Consumers’ in-store satisfaction with food labels: a study in Gauteng, South Africa

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During rational decision-making, consumers carefully evaluate alternatives. In the case of food shopping, consumers make use of food labels to evaluate products within a category. Due to the increasing literacy rate in South Africa and consumers’ increased reference to health and nutrition, it is essential that manufacturers design labels that consumers are satisfied with as the product’s chance of being selected might be improved. However, consumers’ satisfaction with food labels has not yet been explored in South Africa. Consequently, this study aimed to explore and describe consumers’ retrospective satisfaction with food labels based on a typical in-store encounter. A quantitative research approach by means of a survey was followed, using self-administered questionnaires distributed in office buildings within the Gauteng Province. A total of 279 useful questionnaires were retrieved. Results show that concerning the attributes (readability, believability, understandability and adequacy) of food labels, respondents were dissatisfied. They were also dissatisfied with primary label information such as ingredient lists, nutrition information and expiry dates, although they seemed satisfied with secondary label information such as number of servings and logo’s or symbols. This study identified pertinent shortcomings in food labelling that could be communicated to food manufacturers so that they could improve existing labels. Manufacturers might benefit as consumers’ perception of their products improve and positive word-of-mouth could consequently arise. Consumer friendly labels might also lead consumers to favour those products; therefore sales can be improved when food labels are designed according to consumer needs.