YSDN 3008 A - Information Design for Advocacy

Phase 1: Research & Presentation

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Topic Description

Often, food/nutrition labels on products are very small and difficult to read, suggesting that food producers intend to misinform customers on what they're eating. Further, nutrition labels state how many calories are in a product, but only in a suggested single serving. In reality, these serving sizes are much smaller than what we consume in one portion, which can mislead and confuse consumers, especially those that are health-conscious. On the front of the labels, consumers find an excessive amount of flowery language that claims to improve our health when, in reality, it won't. Consumers risk believing the claim and making a purchase without reading the nutrition facts label for a more accurate representation of the product's claims.

My target audience is anyone that is motivated to start a healthy lifestyle based on making better purchasing decisions on food. They value and prioritize health, like to review data before making a decision to purchase something. They are skeptical of current food labels that promise to solve the concerns of their health and they strive to find trust-worthy information when it comes to purchasing food.

Headline / Topic Summary

The Incompetence of Food Labelling.

Call to Action

Consumers should educate themselves where possible and make purchasing decisions based on this knowledge. They could also document misleading labels and either post those on

social media to educate their friends and families or even write emails to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to encourage further enforcement on regulating the food labelling process.

The issue

Research on natural and organic labels has consistently confirmed that consumers are often confused. Results indicated that participants had positive associations with the terms “organic” and “all-natural” with exceptions regarding the trustworthiness of all-natural claims. (Abrams, 365). Many believed that labeling meat products as all natural meant that no antibiotics and no hormones were used to raise animals (which it does not). Some believed that it meant animals were raised outside (also not related to natural claims) (Kuchler, 381).

According to results of a 2015 survey, 64% of respondents believed that natural meant that no artificial growth hormones were used, 59% believed that it meant that animals were fed feed that did not contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and 57% believed that it meant that no antibiotics or other drugs were used. A food supplier making a natural claim is not required to meet any of these conditions, but if they were making a USDA Organic claim, they would be (Kuchler, 381).

Three studies show that low-fat labels lead all consumers particularly those who are overweight to overeat snack foods. Furthermore, salient objective serving-size information (e.g., "Contains 2 Servings") reduces overeating among guilt-prone, normal-weight consumers but not among overweight consumers (Wansink and Chandon, 605).

On top of the matter of misleading labels, The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the agency responsible for food labels but it lacks the regulatory authority and adequate resources to address the majority of questionable labeling practices. The FDA's current system of enforcement is thus essentially based on voluntary compliance and consumer-and manufacturer-initiated litigation has not successfully filled the regulatory gap (Pomeranz, 618).

Actions needed

People need to do research and educate themselves to understand the labels of the daily food products they consume. Get used to understanding food and nutrition labels at the back of a product instead of believing the health-washing information at the front which most likely isn't true.

The advocate

Chemical Cuisine is a website that ranks the safety of food additives and they break down the harmful effects of chemical additives in factory-made food products. Chemical Cuisine is maintained by the enter for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). Their goal is to bring transparency and useful information to the public's good choices.

Research Appendix

Appendix A: Images

Image 1: 10 Misleading Food Labels To Watch Out For

Image 2: The 13 Most Misleading Food Label Claims

Image 3: What's in a Label? How to Decipher Grocery Terms

Www.facebook.com/hungryhobby. “10 Most Misleading Food Labels To Watch Out For!” Hungry Hobby, 12 Sept. 2019, hungryhobbynet/misleading-food-labels/.

Hungry hobby’s post offers honest advice on the nature of normalized misleading food labels that we see at grocery stores all the time, the post breaks down each label to three parts: What we think the label means, what the label actually means, and what we should look for when we’re trying to purchase something similar. This image that I found briefly summarizes the top ten of the most confusing food labels we come across when we shop.

“The 13 Most Misleading Food Label Claims.” *Naked Food Magazine*, 9 July 2015, nakedfoodmagazine.com/13-most-misleading-food-label-claims/.

