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Nutrition and health claims on fibre; consumer perceptions, understanding and behavior

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The importance of dietary fibre consumption for health is widely recognised. However, there is a clear ‘fibre gap’ between actual and recommended fibre consumption^(1,2). In the UK, average fibre intake is 18g⁽¹⁾. Fibre intake increases in relation to income, with fibre consumption particularly low in low-income households⁽³⁾. The absence of a UK reference intake value for dietary fibre means nutrition and health claims are a key route for food manufacturers to promote dietary fibre to consumers⁽⁴⁾. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between perception of valence and understanding of approved fibre related nutrition and health claims, and marketing messages, and the intention to purchase products displaying these claims or messages.

An online survey was used to examine perception of valence and understanding of fibre-related nutrition and health claims, and any effects these claims, and other marketing messages related to fibre have on intention to purchase products, amongst the general population and individuals on a lower income in the UK. Data was collected from 560 respondents, with 84 classified as low-income, based on an annual household income of below £17,100⁽⁵⁾. Chi-squared tests were performed to examine associations, with post-hoc tests applied as appropriate.

Perception of valence was found to be significantly associated with intent to purchase for all the health and nutrition claims that were tested ($p < 0.001$), such that participants who perceived a claim or term to be positive, were more likely to report that they would purchase a product displaying the claim. Three of the eight nutrition claims that were tested demonstrated a significant association between understanding and perception of valence ($p < 0.01$), with only two demonstrating a significant association between understanding and intent to purchase ($p < 0.05$). All four of the health messages that were tested demonstrated a significant association between perception of valence and intent to purchase ($p < 0.001$), three demonstrated a significant association between understanding/interpretation and perception of valence ($p < 0.01$), and two demonstrated a significant association between understanding/interpretation and intent to purchase ($p < 0.05$). Thus, for many of the health claims and some health messages that were tested, there was no evidence to suggest that participants who understood the meaning of the claims would be more likely to perceive them positively or be more inclined to purchase a product displaying the claim or message.

Regardless of consumer understanding, claims must be perceived positively to significantly impact intent to purchase, so effort must be made to promote positive attitudes towards dietary fibre, and its associated health benefits. The wording of some claims may not be conducive to positive perceptions of dietary fibre.

References

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