptical of additives; those who embrace innovation and health optimisation; those who view food fortification through the lens of food sovereignty and external influence; and those who see fortification as a systemic solution to malnutrition. Each narrative is rooted in distinct values, emotions, and assumptions that influence attitudes towards LSFF and BMC.

Overall, the report concludes that advancing LSFF and BMC requires more than scientific evidence and regulatory clarity. Success will depend on the ability to develop narratives that resonate across stakeholder groups, avoid polarising framings, and emphasise shared objectives. By aligning messaging with current political, economic, and industry priorities while maintaining a clear focus on public health outcomes, stakeholders can help build trust, strengthen collaboration, and support the wider adoption of innovative food fortification solutions.

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1. Introduction

Vitamin A deficiency remains a severe global health challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where it leads to blindness, weakened immune systems, and increased child mortality. For decades, large-scale food fortification (LSFF) has been one of the most effective public health interventions, helping to combat micronutrient deficiencies and improve population health outcomes. However, while traditional fortification methods have played a crucial role, new challenges demand innovative solutions. Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC, INS 1205) presents one of several such promising advancements, offering a more efficient way to stabilise and deliver essential nutrients while enhancing the effectiveness of existing fortification efforts and will be used as a case study for this report.

However, despite its promise, industry engagement has been more limited than anticipated. Several factors contribute to this hesitancy, including regulatory uncertainties, production costs, and consumer perceptions shaped by broader public discussions on food safety and emerging technologies. To address these concerns, this report complements the paper entitled " The Use of Basic Methacrylate Polymer (BMC) in Large Scale Food Fortification (LSFF): A Regulatory Overview " by providing an in-depth exploration of narrative dynamics surrounding LSFF and BMC. By analysing these narratives, this study seeks to identify where misunderstandings arise and how they shape engagement with food fortification efforts. As food fortification policies evolve, stakeholders - including scientists, policymakers, industry leaders, and consumers - approach these interventions through distinct and sometimes conflicting narrative frameworks, influencing their perceptions of both risks and benefits.

The timing of this report is critical. As global food security concerns intensify and regulatory landscapes evolve, discussions around food have become increasingly contentious. Furthermore, the EU is navigating shifting geopolitical and economic landscapes, where investments in nutrition and food fortification can play a critical role in enhancing strategic industries, economic resilience, and global influence. These factors make it essential to examine the narratives shaping engagement with LSFF and BMC to ensure that food fortification remains a viable and effective public health strategy.

At the same time, recent years have seen stark shifts in public and political narratives, driven by growing polarisation, societal malaise, economic inequality, and a global cost-of-living crisis. These shifts have profoundly shaped policy debates, including those surrounding development aid, food security, and global nutrition. The growing influence of right-wing political forces within the EU has further marginalised discussions on development aid and large-scale public health measures, limiting their perceived importance in policy and industry decision-making. Simultaneously, as the United States signals reductions in its global development commitments, Europe's role as a global leader in food security and nutrition policy has never been more critical.

By leveraging insights from narrative analysis, this report provides strategic recommendations for bridging the gap between different stakeholders and developing a constructive framework to shift the dynamics of engagement around LSFF and methods of fortification, such as BMC. Through an in-depth examination of the narratives shaping public and industry perceptions, it aims to clarify barriers to the wider adoption of these technologies and identify opportunities to foster trust, alignment, and collaboration in advancing nutrition solutions. Understanding and addressing these evolving narratives will be key to ensuring that food fortification remains an effective, trusted, and widely accepted public health intervention.

a) Narrative Analysis

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i. Relevance of Narratives

Narratives are more than just stories; they are deeply ingrained cognitive frameworks through which we process information and assign meaning, fundamentally shaping our perception of the world around us. Narratives are context-specific, fluid, and constantly evolving according to individual, societal, and global shifts in reality.

It is crucial to recognise that everyone operates within their own narrative frameworks, whether consciously or not, and that these frameworks profoundly shape how we interpret objective facts. To frame this concept, narratives can be likened to sentences in language: narratives give structure and meaning to facts, much like sentences give coherence to words. While words alone may convey isolated meanings, sentences form broader, more understandable ideas. Similarly, facts acquire deeper significance when woven into narratives, making them more impactful and relatable.

Narratives can thus be understood as the tools our brains use to organise facts into meaning. They define how we comprehend the world and are co-created by societies to establish common visions. The power of narratives lies in their ability to bind communities together through shared interpretations of reality, but they also have the potential to divide and polarise.

ii. Key Dimensions of Narratives

Narratives operate along three critical dimensions:

- **Structure:** This encompasses the underlying values and progression of the narrative, determining whether situations are perceived as improving or deteriorating. Structure shapes the storyline by identifying protagonists, antagonists, and the goals or conflicts driving the narrative.
- **Code:** Code refers to the symbols, language, and characters within the narrative. These elements influence how the story is told and received, shaping emotional and cognitive responses from the audience.
- **Community:** Community refers to the groups that share and perpetuate the narrative. These spaces serve as forums where the narrative is communicated, maintained, and reinforced.

iii. Why Narratives Matter

Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman highlights how our brains employ heuristic codes and shortcuts to interpret the world, often unconsciously, attributing subjective values to concepts of 'good' and 'bad' (Kahneman, D. (2011). "Thinking, Fast and Slow"). Understanding these cognitive biases and symbolic frameworks is vital for fostering genuine dialogue.

For example, the 5Star Movement in Italy shifted its stance on vaccines from opposition to neutrality during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, vaccines symbolised big pharma—a villain in their narrative. However, as COVID-19 reshaped global narratives, vaccines became symbols of economic liberation for ordinary people, aligning with the movement's foundational values (Biorcio, R., & Natale, P. (2021). "The Five Star Movement and the Vaccine Debate in Italy").

This understanding of narratives is not merely theoretical. Nelson Mandela, in engaging with Afrikaners, transitioned from polarising debates to solution-oriented discussions by addressing mutual concerns and fears (Mandela, N. (1994). "Long Walk to Freedom"). This approach demonstrates that understanding

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narratives is not about changing minds but changing the conversation, creating space for new perspectives and solutions.

iv. Lessons

Despite the promise of LSFF and BMC, industry engagement has been more limited than anticipated. This report provides a narrative-based analysis to better understand why this disconnect exists, particularly within the European context, where regulatory concerns, public scepticism, and industry hesitancy shape the discourse around food fortification. By examining the underlying tensions and misalignments between stakeholders, it identifies key areas where engagement can be strengthened.

Bridging these gaps requires more than technological solutions—it demands a shift in how LSFF and BMC are communicated, understood, and integrated into broader European food security and public health strategies. As the EU navigates evolving geopolitical and economic landscapes, ensuring alignment between industry, policymakers, and the public will be critical to making these interventions both scientifically effective and widely accepted.

2. Shifting political priorities in Europe

In recent years, the European Union (EU) has faced a rapidly evolving political landscape marked by economic, geopolitical, and security transformations. As the EU navigates a period of heightened global tensions, internal fragmentation, and urgent technological and industrial shifts, its political priorities have undergone significant realignment. These changes are driven not only by external pressures—including geopolitical instability, energy security concerns, and shifting global trade dynamics—but also by the need to strengthen Europe's strategic position and internal cohesion.

At the heart of this transformation overarching priorities:

1. **Defence and Security** → The EU has moved toward a more assertive stance on defence policy, military coordination, and resilience against external threats. The war in Ukraine, rising geopolitical competition, and concerns over strategic dependencies have reinforced the need for greater investment in European defence capabilities, supply chain security, and crisis preparedness. This shift is reshaping discussions on economic sovereignty, innovation, and industrial policy, as security is no longer seen as separate from economic resilience.
2. **Competitiveness and Strategic Autonomy** → The EU is increasingly focused on reducing dependence on external actors in critical sectors, including technology, energy, and food security. The push for industrial competitiveness, innovation, and sustainable economic growth is now deeply intertwined with efforts to maintain European leadership in global markets while ensuring supply chain resilience. Investments in new technologies, industrial capacity, and regulatory frameworks are shaping policies across sectors, including public health and food fortification.

These shifts have profound implications for regulatory decisions, industry incentives, and public-private collaboration. As the EU reorients its priorities toward security, resilience, and economic self-sufficiency, policies affecting nutrition, health technologies, and food fortification are being reframed through a new strategic lens. Understanding how these changing priorities influence engagement with LSFF and BMC is essential for ensuring that food fortification remains a relevant and well-integrated component of Europe's broader policy agenda.

