

Lessons from Nutrition Labeling: Content, Format and Evaluation

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Consumer Studies

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Where did the content come from?

- First, from the marketplace
 - Rising consumer awareness of dietary risk factors—produced by consumer education efforts of a government/public health/industry collaboration
 - New product introductions
 - Consumer confusion—Tower of Babel



Where did the content come from?

- Second, from the experts
 - Prioritized public health importance of various nutrients.
 - Established standardized nomenclature
 - e.g., what's high, what's low.
 - Determined level of detail to disclose
 - e.g., sat fat, not other fatty acids.
 - Public health policy decisions—not communication decisions



Where did the content come from?

- Third, from the law
 - Defined the purpose—to inform consumers by disclosing nutritional characteristics of products in the context of the total diet.
 - Defined the scope of application—virtually all packaged foods covered.
 - Required uniform presentation.



Where did the content come from?

- Fourth, from the coordination between the marketplace, experts and the law.
 - Consumers were educated by public health experts to want the information that the law required to be on product labels.
 - Consumers saw nutrition labeling as meeting a need they already had.
 - They did not learn about that need when they read the label.



Where did the format come from?

- Alternative formats suggested by interested parties--industry, public health experts, consumer groups and regulators--were tested and evaluated.
- Performance, not preference, was the measure.
- Performance was defined in terms of ease of use and accuracy for specific label uses.



Performance Depends on Purpose

- You have to know what people use the label for before you can measure its performance.
- First you ask people what they are going to do with the label.
- Then you define a task (or tasks) that capture these uses.
- Then you can measure performance.



Kinds of Tasks: Nutrition Labeling

- One product/Two product Tasks
 - Product rating/Product selection
- Realistic tasks
 - Evaluate front panel claims
 - Which nutrients are high/low
 - Likely dietary impact
 - Which would you buy



Kinds of Tasks: Privacy Disclosures

- One product/Two product Tasks
 - Product rating/Product selection
- Realistic tasks
 - Opt in/Opt out
 - Which would you buy
 - Information search



Control Groups

- Product rating tasks—with and without privacy disclosures.
- Product selection tasks—multiple privacy disclosure formats.



Evaluation

- Market Impact
 - New product introductions
 - Type and market share
 - Advertising
 - Label usage
 - Frequency of use
 - Different possible uses
 - Perceived credibility



Evaluation

- Consumer Acceptance
 - Value added information
 - tells you something you don't know that you want to know
 - Perceived Purpose
 - information always has a purpose
 - your interest or mine?
 - Consumers don't know the regulations.



Evaluation

- Consumer Acceptance
 - Label design-consumers as critics
 - legible
 - comprehensible
 - ease of use
 - serves its intended purpose.



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