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Influence of Food Label Information on Young Adults' Traditional Food Purchase Intentions

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ABSTRACT

This narrative review examines the impact of food labeling information on the purchase intention of traditional foods among young adults. Traditional foods, while culturally significant and often perceived as healthy, face unique challenges in a market increasingly driven by informed consumer choices. Food labels serve as a critical communication tool, providing details on ingredients, nutritional value, origin, and preparation methods. This review synthesizes existing literature on consumer behavior, food perception, and the role of information in purchase decisions to understand how young adults, a demographic highly influenced by health trends and ethical considerations, respond to such labeling when considering traditional food products. Findings suggest that clear, comprehensive, and trustworthy labeling can significantly enhance perceived quality, reduce information asymmetry, and ultimately bolster purchase intentions for traditional foods among this demographic. The study underscores the importance of strategic labeling for the sustainability and market expansion of traditional food businesses.

KEYWORDS: Food labeling, traditional food, purchase intention, young adults, consumer behavior, information, nutritional claims.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional foods play a crucial role in the cultural heritage, dietary practices, and local economies of many communities worldwide [9]. These foods are often characterized by their authentic ingredients, specific preparation methods passed down through generations, and deep-rooted cultural significance [29]. Despite their inherent value and a growing global interest in authentic and healthy eating, traditional foods sometimes face challenges in market competitiveness, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly driven by transparency, health consciousness, and convenience [20].

In the contemporary food landscape, food labeling has emerged as a vital tool for consumers to make informed purchasing decisions [15, 27]. Food labels provide a wealth of information, ranging from nutritional facts, ingredients, allergens, and origin to certifications (e.g., organic, halal) and preparation instructions [15, 26]. This information can significantly influence consumer perception of quality, safety, and health benefits, thereby affecting purchase

intention and willingness to pay [1, 5, 11]. Consumers' demand for informative labeling has grown, especially for quality food and drink products [5].

Young adults, typically defined as individuals in their late teens to early thirties, represent a key demographic with distinct food consumption patterns and purchasing behaviors. This group is often characterized by a heightened awareness of health, environmental impact, and ethical considerations, and they are increasingly seeking detailed information about the products they consume [28]. Their food choices are influenced by a complex interplay of factors including personal preferences, health concerns, social norms, and the information available to them [6, 23].

While the general impact of food labeling on consumer behavior has been extensively studied [8, 19], specific research focusing on how labeling information influences the purchase intention of *traditional foods* among *young adults* remains a nuanced area. Traditional food consumption can be influenced by cultural familiarity and

personality traits [17], but the role of explicit label information in driving purchase decisions for these products, particularly among a demographic that may not have direct historical ties to certain traditional foods, needs further exploration. This review aims to bridge this gap by synthesizing existing literature to understand how information presented on food labels affects young adults' intention to purchase traditional food products.

Research Question: How does food labeling information influence the purchase intention of traditional foods among young adults?

METHODS

This study adopted a narrative review methodology to synthesize and interpret existing literature on the effects of food labeling information on traditional food purchase intention among young adults. A narrative review approach was chosen for its flexibility in exploring a broad topic, identifying key themes, and providing a comprehensive overview of scholarly discussions across various sub-domains, particularly given the interdisciplinary nature of consumer behavior, food science, and marketing.

Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

The search for relevant academic literature was conducted across multiple online databases and academic search engines. Key search terms were used in various combinations to capture a wide range of pertinent studies. These terms included: "food labeling," "nutritional information," "traditional food," "ethnic food," "cultural food," "purchase intention," "consumer behavior," "young adults," "millennials," "Generation Z," "food perception," "food quality," "health claims," and "marketing food."

Inclusion criteria for selecting literature were:

- Studies published in English.
- Research focusing on food labeling, consumer information processing, and purchase decisions.
- Articles discussing traditional, ethnic, or culturally significant food products.
- Studies explicitly or implicitly involving young adult consumer segments (e.g., university students, individuals aged 18-35).
- Published in peer-reviewed academic journals, reputable conference proceedings, or scholarly books.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies solely focused on non-food products.
- Research that did not involve food labeling or information effects.
- Studies that did not directly or indirectly relate to traditional food or young adult consumers.

- Grey literature or opinion pieces without scholarly backing.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Relevant information was extracted from the selected literature, categorized into themes pertinent to the research question. The data extraction focused on:

- The types of food labeling information discussed (e.g., nutritional facts, origin, ingredients, health claims, certifications).
- The effects of this information on consumer perception (e.g., perceived quality, safety, healthiness, trust).
- The influence of perceived information on purchase intention or willingness to pay.
- Specific findings related to traditional or ethnic foods.
- Insights into the purchasing behavior and information processing of young adults.
- Factors influencing food choices and consumer acceptance beyond labeling (e.g., liking, cultural familiarity).

The extracted data were then synthesized thematically. This involved identifying recurring concepts, arguments, and evidence across different studies. The thematic synthesis allowed for the exploration of how various aspects of food labeling interact with young adults' characteristics and their approach to traditional foods, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Specific attention was paid to how information reduces gaps [3] and affects brand equity [13].