Naked Food Magazine’s article explains common misconceptions of the 13 most misleading food label claims we see in supermarkets. The image I found from the article includes all sorts of different nutrition and food labels we are very used to seeing as consumers, but rarely question the trustworthiness of them.

“What's in a Label: How to Decipher Grocery Terms.” PartSelect.com, www.fix.com/blog/grocery-labels/.

Morin’s blog post on Fix includes a guide to read those labels and fully understand what we as consumers are buying – and eating. It explains the definition for all food-packaging terms from A-Z and informs us on what products we normally see these health claims on.

Appendix B: Charts/Diagrams

Table 1: Low Fat Labels Increase Snack-Food Consumption

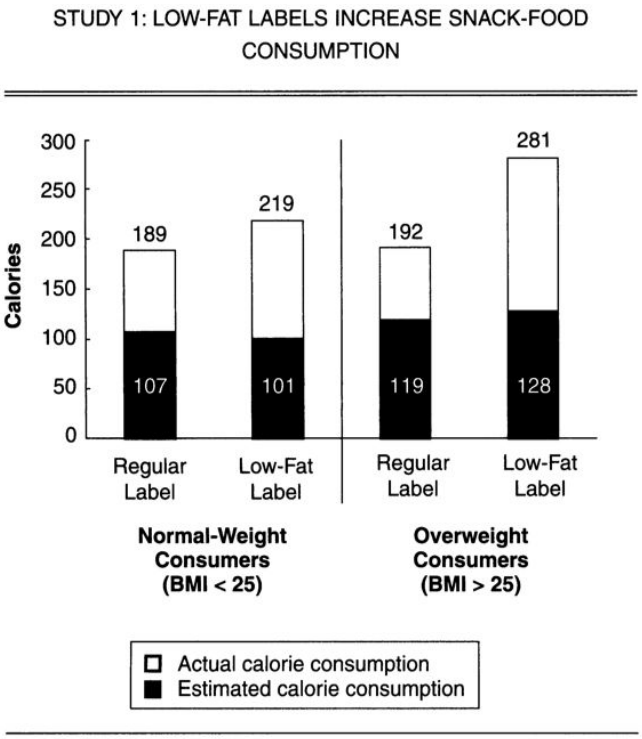


Table 2: How Low Fat Labels Influence Perceived Serving Size, Calorie Density, And Guilt

STUDY 2: HOW LOW-FAT LABELS INFLUENCE PERCEIVED SERVING SIZE, CALORIE DENSITY, AND GUILT
(MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS)

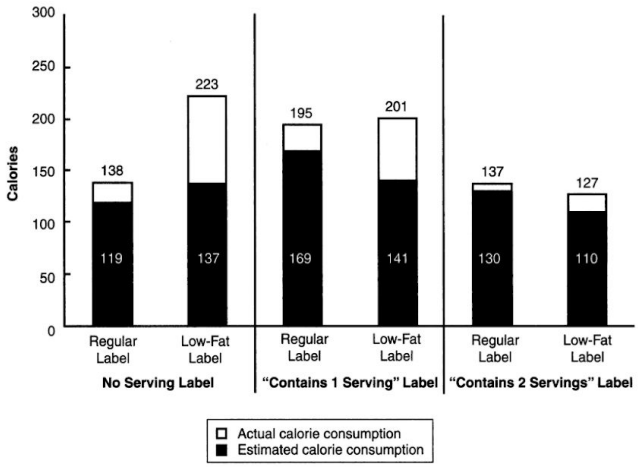
		Normal-Weight Participants (BMI < 25)		*Overweight Participants (BMI > 25)*	
Mediator	*Product*	*Regular Label*	*Low-Fat Label*	*Regular Label*	*Low-Fat Label*
Perceived serving size	M&M's	5.8	6.5	4.3	7.1
		(2.2)	(3.3)	(1.2)	(2.3)
	Granola	5.3	6.4	5.5	5.9
		(1.7)	(3.3)	(3.0)	(1.0)
Perceived calorie density					
	M&M's	1545	1320	1377	942
		(819)	(676)	(624)	(578)
	Granola	1013	732	765	626
		(562)	(458)	(373)	(281)
Anticipated consumption guilt					
	M&M's	4.7	4.5	3.6	2.7
		(3.0)	(2.1)	(2.4)	(2.4)
	Granola	3.6	2.3	3.1	1.9
		(2.3)	(1.5)	(2.2)	(1.2)

