CONSUMERS' ALERTNESS TOWARDS LABELLING OF EATABLES: A STUDY OF CHANDIGARH TRICITY

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ABSTRACT

Companies dealing in packaged eatables print very important pieces of information on the packing labels. These can help consumers to understand valuable aspects of eatables. However, in routine buying of goods at retail stores, it may be possible that consumers ignore this labelled information. In order to explore this gap, this study has been carried out to assess the importance and reading tendency while buying any packaged eatable product. A purposely developed questionnaire was filled by 83 respondents who were visiting retail stores and buying packed eatables. To analyse the data appropriate statistical tools were used including t-test which was used to compare the importance attached to labelled information and tendency to read it thoroughly. Results revealed that consumers consider some pieces of labelled information important and read it before making final purchase decision. These included expiry date of product, maximum retail price and weight or quantity of the product. However, consumers tend to ignore some labelled information like nutritional facts, FSSAI certification and instructions to use the product.

Keywords: Consumer Perception, Labelling, Purchase decision.

1. INTRODUCTION

With advancement of technology every individual is aware and concerned for the personal well-being. Labelling gives message to consumer that the product have those features that consumer wants and how it is different from other brands of same product. Consumer perception towards labelling of product is rising rapidly and consumer are becoming more demanding regarding labels. This is because people are aware of benefits of eating balanced diet and safe and quality food. Consumers' attitude towards the nutritional aspect of foods and proper eating habits are increasing rapidly. Basically labelling provides information of ingredients on eatables along with their quantity, nutritional properties, preparation, storage & usage instructions etc. Further it is becoming more relevant because of safety and quality of product. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) obesity is increasing in present era. Obesity itself leads to many problems such as diabetes, heart problems, hypertension etc. These problems are only cured with intake of nutritious food. Labels provide mandatory information regarding nutritional aspects that shows how a consumer

perceives which effects the purchase decision of consumer. Thus labels for food should provide detailed and exact information of food product without misleading the consumers. When designing the labels for eatables, manufacturers should follow the legislations imposed by the government of a particular country. This study has been carried out to assess the importance and reading tendency while buying any packaged eatable product.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A brief review of literature was carried out to find how the empirical research has placed the importance of labelled information on eatables and how is the tendency of buyers to read and understand this information. Loureiro et al. (2006) had conducted a study a study to find out consumers' value for nutritional labels, most of the respondents viewed mandatory nutritional labelling positively and factors affecting consumer preferences for nutritional labelling were clearly related to health status of the individuals, information use and socio demographic. The study also revealed that consumers who actually shop were willing to pay for nutritional labels. Huang and Lu (2016) put forth that any empirical studies have investigated how the nutrition content can influence consumer's perception of food healthiness, purchase intention, and post taste evaluation.

With an increase in health concerns and marketing activities that essentially present products with healthier alternatives, the healthiness of food products has become an increasingly important attribute for consumers making purchase decision. Caswell and Padberg (1999) opined that the aim of food labelling is to provide consumers with information, which may influence their purchasing decisions. Consumers may want to know what ingredients are in food product, how to cook it, how it should be stored, and its best before or use by dates, its fat content and other nutritional properties. Detailed, honest and accurate labelling is essential to inform the consumer as to the exact nature and characteristics of the food product, enabling them to make a more informed choice. Consumers' ability to choose their diets depends partly on the quantity and quality of information available through a variety of sources, including nutritional panel food labels.

Derby and Levy (2001) shared in 1990 diet and health survey that one third of consumers had changed their decision to buy a product because of the information on the nutrition label. The same authors report their attitudes, understanding, and awareness of health claims on labels. He had found that the consumers with higher education levels had a better understanding of diet-disease-related messages on food labels. Knowledge of fibre was significantly correlated with positive attitudes towards health messages and understanding of health messages. Overall, attitudes toward placing diet-disease-related messages on food labels were positive. Rodolfo (1999) examined the factors that influence consumers perception or beliefs about food labels, which indicated that health and diet related attitudes especial diet status, perceived importance of product attributes like nutrition and ease of preparation, race , gender, income and body mass index were important factors affects consumer perception and beliefs about labels.

