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Food Package Label Reading Habits of Consumers in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area in the Western Region of Ghana

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Abstract:

Food packaging is essential in making products attractive to the consumer to propel or compel him or her to make a purchase willingly or by impulse. Not only does the colour attributes of the package induce and influence consumer purchasing habits, portability (handling) and labeling become important elements of the product's package, which consumers put into consideration before making a purchasing decision. Labeling as an important component of packaging is a legal requirement by Food and Drugs Authorities of various countries across the globe and that all products should be labeled to give the consumer certain information concerning the product. Such labeling should include mandatory, dietary, and nutritional information. These are to assist the consumer to be sure of exactly what is being bought, the product name, the content of the package, ingredients, how to use the product, date of manufacture and expiry among other things. Although these regulations are put in place to ensure consumers safety, a cursory look at consumers purchasing patterns show that a good majority of the people living in urban areas in the Western region of Ghana do not spend time reading the labels on the product before buying. The few people who read the labels mainly centred their attention on the brand name and the date of expiry. These conclusions were arrived at after observations were made in surveys involving a mall, twenty top class shops in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis and other retail outlets in the region to study consumer-reading habits on food package labels.

Key words: Packaging, package, label, nutrition label, consumer-reading habit

1. Introduction

Consumers should be concerned with what they choose to buy and eat to ensure they do not buy sickness or ill-health into their homes. This could definitely be averted if consumers in Ghana would read the labels on the food packages any time, they purchase from the retail shop, supermarket or shopping mall. People these days are becoming conscious of their diet and want to know what constitute the food they are eating. Making sure that what they buy are safe, healthy, and quality, require that they take the information provided on the packages by their manufacturers serious. In this regard packaging labels become an important factor that affects the consumer in product decision making process. Reading labels therefore offers the consumer various information related to ingredients, nutritional values, allergies, as well as preparation and storage. It is worth noting that in Ghana for example, the Food and Drugs Authority like other agencies across the globe insist that by regulation, all food products should be given detailed description of the product to avoid deception. Anything contrary to the provision made by the legislation governing food labeling is tantamount to a breach and is punishable by law. The influx of foreign products on the Ghanaian market irrespective of their quality is characterized with labels of various languages some of which have no translations. The research therefore examines whether the study population takes cognisance of the products and their packaging labels into consideration before making purchasing decision and also to deduce the attitudinal habits of consumers as far as food labels are concerned.

2. Background to the Study

Packages are containers such as boxes that hold matches, biscuits, sugar; cans that contain soft drinks such as Coca Cola, Malt, Fanta, etc as well as cheese, tomato paste, bottles that contain liquid products; crates that hold egg and tubes of creams and other cosmetic products just to mention but a few. Fundamentally, some products that are intangible such as powder, gas, milk, beverages require packages or containers to hold them before they can be carried to the ware house, retail shops or taken home by the consumer. Even after products are held in packages, there is still the need for other containers that will make it possible to stack a number of the products in a vehicle be conveyed safely to the warehouse, retailer's shop and to the consumer's home. Some of the products are so fragile to the extent that without packaging, they will be damaged before reaching the consumer.

Many reasons account for the production of packages (containers) for various food products that are available on the Ghanaian markets and shelves. Some packages are made purposely for storage, protection, advertising, containment, and prevention of theft (shoplifting).

Packages for food are intended to ensure that food reaches the consumer in a safe condition. Manufacturers make packages to ensure that their goods can be transported and delivered to the retailers and the consumers without blemish. For these reasons, various materials that are considered suitable, tried and tested, are used to package food products for public consumption. Tin and cans with coatings are used to package drinks and food including beans, pastes such as margarine and groundnut paste, toothpaste, tomato paste; milk, fish for example, Mackerel and Tuna; glass bottles for beer, wine, champagne; paper as wrapper for biscuits, candies, chocolate and as labels for can fishes, jam, beans, etc. Other bottles come in the form of plastics which hold mineral water, edible oils, etc. Paperboards are used as secondary packages to make boxes for biscuits, toffees, milk, tinned/canned fishes, tin tomatoes, etc.

