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Summary

Super Size Me vividly shows just how bad for you “bad foods” can be, but filmmaker Morgan Spurlock fails to correctly define the line between personal and corporate responsibility. As consumers are becoming more educated, the market is responding with the healthier food choices they demand.

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Super Size This

by Tim Keller

In *Super Size Me*, filmmaker Morgan Spurlock sets out to discover the effects of eating nothing but McDonald’s food for 30 days. He aptly describes his journey as a “one month McDonald’s binge.” In making the film, Spurlock nearly killed himself.

The central issue of the film is where personal responsibility ends and corporate responsibility begins. Based on his experiment, Spurlock concludes that McDonald’s or the government should eliminate unhealthy food in order to reduce health problems. This, however, is not correct. No one forced Spurlock to make unhealthy choices. If you want to be healthy, you should exercise, eat right and make intelligent lifestyle decisions—all things Spurlock intentionally didn’t do.

Nevertheless, obesity is a serious problem. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity will surpass smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in the United States as soon as next year. One possible solution to this problem is for the government to step in by either regulating or heavily taxing foods deemed to be unsafe. But why should the government make decisions for individuals? It would be better to educate consumers about the consequences of their diet and lifestyle choices and let the market adjust.

Super Size Me plays an important role in raising consumer awareness of the health consequences of a poor diet. This film is not a movement in and of itself; rather, it is the byproduct of a trend toward healthier diets and lifestyles. Demand has increased for healthier foods and the market has responded.

Several years ago, David Hirshberg visited California with his family. During their vacation, they ate several meals at fast food restaurants because of a lack of healthier but similarly priced options. Hirshberg, the founder of a prominent organic dairy farm, set out to remedy the situation. The result? O’Naturals, an organic fast food chain based in New England.

With a menu featuring Asian noodles and bison meatloaf, O’Naturals isn’t a typical fast food restaurant. However, its unorthodox offerings have helped

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O’Naturals increase its market share and build a loyal customer base. According to Hirshberg, the fast food experience “taught me that the mainstream consumer wants choices. Burger King years ago said ‘Have it your way’ and that’s really what we’re trying to do.”

Large corporations like Coca-Cola have also embraced this attitude. This summer, the company introduced a new product that has half of the calories, carbohydrates and sugar of regular Coke. According to CEO Doug Daft, “Consumers are the true architects of this idea. Coca-Cola C2 was created to specifically address their desire for a lower-calorie cola.” This is but one example of companies responding to the low-carb craze embodied by the Atkins and South Beach diets.

Even McDonald’s is changing. The “Super Size” option was recently eliminated from the menu in an attempt to “support a balanced lifestyle.” McDonald’s has also heavily advertised salads over the past year and launched a marketing campaign centered on a new, relatively healthier, adult Happy Meal. Through these changes, McDonald’s is telling its customers that it can adapt along with changing demands.

Super Size Me fails to correctly define the line between personal and corporate responsibility. People should recognize that their freedom to do as they please comes with the responsibility to deal with the consequences of their actions. One thing Spurlock does get right is his film’s inclusion of a statement by Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald’s. Kroc said, “Look after the customer and business will take care of itself.” By welcoming this attitude, companies large and small remain competitive and meet consumers’ wishes.

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