ABSTRACT

Background: Changing life styles and dietary habits leading to high prevalence of non-communicable diseases in India. A higher per capita income and buying capacity created a growing market for these health food. Buying of health food are specific to consumer, product or effective communication-based factors. This study was undertaken to identify the consumers for this growing market and the factors that motivate them to purchase health food.

Method: To characterize the health food consumers, their nutritional knowledge level including the food labels and compare the self-reported behavior with the actual simulated purchase behavior. 319 health food consumers were interviewed from homes and supermarkets. A subset of 5 subjects was taken for Eye-Tracking experimentation to prioritize the information given in the food labels.

Results: Best before, nutritional information, product name, brand name, ingredient information and price Claim of health benefit, followed by Nutritional information, along with doctor’s or nutritionist’s recommendations were found to be the leading factors for buying Health food. Married people with children are more regular buyer. Gender of the children has no impact. Triggering factor to purchase specific health food is age and gender also absence of any life style related condition indicates a strong self-motivation and awareness. Consumer’s age is the determinant for type of health food selected. 21% consumer always read label including ‘Best Before Date’ but 46.1% still do not refer to the nutrition label before buying. People with specific allergy problem at home only are concerned about allergen.

Heat map in the eye tracking system indicates ‘Real Fruits, Nuts, All-Natural Ingredients’ etc., create a health aura and drawn maximum attention as initiating point of the eye movement. Significant attention given to ‘value added’ information to the customer including price or extra portion size. Sensory words like “Crunch” also catches a lot of attention. The word ‘Instant’ had substantial attention for Breakfast product.

Conclusions: It was noted that a crisp brief label with Plain and simple presentation is preferred. Urban health-conscious consumers are willing to pay more for health claims and are not price conscious. There is positive shift from curative approach towards preventive approach for health management. Convenience foods like breakfast cereal and health drinks were preferred over whole grains and organics. The food choice people make were directly
correlated with age and gender. Self-reported preferences while shopping for health food and readings with eye tracker had discrepancies.