



STUDY OF FOOD LABEL READING HABITS OF STUDENTS PURSUING PROFESSIONAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Prof. Dr. Anita Frantz, Principal, M.C.E. Society's, M.A.Rangoonwala Institute of Hotel Management and Research, Azam Campus, Pune, Maharashtra.

ABSTRACT

The FSS Act 2006 mandated certain functions to FSSAI, one of which is to frame regulations to lay down the standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food & specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified. Hence FSSAI, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India made the Food Safety and Standards, (Packaging & labeling) Regulations 2011. These regulations specify the general requirements and the labeling mandate for pre-packaged foods. In order to ensure safe, healthy & sustainable food for all Indians, the FSSAI has started the "Eat Right India" movement and the Eat Right Campus certification program. This program focuses on Food and Hygiene audits of the food service establishments in the campus with pre- defined benchmarks. One of the benchmarks is building awareness among individuals in the campus to make the right food choices. Hence it is imperative to understand and evaluate the buying behavior of students related to the purchase of pre-packaged food. The aim of the research paper is to explore whether students read food labels on pre-packaged foods, to investigate the influence of information on food labels on the buying behavior of students, to explore buying behavior of students related to packaged food and to raise awareness among the students about food label reading with the help of data collection form prepared based on the topic. The study is carried out at the educational institutions of Azam Campus, Camp, Pune. The Universe of the study consists of students studying across various professional programs offered by the institutions at Azam Campus. Simple random sampling with a sample size of 135 students admitted for professional programs. Survey questionnaire on Google forms was shared with the students. It was found that majority of the students sometimes read the food labels on prepackaged foods and that there is a need to educate the students on mandatory disclosures and trademarks used on food labels as well as the FSS Act and food labeling regulations.

INTRODUCTION

Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI), established under Food Safety Standards Act, 2006, consolidates various acts & orders to handle food related issues in various ministries and departments. FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe & wholesome food for human consumption¹. The FSS Act 2006 mandated

certain functions to FSSAI, one of which is to frame regulations to lay down the standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food & specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified. Hence the FSSAI, under the Ministry of Health and family Welfare, Government of India made the Food Safety and Standards, (Packaging & labeling) Regulations 2011. These regulations specify the general requirements and the labeling mandate for pre-packaged foods. In the Preamble to the FSS Act 2006, the FSSAI is expected, to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for the people in India. Therefore, FSSAI has embarked on a large scale effort to transform the country's food system.

In order to ensure safe, healthy & sustainable food for all Indians, the FSSAI has started the "Eat Right India" movement and the Eat Right Campus certification program. This program focuses on Food and Hygiene audits of the food service establishments in the campus with pre-defined benchmarks. One of the benchmarks is building awareness among individuals in the campus to make the right food choices. Hence it is imperative to understand and evaluate the buying behavior of students related to the purchase of prepackaged food.

LITERATURE SURVEY

The commodities market is flooded with pre-packaged food. Each and every student these days do purchase some or the other food item in a packaged format. There are numerous frozen foods, convenience foods and other commodities available on the shopkeeper's shelf. The knowledge of making the right choice to safeguard one's health is of prime importance. Extensive research needs to be done in the area. Few research papers published highlights the consumer behavior influencing the decision to purchase packaged food. Nutrition information on food labels is regarded as a major means for encouraging consumers to make healthier choices when shopping for food². The findings of the research by Raksha Goyal and Neeta Deshmukh indicated that the choice of specific foods of more than half of the participants in the survey carried out was not based on nutrition information and concluded that nutrition labeling education strategy should be integrated into broader behavior change strategies related to nutrition education and health to assist consumers in bridging the gap between current dietary practices and dietary recommendations.

The intention of promoting healthy food choices through use of food labels is not being completely met. Since a majority of people found it difficult to comprehend nutrition information, there is a need to take up educational activities and/or introduce new forms of labeling³.

Findings of the research by SnehasreeSaha and others states that although 88% of adolescents read food labels, many read only date of manufacture (79%), expiration (74%) or best used before dates (65%). Fewer adolescents read ingredients (50%) and nutrition information (20%). Their knowledge about quality symbols was low. Many of them (over 60%)

recognized the symbols but had no knowledge of what they indicated. About 66% believed that nutrition information on labels was too complex to understand⁴.

Shireen S, Muthumareeswari, and others studied the hindering factors in food label usage and found that factors like education, income and area of residence had an impact on reading and purchasing foods⁵.

