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Impact of Warning/ Instruction Labels on Consumer Buying Decision and Awareness

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to find out the level of awareness amongst the consumers regarding the hazards of reusing unrecyclable products and to find out the level of their observation to warning and instructions labels on the packaged products.

The topics involve instructions on product's labels and package warnings, to help the reader to review the effect of them on consumer buying decision or changing usage.

It is generally believed and expected that, the products that are purchased from the retailers are genuine and safe. The paper thus will help the reader to gain insights about how one can gain knowledge on becoming an informed customer and how to differentiate between what is good and what is bad for them. The study will also review important warning and label instructions mentioned on product's packaging like- Alcohol, cigarettes, OTC drugs, nutritional food, protein supplements and beauty care products.

Keywords: Packaging; warning labels; instructions; consumer buying behaviour.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the most aggressive form of marketing campaign that can be witnessed to educate customers is the one which educates customers with the help of warning and instructions labels printed on the product's packaging. The most famous amongst these campaigns is the pictorial warning imprinted on the cigarette packs. As per government orders and as an initiative to break the urge of smoking, it is mandatory that 85% of the cigarette pack packaging is to be depicted with pictorial warning and mentioning the hazards of smoking.

Also, instructions printed on product's packaging play a vital role in educating customers about the hazards of not following the aforesaid. There is an observed trend that the consumers now self-educate themselves and always read the instructions before using any product. On the contrary, there is a major chunk of consumers who are still not even informed about the hazards that these products pose on someone, if such instructions are not followed seriously.

Problem Statement

The research intends to check the level of consumer awareness on the basis of impact of instructions/warning labels.

Objectives

- i) To understand the consumer mindset towards packaging labels.
- ii) To study the level of awareness of labels and instructions.
- iii) To find out whether packaging warning/usage affect consumption and disposal.

Review of Literature

Baltas (2001), stated that consumers give a lot of attention on diets, and to the information imprinted on the label of a product's package such as, nutritional and health claims. As a reaction to consumer's demand for healthier and nutritious goods, producers must enhance these claims on the front side of the product's label. Some of the other characteristics like producing organically and local production of various products might provide extra benefits to consumers who care about the environmental preservation.

Teisl, Bockstael, and Levy (2001) researched the effects of nutritional claims on front side label for different grocery products, and they found out that these claims can surely alter consumer's behaviour; However, they mentioned in their paper that the alternative towards health is not the main and only reason for more demand in the market of that product.

Dantas et al. (2004), in this paper, focus groups are used. Mainly, the researchers have used a way of focus groups to collect various data and information about the attitude of consumer towards less processed products. After this study, the results "were "the participants mainly focussed on "best before", brand and nutritional information. The results clearly showed that "showing the information

about food production to the consumer helps him to make a positive perception about the product.”And also, they stated this into their paper that focus group was again arranged, “to check whether the packaging attributes of a less processed vegetable is able to influence the consumer or not.”

Harrison and McLennon (2004) made a use of focus groups to collect and analyse the information about the consumer’s knowledge about biotechnology, and to identify the attributes of labeling that contributes to the consumers’ taste and preference.

Chaloupka& Warner, 2000 they researched about the various factors for non-smokers and also researched their exposure to smoke of tobacco.It was found that, minimal knowledge of the hazards that are caused by tobacco, the question on self-confidence mainly contributed for the study.

According to Hammond, 2011, European Commission, 2009; Vardavas et al., 2009, “this research stated about the smokers, actually it was found out that they are not aware of the risks that are caused by tobacco (WH[WHO], 2011), and actually the warning on the label was useful as it was informing every individual about the hazards caused by smoking.Also, there was a warning about not having one pack a day and this warning was shown up to 20 times a day. Theresearcheralso stated that there are proofs from surveys that graphical warnings on the product was effective in making people realise that smoking is not a good habit and mainly, it was realised that initiation by a person was reduced for smoking.

As per various Canadian studies, it was found that pictorial cigarette health warnings have an effective impact on the consumer’s mind (e.g., Hammond et al., 2003, 2004; Health Canada, 2001). Also as per the evidence from various other countries (e.g., Health Promotion Board, 2004; Li &Grigg, 2009; Miller et al., 2009; Nascimento et al., 2008; Vardavas et al., 2009; Webster & Wakefield, 2008) and cross-country studies, it was found that graphic health warnings are far more effective. Miller et al. (2009) noted that “the call volume to the help quitline increased following the introduction of warning messages on cigarette packs. In Singapore, 47% of smokers reported decreased cigarette consumption after pictorial warning labels were introduced”

Hammond et al., 2006; Hammond, 2011 quoted that, “the graphical warnings which were there on the product was able to get a high emotional response, and it was believed that this warning will be able to help people in getting them aware about the health risks associated with that product, as compared to the textual warnings.”