Prathiraja and Ariyawardana (2003) made an attempt to understand the impact of nutritional labelling on consumer buying behavior with a view of identifying the market for nutritional labelling and the factors that

influence the consumer willingness to pay for nutritional labelling by performing a logistic method of analysis to identify the factors. Results showed that category of 36-50 years, educated consumers, nuclear family were willing to pay more for nutritional label. Jeddi and Zaiem (2010) conducted a study to understand the impact of label perception on the consumers purchase intention. The main objective for research was to study the consumers perception of labels and signals of quality and to bring in the reflection on the consumers tendency to acquired label products and to analyse the effects of such a relation on some moderating variables, namely product implication, the perceived risk and socio demographic variables.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective for the research is to determine the perceived importance and reading tendency in relation to labelled information on packing of eatables. This information has been further divided in eight different components. Hence, the objective is spread over eight selected components of labelled information. Additionally, the objective is also to determine if or not the perceived importance is related to consumers' tendency to read and consider this information at the time of buying.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to carry out the present study, following research design has been used. It covers scope of the study, sampling process undertaken, sources of data collection and analytical tools used including tabular presentation.

4.1. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of study was kept limited to Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali cities, popularly known as Chandigarh tricity. 15 retail stores were finalized for data collection, taking 5 stores each from Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali.

4.2. SOURCES OF DATA

The study is based on primary sources. The primary data has been collected from survey method with the help of structured questionnaire. Also information in labels of eatables has been collected by visiting retail stores and checking various types of information which is available on the eatables.

4.3. SAMPLE SIZE

Initially, a sample of 100 respondents was finalized using unbiased purposive sampling. However, out of 100, a total of 83 responses could be collected by the scheduled time. Respondents were primarily the people visiting the retail stores and buying eatables. To collect data, necessary permission was taken from managers of retail stores in advance.

4.4. STATISTICAL TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

The data collected from the respondents was coded and tabulated to suit requirement of the study. The statistical tools such as percentage analysis, descriptive tools like mean and standard deviation, correlation etc. have been used. Paired sample t-test has been used to examine if there is a variation between perceived importance and reading tendency of the labelled information on eatables at the time of buying.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The scheme of analysis is based upon calculating frequency and percentages, calculating descriptive values like mean and standard deviation and finally applying student t-test to verify if there is a difference between perceived importance of labelled information and reading habit of this information among consumers. Table-1 deals with importance of various components of labelled information in case of eatables.

Table-1: Importance of Label Components of Eatables

		Not at all Important	Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Important	Extremely Important
Date of Manufacturing	Count	4	15	17	30	17
	%age	5%	18%	20%	36%	20%
Date of Expiry	Count	3	6	14	39	21
	%age	4%	7%	17%	47%	25%
Maximum Retail Price	Count	0	7	16	38	22
	%age	0%	8%	19%	46%	27%
Ingredients	Count	6	13	22	21	21
	%age	7%	16%	27%	25%	25%
Nutritional Facts (kcal)	Count	6	14	13	30	20
	%age	7%	17%	16%	36%	24%
Instructions for Use	Count	6	12	23	32	10
	%age	7%	14%	28%	39%	12%
FSSAI Approval	Count	18	28	23	8	6
	%age	22%	34%	28%	10%	7%
Weight/Quantity	Count	3	6	16	29	29
	%age	4%	7%	19%	35%	35%

It can be easily observed that information like date of expiry of the product, maximum retail price and weight or quantity of the product have been marked as important by most of the respondents. At the bottom are ingredients, instructions for use of the product and FSSAI approval. Surprisingly, FSSAI approval has been considered important by only 17% of the respondents in the sample. Table-2 shows the reading habit of various label components of eatables by consumers at the time of buying products. The results are similar to perceived importance of labelled information.

Table-2: Reading of Label Components of Eatables

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Date of Manufacturing	Count	6	8	18	32	19
	%age	7%	10%	22%	39%	23%
Date of Expiry	Count	0	4	19	33	27
	%age	0%	5%	23%	40%	33%
Maximum Retail Price	Count	0	4	24	28	27
	%age	0%	5%	29%	34%	33%
Ingredients	Count	6	15	20	19	23
	%age	7%	18%	24%	23%	28%
Nutritional Facts (kcal)	Count	10	15	17	25	16
	%age	12%	18%	20%	30%	19%
Instructions for Use	Count	6	15	25	24	13
	%age	7%	18%	30%	29%	16%
FSSAI Approval	Count	12	35	22	6	8
	%age	14%	42%	27%	7%	10%
Weight/Quantity	Count	3	14	14	31	21
	%age	4%	17%	17%	37%	25%

Expiry date has been marked as mostly read by the consumers at the time of buying which indeed is a good sign. Besides, date of manufacturing, weight or quantity of the product and maximum retail price are also read or noted at the time of buying. Other type of information like ingredients, nutritional facts and instructions for use are among the less noted and less read information. FSSAI approval is the least read information. Table 3 shows the Descriptives of information collected through questionnaire. Mean value and standard deviation for both the importance and reading of various components of labelled information has been presented.

