

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMERS ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS FOOD LABELING

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Abstract. In navigating the complex landscape of consumer choices and industry practices, this study illuminates the multifaceted dynamics of food labeling perceptions. As consumers increasingly seek transparency and sustainability, there arises a collective call for the industry to align with these expectations. The challenges identified in comprehension and trust underscore the urgency for clearer communication, fostering an environment where consumers can make informed and empowered choices. The study is exploring insights from a survey of 58 individuals conducted between March and July 2023. The study sheds light on the complexities of label comprehension, trust in health-related claims, and preferences for eco-friendly packaging. With a diverse demographic profile, including varying levels of education and age groups, the findings underscore the need for industry transparency and clearer communication. As consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability and demand trustworthy information, the article advocates for an industry that aligns with these evolving expectations, empowering consumers to make informed and conscientious choices.

Key words: food, labels, perception, consumers, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the global food industry has undergone significant scrutiny, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, where over 200 million individuals are now grappling with heightened levels of food insecurity. Paradoxically, this crisis has coincided with soaring profits for food-trading companies, a phenomenon explored in the UNCTAD trade and development report titled "Food Commodities, Corporate Profiteering and Crises." This report highlights the urgent need to reevaluate the conduct of major players in the industry, emphasizing the alarming connection between unregulated financial activities and profits in global food trading.[1-3]

Moreover, the cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by the pandemic has brought to light the strategic implementation of marketing manipulation techniques by food-trading companies. This unethical approach, particularly in the post-pandemic era, raises concerns about its negative impact on consumer decisions and public health. The imperative to address this issue is underscored by the report's findings, revealing a direct link between corporate profits and excessive speculation in commodities markets, as well as the growth of shadow banking.[4-7]

To delve deeper into this critical matter, our study focuses on prevalent marketing manipulation techniques employed by food companies, with a specific emphasis on the deceptive labeling practices that shape consumer behavior. From

“Misleading Labeling” tactics to the concept of “portion distortion” coined by Nielsen and Popkin, and the use of deceptive advertising, we aim to shed light on how these practices contribute to an environment where consumers find it challenging to make informed and healthy food choices.[8-10]

As we delve into the multifaceted layers of this complex issue, it becomes evident that crises, while presenting opportunities, also unveil systemic challenges deeply entrenched in society. Ideally, corporations should navigate these challenges with ethical considerations, prioritizing responsible practices that account for individual and societal impacts. However, the recurrent issue of corporate profiteering during crises highlights a persistent struggle for ethical conduct.[11-15]

As we uncover these manipulative strategies, we also recognize the agency consumers hold in defending themselves against such tactics. By analyzing the results of a survey investigating consumer attitudes and perceptions towards food labeling, we aim to provide insights into the extent to which individuals are aware of and affected by these manipulative practices. The survey, conducted from March to July 2023, involved 58 subjects and focused on key aspects such as label readability, understanding, appeal of health-related claims, and preferences for eco-friendly packaging materials.

Through this comprehensive examination, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse on consumer empowerment, ethical practices in the food industry, and the urgent need for regulatory measures to curb deceptive marketing. Our findings aim to inform both consumers and policymakers, fostering a collective effort to promote transparency and healthier food choices in the face of manipulative practices in the food industry.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The survey was done on a swatch of 58 subjects, selected by a nonrandom method – accessibility. The instrument used was the questionnaire. The questionnaire development was centered on the research objectives and hypotheses. The objective of the survey is to identify the customers attitudes and perceptions towards food labeling. The timeline of the survey was from March 2023 until July 2023.

Statistical evaluation of the data was done using the Excel 2019 Software from Microsoft.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the questionnaire are presented in table 1 and figure 1-4.

Table 1

No. crt.	Question	Answers	
		Yes	No
1.	Do you read the label of food products?	35	23
2.	Do you find it easy to read the label of food products?	21	37
3.	Do you usually understand the label of food products?	12	46
4.	Is the label with "Natural" and "Organic" more appealing?	34	24

5.	Is the label with health benefits more appealing?	24	34
6.	Do you trust the products claim of health benefits?	24	34
7.	Do you prefer packaging materials to be eco-friendly?	42	16

