Introduction

- Children may select packaged foods based on “fun” characteristics like bright colors or characters, whereas parents may consider the social context when making their choice (Nelson, Duff, & Ahn, 2015).
- When parents perceive another adult is evaluating them, parents report that they are more likely to choose products that appear healthier (Abrams, Evans, & Duff, 2015).
- When the parent is at home and looking to provide a treat, entertainment, or even distraction for their child, they report selecting colorful packages with characters that may be perceived as less healthy (Abrams, Evans, & Duff, 2015).

Hypotheses

- **H1**: Parents would choose a “healthier” label (e.g., 100% natural label or organic) when presented with a social evaluation scenario, and choose a “fun” label (e.g., Disney’s Olaf or a dinosaur) when presented with a non-social evaluation scenario.
- **H2**: Parents would rate the 100% natural/organic labels as healthier, more expensive, and be willing to pay more compared to the Olaf/dinosaur label.
- **H3**: Parents who rated themselves as more health conscious would be more likely to choose the 100% natural or organic labels for their children.

Study 1

**Participants**
- 388 Amazon Mechanical Turk users
- Parents of a 3-5 year old child living in the U.S.
- 72.6% female, 83.8% white, 26.5% aged 30-34

**Measures and Procedure**
- Participants read 8 scenarios (four with social evaluation and four with no social evaluation; Figure 1) and chose either the 100% natural yogurt or the dinosaur yogurt (Figure 2).
- Participants answered questions regarding the estimated price, how much they were willing to pay for the yogurt, the healthfulness of each product on a 7-point Likert scale, and completed sections of the Health and Taste Attitudes Questionnaire (Rönninen, Lähteenmäki, & Tariska, 1999).
- Participants completed a demographics form, were debriefed, and received $1.50 compensation.

**Results**

- **H1**: Participants selected the 100% natural yogurt significantly more often when being socially evaluated than when no social evaluation was present ($t(386) = 2.95, p = .003, d = .15) (Figure 3).
- **H2**: Participants rated the 100% natural yogurt as significantly healthier ($t(386) = 21.65, p = .000, d = 1.10), and more expensive ($t(387) = 2.74, p = .006, d = .14), and were also willing to pay more for it ($t(387) = 4.21, p = .000, d = .21) when compared to the dinosaur yogurt (Figure 3).
- **H3**: Participants with higher levels of health consciousness selected the 100% natural yogurt more often, regardless of the situation ($r(386) = .40, p = .000).

*Figure 1. Example choice scenarios from Study 1.*

*Figure 2. Yogurt label stimuli for Study 1.*

*Figure 3. Social evaluation and label impacting choice and health/price perceptions.*

Study 2

**Participants**
- 421 Amazon Mechanical Turk users
- Parents of a 3-5 year old child living in the U.S.
- 75.7% female, 82.8% White, 31.3% aged 30-34

**Measures and Procedure**
- Participants read 8 revised scenarios (four with social evaluation and four with no social evaluation; Figure 4) and chose 100% natural, Olaf, or dinosaur juice (Figure 5).
- Participants answered the same surveys and questions as Study 1 regarding price and health.
- Participants completed a demographics form, were debriefed, and received $2.00 compensation.

**Results**

- **H1**: The organic label was chosen more often with social evaluation while the dinosaur was chosen more often in no social evaluation (Figure 6).
- **H2**: The organic label was perceived as most costly ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.86$) compared to the other labels, $F(3,1254) = 97.91, p = .00$, partial $n^2 = .20$. The organic label ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.31$) and 100% natural label ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.31$) were perceived as healthier than the Olaf ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.36$) and dinosaur label ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.34$), $F(3,1254) = 697.08, p = .00$, partial $n^2 = .63$. Participants were willing to pay more for the organic label ($M = 1.54, SD = 1.42$) and the 100% natural label ($M = 1.50, SD = 1.73$) compared to the Olaf ($M = 1.03, SD = 1.14$) and dinosaur label ($M = 0.99, SD = 0.98$), $F(3,1206) = 74.97, p = .00$, partial $n^2 = .16$.
- **H3**: Participants with higher levels of health consciousness were less likely to choose the organic label, $r = -.29, p = .00$, less likely to choose the dinosaur label, $r = -.14, p = .00$, and less likely to choose the Olaf label, $r = -.28, p = .00$.

*Figure 4. Example choice scenarios from Study 2.*

*Figure 5. Juice label stimuli for Study 2.*

*Figure 6. Label choices from study 2.*

Discussion

- Regardless of the social evaluation condition, 100% natural was chosen most often, followed by organic, Olaf, and dinosaur.
- Parents chose organic juice more often when socially evaluated, but selected the dinosaur juice more often when alone with the child.
- Parents were willing to pay more for and perceived organic as the most expensive, followed by 100% natural, Olaf, and dinosaur.
- Organic and 100% natural were perceived as healthier than Olaf and the dinosaur.
- Parents who rated themselves as more health conscious were less likely to choose Olaf and the dinosaur and more likely to choose organic.

Limitations

- Self-report measures can be inaccurate.
- Online completion of survey lacks experimental control.
- Sample only included parents of children in the U.S.

Future Research

- Ask parents to choose between other health-ambiguous products, such as granola bars.
- Include labels with other health claims, such as “no added sugar.”
- Observe choice in real life situations.

References


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