The choice for a particular material for a specific food product should satisfy a mandatory requirement as prescribed by the laws of that country of origin. For this reason, every country promulgates its own laws to ensure food safety. There are also international laws that cut across borders that trade partners have to comply in order to satisfy the requirements to export to the international market.

3. Statement of the Problem

Packaging of food products has had very positive impact on the manufacturer, retailer, and the consumer in many ways. For the manufacturer, packaging makes it possible for him to go through the distribution chain right from the factory to the warehouse, to the retailer, and to the end user (the consumer), successfully. This positive impact makes handling and transporting of various food products less cumbersome and thus makes the manufacturer's ultimate goal of maximizing profit a reality. For the retailer, the packaging of food products makes it possible for the products to be displayed on the shelf and to advertise them for consumer attention to be drawn to them. Some of the consumers are mostly attracted by the colorful nature of the packaging that makes them do impulse buying even though such products may not have been on their prepared or preference list. It is for this reason the package has been taunted as 'the Silent Salesman'. In this regard, the package of every food product facilitates sales and makes the business of selling and buying boom. The customer and for that matter the consumer who is the end user in the production and distribution chain, is able to carry the food products conveniently home with little or no problem. At times, the consumer is attracted to certain unusual packages so much so that he would not want to dispose of and rather keep them in the shelf for prestige.

Once a package has fulfilled the requirements of containing, protecting, and facilitating the handling of the product throughout the distribution chain, it is also required to perform sales promotion and communication functions. These are mainly accomplished through the appearance and graphic design of the package. The skilful selection and distribution of colour, text, and images make the package of the food product attractive enough to influence the consumer's choice of similar product on the market or the shelf of the shop. This also increases the potential of branding the product.

The communicative aspect of the package of food products however, should satisfy the legal requirements governing the labeling of consumer goods. To ensure that the customer is protected from fraudulent practices and that the product and its package present no risk to the safety of the consuming public. It is also required by law that food packages provide information relating to the use and efficacy of the product.

Although every country including Ghana has these laws and regulations to ensure consumers' safety, majority of the Ghanaian consumers are ignorant of this information on the labels and do not check on them before making a choice of a food product on the market. They do not bother/care to know whether the food they buy meet their health, environmental, or nutritional safety putting them at risk of many health problems that could be avoided if they had taken keen interest in food package labels.

It is for these reasons that the researcher deems it imperative to identify consumers' attitude to food packaging and labeling and to bring to the fore the need to read or check food labels before making a choice to ensure consumer safety in Ghana.

4. Objectives

The objectives of this research paper are to:

- Measure the extent to which the consumer checks the labels on food packages before purchasing food.
- Measure the level of reference made to food labels before using them for food preparation and consumption.
- Create awareness among consumers of food labelling as a driving force in selecting goods for consumption.
- Educate the Ghanaian consumer on the need to read food package labels before making purchases for consumption to ensure food safety.

5. Definitions of Packaging, Package, and Label

Packaging refers to any container that holds a product. This includes such things as boxes, cans, bottles, tubes, wooden crates, and plastic films. The package is mostly designed and made at the same time as the products that are placed in them to end the assembly line and finally stored (Harms, Kroon, & Weigel, 1993). Packaging is the overall package offered by the company to its consumers and stimulates the impulse buying behaviour.

Packaging is considered as the fifth 'p' of the marketing mix after product, price, promotion and place Schrawet and Kundu (2007, as cited in Nayyar, 2012; Ladipo and Rahim, 2013). In the view of Arens (1996), sees a package is a container and can be explained to encompasses the product, as well as its physical appearance; colour, design, materials,

labeling and the shape used. Nayyar (2012) cited Kotler (2000) by saying 'packaging is the designing and the production of the wrapper or container that houses the product.' Packaging according to Underwood, Klein & Burke (2001), is used as a tool of marketing in order to catch the attention of the consumer, to convey and promote the products message and characteristics while the product is still on the shelf or at the point of sale.