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This section provides an overview of how these political transitions are reshaping industry engagement, innovation policy, and public health strategies, setting the stage for the narrative analysis that follows.

b) Main Narratives Underpinning the Shift

The EU's transition towards greater defence and security capabilities on one side and enhanced competitiveness and strategic autonomy on the other is not just a policy shift—it is also a narrative transformation. The way these priorities are framed in political discourse, media, and public debate directly impacts how policies are shaped, justified, and implemented. Understanding these narratives is crucial for grasping how LSFF and BMC fit within this broader strategic realignment.

i. The Resilience Narrative: "Europe Must Secure Its Future"

At the core of the EU's evolving priorities is a narrative of resilience and self-sufficiency. This narrative is driven by a growing recognition that Europe must reduce its dependence on external actors in critical industries, technology, and resources. The war in Ukraine, global supply chain disruptions, and tensions with China and the United States have reinforced the idea that Europe's future stability depends on its ability to defend itself, produce its own strategic goods, and reduce external vulnerabilities.

- In Defence and Security → This narrative has fuelled discussions around military investments, defence procurement, and coordinated security policies. The EU is increasingly positioning itself as a more autonomous geopolitical actor, reducing reliance on NATO while strengthening its own strategic capabilities.
- In Competitiveness and Strategic Autonomy → This same narrative is shaping economic policies, with an emphasis on reshoring production, investing in European industrial capacity, and securing technological sovereignty. This extends to sectors like energy, pharmaceuticals, and food security, where Europe is actively reducing reliance on global supply chains.

ii. The Pragmatic Sovereignty Narrative: "Strategic Autonomy Without Isolation"

While strategic autonomy is a dominant theme, the EU is careful to avoid framing this shift as protectionist or isolationist. Instead, a parallel narrative has emerged—one that balances self-reliance with global engagement.

→ "Europe should reduce dependencies, but not cut itself off from the world."
→ "Strategic autonomy is about being a stronger partner, not retreating from global cooperation."

This narrative is shaping policy discussions on trade, technology partnerships, and investment in innovation. It seeks to ensure that while the EU strengthens its internal capabilities, it remains competitive and outward-looking.

iii. The Security-Health Nexus Narrative: "Food, Energy, and Health Are Part of Security"

One of the biggest shifts in European policymaking is the recognition that security is no longer just about military defence—it extends to health, food, and energy.

→ "A secure Europe is one that can feed itself, power itself, and protect the health of its people."
→ "Supply chain disruptions and global crises have shown that food security is national security."

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This is directly shaping the policy landscape around food fortification and health innovations like BMC. The push for nutritional resilience, enhanced public health systems, and greater food security is now being discussed in the same breath as defence and energy security.

iv. The Innovation-Competitiveness Narrative: "Europe Must Lead, Not Lag"

In a world where technological leadership translates into geopolitical power, Europe's ability to innovate is becoming a core part of its strategic priorities.

→ "Europe must not fall behind in key industries like AI, biotech, and advanced manufacturing."
→ "If we don't invest in our own innovation, we will be dependent on others who set the rules."

This narrative has led to a stronger push for industrial policy, subsidies for innovation, and a regulatory environment that encourages European-led technological advancements. Food and nutrition innovations, including LSFF and BMC, are part of this broader effort to ensure Europe remains a leader in public health and food security technologies.

v. The Economic Resilience Narrative: "Strategic Investment Over Short-Term Costs"

With economic pressures rising, European policymakers are increasingly arguing that strategic investments must take precedence over short-term financial concerns.

→ "Yes, new technologies and policies require investment, but the cost of inaction is far greater."
→ "A resilient economy is one that prioritises long-term stability over short-term gains."

This has influenced how governments and industries approach investments in critical infrastructure, energy transitions, and industrial policy. The same rationale is being applied to food fortification and health interventions, where ensuring long-term nutritional security is seen as a strategic investment rather than an immediate expense. The Commission emphasises the importance of reducing Europe's dependencies, particularly in critical sectors like energy and raw materials. Narratives around the Clean Industrial Deal, for instance, highlight how decarbonising industries and investing in renewable energy are not only environmentally sound but also key to reducing Europe's vulnerability to external shocks.

c) Implications of the Shift

Over the past 9–12 months, the EU's political priorities have undergone a rapid and significant transformation, reshaping nearly every policy area. Narratives that were highly effective just five years ago—such as the Green Deal, driven by the Fridays for Future movement—have all but disappeared. Moralistic, values-driven narratives that once mobilised support are not only losing traction but are increasingly vulnerable to weaponisation by anti-establishment movements.

This pattern is not unique to food security or development aid—it has already played out in debates over migration, vaccines, climate policy, and, most recently, ODA. Issues that were once framed around global responsibility and collective action are now being recast as threats to national sovereignty, economic stability, or individual freedoms.

Understanding why this shift is happening requires deeper narrative analysis. The way these narratives are constructed—who they position as the "hero" and the "villain," how they appeal to emotions, and the assumptions they rest on—determines their effectiveness and their susceptibility to backlash. These

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dynamics will be explored in the coming chapters to assess how LSFF and BMC can be positioned within today's shifting narrative landscape in a way that fosters engagement rather than resistance.

d) Conclusion: Navigating the Political Narrative Landscape

The evolving political landscape in Brussels has fundamentally reshaped how food security and LSFF are positioned within EU policymaking. What was once primarily a public health and development issue must now be framed within broader strategic priorities—namely economic competitiveness, resilience, and security.

The fragmentation of the European Parliament, combined with the growing influence of centre-right, nationalist, and pro-market forces, has led to a shift away from morality-driven narratives and toward arguments rooted in strategic necessity and economic value. While support remains for food security initiatives, policies must be aligned with Europe's drive for self-sufficiency, industrial leadership, and geopolitical stability.

To navigate this changing environment, LSFF and BMC advocacy must be recalibrated to resonate with key political narratives:

- For security-focused policymakers, food fortification must be framed as a pillar of Europe's resilience strategy, ensuring that the EU can withstand global shocks and reduce dependencies.
- For pro-market and liberal forces, LSFF and BMC must be positioned as drivers of industrial innovation and global competitiveness, reinforcing Europe's leadership in food and biotech sectors.
- For progressive and sustainability-driven actors, these technologies should be integrated into climate action, social equity, and food system transformation agendas.

In this shifting narrative landscape, finding common ground across political divides will be essential to maintaining policy momentum for food fortification. The following chapters will explore how existing narratives around LSFF and BMC can be refined, adapted, and strategically communicated to secure broad-based political and industry support.

3. A tale of two perspectives

Despite the promise of LSFF and BMC, industry engagement has been more limited than anticipated. This disconnect is not simply a matter of technical feasibility or public health priorities but rather a reflection of fundamentally different narrative frameworks shaping how key stakeholders perceive these technologies. While scientific and public health communities emphasise innovation and moral responsibility, industry actors assess LSFF and BMC through the lens of regulatory stability, consumer perception, and long-term market viability. These differing perspectives create misalignment in expectations, priorities, and engagement strategies, ultimately slowing adoption.

This chapter examines the two dominant narratives driving this divide, exploring their underlying assumptions, emotional drivers, and structural differences. It also identifies narrative bridges—where alignment and shared objectives can be found - and narrative traps, where rigid framings reinforce division. By understanding these dynamics, we can develop more effective messaging strategies, foster alignment, and create pathways for stronger collaboration between public health advocates, the scientific community, and industry leaders.

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Building on the previous chapter's exploration of Europe's shifting political landscape, this analysis situates LSFF and BMC within broader discussions on economic resilience, security, and strategic autonomy. Identifying ways to reframe these technologies in alignment with current policy priorities and industry realities is essential for securing engagement and ensuring that LSFF and BMC can fulfil their potential in addressing global nutrition challenges.

e) NARRATIVE 1 – The Systemic Solution

(Scientific and Public Health Communities: Emphasising Innovation and Moral Responsibility)

This narrative frames LSFF and BMC as essential, science-driven interventions to combat malnutrition globally. It reflects the perspective of scientists, public health advocates, donors, and development organisations who view food fortification as a moral and practical imperative, particularly for addressing nutrition challenges in low-income countries.

At its core, this narrative is built on the idea that Western countries, global institutions, and corporate actors have a responsibility to support developing nations in the fight against malnutrition. LSFF and BMC are seen as powerful, cost-effective tools that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Narrative Frame:

Western countries have the responsibility of helping developing countries combat malnutrition. With innovative techniques, we can reach the Sustainable Development Goals more easily. It is part of corporate responsibility to fortify food products with the necessary micronutrients.

Deeper Messages and Underlying Values

Solidarity:

- This perspective assumes that scientists, industry leaders, and philanthropists have a moral duty to help those who are less fortunate.
- Malnutrition is framed as an avoidable crisis, and LSFF/BMC as a straightforward solution that wealthier nations can implement to aid vulnerable populations.
- Corporate responsibility is central - businesses are expected adopt food fortification as a way of giving back to society.

Empathy:

- The narrative is reinforced by stories and imagery that evoke compassion - non-white mothers and children, food aid distribution, and human suffering that can be "solved" through fortification.
- Data and research take a backseat to emotionally compelling storytelling that highlights the urgency of addressing malnutrition.

Efficacy:

- This community prioritises efficient, science-based interventions that maximise impact at minimal cost.
- The focus is on low-cost, scalable solutions that can be quickly deployed in the Global South.