Notes: We measured perceived serving size as the number of ounces appropriate to eat during a 90-minute movie. We measured perceived calorie density as the estimated number of calories in a ten-ounce cup. We measured anticipated consumption guilt by asking respondents to rate how they would feel after eating two ounces of the product on a nine-point scale (1 = "not guilty," 9 = "guilty").

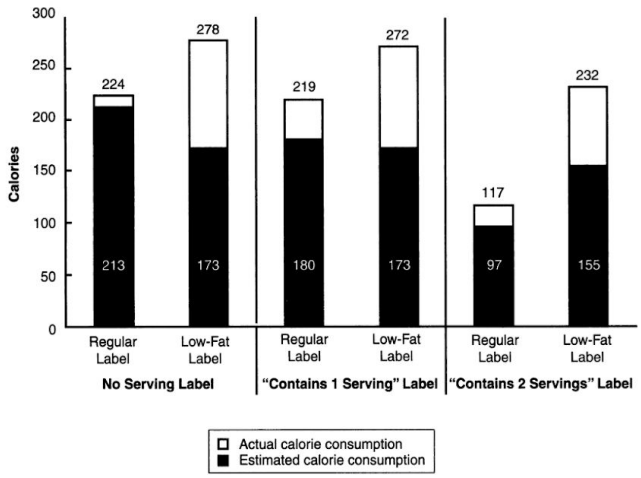
Table 3: Overweight Consumers Are Less Responsive To The Serving-Size Information On Low-Fat Labels

Figure 3
STUDY 3: OVERWEIGHT CONSUMERS ARE LESS RESPONSIVE TO THE SERVING-SIZE INFORMATION ON LOW-FAT LABELS

A: Normal-Weight Consumers (BMI < 25)



B: Overweight Consumers (BMI > 25)



Wansink, Brian, and Pierre Chandon. “Can ‘Low-Fat’ Nutrition Labels Lead to Obesity?” Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 43, no. 4, 2006, pp. 605–617., doi:10.1509/jmkr.43.4.605.

Wansink and Chandon’s publications studies whether “Low-Fat” nutrition labels lead to obesity, the three diagrams and charts above look into the negative impact “low-fat” labels can have on people. The first study compares between normal-weight and overweight consumers and it’s proven that both groups have tendencies to consume more when a food product is labelled “low-fat”. The second study focuses on the differences on consumption guilt between a regular label and a “low-fat” label, and according to the study, both groups are less likely to feel guilty after consuming “low-fat” products. The third study brings awareness to how often consumers that are already over-weight tend to be less responsive towards low-fat labels.

Appendix C: Publications

Abrams, Katie M., et al. “Naturally Confused: Consumers’ Perceptions of All-Natural and Organic Pork Products.” Agriculture and Human Values, vol. 27, no. 3, 2009, pp. 365–374., doi:10.1007/s10460-009-9234-5.

Abram’s study focuses on consumers’ attitudes and reactions toward all natural and organic pork and their responses to the USDA organic standards for meat, and their policy for natural claims and labels.

Kuchler, F., et al. “Evidence from Retail Food Markets That Consumers Are Confused by Natural and Organic Food Labels.” Journal of Consumer Policy, vol. 43, no. 2, 2018, pp. 379–395., doi:10.1007/s10603-018-9396-x.