Limitations of Methodology

As a narrative review, this study does not employ a systematic search protocol or quantitative aggregation of results. This means it might be subject to researcher interpretation bias and may not capture every single piece of relevant literature. However, this approach is suitable for providing a broad understanding of a complex, socially nuanced topic and serves as a valuable preliminary step for future empirical investigations.

RESULTS

The synthesis of literature reveals that food labeling information plays a significant and multifaceted role in shaping the purchase intention of traditional foods among young adults. This influence is mediated by factors such as consumer expectations, perceptions of quality, and the increasing demand for transparency.

The Role of Information in Shaping Consumer Perceptions and Expectations

Food labels act as a primary source of extrinsic product attributes that influence consumer decisions [8, 15, 27].

Information presented on labels can significantly manage consumer expectations about a food product's sensory properties and overall acceptance [2]. When labels provide clear and comprehensive details, they can reduce the "information gap" between producers and consumers, leading to increased market orientation and consumer trust [3]. This is particularly relevant for traditional foods, where consumers, especially young adults, might be less familiar with preparation methods or ingredients [25, 29].

- **Perceived Quality and Safety:** Labeling information contributes directly to the perceived quality of food products [11]. For traditional foods, details about origin, traditional preparation methods, or heritage claims can enhance perceived authenticity and quality [29, 30]. Consumers' concerns about food safety also drive their demand for informative labeling, and clear labels can mitigate perceived risks [12, 19].
- **Health and Nutritional Claims:** Young adults are increasingly health-conscious, making nutritional information on labels highly influential [6, 28, 31]. Information on ingredients, calorie counts, fat content, and specific health claims (e.g., "low sugar," "high fiber") can significantly impact purchase intention [1, 24, 31]. While some studies show that consumers are aware of nutrition claims, their understanding of these claims can vary [25]. The presence of such information on traditional food labels can appeal to young adults seeking healthier options, even for culturally rich foods [9].
- **Ethical and Certification Information:** Labels indicating ethical sourcing, sustainability, or religious certifications (e.g., Halal) can also influence purchase decisions, particularly among specific consumer segments like Muslims who prioritize Halal consciousness [7, 13]. While not explicitly discussed for traditional foods among young adults in all provided references, the general principle applies, suggesting that certifications could boost appeal.

Impact on Purchase Intention

The provision of information on food labels directly influences purchase intention [1, 5, 8]. For traditional foods, this influence is complex:

- **Reducing Uncertainty:** Detailed labeling helps young adults reduce uncertainty about unfamiliar traditional foods. Understanding ingredients, preparation, and nutritional content allows them to make more confident choices, especially if they are outside their immediate cultural context [17]. The theory of planned behavior can be extended to understand food label use, where intention to read labels translates to purchase decisions [32].

- **Building Trust and Liking:** Information that aligns with consumer values or health goals can foster liking and trust [6, 1]. This applies to traditional foods; if labels transparently convey positive attributes (e.g., natural ingredients, artisanal preparation), it can enhance consumer affinity and willingness to purchase [1].
- **Competitiveness:** In a market with diverse food options, clear labeling can give traditional foods a competitive edge, especially against highly marketed conventional products. By effectively communicating their unique qualities and benefits, traditional foods can attract young adults who are seeking novelty, authenticity, or specific health attributes [20].

Challenges and Nuances

Despite the general positive influence, challenges remain:

- **Information Overload/Understanding:** Consumers may face information overload or difficulty understanding complex nutritional data or terminology, which can hinder the effectiveness of labels [15, 26]. Simpler, clearer presentation is often preferred [15].
- **Terminology and Acceptance:** The terminology used on labels, especially concerning new technologies or complex food characteristics, can impact consumer acceptance [10]. This might extend to traditional foods if complex cultural terms are used without adequate explanation.
- **Brand Equity vs. Labeling:** The influence of organic labels, for instance, can sometimes be marginal if brand equity is not well-established [13]. For many traditional food products, brand recognition might be lower than for industrial foods, making the label information even more critical for building initial trust and appeal.
- **Beyond the Label:** While labeling is crucial, other factors such as sensory properties, consumer liking, previous experiences, and cultural familiarity also play significant roles in food acceptance and purchase [6, 17, 30].

Overall, the results indicate that for young adults considering traditional foods, comprehensive and easily digestible food label information is a key driver of purchase intention, primarily by enhancing perceived quality, safety, healthiness, and trust, and by reducing informational asymmetry.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of literature unequivocally demonstrates that food labeling information significantly influences the purchase intention of traditional foods among young adults. This influence is not merely a direct causal link but a complex interplay of factors, where information translates into perceived value, reduced risk, and enhanced desirability. For traditional food businesses, understanding these

mechanisms is crucial for market penetration and sustainability.