According to Olson and Jacoby (2002), 'packaging is an extrinsic element of the product whose attribute relates to the product but does not form part of the physical product itself'. Arens (2001) again describes Packaging as the container for a product, which consists of the physical appearance of the container including the design, colour, shape, labeling and materials used.

In another perspective, some others consider packaging as a promotional tool rather than merely an extension of the product. Keller (2008) for example, maintains that packaging can be said to be an attribute that is not related to the product but it is one of the five elements of the brand that comes with the name, the logo and/or graphic symbols, the personality and the slogans.

To be successful in exporting goods and products, the issue of packaging becomes a prime factor to ensure its contents will be preserved and protected until they reach their destination in acceptable condition without blemish. It is the product's packaging that positions, differentiates and sell it and give it a competitive edge over similar products on display on the market especially those that have materials that comply with packaging regulations.

A package therefore is a product made of any material of any nature to be used or meant for the containment, protection, handling, delivery and preservation of goods from the producer to the user or consumer. A package is often the material that wraps around an item and at the same time containing, identifying, describing and protecting it. Packages display, promote and make the product marketable and keep it clean. This includes such things as, cans, boxes, bottles, tubes, crates, and plastic films. The package is mostly designed and made at the same time as the products that are placed in them to end the assembly line and finally stored. A Package therefore refers to any container that holds the product. What needs to be understood is that the package should not be always seen as the physical container designed to hold and transport products only, but also to be thought of as a marketing tool.

Packages are containers such as boxes that hold matches, biscuits, sugar; cans that contain soft drinks such as Coca Cola, Malt, Fanta, etc. as well as cheese, tomato paste, bottles that contain liquid products; crates that hold egg and tubes of creams and other cosmetic products just to mention but a few.

Some products that are intangible such as powder, gas, milk, beverages require packages or containers to hold them before they can be carried to the warehouse, retail shops or taken home by the consumer. Even after products are held in packages, there is still the need for other containers that will make it possible to stack a number of the products in a vehicle be conveyed safely to the warehouse, retailer's shop and to the consumer's home. Some of the products are so fragile to the extent that without packaging, they will be damaged before reaching the consumer.

6. Purpose of Packaging

Many reasons account for the making of packages for products such as food. Foremost, some intangible products as milk, beverages, powder, etc. needs to be held in a container such as bottle, can, or carton before can be carried or taken home or to the shop.

Products such a drink, television sets, jags, etc. need to be packaged to enable them be stacked in a vehicle to convey them safely to the warehouse and to the consumers' homes. Without packaging, how would eggs for instance be carried to the consumer without being damaged? For this and many others, the package serves the purpose of protection. The protective function of the package is also extended to certain items such as food and medicines against being contaminated with germs, dirt, and other atmospheric micro-organisms.

The protective function of packages can be seen in packages of childproof medicine containers that prevent children from opening them. Special seals on some food items help to warn consumers if the package has been opened. It helps the consumer to be aware that if the seal is broken, poisons and other harmful substances may have been added and that anyone suspects that a product has been tampered with would not buy or should return it to the store unused.

Some packages are designed to prevent shoplifting as they become too bulky for thieves to hide them in their pockets or purse and taken out of the shop unseen. Packages also serve advertising purposes as they provide information about the product to their patrons. The unusual designs and bright colours are means or ways of attracting consumers to the package on the shelf because they are always visible. Hence the nomenclature, 'silent salesman' which often times induces people to make impulse buying.

Once a package has fulfilled the requirements of containing, protecting, and facilitating the handling of the product throughout the distribution chain, it is also required to perform sales promotion and communication functions. These are mainly accomplished through the appearance and graphic design of the package. Packages for food are intended to ensure that food reaches the consumer in a safe condition.

Manufacturers make packages to ensure that their goods can be transported and delivered to the retailers and the consumers without blemish. For these reasons, various materials that are considered suitable, tried and tested, are used to package food products for public consumption. Tin and cans with coatings are used to package drinks and food including beans, pastes such as margarine and groundnut paste, toothpaste, tomato paste; milk, fish for example, Mackerel and Tuna; glass bottles for beer, wine, champagne; paper as wrapper for biscuits, candies, chocolate and as labels for can fishes, jam, beans, etc. Other bottles come in the form of plastics, which hold mineral water, edible oils, etc. Paperboards are used as secondary packages to make boxes for biscuits, toffees, milk, tinned/canned fishes, tin tomatoes, etc.

