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What can eye-tracking techniques add to conjoint analysis on food label design?

Application to healthiness perception of yogurt labels

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Labelling plays a key role in attracting consumers' attention and providing information that influence consumer expectations and purchase intention. Before engaging in perceptual analyses, consumers' have to pay attention to specific aspects of the labels. However, research performed using conjoint analysis on label design has been traditionally based on rating and choice tasks. The main disadvantage of this approach is that it could not be concluded if a certain label feature is not relevant for consumers or if it did not catch their attention and therefore it was not processed. In this context, studying attention capture and determining which information consumers' rely on for evaluating different aspects of the products is crucial for people working in label design.

The aim of the present work was to determine the relative importance of four design features on consumers' perceived healthiness of yogurt labels using conjoint analysis and eye tracking techniques.

Sixteen yogurt labels were designed according to a four 2-level factors full factorial design with the following variables: label background design, fat content, sugar content and traffic light system. The labels were presented to 51 consumers, who were asked to rate the healthiness of each product. Participants' eye movements when evaluating the labels were recorded using an eye tracker. Areas of interest on the labels were defined and attention measures were calculated.

The great majority of the consumers fixated their gaze on label background, nutritional information and traffic light system, being fat and sugar content the variables with the highest relative importance on perceived healthiness. The traffic light system only affected healthiness perception when labels corresponded to high fat products. Eye tracking measures provided an insight on how consumers visually processed the labels to rate their perceived healthiness.

Results suggest that the application of eye-tracking techniques in conjoint tasks could provide information on consumers' attentional process. The combination of these approaches might improve the interpretation of results since it allows to conclude if a design variable has a low relative importance because consumers do not consider it relevant or because they did not attend to it.

Keywords: conjoint analysis, eye tracking