

Choice or surprise? Unboxing the impact of surprise labeling on the reduction of end- of-day food waste

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Acknowledgements:

This work was supported by the UTS Behavioural Lab Grant (Round 1, 2024)

Cite as:

Saluja Geetanjali, Hermoso Eldrin (2025), Choice or surprise? Unboxing the impact of surprise labeling on the reduction of end- of-day food waste. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 54th, (125913)

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025



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Abstract:

The staggering amount of food waste generated worldwide has compelled organizations to offer surplus food at a discount to help reduce waste. Within this context, a novel yet understudied strategy exploits surprise offers, where consumers purchase a product without knowing what they will receive. This paper examines how surprise (versus choose-your-own) labels influence consumers' responses to end-of-day surplus food promotions. Four experiments reveal that consumers prefer end-of-day food promotions labeled as choose-your-own (vs. surprise) offers. This effect is mediated by the perceived value of the offering (cognitive pathway) and consumers' anticipated enjoyment (affective pathway). Importantly, assortment size and novelty serve as boundary conditions for this effect such that consumers equally favor surprise and choose-your-own offers when the offer contains one (vs. four) items and their relative preference for surprise (vs. choose-your-own) offers increases when presented with a more (vs. less) novel assortment. This research contributes new knowledge while providing practical implications for food retailers to minimize food waste.

Keywords: Surprise, Food waste, Retail promotions

Track: Consumer Behavior