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- Effective philanthropy is a driving force—funders and institutions want to see measurable success in tackling malnutrition.

Key Phrases Associated with This Narrative:

"Malnutrition," "Development," "Science-based," "Philanthropy," "Global South," "Low-income countries," "Solution."

Emotions Evoked:

✓ Piety – A sense of duty to help those in need.

✓ Compassion – The belief that intervention is necessary to prevent suffering.

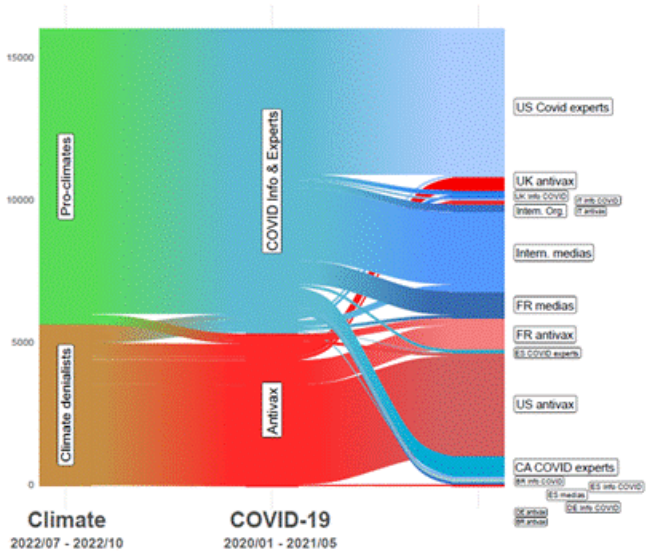
✓ Empathy – A connection to vulnerable populations, particularly mothers and children.

Implications for Engagement:

This narrative has historically been effective in driving LSFF adoption, particularly within development organisations, donor networks, and philanthropic initiatives. However, in the current political landscape, it faces growing resistance as morality-driven narratives become increasingly contested (as discussed in the previous chapter). We have seen how narratives structured in this way have been increasingly weaponised starting from *migration,* moving on to *vaccines* during the COVID-19 pandemic and then to the *climate* debate. It is now taking aim at *development* narratives. In fact, a deeper look at the correlation between narrative communities on these different themes show that there is a remarkable correlation underlining the fact that this is probably not about the issue itself at all but rather about broader messages and meta-narratives implied by the narrative structure.

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Figure 1- Correlation between Climate and Covid narrative communities



Source: NODES (2024). The Narratives that Shape our World - Narrative Analysis Report [online] available at: D2.2 Report on the Narrative Analysis (nodes.eu)

One of the key challenges of this framing is that it risks triggering a deep-seated "narrative trap" present in European societies - the idea that "to do good, one must necessarily suffer." This subconscious framing positions LSFF and BMC not as an opportunity, but as a necessary sacrifice - one that requires corporations and governments to prioritise moral duty over economic or strategic benefits. As a result, this perspective unintentionally reinforces scepticism from both industry and policymakers, who may view fortification efforts as charitable obligations rather than viable, scalable solutions that align with Europe's economic and security interests. This aligns with findings from the European Narrative Observatory (Stäel von Holstein et al., 2024), which identified similar mechanisms in the weaponisation of morality-driven narratives across multiple policy areas.

To effectively engage stakeholders beyond the traditional development sphere, this narrative needs to be adapted so that LSFF and BMC are not perceived as acts of self-sacrifice, but rather as strategic investments that generate mutual benefits—for both Europe and the communities they aim to serve. The next section will explore the contrasting industry perspective, which prioritises market viability, regulatory stability, and long-term economic sustainability.

f) NARRATIVE 2 – The Industry Perspective: Strategic Investment and Long-Term Viability

While the scientific and public health communities frame LSFF and BMC as moral and scientific imperatives, the food industry, ingredient suppliers, and manufacturers engage with these technologies through a fundamentally different lens - one that prioritises market dynamics, regulatory stability, and long-term economic viability.

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For industry stakeholders, adopting LSFF and BMC is not a question of whether it is morally right, but whether it makes strategic and commercial sense. This perspective does not reject fortification outright but requires that it be viable within existing business models, regulatory landscapes, and consumer expectations.

Narrative Frame:

New food technologies must fit within existing regulatory frameworks, align with consumer expectations, and present a clear business case. Without market demand or regulatory certainty, even the most scientifically sound innovations face barriers to adoption.

Deeper Messages and Underlying Values

Regulatory Stability:

- Companies need assurances that LSFF and BMC will be supported by long-term EU policy, rather than being subject to shifting regulatory pressures or consumer-driven backlash.

Market Demand & Consumer Perception:

- Unlike in public health or development sectors, where scientific consensus is the driving force, industry engagement depends on consumer trust and purchasing behaviour.
- European consumers are increasingly sceptical of "processed" or "artificial" food interventions, making companies wary of adopting technologies that could trigger negative public reactions.
- Even if LSFF and BMC offer health benefits, they must be framed and marketed in a way that aligns with consumer trends, such as clean-label preferences, natural ingredients, and transparency in sourcing.

Economic Feasibility & Competitive Advantage:

- For industry players, LSFF and BMC adoption must be cost-effective, scalable, and provide a clear competitive edge.
- Companies evaluate whether fortification aligns with profitability goals, return on investment, and operational efficiency.
- Without market incentives or strong policy backing, businesses may perceive LSFF and BMC as unnecessary costs rather than value-generating investments.

Key Phrases Associated with This Narrative:

"Regulatory certainty," "Consumer trust," "Market viability," "Scalability," "Cost-effectiveness," "Risk management," "Competitive edge."

Emotions Evoked:

✓ Pragmatism – A focus on feasibility, long-term sustainability, and risk management.

✓ Scepticism – Concern over consumer acceptance, regulatory hurdles, and potential liabilities.

✓ Caution – A preference for incremental adoption rather than rapid implementation.

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Implications for Engagement

This perspective presents both challenges and opportunities for LSFF and BMC adoption in Europe.

Challenges:

Unlike the public health community, the industry does not respond strongly to moral responsibility narratives but instead requires clear business incentives, risk assessments, and regulatory alignment. This is even more true in today's climate.

Consumer scepticism toward synthetic food innovations means that industry players are hesitant to adopt technologies that might erode brand trust or face backlash from advocacy groups.

The absence of harmonised EU policy and regulatory clarity on LSFF and BMC makes it difficult for companies to commit to long-term investments.

Opportunities:

If LSFF and BMC are framed as enhancing food quality, supporting economic resilience, and aligning with consumer expectations (e.g., sustainability, clean-label, health-conscious trends), industry engagement may increase.

Stronger–backing, incentives, and harmonised EU policies could reduce uncertainty and encourage investment.

By bridging the gap between public health goals and business interests, LSFF and BMC could be positioned as both scientifically necessary and commercially advantageous.

g) Bridging the Gap: Understanding Differences and Aligning Perspectives

As highlighted in our initial narrative analysis, the two dominant perspectives encountered within the stakeholder outreach—those of the public health and scientific community and those of industry stakeholders—approach LSFF and BMC through fundamentally different framings, priorities, and objectives. While both communities ultimately share an interest in improving nutrition, their differing codes of communication, decision-making frameworks, and institutional imperatives have led to misunderstandings and missed opportunities for alignment.

Our stakeholder discussions confirmed that these differences are not due to outright opposition but rather reflect distinct ways of assessing the role and impact of LSFF and BMC. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing strategies that foster engagement, bridge gaps in perception, and ensure that LSFF remains a viable and widely accepted intervention.

Our stakeholder discussions confirmed that misalignment between these two perspectives can slow engagement and adoption. The following areas emerged as recurring points of misunderstanding:

Why Some Messages Resonate More Than Others

Scientific innovation and social impact:

For organisations like Particles for Humanity (PfH), the driving force behind BMC has been a clear and urgent humanitarian mission.

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The narrative framing has largely revolved around scientific ingenuity meeting moral responsibility: "Vitamin A deficiency is a major global problem, but thanks to technological advancements, we now have a simple, cost-effective solution. The question is not whether we should act, but how quickly we can implement it."

This framing draws from a longstanding tradition in global health and development, where the moral and scientific case for intervention is expected to drive action.

Strategic investment and long-term viability:

In contrast, for many industry players—from ingredient suppliers (DSM, BASF) to food companies (Nestlé, Unilever)—decision-making processes follow a different logic.

While social impact remains relevant, engagement with new technologies is typically shaped by three key considerations:

- Regulatory Stability → Will this technology fit within existing and future regulatory frameworks?
- Market Demand & Consumer Perception → Is there a clear pathway for consumer and government acceptance?
- Economic Feasibility → Does this technology present a compelling business case in terms of cost, scalability, and competitive advantage?

These actors operate within a different narrative framework—one that prioritises long-term market fit over immediate social need.

Neither of these perspectives is "right" or "wrong"—but they function on different logics. And when two groups speak from different narrative frameworks, it can be difficult to find common ground.

