

Tales of Food Labeling: Experimental Studies on the Effects of Advertisings and Warnings on Food Labels in Brazilian Context: An Abstract



Rita Pereira and Josuéilton da Costa Silva

Abstract Though the labels are rich in information, studies suggest that these are not made in favor of the consumer. This can make them vulnerable to advertising on food. One of the causes of this is the lack of the ability to find and process information efficiently—literacy. Therefore, this study aims at understanding how do the labels influence the consumer’s perception and decision-making. In addition, two categories of products have been analyzed, so it can be verified if different product types are differently affected by the messages: a healthier product (cereal bar) and a less healthy one (chocolate cookies). Also, positive messages (advertisements) as well as negative messages (warnings) have been used. An online experiment with six different treatments was performed. Data from each group were compared with the nonparametric tests Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis, with the Dunn’s technique for paired comparisons. The t-test (parametric) was also used for the analysis. With more than 300 respondents, it can be inferred that advertisements have a positive effect on any product, but the warning had no effect on the cookies. Cereal bars can benefit from advertisements, but not as much as the cookies. As for price, only the cookie with the advertisement achieved a significantly higher result, indicating that people are more attracted, and could pay more, for these kinds of products when they come with positive messages. To test this assumption in an environment closer to reality, cookies were sold to university students. Almost half of the sample of 38 students preferred the more expensive cookies (carrying advertisement), even though both products (with/without propaganda) had identical back-of-package information and design. Only few individuals were able to find and interpret the back-of-package information. Those who bought the most expensive product justified themselves saying that the product was nutritionally better.

R. Pereira (✉) · J. da Costa Silva
Federal University of Paraíba, João Pessoa, Brazil
e-mail: rita_faria@yahoo.com; jdacostasilva@posteo.de

It is suggested that further studies on labeling seek to be more realistic and that industries and governments should be more concerned on how the consumer understands the labels. Especially for the companies, it should not be the goal of its investigations solely which formats sell more, but which label formats are more efficient to inform the consumer.