Food labels are the first informative tool found by the customers during shopping, and are informative in terms of ingredients, nutrient content, and the presence of allergens of the selected product. However, food labeling also represents a marketing tool and may influence perception of the food quality and, in turn, the dietary choice of consumers. For this reason, there is growing research in the food labeling field and in the evaluation of its effects on consumers, food operators, and the whole market⁶.

NazanCakiverCalbayram and others conclude that food labels can help promote the awareness of consumers about nutrition and access right information. The findings of the study indicated that the most influential factor to purchase a packaged food product was their own preference⁷.

Investigation of consumers' awareness of food labels and how this awareness guides their decisions when making purchasing choices of food revealed that awareness and use of pre-packaged food labeling information is low among consumers in Tripoli municipality⁸.

METHOD

The study is carried out at Azam Campus, Camp, Pune. Azam campus is an Educational Hub located in the heart of Pune Camp, Pune. It is one of the oldest educational organizations of Pune with academic institutions imparting education in the medical, technical and professional field of Arts, Science, Commerce, Computer Science, Law, Education, Pharmacy, Management Sciences, Architecture, Dental Sciences, Animation, Hospitality Studies and Information Technology.

The Universe of the study consists of students studying across various professional programs offered by the institutions at Azam Campus.

Sampling: Simple random sampling with sample size of 135 students admitted for professional programs.

Male: 74 respondents

Female: 61 respondents

AIM

1. To explore whether students read food labels on packaged foods.
 2. To investigate the influence of information on food labels on the buying behavior of students.
 3. To explore buying behavior of students related to pre-packaged food.
 4. To raise awareness among the students about food label reading with the help of data collection form prepared based on the topic.
-

DATA COLLECTION TOOL & METHOD

Data collected through a well-structured questionnaire circulated to the students on Google Forms developed by the researcher. The Form consists of section I- questions about general information on Social Demographic Characteristics and section II - questions on knowledge & purchasing behavior of respondents. Data analysis is done on Google.

Ethical Consideration: Permission for participation of students in the survey was obtained from the institutions where the study was carried out.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

SECTION I: General Information on Social Demographic Characteristics

Question 1. Age of the respondents

Majority of the respondents, i.e. 80 are in the age bracket of 20-22 years, 31 respondents are 17- 19 years old and the remaining 21 respondents are in the age group of 23 – 25years.

Question 2.Gender

74 are Males and 61 are females.

Question 3.Marital Status

Most of the respondents are single -130 (96.3%) whereas only 5 (3.7%) respondents are married.

Question 4.Educational Status

89(65.9%) respondents are pursuing undergraduate program where as 46 (34.1%) post graduate programs.

SECTION II: Knowledge about food label information and purchase behavior

Question 5. Frequency of food label reading [Do you read food labels on pre-packaged foods for every pre-packaged food purchase]

The response to the question asked as to whether the respondents read food labels on prepackaged foods for every purchase, there is a good number i.e 60 (44.4%) who always read food labels on every purchase whereas, a large number i.e 78 (57.78%) stated that they sometimes read food labels on every purchase. One respondent (0.75%) never reads food labels.

Question 6. Effects of label content on purchasing decision [Does the content on the food label influence your purchase]

54.8% of respondents are always influenced by food labels for their purchase, whereas 43.7% are sometimes influenced.

Question 7. You read food labels to check

- **Price**-Majority of the respondents always read labels for price whereas few of them read sometimes.
- **Nutritional Facts**-75 respondents sometimes read food labels for nutritional information, 50 respondents always, whereas as remaining respondents never read label for nutritional information.

- **Expiry date**- Surprisingly more than 100 respondents responded positively that they always check food labels for the expiry date of the product, whereas there are a few respondents who sometimes check and a few respondents never check for the expiry date of the product.
- **Additives in food**-Close to 75 responses received stated that they sometimes check labels for additives whereas close to 50 responses sometimes check for additives and a few of them never check labels for additives.
- **Preparation and storage condition instructions**-Close to 75 responses read labels for preparation and storage instructions, around 52 replied that they sometimes read whereas few responded that they never read labels to check preparation and storage instructions.
- **Whether package is recyclable**-Less than 75 respondents sometimes read labels for recyclable packaging. The responses received for always and never are somewhat similar.
- **Whether food is organic**-Majority of the respondents sometimes read food labels for food being organic followed by always and a few for never.
- **Whether food is genetically modified**-Just about 50 respondents read about genetically modified food information followed by always and a few for never.
- **Address of the manufacturer**-Close to 75 respondents sometimes read the manufacturers address, close to 50 always read and 25 never read manufacturers address.
- **Mandatory trademarks**-More than 50 respondents sometimes read the information on mandatory trademarks, around 51 respondents always read for trademarks whereas close to 25 respondents never read labels for mandatory trademarks.