The Narrative Shift: Why the Moral Imperative Approach May No Longer Be Enough

Over the past decades, the dominant way of framing global challenges has undergone a subtle but important transformation. Whereas moral urgency and humanitarian responsibility once served as the primary drivers of large-scale action - from vaccine campaigns to international development aid - today, decision-making across industries and policy spheres is increasingly shaped by pragmatism, risk management, and tangible return on investment.

This shift is not unique to the food industry but reflects broader trends in how global priorities are positioned and addressed, as outlined in chapter 2 of this report. In climate policy, for instance, messaging has gradually moved away from appeals to moral responsibility - "we must act to save the planet"—toward narratives that emphasise economic incentives and strategic opportunity, such as "green investment is a smart business choice." A similar transformation has occurred in corporate sustainability, where companies are less responsive to broad ethical imperatives and more attuned to regulatory frameworks, competitive advantage, and long-term market positioning. Even in public health, we observe a growing emphasis on individual and economic benefits, with vaccine campaigns, for example, increasingly framed around the direct advantages for personal health and economic productivity rather than as a collective duty to protect others.

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For BMC, this shift in narrative framing carries important implications. While its scientific and humanitarian case remains strong, it may no longer be sufficient on its own to drive large-scale industry engagement. The challenge is not scepticism about the severity of vitamin A deficiency or the legitimacy of the proposed solution, but rather the way in which industry stakeholders assess new interventions.

One factor at play is what cognitive science refers to as narrative plausibility bias - the idea that a solution that appears too easy may be met with scepticism simply because it does not align with expectations about how complex global challenges are typically resolved. If a technology does not demand substantial effort, adaptation, or trade-offs, decision-makers may question whether it can truly be as effective as claimed. Additionally, narrative structures that emphasise sacrifice - where action is positioned as a moral necessity rather than an economic or strategic advantage - can sometimes create unintended resistance rather than momentum.

This does not mean that the case for BMC is weak - far from it. Instead, it suggests that reframing how the technology is positioned could make a significant difference in engagement. While the moral imperative behind BMC remains compelling, aligning its narrative more closely with the evolving priorities of industry—such as regulatory stability, market viability, and competitive advantage—could enhance its resonance with key stakeholders and facilitate broader adoption.

h) Strengthening Industry Engagement

To foster stronger alignment between BMC proponents and industry stakeholders, there is an opportunity to refine how the technology is positioned. While the existing emphasis on the scientific and humanitarian importance of fortification is well-founded, engaging industry actors requires an additional layer of strategic framing - one that aligns more closely with how businesses evaluate new technologies.

One key shift involves moving from a moral urgency narrative to one that presents BMC as a strategic opportunity. Rather than emphasising why companies should act based on ethical imperatives, the focus can be placed on why they would want to - because integrating BMC into their products strengthens portfolios, aligns with emerging regulatory expectations, and fits within broader trends in innovation and nutrition science. When positioned as a forward-looking investment rather than a philanthropic commitment, BMC can become part of a proactive business strategy rather than a reactive obligation.

Similarly, while scientific validation remains essential, industry decision-making often hinges on market validation - clear evidence of commercial viability. Companies are not only looking for proof that BMC is safe and effective but also that it is already in use, gaining traction, and meeting consumer and policy expectations. Demonstrating real-world adoption and highlighting early success stories can help establish credibility and reduce perceived risk. Therefore, having a company like GB Foods adopting the technology, as is already in the strategy of PfH, is an essential element to build trust and best-practice.

Another area of refinement involves language. While appeals to philanthropy and global health impact remain powerful in certain circles, they may not always resonate with industry leaders focused on market expansion, brand positioning, and competitive differentiation. Reframing BMC as a market-driven innovation rather than an intervention for low-income countries could help reposition it as a future-proofing strategy for product lines in high-growth regions, aligning with business goals rather than external obligations. This could also help with narrative acceptance in the countries that will be the end users of the product; countries that are also undergoing significant narrative shifts.

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Finally, shifting from external advocacy to industry-led engagement could play a key role in building trust and momentum. Rather than relying solely on external organisations to promote the benefits of BMC, leveraging early industry adopters as champions could provide a more compelling pathway for wider adoption. When businesses hear from their peers - companies that have already integrated BMC and seen positive results - they are more likely to perceive the technology as a viable and desirable innovation rather than an external initiative requiring justification.

Importantly, many of these strategic adjustments can be easily adapted to the BMC case, aligning with the way companies are already evaluating potential innovations. Our conversations with key stakeholders suggest that the key drivers for industry interest are the commercial ones and the challenges posed by current vitamin A delivery systems. However, there remain critical gaps in knowledge regarding the practical implications of adoption.

One of the main concerns is cost and comparative advantage. Many companies have limited visibility on what the large-scale implementation of BMC would cost and how it compares to existing solutions already in use. Without clear benchmarks on pricing, as well as who should bear the costs of testing, development, and reformulation, it remains difficult for companies to fully assess BMC's viability within their supply chains. Similarly, uncertainty about product efficacy in industrial settings has created hesitation. While initial research has demonstrated promising results, ongoing industrial trials will play a crucial role in addressing these concerns and providing the concrete performance data companies need to move forward.

By refining the narrative around cost, efficacy, and business value, BMC proponents can help bridge the existing gap in engagement, fostering a shared understanding of the technology's commercial potential and unlocking new pathways for adoption at scale.

i) Towards a Broader Shift in Food Narratives

This need for alignment between scientific innovation and commercial adoption is not unique to BMC. Across the food industry, the way new technologies, ingredients, and fortification strategies are introduced has increasingly been shaped by broader shifts in food narratives. In recent years, the food debate has expanded beyond nutrition and safety to encompass issues of sustainability, consumer trust, and corporate responsibility, all of which influence commercial decision-making.

For businesses, engaging with new food technologies is no longer just a matter of scientific validation - it is deeply tied to narrative sensibilities that shape consumer perception and regulatory landscapes. The food industry must navigate a complex web of expectations around health, environmental impact, and social responsibility, all of which inform how innovations like BMC are assessed and adopted.

In the next section, we explore how these larger narrative structures influence decision-making in the food industry and how BMC fits into these evolving debates. By understanding how food narratives shape commercial strategies, we can gain deeper insights into how innovations are positioned, received, and ultimately scaled.

4. The reframing of narratives on food

The global food industry is undergoing profound shifts, not just in terms of regulatory frameworks, sustainability demands, and technological innovations, but also in the way food itself is discussed and

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understood. Narratives play a crucial role in shaping how consumers, policymakers, and businesses engage with new technologies and food systems.

Historically, many discussions around fortification and food security have been shaped by humanitarian narratives that emphasise moral responsibility, urgency, and global development goals. However, as explored in previous sections, the commercial food industry does not necessarily operate within this framework. Instead, economic feasibility, market demand, regulatory predictability, and consumer perception play a more central role in how companies assess new technologies.

To understand the challenges facing BMC in LSFF, it is essential to step back and examine the broader shifts in food narratives - how ideas about nutrition, food technology, and responsibility have evolved and how these influence commercial decision-making today. By recognising these narrative currents, BMC proponents can refine their engagement strategies to align with existing industry priorities rather than working against them.

This chapter explores how food narratives have changed in recent years, how different stakeholders frame fortification and food technologies, and what this means for BMC's positioning within the industry.

i. The Changing Narrative Landscape of Food

In recent decades, food narratives have expanded beyond traditional concerns of nutrition, safety, and public health to include broader themes of sustainability, autonomy, consumer empowerment, and social justice. These shifts are not just rhetorical—they directly influence how businesses and consumers engage with food and technology.

Several key narrative trends have reshaped the food debate:

a. From Nutritional Deficiency to Personalised Nutrition

Historically, fortification was framed as a public health intervention, designed to correct micronutrient deficiencies at the population level.

Today, the focus has increasingly shifted towards personalised nutrition, wellness, and self-optimisation, where consumers view food choices as a way to enhance individual well-being rather than solve structural deficiencies.

This has led to the rise of biohacking, functional foods, and a consumer-driven interest in optimising health, which exists in tension with traditional fortification models.

b. From Science-Based Innovation to Consumer Trust and Transparency

While food technology has long been framed around scientific advancement, public scepticism toward highly processed or artificial ingredients has grown.

Consumers are more concerned with "naturalness," transparency, and control over what they eat - a challenge for technologies like BMC, which, while scientifically validated, may be perceived as overly synthetic.

c. From Philanthropy and Development to Equity and Food Sovereignty

In the past, food fortification was often framed through a development lens, with a focus on helping lower-income countries combat malnutrition.

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However, this framing is increasingly being challenged by food sovereignty movements that emphasise local control over food systems, resistance to multinational corporations, and scepticism toward Western-led interventions.
Fortified foods - particularly when developed by international actors—can be seen as imposing external solutions rather than supporting locally driven food security efforts.