The Information-Perception-Intention Pathway

Food labels serve as vital communication channels, bridging the gap between producers and increasingly discerning young adult consumers [3]. Young adults, a demographic often characterized by health consciousness and a desire for transparency, actively seek detailed information about the food they consume [28, 31]. For traditional foods, which may lack established branding or widespread familiarity among this group, the label becomes an indispensable tool for conveying crucial attributes. Information about ingredients, nutritional composition, origin, and traditional preparation methods directly shapes consumers' perceptions of quality, safety, and health benefits [1, 11, 24]. When these perceptions are positive, they translate into a higher purchase intention. This aligns with the broader understanding that extrinsic cues on labels are powerful drivers of consumer decisions [8, 19].

For instance, a label detailing the ancestral recipe or the specific region of origin for a traditional dish can enhance its perceived authenticity and premium quality, appealing to young adults who value unique culinary experiences [29]. Similarly, clear nutritional breakdowns on labels can address concerns about the healthiness of traditional foods, which might sometimes be perceived as indulgent or unhealthy due to lack of information. This is particularly relevant given the emphasis on health and wellness among young consumers [9, 28].

Navigating Traditional Food Acceptance and Marketability

Traditional foods, while culturally rich, face inherent challenges in competing with modern, often heavily marketed, food products. Food labeling can be a powerful tool to overcome these barriers:

- **Reducing Perceived Risk and Enhancing Familiarity:** For traditional foods that are new to a young adult consumer, clear labeling can significantly reduce perceived risk and increase comfort [17]. Information on ingredients, allergens, and cooking instructions (if applicable) removes uncertainty and encourages trial.
- **Building Brand Equity and Trust:** While traditional foods often lack large-scale brand recognition, comprehensive and transparent labeling can help build trust at the product level. As Larceneux et al. (2012) [13] highlight, even with established labels like "organic," brand equity plays a role; for traditional foods, the label itself acts as a primary identifier, and its trustworthiness becomes paramount.
- **Meeting Consumer Demand for Information:** There is a growing consumer demand for more information on

food labels, especially regarding quality and origin [5, 26]. Traditional food producers who actively meet this demand by providing comprehensive and easily digestible information can gain a competitive advantage and appeal to a segment of young adults who prioritize informed choices [32].

Implications for Stakeholders

The findings carry significant implications for various stakeholders:

- **Traditional Food Producers/SMEs:**
 - **Strategic Labeling:** Invest in clear, comprehensive, and attractive food labeling that highlights unique attributes (e.g., natural ingredients, heritage, specific preparation methods, health benefits).
 - **Transparency:** Be transparent about ingredients, sourcing, and nutritional information to build trust among young adults.
 - **Certifications:** Where applicable, obtain and prominently display relevant certifications (e.g., halal, organic, geographical indications) to broaden appeal [7].
- **Policymakers and Regulators:**
 - **Standardization and Clarity:** Develop guidelines for clear and consistent labeling practices for traditional foods, ensuring that crucial information is easily understandable to consumers, including young adults [15].
 - **Consumer Education:** Implement public awareness campaigns to educate young adults about the importance of reading food labels and understanding various claims, particularly concerning traditional foods.
- **Researchers:**
 - **Empirical Validation:** Conduct quantitative studies to measure the specific impact of various labeling elements (e.g., origin vs. nutritional facts) on young adults' purchase intention for different types of traditional foods.
 - **Qualitative Insights:** Explore through interviews and focus groups how young adults interpret and value different types of information on traditional food labels.
 - **Cross-Cultural Studies:** Investigate how cultural background and familiarity influence the role of food labeling in traditional food purchase decisions among young adults in diverse contexts.

Limitations and Future Research

This narrative review synthesizes existing literature and, as such, relies on the breadth and depth of published studies. It

does not present new empirical data directly quantifying the impact of specific labeling information on traditional food purchase intention among young adults. While references discussed consumer behavior and labeling in general, and traditional foods in particular, specific studies directly combining all three elements (food labeling, traditional foods, young adults) in a direct empirical comparison were synthesized to draw inferences.

Future research should focus on:

- Direct Empirical Studies: Conducting surveys and experiments to measure the willingness to pay and purchase intentions of young adults for traditional foods with varying labeling information.
- Behavioral Studies: Utilizing eye-tracking or other behavioral methods to understand how young adults interact with traditional food labels.
- Generational Comparisons: Comparing the responses of young adults to food labeling on traditional foods with older generations to identify generational differences.
- Specific Traditional Food Categories: Investigating whether the impact of labeling varies across different categories of traditional foods (e.g., snacks vs. main meals, packaged vs. fresh).

CONCLUSION

Food labeling information serves as a powerful determinant of young adults' purchase intention for traditional foods. By providing clear, comprehensive, and trustworthy details about ingredients, nutritional value, origin, and health claims, labels can significantly enhance the perceived quality, reduce information asymmetry, and ultimately boost the appeal of traditional food products among this health-conscious and information-seeking demographic. The narrative review highlights that while traditional foods carry immense cultural significance, their market success in the contemporary food landscape increasingly hinges on effective communication through labeling. For traditional food businesses, embracing transparent and informative labeling is not merely a regulatory compliance but a strategic imperative to connect with young consumers, ensure sustainability, and contribute to the continued appreciation and consumption of culinary heritage.

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