

Category: *Food Manufacturer*

Methods: *Online Consumer Survey*

Summary

A manufacturer of food and beverage products wanted to gauge consumer reactions to various nutrition and ingredient labels listing different sugars, fibers, and starches. Specifically, the ingredient manufacturer wanted to:

- Assess purchase interest of their current (control) product as compared to products labeled with alternate ingredients.
- Understand how interest varies across different product categories.

Strategic Issues

In recent years, consumers have become more interested in the content of the foods they eat. They are more likely to consider a product's nutrition, the specific ingredients included, and other information on the product's packaging to decide if they will buy it. As a result, savvy manufacturers of food and beverage products have begun experimenting with their formulas in order to use fewer ingredients (for the clean-label trend) or to incorporate ingredients that are lower in fat, higher in nutritional value, or more natural-sounding. These changes often affect the claims a product can make, which impacts selection at the shelf. Therefore, it is important to understand consumers' reactions to these changes and to assess them at the category level.

Research Objectives

The main objective for the research was to gauge consumers' reactions to food ingredients, nutritional facts, and marketing claims in order to understand purchase interest and appeal of different variations of ingredients (and associated nutritional facts and claims) across several food categories. The types of ingredients tested included:

- Fibers
- Sweeteners
- Starches



Research Design and Methods

A 15-minute online survey was conducted with approximately 150 consumers per category, including a mix of ages, household incomes, and other demographics. Consumers were primarily responsible for the household's grocery shopping and read product ingredient labels at least sometimes. They must also have purchased the food category in the past three months.

The questionnaire was strategically designed to have consumers evaluate up to three test labels and one control label within a single product category. Labels were evaluated one at a time in a randomized order.

After rating their purchase interest and ingredient preferences (including likes and dislikes), consumers responded to a battery of questions about the food category, which included topics such as familiarity, emotional response, importance, attitudes about food and personal health, and other demographic and behavior questions.

Results

The manufacturer was able to identify the substitute ingredient(s) that would generate the highest purchase interest in each product category. Results were also used to select supporting claims and update packaging to better highlight the information that generated the most interest among consumers.