These shifting narratives impact how businesses and policymakers assess new food technologies. If BMC continues to be framed as a humanitarian intervention, it may struggle to gain traction within an industry increasingly shaped by consumer empowerment, regulatory scrutiny, and localised approaches to food security.

ii. Understanding Narrative Communities in the Food debate

To navigate these shifts, it is crucial to understand the different narrative communities that shape food debates. These communities operate with distinct values, emotions, and underlying assumptions, which influence how they respond to fortification and food technologies.

We can broadly categorise these communities along two axes: support or scepticism toward food technology and whether they frame the issue at a personal or global level.

	Negative Perception of Additives	**Positive Perception of Additives**
Personal Level	**"Food Should Be Natural"** – Sceptical of additives and fortification, emphasising tradition, simplicity, and self-sufficiency.	**"Unlocking Hyperhealth"** – Views fortified foods and biohacking as a way to optimise health and achieve peak performance.
Global Level	**"Fortified Food as Control"** – Sees large-scale fortification as a form of neocolonialism or corporate influence over food systems.	**"Systemic Solution"** – Views fortification as a moral responsibility of developed nations to help combat malnutrition.

These communities are not rigid categories, but they illustrate the underlying tensions in how different actors engage with fortification.

For BMC, this means that engagement efforts must be carefully tailored. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work - instead, different framing strategies are needed to engage with different stakeholders effectively.

To understand how to use insights from narrative analysis RIE has developed the REFRAME methodology that we will use below to gain insights into how these different narrative communities operate.

j) Responsive Listening

The first step of this methodology is to learn to hear beyond words and uncover the underlying narrative structure. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that an atheist and a believer could talk for hours yet never truly understand one another; their differing worldviews would lead them to "talk past each other,"

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missing the underlying assumptions that shape their beliefs. Similarly, during the pandemic, attempts at real conversation between anti-vaccine and pro-vaccine communities were often ineffective.

The pro-vaccine movement frequently responded with scientific data and reports, yet for many in the anti-vaccine community, the debate wasn't primarily about vaccines. For some, it was about a perceived threat to personal freedom, while for others it was rooted in distrust of large corporations. By learning to read beyond the surface of what is being said, we can better understand the real issues at stake. Responsive listening allows us to identify the deeper concerns and motivations within a debate, enabling us to address what truly matters rather than talking around each other. This approach opens the door to dialogue that resonates more authentically and creates a foundation for constructive, meaningful engagement.

What are the different communities really saying?

Here we outline different narrative communities on BMC in LSFF and showcase the real message behind their narrative. The identified narrative communities can be organised as shown below given their negative or positive perception of BMC for LSFF and the scale which they represent:

	Negative	**Positive**
Personal level	Food should be "natural"	Unlocking hyperhealth
Global level	Fortified food to control	Systemic solution

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Narrative Community 1 – **Food should be "natural"**
Personal level, Negative towards BMC in LSFF

Narrative frame: "Food should be natural and without any additives. I want food as my grandma ate it. I don't trust these food additives, have they been properly tested? I don't think they are useful."
Deeper messages and underlying values:

- **Control and Agency**: Individuals want to be well-informed about the food products they consume. They feel it is hard to be able to navigate grocery shopping, since they feel like potential health risks are luring around every corner.
- **Protecting loved ones**: The concern around additives is most pressing when vulnerable consumers such as children or elderly people are involved. The attitude of protecting loved ones is reflected strongly in this narrative.
- **Restoring Connection to Nature**: An underlying desire to "get closer to nature" surfaces in this narrative. Especially for city dwellers, the sense of loss regarding their connection to the natural environment can be very large, informing their decisions on i.a. which food products to consume.
- **Moderation and Tradition**: Food additives are seen as superfluous and going against traditional food practices such as fermentation and conservation techniques. To protect this knowledge and uphold tradition, this narrative community feels it is better not to consume products with food additives.

Key frases: "chemicals", "ultra-processed", "laboratory", "man-made", "artificial"
Emotions evoked: distrust, self-protection, nostalgia
Extreme form: In an extreme form, this narrative feeds into conspiracy theories about poisoning. In this case, food additives are believed to pose serious health hazards, and are related to as diverse conditions as autism, gut issues and bipolar disorder.




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Narrative Community 2 – **Unlocking hyper health**
Personal level, Positive towards BMC in LSFF

Narrative frame: "Modern technologies provide huge opportunities for me to feel better than ever. By unlocking the power of forgotten plants, I have been able to gain back control over my health!"
Deeper messages and underlying values:

- **Trust in Science**: This narrative community is generally in favour of technological innovations in food and has high trust in science to boost health and help achieve other goals. It is believed that modern science has the power to unlock nature's archive of bioactive components and find ways to harness their potential for consumers. Both newly discovered exotic plants and re-discovered forgotten plants can be used to benefit the health of consumers via new and innovative ways of processing, making new combinations and marketing.
- **Wellbeing and self-development**: The micronutrients from these superfoods have a significance beyond being part of a complete diet in this narrative, with often almost mythical properties being ascribed to them. Contrary to Narrative Community 1 where food additives were described as the cause of an array of medical conditions, here they are seen as the antidote: a way of "hacking" the biological system to no longer experience fatigue, aging or stress.

Key phrases: "biohacking", "superfoods", "supplements", "secret ingredient"
Emotions evoked: inventiveness, self-improvement





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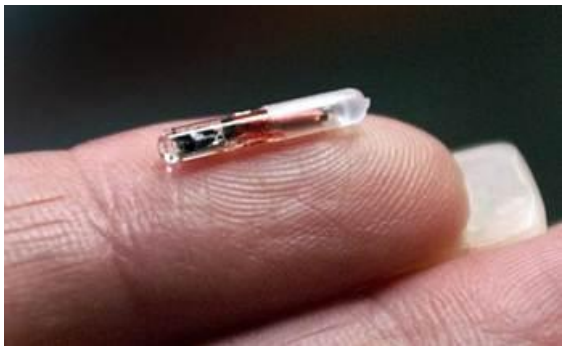
Narrative Community 3 – **Fortified food to control**
Global level, Negative towards BMC in LSFF

Narrative frame: "These imported fortified food products are a way of getting under the skin of our people. They are the new instalment in a long line of colonial and neocolonial histories of power directly targeting subjugated bodies. These products are not even available in Europe, why do they want to sell them to us? How can we trust that they are safe when it is the enemy that is feeding us this?"

Deeper messages and underlying values:

- **Food Sovereignty and Autonomy**: This narrative community cares deeply about the local production of food that is culturally appropriate. They generally oppose multi-national food companies that are said to disturb local markets by flooding them with cheap imported products. This informs their narrative on LSFF because it is mostly these staple commodities provided by multinational cooperations that are fortified.
- **Global Justice**: This narrative community is very aware of the history of unequal power relations with the Global North. They will in general be opposed to any initiative from the Global North that is specifically targeted towards the Global South. For this community, it is very important that the product used to fortify, in this case BMC, is also fully authorised in Europe/the US and is available on the market in these countries.
- **Distrust in Western science, Western cooperations, Western government and international development agencies**: Western science, cooperations and governments are all conflated into one enemy, an entity that is opposing the sovereignty of countries in the Global South. This leads to a general distrust in scientific innovations in food systems, with science being seen as a Western invention or practice.

Key phrases: "biopower", "under our skin", "poisoning", "weakening", "subjugating"
Emotions evoked: distrust, anger
Extreme version: Related to this narrative, some conspiracy theories exist about even more direct ways of controlling bodies with the use of innovative technologies such as chips, introduced into the body via fortified foods. Following this theory, these chips can be used by malign outside (Western) forces to track and collect data about individuals.



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Narrative Community 4 – **Systemic Solution**
Global level, Positive towards BMC in LSFF

Narrative frame: "Western countries have the responsibility of helping developing countries to combat malnutrition. With innovative techniques, we can reach the Sustainable Development Goals more and more easily. It is part of the corporate responsibility to fortify their food products with the necessary micronutrients."

Deeper messages and underlying values:

- **Solidarity**: There is an underlying sense that the community of rich and educated scientists and entrepreneurs have a responsibility towards the less fortunate. Especially in the field of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, conditions that are seemingly so easy to fix, the feeling of solidarity is very present.
- **Empathy**: The efforts of donors, developers and investors are stimulated by the exposure of stories and images triggering empathy rather than by abstract numbers and figures. In the realm of LSFF, this narrative abounds in images of non-white mothers and young children or people awaiting food distribution.
- **Efficacy**: For this narrative community, the efficacy with which solutions address the identified issues is of high importance. In LSFF, this leads to a focus on effective philanthropy and low-cost technologies.

Key phrases: "Malnutrition", "Development", "science-based", "philanthropy", "Global South", "low-income countries", "solution"

Emotions evoked: piety, compassion, empathy



ii. Eliminate Polarising Language

The second step of the REFRAME Methodology involves understanding the codes used by each community in order to avoid using language that is easily misunderstood by someone from a different community. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff's research in neuroscience reveals that certain words act as emotional triggers, activating deeply ingrained neural pathways and evoking powerful associations. These associations differ across narrative communities, often amplifying division and reinforcing entrenched positions. Words like "freedom," "sustainability," or "justice" may resonate positively with one group while alienating or even provoking scepticism in another, depending on their lived experiences, values, and worldviews.