The choice for a particular material for a specific food product should satisfy a mandatory requirement as prescribed by the laws of that country of origin. For this reason, every country promulgates its own laws to ensure food safety. There are also international laws that cut across borders that trade partners have to comply in order to satisfy the requirements to export to the international market.

Cans, bags, tubes, cartons, boxes and containers for industrial goods are a few of the common types of packages. Protecting the product from damage during transportation and shipping as well as promoting the product is mainly achieved through commercial packaging although there are other functions that the package performs.

In summary, the objectives of packaging are getting the product to the end user or consumer safely and to communicate its sales message and all other necessary information about it, to purchasers and to those involved in the distribution chain.

A label from the standpoint of Kerin, Hartley, & William (2015), is an integral part of the package and typically identifies the product or brand with its content and ingredients, who made it, where and time it was made as well as directing the user on how the product should be used.

On their part, Farese, Kimbell, & Woloszyky, (2009) describe a label may be seen as a seal, an information tag, or wrapper that is attached to a product or its package, or an imprinted message on the package. The authors further explain that the main function of a label is to inform customers about a product's contents and give directions for use. It also protects businesses from legal liability if a consumer gets hurt in the process of using its products. For fear of litigation, consumer pressure and the concern for consumer safety, manufacturers are compelled to place detailed information on labels.

Food labels include 'any mark, tag, brand, pictorial or descriptive material, written, printed, stencilled, marked, painted, embossed or impressed on a material such as wood, metal, paperboard and attached to a package or included in the package, or accompanying any food'. In packaging for export, labeling plays an important role to complement the functions of the physical package.

Although labeling mostly has done to with primary packaging, a few storage and transport packaging have it but not as elaborate as those on the primary packaging. Effective package labeling is always monitored in many countries by their respective Foods and Drugs Authorities (FDA), which are in charge of consumer health and protection. Proper labeling and coding allow for quicker handling at customs and warehouses and reduces damage to the packages.

Labeling is used for four main purposes including:

- Easy identification of all kinds of packages and their contents during handling, transport, and warehousing.
- Informing the consumer (about individual goods, the specification of the goods, date of validity, quantity, hazardous nature of the product, etc.)
- Providing proper product identification and information to product users
- Informing the users on correct use of the product.

Even producers of various other consumer goods like self-care items such as medicines, are also obliged to put explanatory information in the labels on their products to provide identification and information to customers about the product they are about to purchase.

7. Types of Labels in Packaging

There are three kinds of labels namely, brand, descriptive, and grade labels. Brand labels are labels with comprising the brand name, trademark, or logo. This does not supply sufficient information on the product. Labels that give information about the product's use, construction, care, performance, and other features are referred to as descriptive. An example of descriptive label can be made of food labels. These include product illustrations which represent what is in the package, weight statements which give the net weight of the product minus the package, dating (date food was packed, last date product should be sold and last date for use for top quality). Storage information (how the product should be stored for best quality), ingredient, product guarantees, and manufacturer's name and address also form part of descriptive labeling. Similarly, non-food product labels also provide consumers with instructions on the proper care and usage of products. It provides manufacturers convenient place to communicate warranty information and product usage warnings. Grade labels on the other hand states the equality of the product by assigning grade label such as AA, A, and B as in eggs, 1 and 2 as seen in corn and wheat; and A, B, C in canned fruits Farese, Kimbell, & Woloszyky (2009). For the benefit of this paper, the descriptive labeling is the type or kind that best fit the labels in the ensuing discussions. In line with the research wanting to find out the reading habit that informs the consumers to make purchasing decision, the nutritional labels would be the prime focus of the paper. Nutritional label format can be grouped into back-of-pack and front-of-pack.

