



A STUDY ON THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE READABILITY AND UNDERSTANDABILITY OF LABELING INFORMATION ON PACKED FOOD PRODUCTS: IN THE CASE OF SRIKAKULAM CITY

***Dr K.Venugopal**

Professor

Department of Marketing Management,

College of Business and Economics, University of Gondar, Ethiopia.

**** V. Gopalakrishna**

Assistant Professor

Department of Management Studies

AITAM, Kotturu, Tekkali, Srikakulam, AP. India

*****Dr Mulugeta Negash**

Assistant Professor

Department of Marketing Management

College of Business and Economics

University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia

******Aschalew Adane Brhanu**

Lecturer,

Department of Marketing Management

College of Business and Economics

University of Gondar, Gondar, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

Packed food products are meant to be hygienic and increase the intension of Buying Behaviour for most of the customers now a days. Customers do not hesitate to spend more money for the sake of freshness, protection and quality of the product. It has been a conditional formality for all the marketers to establish complete information regarding freshness, contents, pricing and etc., in the form of Labeling for the information transformation to the customers. But the question arises whether the customers are interested to be aware of it and if or /if not what factors would influence them to do so. Factors such as Education, Attitude, Age, Time, Brand Image and Gender Discrimination are expected to be the independent variables for reading the labeling information. Labeling includes any written, printed or graphic matter that is present on the label, accompanies the food, or is displayed near the food, including that for the purpose of promoting its sale or disposal. The purpose of this study is to examine the awareness that consumers have labeling information on packed food products. The study is explanatory and data will be collected using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 147 consumers in Srikakulam with convenient sampling technique will be used in the selection of the respondents. Significance of study seeks to provide further insights into consumer awareness and usage of nutrition information in Srikakulam City.

1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of reading and using food labeling information in purchasing packed food is becoming a very imperative issue. This is because packed food labels contain important information on the characteristics of a particular food such as ingredients, nutrition contents, country of origin, manufacturing date, shelf life and storage conditions and handling instruction, chemical and pesticide information and biotechnology information. Therefore, providing food content and other necessary information on packets can be thought of as an important element for consumer's health protection. However, in developing countries like India, where many illiterate or less educated people are found understanding or using information provided by labeling could not be easy. Even for educated people, understanding the information provided by labeling, is difficult, because most of the packed food items are imported and written in foreign languages.

Moreover ,awareness and usage of information provided by labeling can be influenced by many factors level of education, health consciousness, products attributes, food labeling format, influence of mass media, perceived role of regulatory authorities and non availability of consumer guidelines on the use of food labeling have been reported by studied articles from various countries as factors related to consumers not reading and using food labeling information in purchasing food (Coveney, 2007, Sunelle *et al*, 2010, Philip *et al*, 2010)

This issue is more critical since most of the Indian consumers are at lower level of education and many food products are imported from all around the world. Many countries in the world are developing mandatory or voluntary programs to assure food safety by using traceability in food value chain “Traceability is defined as the ability to follow the movement of a food through specified stage(s) of processing, production, and distribution” (Souza-Monteiro and Caswell, 2004).

Based on these proclamations, rules and regulations have set by the Government. Therefore, to rise capacity of labeling information reading and usage in Srikakulam city, above all investigating awareness level of public regarding and usage of labeling information is an important issue that has to be given due consideration regarding public health improvement . As consumers have become increasingly concerned about what they eat and how it affects their health, the food industry has responded by providing more detailed nutrition and expiring date information on their food labels (Petrovici et al. 2012). Despite the growth in demand for and supply of nutritional information in recent years relatively little empirical research has been conducted in developing countries to determine the extent to which consumers know and actually use such information to inform their purchases. Most of the accumulated knowledge on nutritional information use is largely based on studies conducted in developed countries and in particular the UK and USA (European Heart Network, 2003).