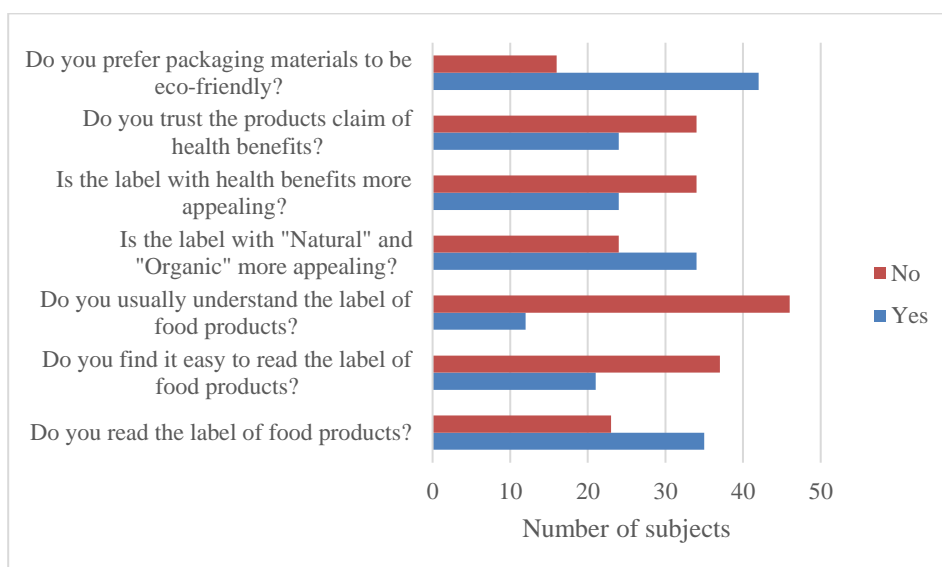


Figure 1. Results obtained from the questionnaire

The majority of respondents (35) claim to read food labels, suggesting a significant portion of the surveyed individuals are conscious about the information on food products. A larger proportion of respondents (37) find it challenging to read food labels, indicating potential difficulties in comprehending or accessing the information presented on these labels. A substantial majority (46) admit to not understanding food labels, indicating a potential gap in consumer knowledge or clarity issues with the information provided. A considerable number of respondents (34) find labels with "Natural" and "Organic" appealing, suggesting a positive inclination toward products associated with these terms. A significant portion of respondents (34) does not find labels emphasizing health benefits appealing, highlighting potential skepticism or a need for clearer communication of health-related claims. Similar to the previous question, a notable number of respondents (34) express distrust in health-related claims, indicating a level of skepticism or concerns about the credibility of such assertions. A clear majority (42) prefer eco-friendly packaging materials, suggesting a positive attitude towards environmentally conscious choices among the surveyed individuals.

The data indicates a larger representation of females (37) compared to males (21) in the surveyed group. This gender distribution is essential to consider when drawing conclusions or generalizations from the survey results. The majority of respondents fall within the age range of 26-30 (21), followed closely by those aged 20-25 (20). This suggests a relatively young demographic, which may influence preferences and behaviors, especially in the context of food labeling.

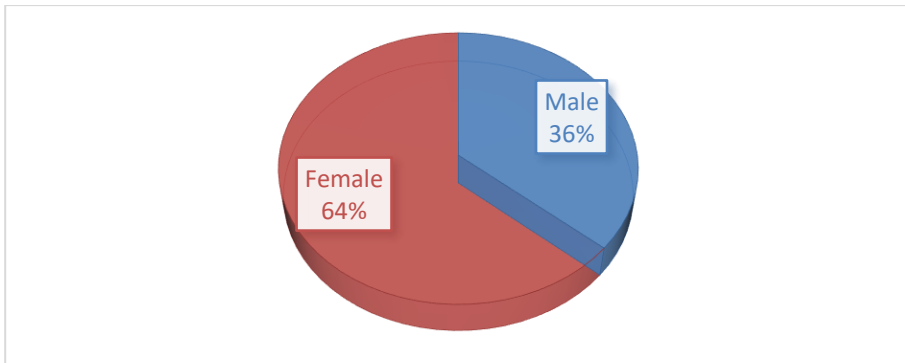


Figure 2. The distribution of the subjects regarding gender

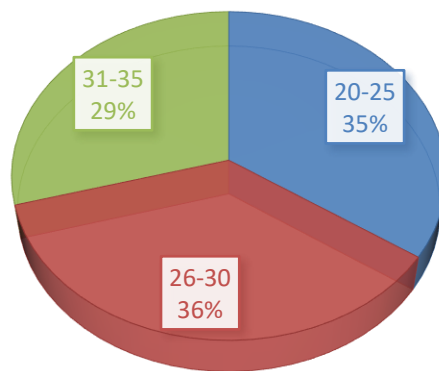


Figure 3. The distribution of the subjects regarding age

The distribution of education levels indicates a diverse group, with a higher number of respondents having completed high school (20) or a bachelor's degree (21). The presence of individuals with master's (14) and PhD (3) degrees adds diversity and potentially different perspectives to the survey responses.

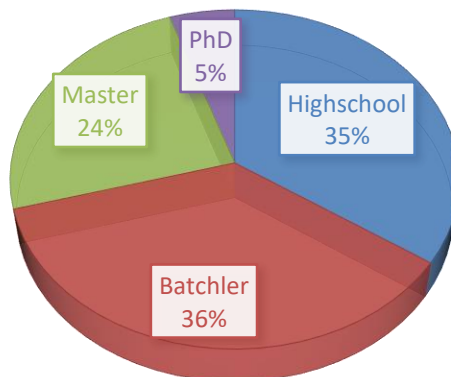


Figure 4. The distribution of the subjects regarding the last completed form of studies

CONCLUSIONS

The survey provides valuable insights into consumer attitudes and preferences regarding food labeling. The findings underscore the importance of clearer communication, especially in health-related claims, and highlight the significance of environmental considerations in packaging choices. The demographic breakdown enriches the understanding of variations in preferences, emphasizing the need for targeted approaches in the food industry to cater to diverse consumer segments. There is notable skepticism regarding labels emphasizing health benefits, with a significant portion (34) expressing distrust. This highlights a need for clearer communication of health-related claims to build consumer trust. A substantial number (46) admits to not understanding food labels, indicating a potential gap in consumer knowledge or clarity issues with the information provided. As we collectively move forward, consumers armed with knowledge hold the key to shaping an industry that not only meets their needs but also aligns with their values of health, sustainability, and integrity.

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