Front of pack labels are place on the front of the food package and gives information to consumers in various formats. Scott & Worsley (1994) in Azman & Zaleha (2014) point out that the front -of pack format of labeling is the most effective and acts as the addition to the numerical nutrition fact table on the back of a package. This is useful in assisting customers to make the healthier food choice because it summarizes the whole nutrition profiles of the packaged food. Geiger, Wyse, & Hansen (1991) emphasize that the simple label format reduces the cognitive effort and time needed to process the information as compared to more detailed labels.

However, labels on the package therefore can further be subdivided into mandatory, dietary, nutritional, and allergic information.

8. Methodology

A survey was conducted in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis in the Western Region of Ghana to interact with selected consumers who purchased food products from provision shops and stores in the metropolitan area. Observations were made on the consumers' purchasing habit to ascertain whether they read the labels on the products they intended to buy. In doing this, unstructured interviews were occasionally conducted on the consumers after their shopping to find out whether or not they read the labels before buying. The interviews were recorded using a smart phone and later played back after leaving the field to extract and classify key concepts of responses, which were transcribed into text. Quick notes were also taken where necessary to supplement some of the recorded material. The simple random sampling and convenience sampling were adopted in the process to seek the views of literate consumers on the rate at which they read labels on the products they purchase and use. This included people in the hospitality sector and food vendors who could read. The findings and conclusion of the paper were drawn based on the literate consumers and excluded consumers and shoppers who could not read nor write. The study is purely Qualitative, which generated narrative or textual descriptions of the phenomena under study. Qualitative studies offer prospects for the exploration and description of phenomena in situ via multiple data sources (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The descriptive method, content analysis approach and phenomenological study were adopted and relied on observation checklist and interview for the data. The descriptive method was used to record, describe, analyse and interpret secondary data from books (Best, 1981; Ngadi, 1984). This provided evidence on what has been done already related to the study.

The study is for Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly, which is one of the six (6) metropolitan assemblies in Ghana, and the people share common socio-economic backgrounds with the remaining five. The Sekondi-Takoradi metropolitan study could therefore provide useful insights into nationwide views.

9. Discussion

A study on labels on packages showed that the product name (brand name), brand image/display (illustration) and net weight are the most common elements found on the Front of the pack with the Nutritional labels placed at the back of the pack. Some of the packages have the product name, display and the Net weight labeled on both the front and back of the pack. In this instance, the nutrition label is placed on the side or sides of the package. The study also observed that products displayed on shelves in the retail shops and malls indicated that they have the front-of-pack (FOP) displayed making the product's name the most visible element when consumers want to shop. For that matter, the nutrition information that are placed on the sides of the package become virtually invincible thereby making it difficult and impossible for consumers to read. From the observations, the consumers do not have the habit and do not form the attitude of picking and turning products from the shelf to read information on the sides of product packages. The study also showed that consumers' attention varied depending on the location of the nutrition information and that people were most likely to peruse the label if it appeared in the middle part of the label other than on one side or the other.

Although the country of origin of food according to (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) should be stated and must be conspicuous on the label, a closer look at imported food products on the Ghanaian market indicates that about ninety percent (90%) do not satisfy that requirement. Most of the product do not have the country of origin declared on their packages. Another damning issue has to do with the influx of foreign food products onto the Ghanaian market with foreign languages dominating the labels and information. These products range from confectioneries, groceries, meat products, and candies. Pastries, biscuits, and beverages (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic) are yet a greater number of these products displayed on the shelves and have their labeling in their local languages irrespective of the fact that Foods and Drugs Authority (FDA) regulations demand that all required label statements must appear both in English and in the foreign language.

A cursory look at products on the shelf of retail shops, marts, supermarkets and even shopping malls shows an exhibition of foreign languages including Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, etc., on the various product packages without any accompanying translation. This makes buyers reluctant to read the labels because to them they can neither read nor comprehend these languages but purchase based on the product's trade name and sometimes brand loyalty.

