

The downside of clarity: The conditions under which concrete labels depress consumer interest in plant-based burgers

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Abstract

This study examines how and when abstract labels for plant-based meat alternatives (e.g., meat-free burger) outperform concrete ingredient-based labels (e.g., soy burger) in driving consumer appeal. In a between-subjects experiment with four labels (meat-free, plant-based, soy burger, or pea burger), concrete labels were found to heighten meat affinity, which subsequently reduced product attractiveness, perceived taste, and purchase willingness. The total indirect effect was stronger among men, who exhibited a higher overall affinity for meat. The findings advance theory by identifying meat affinity as a key psychological mechanism underlying resistance to plant-based alternatives and by highlighting gender as an important boundary condition. The study offers practical guidance for marketers and policymakers, including the strategic use of abstract front-of-package labels, gender-sensitive communication approaches, and caution against restrictive labeling regulations.

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications