CATEGORY BIAS AND FRONT-OF-PACKAGE LABELS

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Abstract

Front-of-package nutrition labels are a common way to offer consumers more information about a food product's healthfulness. However, not much is known about how category perceptions influence consumers' interpretation of objective nutrition information or how individual characteristics might influence this. Across four experiments, we find that consumers evaluate the same nutrition information different across different food categories. Although they can adapt their evaluations based on the nutrient levels presented, the category bias remains. We further find initial evidence that the bias is stronger among those who report being more health conscious. Subjective or objective nutrition knowledge or one's confidence in it does not help to overcome the bias. The results suggest that nutrition information is interpreted in the broader context of the food category. Policy makers and consumers need to find ways to increase their focus on the individual products over broad categorizations.

Subject Areas: *Consumer Behaviour, Decision-Making, Product Categorization, Public Policy*

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