

A Study of Food Labelling Strategies to Allay and Tackle the Paranoia Concerning Food Additives, Sugar and Fat

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The essence of a food label is provision of useful and essential information. The label must comply with the legislative requirements; it must not be false and misleading. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Food Information Regulations 2014 implementing Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, contain provisions to inform and protect the consumers from false and misleading information and ultimately fraud. The general requirements for food safety including labelling are laid down by Food Safety Act 1990 as amended and Regulation (EC) No 178 / 2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council. In addition to safety, there are concerns about adverse impact of certain food additives, fats and sugars on health. Hence, the consumers' food preferences are additive-free, fat-free and sugar-free products. Food safety and health are very mediacentric and sensitive. The mediacentricity has been exploited and used as a weapon by certain groups to further their own agenda. In the UK, there is hardly a week without a headline on foods, often scare mongering and contradicting, with additives, fats and sugars as the main targets. The extreme and relentless campaigns against these ingredients by consumers, consumer advocacy groups and governmental agencies and departments, have led to the development of food labelling strategies to dispel the fears and appeal to the consumers. The strategies include exclusion of the E-numbers, food additives categories and use of descriptors such as fat-free and sugar-free on food labels. Such strategies raise several questions; to what extent are the descriptors misleading, what impact will the apparent absence of additives have on product sale and finally how does it influence the consumer choice. Thus, this paper through a rigorous examination of food labels, assessment of sales and consumer survey, will attempt to answer these questions and show how such labelling practice could mislead the consumer and influence their food choice. It will also highlight a new trend and opens up the debate for consumer education on food labelling and protection from psychological manipulation. It is expected with respect to food choice, that the descriptors and absence of additives will have a significant positive impact, as the fear and paranoia are dispelled.

Keywords: Consumer choice, fats, food additives, food labelling regulations, food labelling strategies, sugars.

Biography:

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Delia Ojinnaka is a graduate of King's College, University of London (BSc; Biology), Leeds University (MSc; Food Science) and Cranfield University (PhD). Whilst at London South Bank University, I gained further qualifications; PGCHE in teaching and learning and PgCert(CPE) in legal studies. he is a fellow (FIFST) of the Institute of Food Science and Technology, UK, a fellow (FHEA) of the higher education academy and a chartered scientist (CSci), member of the IFST accreditation panel and mentoring scheme. He has taught food science and related subjects at HNC to PhD levels for over twenty five years. He gives international lectures on food sustainability, security, labelling and bioterrorism and has done so annually at Universidad Politecnica de Valencia, Spain since 2014.