Question 8. What influences your prepackaged food product purchase?

To the question on the factors influencing the purchase of prepackaged food; brand of the product, taste of the product, quantity of the product, quality of the product, price and ease/ convenience has scored higher, whereas for nutritional facts on label sometimes response exceeds the always response. Few responses are also received as never for the brand of the product, nutritional facts on the label and ease of convenience.

Question 9. What influences you to buy the prepackaged food?

The responses for what influences to buy packaged food?, 71.9% responded that the product was recommended by friends, colleagues and family, followed by 57% stating as advertisement in the media whereas 15.6% for recommended by seller.

Question 10. Where did you learn about food labels?

Response to where did you learn about food labels? - 48.9% selected college, 42.2% through family and friends, 41.5% through media and 39.3% in schools.

Question 11. Are you knowledgeable about the Government's Food Labeling Regulations?

Questions on whether the respondents are knowledgeable about Government's food labeling regulations, surprisingly 47.8% responded in negative and 53% positive.

Question 12. Are you aware about the 'Eat Right Campus' movement of the Government?

Responding to the knowledge of the Eat Right Campus movement of the Government 57% respondents are not aware whereas 43% are aware.

Recommendations:

1. There is a need to promote the ‘Eat Right Movement’ of the government of India in all educational institutions and educate the students on healthy eating habits through various programs initiated by the central and state government to improve the health of the student community. The management of the educational institutions should priorities the health of students and staff and take necessary measures to provide safe and healthy food options through the canteens run in the campus.
2. Students should be encouraged and educated to read food labels on all pre-packaged food purchases.
3. Students should be educated about the mandatory disclosures and trademarks used on pre-packaged food.
4. Educational Institutions should conduct Seminars, Conferences and Expert talks on, role of FSSAI, FDA and various food hygiene and food labeling requirements to create general awareness among the students, though it may not be included in the program curriculum for which the students are admitted.
5. Government should carry out awareness drives through mandatory activities on topics related to healthy eating for general health and wellbeing of the students in educational institutions and through various social media platforms.

REFERENCES

1. fssai.gov.in/cms/about-fssaiphp, viewed on 28th Jan 2023
2. Raksha Goyal and Neeta Deshmukh, ‘Food label reading: Read before you eat’, [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5903167-](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5903167/) viewed on 28th January 2023
3. Sudershan Rao Vemula, Subbarao M Gavaravarapu, Vishnu Vardhana Rao Mendu, PulkitMathu, August 2013, ‘Use of food label information by urban consumers in India- A study among supermarket shoppers’, Public Health Nutrition 17(09) – 1 -11 DOI 10.1017/s1368980013002231, [researchgate.net/publication](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260111111)
4. SnehasreeSaha, M.Sc,¹ Sudershan Rao Vemula Ph.D², Vishnu Vardhana Rao Mendu Ph.D³, Subba Rao M. GavaraVarapurPh.D⁴ 2013, ‘Knowledge and Practices of using food label information among Adolescents Attending Schools in Kolkata, India’, Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, Volume 45, Number 6, 2013 .www.academia.edu
5. Shireen S, Muthumareeswari S, Sumaya, Bhivaneshwarikm, Lakshmishree R, 2022, ‘Food label and its influence among Indian Consumers’, Journal of food science and Nutrition Research vol 5, No. 2, June 2022 (ISSN-2642-1100)



6. Shangguan S., Afshin A., Shulkin M., Ma W., Marsden D., Smith J., Saheb-Kashaf M., Shi P., Micha R., Imamura F., et al. A Meta-Analysis of Food Labeling Effects on Consumer Diet Behaviors and Industry Practices. *Am. J. Prev. Med.* 2019;56:300–314
7. NazanCakiver Calbayvram¹, Hulya Yardimci², Bahise Aydin³, 2017, ‘An Evaluation of food label reading habits of individuals working in hospitals’, *Progress in Nutrition* 2017, Vol 19, N.4: 415-422
8. Amal Alshukri¹, Safia Elramli²& Hana Albkaush³, *ijar*vol 7, issue 2, April-June 2020. ‘Study of Knowledge, attitude and awareness of the information of food labeling among consumers in Tripoli Municipality Libya’, *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews* , EISSN 2348-1269, print ISSN 2349-5138