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Conversations about food are always very emotional and have a very strong link to identity – this is particularly true in Europe. Much of the discourse around LSFF relies on moralising elements. In the "Food should be natural"-narrative, there is a moral obligation to protect loved ones against "artificial" food additives by making informed decisions. The use of words such as "protection" stress this tendency. In the "Unlocking hyperhealth"-narrative, there is a moral pressure to be the best version of yourself and realise your full health potential, emphasised by words like "self-realisation". The "Fortified food to control"-narrative drives on moral indignation towards foreign control and influence. Words like "defiance", "subjugation" and "resistance" stress this moralising aspect. Lastly, the "Systemic Solution"-narrative is informed by a moral imperative to "help the weak", with words like "saving lives" and "responsibility" underlining its importance. A strong presence of moralising elements can unintentionally spark misunderstanding and emotional responses. Moralising words can evoke feelings of guilt, resentment, or defensiveness depending on the audience, and may polarise discussions by reinforcing divisions rather than bridging them.

These words, while meaningful to some, can entrench opposition or alienate those with different worldviews. For example, the framing as LSFF as artificial by the "Food should be natural" community leads to opposition from the "Unlocking hyperhealth" community, which holds strong beliefs in the positive powers of new food technologies. Similarly, the framing as LSFF as an act of charity and benevolence by the "Systemic solution" community leads to indignation and resistance from the "Fortified food to control" community, who see in these intentions a desire to subjugate and control.

Neutral and inclusive alternatives can help bridge these divides. For instance:

- Instead of "charity" or "handouts, consider using "partnerships" or "collaborative support."
- Replace "natural" of "artificial" with "useful."
- Use "mutual benefits" or "cooperative solutions" rather than "global responsibility."
- Shift from "obligation" to "opportunity for growth and resilience."

Neutral language fosters an environment where participants feel less attacked or alienated, reducing friction and paving the way for mutual understanding. This approach does not mean diluting the message or avoiding complex issues—it means framing ideas in ways that resonate broadly and encourage exploration of shared values and cooperative solutions.

iii. Find Shared Objectives

The third element of the REFRAME Methodology shifts the focus on shared objectives. The narrative map outlined in the section "Responsive Listening" uncovers shared values and objectives, providing a foundation for collaborative action. This deeper understanding of the motivations and concerns driving different communities makes it easier to identify common ground—even in polarised discussions. By emphasising areas of convergence, the focus shifts from ideological differences to practical solutions, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

This approach not only bridges divides but also transforms dialogue by reframing it as a cooperative effort rather than a contest of ideas. Instead of aiming to "win" an argument, stakeholders work together to address shared challenges, creating an environment where trust can grow, compromises can be reached, and long-term, impactful change can take root.

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Common Threads Across the Narrative Communities

The analysis of narrative communities reveals that, despite their differences, many share similar desires and values when it comes to food and nutrition. These shared desires and values, while stemming from diverse perspectives, offer an opportunity to identify mutual objectives:

- **A desire for agency in food and nutrition choices:**
  Both the narrative communities that want to limit food additives and those that embrace them start from a desire to be able to make informed decisions about what and how they eat, and to be able to act upon these decisions. The enabling of this personal choice should be central to any narrative trying to bridge narrative divides.
- **A desire for good health and well-being:**
  Both the communities that want to limit food additives and those that embrace them do so from a desire to develop or maintain good health and well-being. Due to this desire, they over-emphasise the role of food additives in health and well-being, be it negatively or positively. In any narrative about LSFF, the role that food additives play in health and well-being should not be overestimated. To bridge narrative divides, it is more productive to present LSFF as only one element among many that contributes to a healthy diet and a high sense of well-being.
- **A desire to protect communities and loved ones:**
  Both the communities that want to limit food additives and those that embrace them do so from a desire to protect their respective communities and loved ones, either from the supposed risks of food additives or from the risks of nutrient deficiencies. An effective communication strategy should recognise the salience of this desire and can build upon it to find common ground between different narrative communities.
- **A desire to improve rather than maintain status quo:**
  All narrative communities see the current state as undesirable, although for very different reasons, and a clear desire and sense of direction for improving this state to an again very different better equivalent is shared. Hence, it is polarising to use an argument of conservatism against certain narrative communities. Rather, the shared desire to improve should be embraced by emphasising the ability of the food consumer to improve their health and wellbeing by intentionally consuming fortified foods.

These shared values create a framework for discussions on how LSFF can address nutrition challenges while respecting diverse perspectives.

k) Recognise the Emotions

The fourth element of the REFRAME methodology includes understanding the emotional triggers of each narrative community. Emotions are the foundation of narratives, shaping how people connect with stories and understand complex issues. Recognising the emotional underpinnings of narratives is essential for building narrative bridges—tools that foster communication and understanding across divides. Emotions not only drive narratives but also determine their plausibility by shaping how audiences perceive heroes, villains, and solutions.

Dominant Emotions Today: Fear, Anger, and Nostalgia

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A core finding of the NODES initiative was to be able to outline dominant emotions today that transcend the issue-specific emotions. These emotions where also detected by the UNDP in their research for the preparation of the 2023-2024 Human Development Report "Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarised world". These dominant narratives are:



Narrative Plausibility Depends on Emotional Truth:

Audiences instinctively evaluate whether a narrative "feels right," based on their emotional understanding of heroes, villains, and conflicts.

> For example:
>
> *A community driven by fear of external threats may reject narratives portraying global partnerships as inherently beneficial, as it contradicts their emotional reality.*

Positive narratives succeed when the actions of the protagonist align with shared values like justice, solidarity, or responsibility.

Protagonists and Antagonists:

Protagonist: Often represents the community or individual audience members identify with, such as taxpayers, the Global South, or Europe as a collective force for good.

Antagonist: Typically embodies the source of perceived harm or injustice—be it corporations, bureaucrats, global elites, or even historical legacies. But this is not true in "morality-driven narratives" where this format is usually reversed.

Narratives resonate when these roles align with the audience's lived experiences and emotional expectations.

Understanding these narrative frameworks allows us to listen differently and recognise the deeper emotional and cognitive drivers behind public discourse. This understanding is crucial for developing strategies that effectively counteract the divisive power of disinformation.

Food is an emotionally sensitive topic

Shared among all narrative communities is the salience of the emotional sensitivity surrounding the topic of food.

Emotions are deeply interwoven into the debate on food fortification for several reasons. First, food is steeped in tradition and culture. What we eat has the power to connect us to our cultural heritage, and the desire to consume culturally appropriate ingredients prepared in recognisable ways cannot be underestimated. Depending on the local context, this aspect gets a higher or lower importance assigned to it. Finland for example doesn't have a strongly developed food culture or important traditional foods and is therefore more open to certain new technologies, for example in the realm of alternative proteins. Second,

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many people have strong heartfelt memories of sharing food with loved ones. Sharing food is an essential ritual in many cultures and has a high importance attached to it. The quality of the food served and shared, and by extension its nutritional value and safety, is used to express the depth of connection between the cook and the eating crowd. Third, food is strongly linked to identity. People identify themselves with what they consume and group themselves in certain well-defined and distinct identities. Both veganism or the eating of large quantities of meat for example is broadly used to express adherence to a certain tribe or class. Fourth, as we have already stressed, the topic of food is highly moralised. Last, food has a direct effect on the individual to an extend little other things have. Some foods are seen as "pure" and "strength-giving", while others are "contaminated" and "debilitating". Hence, the consumption of some foods is encouraged while the consumption of others is forbidden.

The Emotional Disconnect: Why Some Narratives Falter

Narratives grounded in the optimism of globalisation and technical innovation often clash with the dominant emotions today:

- Fear of the Future:
  Example: Narratives portraying LSFF as a pathway to "hyperhealth" may falter if they do not acknowledge pressing problems such as malnutrition. They sometimes also seem to be naïve.

- Anger at the Present:
  Example: Narratives that position elites or corporations as benevolent actors are unlikely to resonate with audiences who see these groups as exploitative or complicit in global inequalities. There is also a growing feeling that elites are "stupid" in the sense that they their models and expertise is what has brought this mess in the first place so using the same logic to fix the problem is not going to help.

- Nostalgia for the Past:
  Example: Calls for solidarity and cooperation may be perceived as naive unless they address the loss of trust in global systems and the yearning for simpler, more self-reliant times.

Resonance Requires Emotional Alignment

For BMC-LSFF narratives to gain traction, they must align with the current meta-narrative structures. This requires acknowledging and addressing the emotional realities of today's audiences:

- **Confronting Disillusionment:**
  Narratives must go beyond idealism, directly addressing fears and anxieties with tangible, realistic solutions.
- **Rebuilding Trust:**
  Positive narratives must demonstrate transparency, accountability, and shared benefits to counter scepticism about institutions and elites.
- **Recognising Shared Struggles**:
  Narratives that bridge the gap between domestic and global concerns—such as emphasising mutual benefits—can align with the zero-sum worldview while fostering solidarity.