Today, the urban consumers in Srikakulam are in the process of changing their consumption/buying behavior especially with respect to packed food items. Therefore, with the change in lifestyle and consumption pattern, food safety is important issue from public health and food companies’ marketing perspective. However, in the context of emerging economies, very little is known regarding consumers’ expectations and their response to food label information (Wang et al., 2008). On the subject of the food labeling information in Srikakulam, to the best of my knowledge, very few empirical articles have been reported to date. Therefore it

is important to emphasize reading and understanding of the information provided on packed food labels before purchase/consumption of such foods. In India the frequency of which consumers check information on food labels is not clearly known. Also the understanding of labeling information in relation to purchase and consumption behavior of packed food among consumers is not clearly known. Thus, in order to maximize benefits from implementation of Indian policy tools in the field of food product labeling and also voluntary disclosure on the part of food companies, it is essential to review awareness and usage among Indian urban consumers towards such information. Therefore, the present study proposes to fill this gap by exploring awareness and usage among Srikakulam consumers regarding information on packed food product labels. Because of these the significance of this study is very important and the issue is very critical to protect people's health from expired, unknown nutritional content, and usage of products but if the study is not conducted the consequence will be awful because the awareness of the people is not in a good phase based on this not reading labeling information will expose for critical health problem. Thus, the study attempts to answer the two basic questions: how aware Srikakulam consumers on packed food labeling and usage information? And what socio-economic factors affect packed food labeling and usage information?

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To examine awareness and usage of packed food labeling information among consumers in Srikakulam city
2. To assess the different factors that are influencing on the readability and understandability of packed food labeling information among consumers in Srikakulam city.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the age when more than ever before consumers are constantly being reminded by health officials of the connection between nutrition and good health it is surprising that most studies report relatively low usage of nutritional information on food products. In a study of French consumers' use of nutritional information Mannell et al. (2006) found that the majority of the respondents do not read nutrition labels because of lack of interest.

According to Joint,(2007). "Labeling includes any written, printed or graphic matter that is present on the label, accompanies the food, or is displayed near the food, including that for the

purpose of promoting its sale or disposal” .Therefore, it is not only a major instrument that enables consumers to have information about the kind of food they purchase and make nutritionally appropriate choices. But also it is a supportive marketing environment that provides content of food items that can be considered as a principle in promoting the health of consumers. Food labels are of tremendous importance to the consumer (provide them a means of evaluating the food before purchase), the firm producing and selling the product (a means of communicating to the potential consumer the attributes and qualities of the product), and regulatory bodies (a means of ensuring that food produced and sold meet required standards and a means of protecting the interest of the general public). Despite these benefits of food labels, there have been many reported instances where non-certified, expired, illegal or fake food products are sold to the public

Food regulations and increased consumer awareness are forcing the food companies across the world to display more and more information on packaged food products. As Kim, Nayga and Capps, (2001) stated food product labeling, as policy tool for ensuring provision of nutrition and health information to the consumer, has gained importance in the recent past across the globe. Trend towards healthier and wellness food has also led to consumer demand for “more detailed, accurate, and accessible” nutritional information on the packaged food (Abbott, 1997). Consequently, nation states across the globe have come out with legal regulations which require mandatory nutrition labeling of packaged food products. These labeling regulations essentially reflect response to consumer’s right to know the content and nutrition of a particular food product.

Food labeling provides consumer with information on the characteristics of packed foods. According to available literature, food labeling acts as a medium that carries information about the product (Katarzyna *et al*, 2010). Labeling information and consumers’ level of education have large contribution in ensuring consumer with the suitable protection against hazards that may be associated with consumption of food. Consumers of packed foods are ought to make conscious choice of foods with respect to their preferences, health status and needs.

Food labeling information is very important /useful for people who are in special diet or with food /nutrition related health problems and diseases such as obesity, diabetics, cardiovascular diseases and various types of cancers as it helps them to make informed choices of food (Washi, 2012). Food labeling is also an important tool in packed food trade. Manufacturers of packed

foods use labeling information to market their products whereas consumers use the information in making informed food choices.

Few studies have been conducted in different countries on the knowledge and use of packed food labeling in decision making during purchase of such foods. Factors related to awareness, knowledge and use of food labeling information in purchasing packed food among consumers. Consumers' need and or motivation to use food labeling is determined by different factors. These factors, being internal (individual), situational or external (institutional, product attributes) motivate consumers whether to seek or not to seek information about a particular packed food prior its purchase or eat.

The information about a particular packed food is normally expected to be found on its label. Consumer's attitude towards reading food labels can be influenced by demographic characteristics such as age, sex, education level, and health status and nutrition knowledge. Situational factors such as income, time and being in special diet can also influence a consumer to seek information about a particular packed food and use the information to make an informed food choice (Sunelle *et al*, 2010).

The internal factors that influence consumer to read and use packed food labeling can be individual characteristics such as sex, age, health status education level etc. Situational factors such as time constraint and special diet status can also be influence consumers motivation in reading and using food labeling information. EdComs (2007) conducted a research in UK on consumers understanding of nutrition and health claims made on food and revealed that women especially mothers with high education levels read food labels due to their interest in nutrition and health, food allergy and religious beliefs.

