



Does extra on-pack information impact consumers' understanding of expiry dates & food waste behaviour?

Introduction

Misunderstanding of expiry dates (use-by, best-before) has been identified as one of the causes of food waste at the household level. In a prior online study, extra date-marking information on product packages positively affected consumers' hypothetical decisions to use or discard expired foods. The current study aimed to extend these findings to more realistic food management situations.

Method

Under a cover story, 42 participants created a snack platter using 12 ready-to-eat products (6 use-by, 6 best-before) with fictive expiry dates (4 non-expired, 8 expired). Date stickers occurred in two conditions (between-subjects):

- containing extra information in the form of a visual symbol plus explanatory text (best-before: "Often good after date. Look, smell and taste"; use-by: "Do not use after date") (N=19)
- containing no extra information (N=23)

Subsequently, participants filled out a questionnaire and engaged in a group discussion during which the snack platters were served.

Conclusion

This is the first study to show that on-pack date-marking cues positively affect consumer food management practices in a realistic setting. Findings highlight the potential of on-pack communication in helping consumers to distinguish between use-by and best-before dates. As behavioral effects occurred irrespective of consumers' understanding of date-marking terminology, findings imply that educational date-marking activities should explicitly target the associated action (what to do with expired foods) to impact food waste behaviours.

Main findings

- Extra on-pack information elicited different waste behaviour for expired foods with use-by versus best-before dates, but no difference was found in understanding of date-marking terminology
- Extra information discouraged serving of (and tasting of some) products past the use-by date
- Extra information encouraged tasting of some products past the best-before date
- Expired best-before products were hardly discarded regardless of extra information
- Almost all consumers distinguished between typical use-by and best-before foods (raw meat vs. sugar), but a quarter reversed the corresponding date-marking terms

Information

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