Implications for BMC-LSFF Storytelling

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To succeed in this environment, BMC-LSFF narratives must evolve to reflect the dominant emotional and cognitive frameworks of today. Recognising the broader meta-narrative structures allows storytellers to:

- Craft messages that feel authentic and grounded in shared realities.
- Avoid tones or themes that audiences perceive as disconnected or naive.
- Highlight the intersection of global challenges and local priorities, building bridges between competing perspectives.

By understanding these larger narrative shifts, BMC-LSFF advocates can adapt their messaging to resonate more effectively, fostering trust, engagement, and support in an increasingly polarised world.

l)
m) Avoid Narrative Traps

We're all influenced by cognitive shortcuts and biases that subtly shape how we interpret the world. These mental patterns, often referred to as narrative traps, can distort perceptions and reinforce misunderstandings. Recognising and addressing these traps is essential not only for fostering constructive dialogue but also for uncovering our own blind spots in framing complex issues.

One of the key tools developed by NODES is the identification of narrative traps—cognitive biases and mental shortcuts that shape how individuals and communities interpret complex issues. These thinking patterns, as described by Daniel Kahneman, often persist even when they lead us to incorrect conclusions. Similar to how AI systems are often criticised for their "black-box" nature—reaching decisions without clear transparency—humans are prone to their own "black-box" thinking, in which ingrained mental fallacies influence perceptions without being fully examined. These traps, deeply embedded in our cognitive processes, guide how we frame issues and process information, often distorting reality.

The Power and Pitfalls of Narrative Frameworks

Narratives are powerful tools for interpreting reality, but they are not static. While they provide a structured way to make sense of the world, they also carry inherent limitations. Like shifting from Roman numerals to Indian-Arabic numerals, adopting new narrative frameworks doesn't change reality itself but fundamentally transforms how we perceive and engage with it. This underscores the adaptability of narratives—they evolve in response to societal change, shaping and reshaping our understanding of complex issues.

Today, we live in a time of heightened narrative competition, fuelled by rapid technological advancement, geopolitical disruptions, and climate and economic crises. In this volatile landscape, narratives are exploited, reshaped, and weaponised to influence societal metanarratives. Understanding how old thinking patterns – that do not make sense in today's reality – influence our ideas on a given issue is crucial to recognise our own blind spots and understand why our narrative frame might not be the best adapted to finding the solutions we need.

Example Box:

In the context of climate change, NODES research identified several common erroneous thinking patterns shared across various narrative communities:

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- *The Myth of People vs. Planet Dichotomy*: The debate around climate change is frequently framed as a conflict between human needs and environmental preservation. However, this is a false dichotomy fabricated by our narrative structures.

- *The Myth of Necessary Suffering to Do Good*: A pervasive belief in European thought suggests that doing "good" deeds requires self-sacrifice. This mindset is evident across various issues, from migration to COVID-19, and is particularly pronounced in the climate change debate. As a result, two of the three prevailing stances on climate policy—those of pessimists and sceptics—frame these policies negatively. This is not based on evidence but fabricated by our narrative framings

- *The Myth of Sustainability vs. Innovation*: Another widespread fallacy is the belief that sustainability and innovation are opposites. This flawed narrative ignores the potential for innovation to drive sustainable solutions and is not helpful in framing a constructive debate about how to address the difficult transitions ahead.

These examples illustrate that all communities, regardless of their stance, are susceptible to cognitive biases and flawed reasoning. They also reveal that current climate change debates, constrained by rigid narrative framings, are often ineffective in fostering genuine, shared solutions. To move forward, we must recognise the need for a profound reset of our narrative frameworks—an openness to rethinking how we approach complex issues. By engaging in these discussions with greater humility and reducing defensiveness, we create the space to collaboratively build narratives that are more accurately aligned with reality and better equipped to address the challenges of our time.

The Duality of Narrative Traps

What makes narrative traps particularly damaging is that they influence all narrative communities, regardless of ideological stance. For example, the myth of necessary suffering leads to contradictory outcomes:

- Many communities and advocates unintentionally frame their narratives in ways that position the issues they care about as sacrifices. For example, narratives about "saving the planet" or "protecting the vulnerable" inherently emphasise moral duty, which audiences often interpret as requiring personal or collective sacrifice. This framing can lead to the perception that the proposed actions are costly or burdensome.

- This effect is compounded by a broader psychological phenomenon linked to this narrative trap: people tend to equate hardship with effectiveness. In product design, for instance, medicines are often given a bitter taste because consumers associate unpleasantness with efficacy. Similarly, reduced-calorie products are sometimes altered to taste less indulgent to reinforce the perception that they are healthier alternatives. In the context of BMC-LSFF, actions that lack visible hardship or cost may be dismissed as insincere or less impactful. This reveals a powerful narrative trap: unless carefully framed, even positive actions risk being perceived as sacrifices, undermining their broader appeal.

These traps limit our ability to engage with the complex realities of global challenges and foster solutions that resonate across diverse communities.

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Adapting Narratives to New Realities

Narrative traps also highlight the dynamic nature of storytelling. Just as narratives evolve to reflect societal changes, so too must our frameworks adapt to the challenges of today. Research from NODES reveals that this period of narrative competition demands a deeper understanding of how disinformation exploits existing traps to undermine trust, polarise discourse, and reshape societal metanarratives.

For example, in a time when fear, anger, and nostalgia dominate public sentiment, narratives that cling to outdated notions of progress and globalisation risk being dismissed as naïve or disingenuous. Recognising this dynamic helps us refine narratives to better align with contemporary emotional and cultural landscapes.

n) Move Beyond Polarising Binaries

In polarised debates, the world is often presented in black-and-white terms, with rigid moral judgments dividing communities into "us" and "them." While this framing might simplify complex issues, it also entrenches divisions and prevents collaborative problem-solving. Research shows that binary thinking emerges early in human development, tied to emotional responses and a tendency to moralise opposing views. This framing encourages people to see those who disagree as inherently "bad" or even "evil," fuelling conflict rather than resolution.

However, reality is rarely binary. The values and priorities of different communities are not simply "wrong" or "misinformed"—they often arise from diverse lived experiences and cultural perspectives. To foster genuine collaboration, we must embrace the complexity of these issues and replace the "win-lose" mindset with one centred on curiosity, nuance, and shared goals.

Moving Beyond Binary Thinking

Rigid, all-or-nothing frameworks can trap debates in cycles of polarisation. Shifting away from these patterns requires:

- Recognising Complexity: Acknowledging that problems are multifaceted and solutions often require balancing competing interests.
- Building Empathy: Understanding that opposing views may reflect legitimate concerns rooted in unique experiences.
- Focusing on Shared Goals: Identifying common objectives that transcend ideological divides, fostering unity and cooperation.

Polarising binaries in the BMC-LSFF debate

- **Conservative vs. Progressive attitudes towards food**
  The debate around food additives is polarised by the side that embraces them by casing the opposing party in the role of conservative and backwards. The community resisting food fortification is seen as denying basic scientific facts, whereas, as we have seen, it is not mainly facts that are driving the apprehension or resistance towards fortified foods.
- **Natural vs. Artificial Food**
  The side of the sceptics of food additives also uses a polarising binary to discredit the views of the opposing camp: the natural vs. artificial dichotomy. This binary is used to question the added value of food additives and raise concerns about their safety. This is leading to polarisation of the debate,

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as the community in favour of food additives takes food safety very seriously and regularly subjects its products to rigorous safety assessments.

- **Developed vs. Developing Countries**
  The "Systemic solution" narrative community generally enforces the dichotomy between developed and developing countries in its narrative. This binary, although it might appeal to a specific body of donors in the Global North, leads to polarisation of the debate around LSFF as it is opposed by the "Food fortification to control" community in very strong terms.

From Perceptions to Shared Vision

The language and framing we choose, have a profound impact on how issues are perceived. Moving beyond binary framings allows us to transform perceptions and foster inclusive, solution-oriented conversations.

Bridging the Divide

Breaking free from binary narratives isn't just about changing how we think—it's about transforming how we engage with one another. By fostering narratives grounded in shared goals, respect, and adaptability, we create the space for solutions that benefit all stakeholders.