The research also revealed some barriers to reading and use of pre packed food labels as lack of time, lack of understanding, lack of consistency in the format of labels and being unsure of what nutrition information to pay most attention to. In the same study, consumers reported to prefer simple and non- technical health claims on food labels rather than those using negative terms and references to diseases.

External factors that influence consumer to read and use pre packed food labeling can be institutional such food labeling regulations, packed food labeling information and packed food product attributes.

A study by Philip *et al* (2010) reported that use of food labeling among consumers is affected by the format of many food labels being inadequate, especially the size of labels and the printing

fonts used as well as the style of language in which they are written (not “plain English”). Food labeling has also being reported to present consumers with more information than they can reasonably process resulting into information overload. There were also some evidences that consumers view the responsibility for quality assurance as of government and public institutions i.e. food regulatory authorities. Sunelle *et al* (2010), revealed that in South Africa, factors leading consumers not to use food labeling information in food purchase decision making as products attributes such as taste and price of the product, demographic characteristics of consumers such as lack of education and nutrition knowledge and situational factors like time constraints.

On the other hand, a study by Coveney (2007) revealed that consumers view food labels as marketing ploys rather than a means to communicate the quality of food or its nutrition information thus are not using them as one of the factors to consider in food purchase decision making. Purchase and consumption of packed food cannot be avoided in this era of high increase in national and international trade of packed foods. The increased access to packed foods from different sources and with different ingredients; has a potential risk for consumers to purchase foods with ingredients that have undesired impact to their health.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study design is an explanatory, cross-sectional time based research type. The primary data was collected from respondents selected randomly through a survey questionnaire. Sample frame or the target population for this study covered 147 consumers those who bought packed food items from various departmental stores in Srikakulam city. Since general goal of the sampling method is to obtain a sample that is representation of the target population, the researcher has used multi-stage sampling with convenience sampling technique.

5. ANALYSIS:

The factors from the respondents’ perspective can be figured out firstly with the standards of education which really helps them to access readability and therefore understandability. Secondly the Attitude of learning about certain relevant and needy information about the product printed on the labeling creates the respondents to be more responsible and on the other hand adds value to consumerism. Thirdly the Age factor which is expected to influence the readability in psychological and emotional dimensions. Fourthly, the brand image of the product establishes a kind of complacency in the minds of the customers which overlaps the readability. Lastly the

gender discrimination carries a lot to the traders of certain countries like India in particular with the different contents observation on the labeling.

On the other hand a study was advocated to analyse also the different elements of labeling information of food products majorly correlated with the Freshness of the product (manufacturing date, best before use etc), Price of the product (MRP, taxes details, Offers etc), and Instructions (preparations, procedures, contraindications etc), Ingredients (Contents, combinations, compositions etc) .

Table: Factors influencing the readability of Different elements of labeling

	Elements of labeling	Factors												Grand Total	
		Education		Attitude		Age		Time		Brand Image		Gender Discrimination		N	%
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Factors Influencing the readability of Different elements of labeling	Manufacturing date	4	12.5	10	19	2	13	2	8	4	19	1	50	23	16
	Instructions	13	40.6	12	23	5	33	4	16	7	33	1	50	42	29
	Price	12	37.5	24	46	6	40	10	40	9	43	0	0	61	41
	Ingredients	3	9.4	4	8	1	7	6	24	1	5	0	0	15	10
	Company & brand information	0	0	2	4	1	7	3	12	0	0	0	0	6	4
Total		32	100	52	100	15	100	25	100	21	0	2	100	147	100

Based on the above table, the respondents have given the importance to the above stated five labeling elements according to the factors influencing them.

As far as observing the Manufacturing date is concerned, surprisingly out of total 23 respondents, Education influences 12.5%, Attitude of watching freshness leads to 19%,Age variation relates to 13%, Time spent shows 8%, Brand image is found with 19% and Gender discrimination gains 50%. For the total sampling of 147, 23 respondents of 16% have concentrated on manufacturing date.

As instructions are very important for food products, response of educated people tops the list with 40.6%, Attitude of following the instructions is 23%, both Age variation and Brand image influences 33%, Time spent for shopping relates to 16% and Gender discrimination amounts 50%. It is understood that the importance given to Instruction is 29% with 42 respondents out of 147.