Kuchler’s paper examines the confusion consumers have on natural and organic food labels and how these two claims often seem identical and related from a consumer’s standpoint. Through surveys and studies, they explore whether this confusion influences aggregate retail food expenditures.

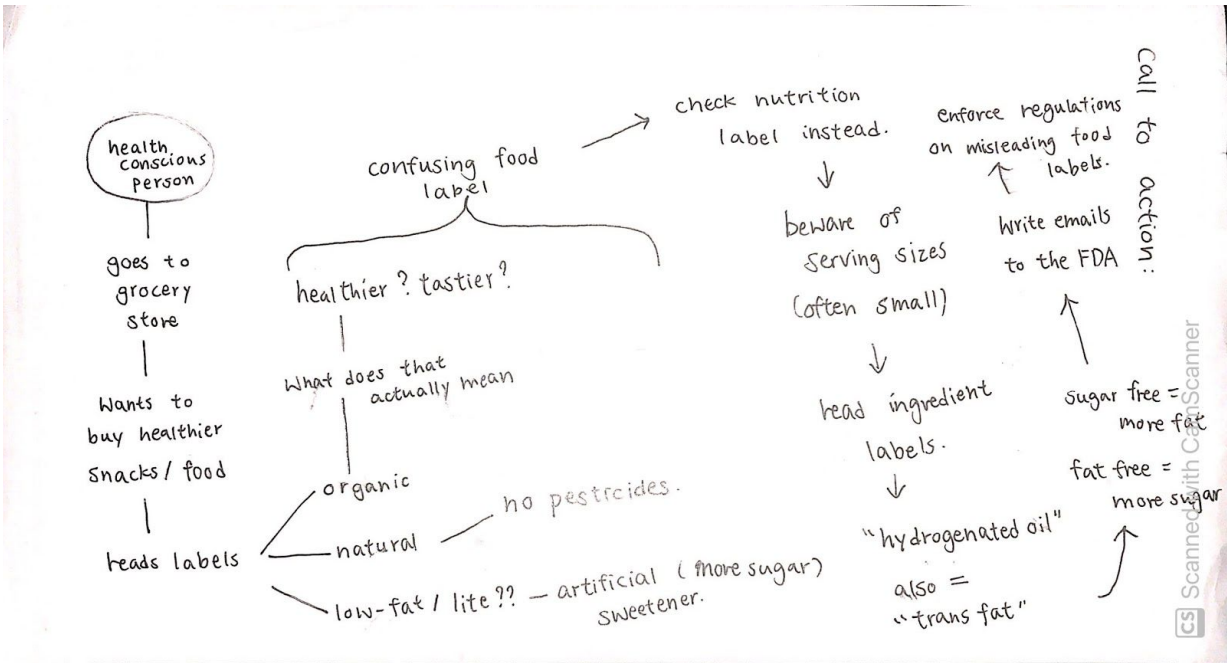
Pomeranz, Jennifer L. “A Comprehensive Strategy to Overhaul FDA Authority for Misleading Food Labels.” American Journal of Law & Medicine, vol. 39, no. 4, 2013, pp. 617–647., doi:10.1177/009885881303900403.

Pomeranz’s essay reviews the current state of food labelling claims and the FDA’s nonuniform authority over misleading and confusing food labels. It argues that an overhaul consistent with the best science and the First Amendment is necessary in order to make sure consumers are properly informed about the food products they’re buying and to solve current public health problems.

Wansink, Brian, and Pierre Chandon. “Can ‘Low-Fat’ Nutrition Labels Lead to Obesity?” Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 43, no. 4, 2006, pp. 605–617., doi:10.1509/jmkr.43.4.605.

Wansink and Chandon’s publications studies whether “Low-Fat” nutrition labels can have a negative impact on overweight consumers. It also mentions how in some situations these labels can even lead to obesity and unhealthy eating habits.

Visual Outline



Refined version