

Someone Is Judging Me: The Impact of Social Evaluation on Parents' Choices Using Front-of-Package Labels

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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 would be willing to pay for the yogurt, rated the healthfulness of each product on a 7-point Likert scale, and completed sections of the Health and Taste Attitudes Questionnaire (Roininen, Lähteenmäki, & Tuorila, 1999).
- Participants completed a demographics form, were debriefed, and received \$.50 compensation.

Example “social evaluation” scenario:	Example “no social evaluation” scenario:
Imagine your child’s preschool teacher has requested that you pack a snack for snack time. Which product would you choose to provide as a snack?	Imagine you want your child to eat a snack while you do some quick chores around the house. Which product would you choose to provide as a snack?

Figure 1. Example choice scenarios from Study 1.



Figure 2. Yogurt label stimuli for Study 1.

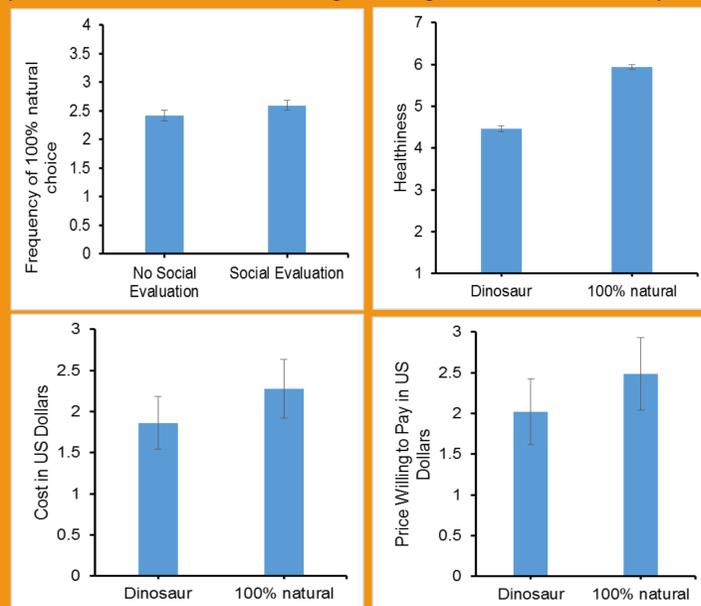


Figure 3. Social evaluation and label impacting choice and health/price perceptions.

Results

H1: Participants selected the 100% natural yogurt significantly more often when being socially evaluated than when no social evaluation was present ($t(387) = 2.95, p = .003, d = .15$) (Figure 3).

H2: Participants rated the 100% natural yogurt as significantly healthier ($t(387) = 21.65, p = .000, d = 1.10$), 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 ($r(386) = .40, p = .000$).

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, organic, 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 \$.20 compensation.

Example “social evaluation” scenario:	Example “no social evaluation” scenario:
Imagine that at the end of a doctor’s visit, your doctor offers you a choice of drinks for your child. Which juice box would you choose to provide?	Imagine that your child needs a drink at home while coloring in their coloring book. Which juice box would you choose to provide?

Figure 4. Example choice scenarios from Study 2.

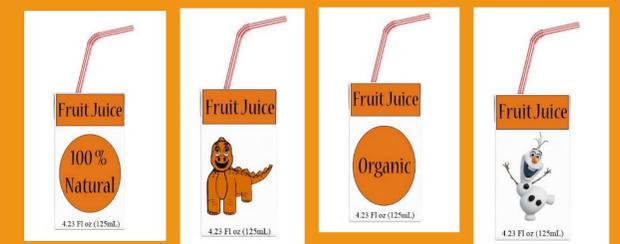


Figure 5. Juice label stimuli for Study 2.

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, $F(3, 1215) = 97.91, p = .00$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$. 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 ($M = 3.34, SD = 1.34$), $F(3, 1254) = 697.08, p = 0.00$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.63$. 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), $F(3, 1206) = 74.97, p = 0.00$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.16$.

H3: Participants with higher levels of health consciousness were more 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, $r = -.28, p = .00$.

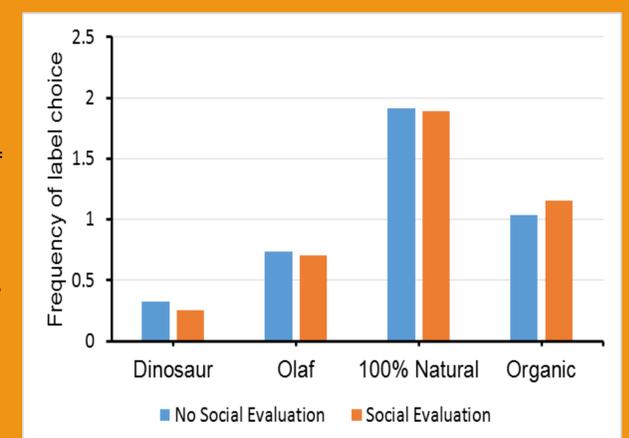


Figure 6. Label choices from study 2.

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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