In the area of BMC-LSFF, this entails:

- **Conservative vs. Progressive attitudes towards food**:
  We have to accept that there is no going back to a more pure and healthy state, if this state ever existed in the first place. Similarly, we have to accept that in the future, there will still be problems that cannot be solved by the implementation of the proposed solution. A utopian state of purity and health for all global citizens is equally impossible as going back to the perfect past. Conversely, we must learn from the past and take the things that are useful from that past with us to build a healthier future.
- **Natural vs. Artificial Food**:
  We have to accept that all food is a blend of artificial and natural. There is no food production without artifice, although there are indeed many different kinds of artificial interventions. We must find ways to combine the natural and the artificial in our thinking. Attitudes of vegans towards food show that eating lots of "natural" fruits and vegetables (in their unprocessed form) can go hand in hand with taking supplements or consuming fortified foods such as fortified plant milks or fortified meat alternatives to meet demands for e.g. vitamins D and B12, and minerals such as iron and potassium. The narratives of this distinct community can provide guidance in the development of a shared narrative on food fortification.
- **Developed vs. Developing Countries:**
  These concepts emerge from an essentialist dichotomy of the Developed North vs. the Developing South, a heuristic that is unable to describe the shear diversity of needs on each side of the binary. While poverty is rising in "the Global North", middle classes are rapidly growing in many countries in the "the Global South". The divides within each region are often bigger than the divides between regions. We must accept that it is counterproductive to continue talking about BMC-LSFF in terms of welfare and development aid. Growing global middle classes will be an important customer base for fortified products in the future. If fortified products are presented as luxurious rather than essential, as additions to an already rich, varied and culturally-specific diet rather than core elements, this new customer base will be far more willing to pay the price for these products.

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By moving beyond polarising binaries, we lay the groundwork for resilience, cooperation, and a shared commitment to addressing today's most pressing challenges.

o) Empower Collective Action

Create new, shared narratives that reflect a commitment to collaboration, adaptability, and inclusivity. In a world shaped by rapid digital advancements, climate imperatives, geopolitical shifts, and growing inequality, we face unique challenges that demand fresh perspectives and evolving frameworks. Many of the narratives we rely on today are rooted in past assumptions and fail to address the complex realities of our present or the demands of our future. This is particularly evident in the realm of BMC in LSFF, where entrenched narratives often struggle to resonate with the needs and convictions of diverse communities.

This is a moment of profound opportunity to rethink and reshape the stories we tell about BMC in LSFF. By recognising the limitations of existing narratives and actively inviting diverse voices into the process, we can foster collective agency and co-create narratives that inspire and unify. The goal is not to erase the past but to build upon it, crafting narratives that acknowledge current challenges while offering a vision for a sustainable and hopeful future.

Principles for New Narratives

- **Relevance to Contemporary Realities:** Narratives must reflect the interconnected and rapidly changing world, emphasising how development benefits both local and global communities.
- **Flexibility and Inclusivity:** Stories must resonate across different ideological and cultural communities, focusing on shared values and common goals.
- **Empowerment Through Collaboration:** Co-creating narratives with stakeholders ensures they are grounded in collective experiences and aspirations.
- **Responsive Listening:** Understand the deeper priorities and values driving diverse narrative communities.
- **Eliminate Polarising Language:** Use neutral, inclusive terms to bridge divides and foster constructive dialogue.
- **Find Shared Objectives**: Highlight common goals like stability, sustainability, and resilience to unite communities.
- **Recognise the Emotions:** Address dominant fears, anger, and nostalgia to make narratives resonate emotionally.
- **Avoid Narrative Traps**: Reframe myths and biases, such as zero-sum thinking or sacrifice, to build trust.
- **Move Beyond Polarising Binaries:** Emphasise collaboration and nuance over "us vs. them" divisions.

Implications for BMC-LSFF Narratives

- Don't frame BMC for LSFF in a development narrative but rather focus on cooperating with stakeholders, governments and businesses in the Global South e.g. for a pilot project.
- It is more productive to no use the narrative on malnutrition to promote LSFF but rather focus on how it can be complementary to an already existing, culturally specific diet.
- Remove BMC-LSFF from a scientific-solutionist narrative. Rather, present it as a small step forward that is complementary to the already existing food context.

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- It might be unproductive to frame BMC for LSFF in a top-down narrative. Rather, focus on enabling individuals to make choices about the food they want to eat and enable to act upon them.
- Recognise the salience of the desire to protect communities and loved ones against harm. These emotions are important drivers of the positions in the debate and of the choices of consumers.

5. Conclusions

The analysis presented in this report highlights the crucial role of narrative dynamics in shaping engagement with Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF) and Basic Methacrylate Copolymer (BMC). As political, economic, and societal landscapes shift, so too do the perceptions and motivations of key stakeholders—including policymakers, industry leaders, and the public. Understanding these evolving narratives is essential for ensuring that LSFF and BMC are positioned effectively within the broader discourse on food security, public health, and economic resilience.

a) Key Findings

- **The Divergence of Perspectives**
  One of the most significant insights from this report is the fundamental divergence in how different stakeholders perceive LSFF and BMC. The public health and scientific communities emphasise LSFF as a necessary and morally imperative intervention to combat malnutrition. Meanwhile, the food industry approaches LSFF and BMC through the lens of regulatory stability, consumer perception, and economic feasibility. These distinct narrative frameworks have resulted in misalignments that hinder engagement and adoption.
- **The Evolving Political and Economic Context**
  The shifting political priorities in Europe have reframed how food fortification is perceived within policymaking. Discussions around LSFF and BMC can no longer rely solely on traditional public health arguments but must be strategically aligned with narratives of economic competitiveness, strategic resilience, and innovation leadership. By situating LSFF within these broader priorities, engagement with policymakers and industry stakeholders can be strengthened.
- **The Power and Pitfalls of Existing Narratives**
  The report identifies four dominant narrative communities shaping discussions around LSFF and BMC:

    - Food Should Be Natural: Scepticism toward food additives, emphasising tradition, simplicity, and consumer autonomy.
    - Unlocking Hyperhealth: Embraces science-based innovation and biohacking to optimise individual health.
    - Fortified Food as Control: Views LSFF as a form of external influence, with concerns about food sovereignty and global power dynamics.
    - Systemic Solution: Frames LSFF as a moral responsibility to combat malnutrition, emphasising solidarity and public health impact.

Each of these narratives is driven by deep-seated values, emotions, and cognitive biases. Recognising and addressing these perspectives is critical for reframing LSFF in a way that resonates across diverse communities.

- **Overcoming Narrative Barriers**

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To increase acceptance and adoption of LSFF and BMC, messaging must move beyond moral imperatives and traditional public health arguments. Instead, it should:

- Emphasise strategic alignment with industry priorities, regulatory stability, and economic incentives.
- Position LSFF as a consumer choice rather than an externally imposed intervention.
- Avoid polarising binaries, such as "natural vs. artificial" or "developed vs. developing countries."
- Build trust through transparency, addressing concerns about safety, efficacy, and industry motivations.
- Leverage early industry adopters to showcase practical benefits and market viability.

- **The Need for Adaptive Narratives**
  The REFRAME methodology provides a structured approach for engaging stakeholders across different narrative communities. By practicing responsive listening, eliminating polarising language, and identifying shared objectives, LSFF proponents can build narratives that are more inclusive and effective. Recognising the dominant emotions shaping public discourse—fear, anger, and nostalgia—will further help in crafting messages that resonate with today's audiences.

b) Strategic Recommendations

a. Reframe LSFF as a Strategic Investment

- Position LSFF as part of Europe's economic resilience and innovation strategy, aligning with industry and regulatory priorities.
- Highlight its role in ensuring food security and reducing dependencies in an era of geopolitical uncertainty.

b. Engage Industry Through Market-Driven Incentives

- Shift from a narrative of moral obligation to one that emphasises business opportunities, regulatory clarity, and consumer demand.
- Demonstrate how LSFF and BMC can enhance competitive advantage, supply chain stability, and product innovation.

c. Tailor Messaging for Different Stakeholder Groups

- Policymakers: Link LSFF to economic competitiveness, resilience, and industrial leadership.
- Industry Leaders: Highlight scalability, market demand, and consumer acceptance.
- Public: Address concerns around safety, transparency, and personal choice rather than imposing a "one-size-fits-all" solution.

d. Shift from a Development Narrative to a Global Innovation Narrative

- Move beyond framing LSFF as a tool for "helping the Global South" and instead emphasise its relevance for diverse markets, including Europe.
- Highlight LSFF as an innovation that enhances food quality rather than a necessity only for vulnerable populations.

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e. Leverage Early Adopters and Real-World Success Stories

- Showcase examples of LSFF and BMC adoption by industry leaders to create credibility and reduce perceived risks.
- Emphasise practical applications, cost-benefit analyses, and successful regulatory approvals to build trust.

c) Final Thoughts

Ensuring the long-term success of LSFF and BMC in global food systems requires more than scientific validation and regulatory approval - it demands a strategic reframing of narratives. By aligning LSFF and BMC with the shifting priorities of policymakers, industry leaders, and consumers, advocates can foster greater acceptance, engagement, and ultimately, broader adoption of these critical nutrition solutions.

Navigating the evolving political and economic landscape will require adaptability, collaboration, and an emphasis on shared objectives. Through a refined, strategic narrative approach, LSFF and BMC can be positioned not only as effective public health interventions but as essential components of a resilient and forward-thinking global food system.

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