The research revealed that there is too many information on the package which consumers do not have ample time to process; they are constrained by time and because of that, consumers shopping in the supermarket setting only do a cursory check and not anything about detailing. On the open/street and retail markets, any attempt at doing thorough checking on products is not countenanced by the sellers who have low literacy and numeracy skills and did not check before they purchased to sell, the person is antagonized with statements that suggest that the one is being 'too known'. They also see the act of reading and checking labels as a waste of time, for which reason, many do not want to incur the wrath of the market women and decide to ignore label information and buy based on previous experience of the product and probably product loyalty to avoid unnecessary confrontations and insults.

Ask whether the participants do post purchase check or reading before using the products, majority of them responded in the negative. They then felt intimidated that having bought the product, and of course having had prior knowledge of the products' performance, there was nothing more or new that was expected. Those who did some reading before using the product checked mainly the expiry date. They were not even bothered about how to use the product since their judgment is often based on their previous experience of the product. For nutritional values, the participant responded that it is the least of what they read.

10. Findings

The significance of packaging can be explained in relation to what the package does to the producer, retailer and the consumer. The design component of the package makes the product attractive and adds value to the product's appearance on the shelf and thus helps producers and retailers to increase the selling price which will hitherto have been low yet because of the appealing nature of the product's package, consumers are prepared to pay more for a well-packaged product. It is known that there is a category of people who attribute quality to the packaging and pricing of the product. Therefore, effective and good packaging should lead to increased patronage of the product as a result of its quality and attractiveness. This helps the producers to maximize profit. For this reason, they would want to go every length to ensure that their designers give them attractive designs that will entice buyers to go for their products instead of other similar products on the market. The package is therefore an important and powerful sales tool for the retail customers; that is why producers may have to change their packaging and labelling to meet their retail customers' needs in order to get their products stocked in their stores.

Effective packaging helps sell the product without the producer being there. The packaging sells the product by the way it looks (by attracting attention), by describing the actual product and making the product easily accessible.

Food safety procedures are closely being put in place and inspected at all levels of the supply chain. Packaging offers a way of ensuring food safety to meet people's expectations for packages that are intact by way of its sealing and the guarantee of freshness of the product in the package. In the food packaging production line, material handling, shipping and storage are the most important factors that have to be considered to ensure food safety. In all of these processes, mechanisms are put in place to check that all those who come in contact with food are equipped with adequate knowledge of personal hygiene. They have to adopt washing and sanitization of equipment, utensils and surfaces where foods are processed and packaged. Such people should as well have the understanding of the consequences of any malpractice that compromises the safety of the product.

Companies organized periodic training programmes for their employees to develop certain work culture peculiar to the company's food packaging standards to avoid the risks of contamination which packaging seeks to protect. Compliance of international food safety standards and regulations also helps to identify hazards, control points and to provide another level of protection. In other instances, the institutionalization of regular microbiological tests and clear policies strengthen vigilance and help eliminate diseases that could easily be transferred onto food by physical contact if food were sold without packaging.

Good packaging obviously protects a product well, but it also makes it noticeable on the shelf, conveys a brand or corporate image, can give information, and so on. More and more products can be packaged to appeal directly to the customer.

Packaging can change the market for a particular product and manufacturer. This is so because no matter how the quality of a product might be, poor packaging of such product may put people off and would not encourage them to buy because the product's packaging often does not boost its appearance on the market shelf. Packages that are not designed carefully and cleverly are not able to compete favourably on the international market. Therefore, a well-designed product packaging can take the product into a completely new market. In Ghana, most of the food and other products are not properly packaged to meet international packaging standards. This therefore does not make such products the preferred choice among similar products on the market since their point of sale attraction is not comparable to other foreign products irrespective of the fact that the quality of the product is better.

As part of the product development process, structural package designers try different materials, shapes, and sizes to assess how it will meet the consumer's needs. Consumers are on-the-go and therefore require portable, convenient, lightweight and ready-to-eat foods that are packaged to meet their satisfaction.

The importance of packaging to both sellers and buyers of products cannot be overemphasized in the sense that it prevents spoiling, breakage, tampering, and enhance convenience in usage, storage, and makes products easy to identify.

Though packaging is expensive, it gives the product a competitive advantage over other similar products found on the shelf. This advantage includes communication benefits, functional benefits, and perceptual benefits. The main benefit of packaging is the label information it conveys to the consumer, such as directions on how, where, and when to use the product and the source and composition of the product. This is needed to satisfy the legal requirements of product disclosure.