Pricing of any product is expected to be watched by almost everybody as the food products are generally bought continuously experienced customers may not also go through the price. The table shows 37.5% of educated, 46% respondents having the attitude, 40% of Age and Time categories each, 43% of respondents are Brand centric and Gender Discrimination gains nothing. Finally at higher sight 61% respondents which are 41& have concentrated on Price information existed in Labeling.

As far as the Ingredients information is concerned out of 15% respondents, educated amounts 9.4%, respondents having Attitude gains 8%, Age relates to 7%, 24% is concentrated on Time spent, 5% of respondents gain Brand Image and Gender discrimination is found to be nil. Totally respondents concentrated on the information of contents and its percentages are found to be very lower with 15% out of total sampling 147% carries 10% only.

Lastly respondents concentrating on Company and Brand information found to be very less and almost negligible with 4% from 6 respondents out of total sampling 147. In detail, related to education and respondents of Brand Image and Gender discrimination have got no respondents, Age variation with 7% and Time spent with 12% is found with low importance.

6. CONCLUSION:

An emphasis on the readability of labeling information on the packaged food products relates and assists much to certain precautionary attributes majorly pertaining to the health and consumer rights. From the consumers' perspective the confidence on the quality while consuming the product would create appetite with utmost satisfaction. Traders such as middlemen, salesmen are thereby should take every possible preventative measure to access the readability so that the product image will be increase but quite contrary to this they would mainly focus on offers only. Company image is built stronger by the customer satisfaction in terms of hygienic food preparations, freshness of the product, and packaging quality rather than pricing and offers which are meant for short run. So companies instead of being particular to make the

labeling as mandatory a special focus on how readable and understandable the information really is. The middlemen who are in fact directly connected to consumers are supposed to be trained to carry forward the same to the customers which is actually not happening because of several reasons. A study as a way forward can also be recommended for the awareness of consumer rights especially on food products for every consumer backed up by his/her rights may have all the chances to make the most of the law including debating on the labeling information.

REFERENCES

1. African journal of food agriculture, nutrition and development .vol 7 no. 6. 2007.
2. Bowman, J. (2004), “ The Markets That Will Matter”, Media: Asia’s Media and News paper, pp.15-25
3. Fejes, F(1989) ‘ Image of Men In Media Research’ Critical Studies in Mass Communication, Vol.6 (2)
4. Food Labels: Assessing Awareness and Usage Level of Indian Consumer and Influences on Food Buying Behavior Sushil Kumar and A. Pandit. August,2015
5. Food and nutrition information: a study of sources, uses, and understanding.(2012) *British Food Journal*, 99(2).
6. Grunert, k. g., & Wills, J. M. (2007). a review of European research on consumer response to nutrition information on food labels. *Journal of public health*, 15, 385-399.
7. Guthrie, j. f., Cleveland, l. e., & welsh, s. (1995) *Journal of nutrition education*, 27(4), 163-172.
8. K.Venugopal., Sailesh Kedia ., (2014)“AGRI-MARKETING PRACTICES IN INDIA” Proceedings of the National Conference on “Indigenous Management Practices” PANACEA-2014 organized by Department of MBA , Datta Meghe Institute of Engineering, Technology & research, Wardha, Nagpur., April 4th 2014., ISBN: 978-81-924021-3-0, pp:104
9. Mahout S.E., Lesoli p.p., and Gobotswang K. awareness and use of nutrition information on food packages among consumers in maseu (lesotho). (2007)
10. Michael Tsiros & Carrie M. Heilman, The Effect of Expiration Dates and Perceived Risk on Purchasing Behavior in Grocery Store Perishable Categories *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 69 (April 2005), 114–129
11. Mostafa Mirghotbi, Katayoun pourvali, *Journal of paramedical sciences (JPS)*consumers’ attitude towards date marking system of packaged foods *summer 2013 vol.4, no.3*

12. Santosh Ranganath N., Dr Achutarao., Venu Gopal K.,(2012)., “Green Marketing in India – A Tool for Corporate Social Responsibility”., Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)., Volume3, Jan 2012., ISSN: 0975-7635, pp.14-21
13. Venu Gopal K., Santosh Ranganath N.,(2012)., “Behavioral Changes of Consumers on Indian Organised Retailing” Asian Journal of Research in Business Economics and Management , Volume 2, Issue 1 January 2012, ISSN: 2249-7307, pp. 57-66