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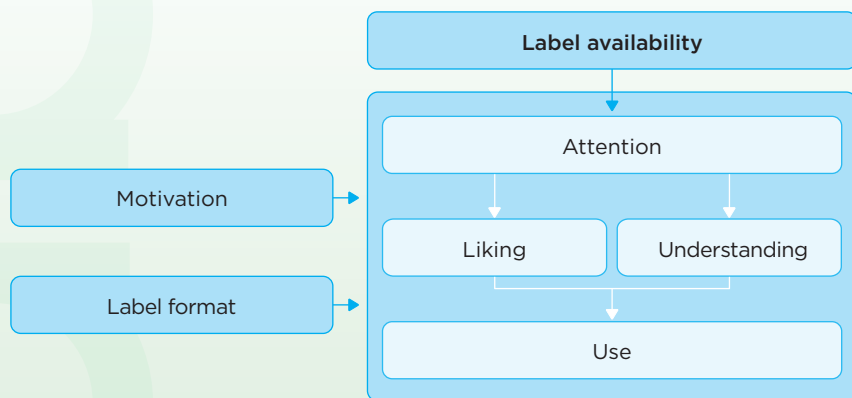
Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life

A pan-European project which has explored the impact of food labelling among consumers in Europe

About FLABEL

FLABEL (Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life) is an EU-funded project which has explored the impact of food labelling among consumers in Europe.

Nutrition labels are a potentially useful tool for helping consumers to make more healthful food choices, but insights into how these labels are used in real-life shopping situations are limited. It also seems that the different labelling formats already in place may stimulate a range of consumer reactions, making it difficult to develop new labelling policies and evaluate existing ones. To fill in the gaps in the scientific evidence, FLABEL was set up to find out what effect nutrition labelling has on dietary choices.



Assuming nutrition labels are available on food products, any effect on food choice depends on consumers paying attention to these labels and understanding the label information. It also helps if consumers like the idea of nutrition labelling. Other factors such as the label format and consumers' motivation to make healthful choices will determine how much consumers pay attention to labels, and how much they like, understand and use them.



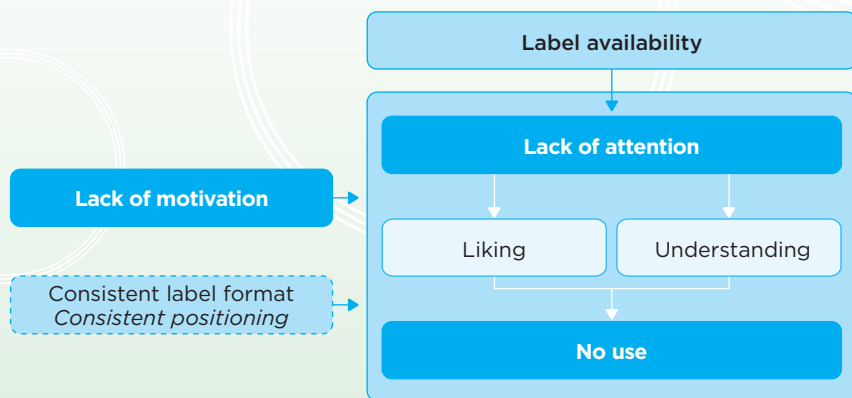
FLABEL final results

How available are nutrition labels?

The availability of nutrition information on food products in Europe is very high. After looking at over 37,000 products in five product categories across Europe, it was found that the majority (85%) of food packages have some nutrition information on the back of the pack and nearly half (48%) have nutrition information on the front of the pack.

Can consumers understand nutrition labels?

Consumers can understand the information presented in nutrition labels, in the sense that they have no problems using this information to rank products according to healthfulness. Variations in label format have only small or no effects.



FLABEL research shows how label format can affect consumers' reactions to and use of nutrition labels, particularly when applied in a consistent way. Other potential bottlenecks like lack of consumer motivation and lack of attention result in poor use of nutrition labels as a guide to healthful food choices.



What are the main obstacles, or bottlenecks, to using nutrition labels?

Lack of motivation and attention are significant bottlenecks which prevent nutrition labelling from having a positive effect on consumer choice.

The project results show how average attention to nutrition labels is between just 25 and 100 milliseconds. This is too brief a period for the information to be processed meaningfully. Consumers need to be motivated to engage with nutrition information – for instance, by having a health goal – in order to pay greater attention to nutrition labels.

What kind of label would improve attention and use?

According to FLABEL data, the most promising option for increasing consumers' attention to and use of nutrition labels would be to provide information on key nutrients and energy on the front of the pack in a consistent way.

Complementing this information with a health logo can also increase attention and use, especially when the consumer is under time pressure.



Guiding policy

The insights gained from this research can be used to develop guidelines on the use of nutrition labelling for EU policy and the food industry.

Some policy implications which have been discussed with different stakeholders include:

- Considering nutrition labelling in a broader context

Rather than focus solely on the label itself, policy interventions should consider how this slots into the “bigger picture” of nutrition education and health motivation

- Standardising guidelines on the use of nutrition labelling

Improving consistency and familiarity could help to improve consumer use of nutrition labels (widespread use of front-of-pack nutrition information would be particularly desirable)

- Recognising the use of nutrition labelling as a major incentive for product reformulation and innovation

Many manufacturers will strive to develop foods with a more healthful nutrient profile in order that they can put certain health logos and nutrient claims on their products



The project results are being submitted to peer-reviewed journals. For more information about the FLABEL project, including references to publications, please visit the project website www.flabel.org.

Research Consortium Partners

FLABEL was coordinated by the European Food Information Council (EUFIC). Professor Klaus G. Grunert from Aarhus University, Denmark, was the Scientific Advisor.

Members of the consortium included academic experts from eight European universities, two major retail organisations, and representatives of European associations of SMEs and Family organisations. The project also worked together with stakeholders from the whole food sector to ensure results with a high degree of practical relevance.

- European Food Information Council (EUFIC), Belgium
- Aarhus University, Denmark
- Agricultural University of Athens, Greece
- University of Surrey, UK
- Wageningen University, The Netherlands
- Saarland University, Germany
- European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME), Belgium
- Tesco Stores Ltd, UK
- Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), Belgium
- Euro Coop, Belgium
- University of Warsaw, Poland
- Dokuz Eylül University, Turkey
- Georg-August University Göttingen, Germany



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