In the United States for example, the labelling system of packaged foods provides a uniform format for nutritional and dietary information. For this reason, most of the packaged foods contain informative recipes to promote the usage of the product. All these forms the communication benefit of packaging

Many also did not look at the nutrition labels at all, as the survey expected but at least one of the components of the average label.

The participants complained that nutritional facts are not located in the front and back of the package; rather they are placed on the sides, which make it difficult to read at first touch. The location of the labels therefore does not make it easy for consumers to read when looking at the products being displayed on the shelf. Some of the people admitted that they often look at the brand name and the date of expiry. These consumers are mostly concerned with the expiry date because anything that comes before the time of expiry, they considered wholesome, might not have been contaminated, and thus could be healthy enough for consumption.

Most of the respondents admitted that they lack motivation of reading labels since they have no understanding of the nutritional labels and that they were less likely to attempt to read especially when they were hard pressed for time. This affirms Grunert & Wills (2007) assertion that Consumers generally do not have time to process detailed nutrition

information and lack the cognitive skills needed to use the nutrition information to make comparison and interpret products and their nutrients in the context of their total diet.

They also harboured some mixed feeling about the credibility of the labels as to whether they carry the right information with respect to the claims they make. After all, they have no means to verify whether the information found on the package is correct or not. Lempert (2018) made a similar finding on the issue of 'Young Adults Don't Read Food Label' in a research conducted in Minneapolis – St Paul. This is a cross cultural phenomenon which attests to the fact that people in the middle ages and for that matter those in the tertiary education level are not conscious of the labels on the food they eat and the benefits they can derive from such labels.

The participants continued to say that they found the information too complex to decipher in the short time available to them during shopping. This, the respondents maintain creates confusion in their minds.

The research revealed that people do not look at the label information holistically but pick and choose the kind of information they want. They are mostly concerned with the date of expiry and the brand name. They were not particularly concerned about Nutritional values and information on allergies.

11. Conclusions

- The study did not involve the illiterate Ghanaians because of their inability to read and comprehend the label information on the food product.
- Consumers were bored with too many writings and labels, especially those that come with foreign languages other than English. People also said they shun the reading of labels because of the font sizes used for the labelling. They found the fonts too small to encourage them to read. This is so because producers tend to put many information on the package and so use smaller fonts to enable them accommodate a lot of the information, they want to satisfy especially those that are mandatory and are legal requirements as far as package labelling is concerned. This in effect, defeats the prominence that the information deserves and also makes visibility of the required label statement poor. These distract the attention of most of the buyers who are mostly in hurry from reading especially, the food label.
- This finding makes it imperative for an improvement in the nutrition labelling especially at the point of purchase to encourage the selection of healthier products by the consumer.
- People make purchases without recourse to health and other issues.
- Majority of the respondents said they do not bother to read information on allergies because they themselves are not aware of what they are allergic to and thus do not care to know whether such labels are of any importance or not. Above all, there is nothing that could assist them to easily interpret or calculate nutrition label/values to enhance their ability to make the necessary comparison to understand what food product fits well into their overall diet.
- There is a public education gap that hinders the consumer's understanding of the label regulations governing food products and the information provided on the package. This puts the consumer at risk for not being able to interpret correctly the values they would derive from reading the label information on what they are eating. When they become aware of the benefits of reading the label, they will avoid the danger of purchasing food products that have adverse effect on their health.

12. Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that

- The Foods and Drugs Authority (FDA) insist that there should be effective front-of package nutrition labelling system and enforce this regulation to the letter.
- FDA should map up strategies to educate the consuming public to be abreast with nutritional information on product packages to assist them take control of their health and dietary needs as poor nutrition knowledge may reduce the ability to interpret and use the nutrition information provided.
- Consumers should make frantic effort to take advantage of the availability of nutritional information to maintain healthy and dietary practices.
- Producers should ensure that the information they provide are legible enough for consumers to read and comprehend the message they want them to get.

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