Consumer Attention to Facts Up Front Labels on Similar Products with Different Serving Sizes

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Background

- Facts Up Front (FUF) nutrition labels are used by food manufacturers to highlight selected nutrition information on the front of the package.
- Differences in serving sizes between similar products may go unnoticed by consumers, leading to misinterpretations of the nutritional information displayed in the FUF.

Objectives

- To examine consumer attention to FUF labels on two similar cereal products with differing serving sizes.
- To assess how attention to the FUF influences perceptions of nutrient amounts.

Methods

- Online experiment with a nationally representative sample of 1,022 adults.
- Participants were shown images of two cereals on the market – Special K Original and Special K Protein, with FUF labels that differ in serving size and nutrient amounts.
- The cereal images were each shown 5 times, but were intentionally not visible to the participants when asked questions about nutrient amounts and serving sizes.
- Attention to the FUF and serving sizes was assessed.
- Participants were asked comparative questions about the nutrient content of the cereals.
- Descriptive statistics and multinomial logistic regressions were performed.

Product Stimuli*

- *FUF labels were not magnified during actual survey.

Results

- Only 21-25% correctly indicated the product with the bigger serving size and higher amounts of the nutrients shown in the FUF.
- 64% reported using the FUF.
- 79% correctly indicated which cereal had more protein.
- 20% correctly indicated the product with the bigger serving size and higher amounts of calories and sodium.

When the serving sizes are equalized to 1 cup, there are marked nutritional differences between the products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient/Quality</th>
<th>Original Serving Size</th>
<th>Equalized Serving Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serving Size</td>
<td>% cup</td>
<td>1 1/4 cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calories</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>7g</td>
<td>5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>190mg</td>
<td>280mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>10g</td>
<td>7g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>0.5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate</td>
<td>19g</td>
<td>29g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber</td>
<td>3g</td>
<td>&lt;1g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All participants correctly indicated that Special K Protein had more protein than Special K Original.
- The majority of those who reported looking at the FUF were consistent with the literature.
- Most participants correctly indicated that Special K Protein had more protein and calories than Special K Original.
- The percentage of participants who reported viewing the FUF is generally more accurate in indicating which cereal had more of certain nutrients per serving.

Conclusions

- Attention to differences in the FUF and serving sizes was lacking.
- Participant inattention to the inequalities in serving sizes between cereals could mean they perceive the serving sizes as being equal.
- Attention to the FUF may be reduced by the presence of other FOP elements, such as a protein label, highlighting the need for additional ways to draw consumer attention to the important information located in this portion of the FOP.
- Significant nutritional differences between products may be obscured by the failure of consumers to take different serving sizes into consideration.

References