Table-3: T-Test (Paired Samples Statistics)

			Mean	N	Std. Dev.
Pair 1	Date of Manufacturing	Importance	3.494	83	1.1516
		Reading	3.602	83	1.1576
Pair 2	Date of Expiry	Importance	3.831	83	1.0099
		Reading	4.000	83	.8695
Pair 3	Maximum Retail Price	Importance	3.904	83	.8919
		Reading	3.940	83	.9019
Pair 4	Ingredients	Importance	3.458	83	1.2327
		Reading	3.458	83	1.2717
Pair 5	Nutritional Facts (kcal)	Importance	3.530	83	1.2331
		Reading	3.265	83	1.2981
Pair 6	Instructions for Use	Importance	3.337	83	1.0963
		Reading	3.277	83	1.1510
Pair 7	FSSAI Approval	Importance	2.470	83	1.1512
		Reading	2.554	83	1.1289
Pair 8	Weight/Quantity	Importance	3.904	83	1.0776
		Reading	3.639	83	1.1431

Manufacturing and expiry dates are considered fairly important and these are thoroughly read at the time of buying as shown by Mean values. It is worthwhile to note that information like nutritional facts and weight or quantity of the product are considered fairly important by consumers but when it comes to know that these things or read this information at the time of making a purchase people tend to read less. FSSAI approval has been given the least importance and it is not considered while purchasing any eatable.

Table-4: T-Test (Paired Samples Correlations)

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Date of Manufacturing	83	.195	.078
Pair 2	Date of Expiry	83	-.181	.102
Pair 3	Maximum Retail Price	83	-.007	.948
Pair 4	Ingredients	83	.223	.043
Pair 5	Nutritional Facts (kcal)	83	.231	.036
Pair 6	Instructions for Use	83	.205	.063
Pair 7	FSSAI Approval	83	.182	.100
Pair 8	Weight/Quantity	83	.229	.038

Table-4 deals with paired samples correlation. These correlations have been calculated between the importance rating and reading score of the consumers for various components of labelled information. One can observe that correlation coefficients in case of ingredients, nutritional facts and weight or quantity of the product have been significant. It indicates that consumers which feel any information to be important in these cases also spend time to go through the information or read it. Table-5 finally shows the results of paired sample t-test between importance and rating of various components of labelled information. Null hypothesis in this case has been that there is no significant difference between the importance and reading of labelled

information in case of eatables. The last column of the table showing significance clearly indicates that null hypothesis has been rejected for all the eight pairs.

Table-5: T-Test (Paired Samples Test)

			Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean	Std. Dev.			
Pair 1	Date of Manufacturing	Importance - Reading	-.1084	1.4651	-.674	82	.502
Pair 2	Date of Expiry	Importance - Reading	-.1687	1.4468	-1.062	82	.291
Pair 3	Maximum Retail Price	Importance - Reading	-.0361	1.2730	-.259	82	.797
Pair 4	Ingredients	Importance - Reading	.0000	1.5617	.000	82	1.000
Pair 5	Nutritional Facts (kcal)	Importance - Reading	.2651	1.5702	1.538	82	.128
Pair 6	Instructions for Use	Importance - Reading	.0602	1.4172	.387	82	.700
Pair 7	FSSAI Approval	Importance - Reading	-.0843	1.4584	-.527	82	.600
Pair 8	Weight/Quantity	Importance - Reading	.2651	1.3800	1.750	82	.084

It clearly indicates that there is no significant difference between the perceived importance and reading habit of the consumers for labelled information. It clearly is a positive sign as people who considered information important also went through it and made use of this information in making a buying decision.

6. CONCLUSION

Information shown on the product label is both mandatory for company and very important for consumers. Contents like date of expiry, nutritional facts, and product certifications certainly help buyers to make purchase decision specifically in case of eatables. An alert consumer must go through this information before buying any eatable product. Results of the survey positively indicate that those consumers who considered levelled information important have also gone through to the same information before buying. However, 7 pieces of information like nutritional facts and regulatory approvals having considered less important it and so less read are considered by the consumers. So an effort must be made to alert consumers about the importance of such information.

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