Borland et al., 2009; Hammond et al., 2006, 2007 as per various cross-country studies, it was found that the larger the graphic health warning images, the more was the effectiveness in the stimulation of cognitive reactions (i.e., an increase in quit intentions as an outcome of increase in knowledge about the health hazards of smoking) compared to text-only warnings.

Givel (2007), this study actually compared the textual warning label from USA with that of Canadian graphical warning label, and it was found out that graphicalwarning label was able to making consumer realise that they should quit smoking.

Chang et al. (2011) stated “in Taiwan, the graphic warning label with smokefree laws, were able to aware the consumers about the hazards of the effects of smoking and thoughts of cessation.”

Brennan et al. (2011) on the basis of the analysis of the study conducted, was able to find a main link that was coming by the effects of both, pictorial warnings and television commercials. And the link was that these both are leading to an increase of awareness of consumers about the risks related to health because of smoking and motivating people to give up smoking in Australia.

Hastings et al., 2004; Ruiter&Kok, 2005 stated that, there is a belief and also as per various research conducted it is found, “that the graphical warnings label for tobacco are effective; (less data was there for actual smoking behaviour). The other study was based on the respondents’ assertiveness to questions about the graphical health warning label that determines their effectiveness. And there were several measures of effectiveness. Some of them includes, “consumer’s attitude towards the behaviour of quit smoking, increased awareness of the consumers towards the risks caused by tobacco, These answers may or may not reflect actual behaviour of the people and hence, they were not able to give an objective assessment of the effect of graphical warning label.”

Holt et al, 1992, Shrank et al, 2007 Labelling and packaging, displaying instructions and warnings must be easy to comprehend as if it is not then it may adversely affect person’s safety and life (de Somer and Trofimov, 2011; Shrank et al, 2007). Also, they found out that, “In the US, when the US Pharmacopoeia investigated, they found out that approximately 1/3 of errors are there in the drug labels which were poorly designed, and is due, at least in part from confusion caused by the label (Shrank et al, 2007b). Furthermore, the observation that there were many patients who received actually no information from a healthcare professional. They were only given with the instructions on the label of the drug and that label is only highlighting the importance of the medication.”

Hellier et al (2006) conducted a research based on an evidence in related areas such as labelling on food and chemical products. There was another research that took place which account the characteristics of a general textual warning such as, “font size, colour, signal words and language and the effect of these on performance variables including compliance, understandability and discriminability; and discussed the relevance of these factors to medicine labels.” The authors concluded that “the three characteristics were having the most consistent effect on user outcomes; signal words, colour, format and wording.

Cohen, 1995; Jensen et al, 2004; Hellier et al, 2006; Gernerin et al, 2007 stated that, “There are various reasons involved behind the issues that arises in labelling and packaging,” where, “The main contributing factor for errors in medical field is mainly pharmaceutical packaging and labelling. Also, non-existent warning systems, and badly conceived drug nomenclature have been identified as another contributing factors to medication errors.”

Caswell and Padberg, 1999 A number of factors influence consumers “ decision-making, but Prathiraja and Ariyawardana (2003) pressurized on labels like nutrition and stated that these labelling

affect consumers purchasing behaviour significantly. Also, this research proved that the consumers look for both quality and quantity information available on the label of the product.”

Nayga, 2003 The labels can be used as a measure for pre-purchase search of nutritional information. Thus, there exists a positive correlation between consumer's purchase decision and consumer's preference with the use of labels and thus suggests having direct impact on the behaviour choice.

Silayoi&Speece, Packaging and Purchase Decisions, 2004 found in their research that, “there were several elements (packaging) that mainly affect the consumer's purchase decision. And the researcher divides these elements into 2 different categories- 1) the main element of packaging is the graphical content on labels which includes, colours, graphics, design size, shape and packaging. 2)second element of the packaging is the information part which relates to the content. And these 2 factors mainly, address the cognitive side of decision-making, such as educating the customer and the overall image of the brand.”

Baik,2011 stated that, “the upper-class labelling is done in a other way, when the product is a high level product and which have some elements which are way too high, its labelling & packaging is done in a another way. So, that it will target only the high-class people.” And as we all know the fact that the upper-class people are very much keen towards their diet and health. And they choose their brand wisely.Also, it was stated that, “mainly the revenue lies in the hands of how the product's packaging is affecting the mind set of high-class people.”

Shah, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2013 The packaging ensures that, “when we say that there is a new product or unused product, that means the product is original and genuine.While, the manufacturer uses the packaging for the delivery part, also for the security reason and eventually it leads to as a medium of sale promotion. Basically, the Packaging of a product defines the information about product like content part, making process, date of manufacturing, usage etc.” Hence, the packaging of a product encourages the value of the product and sometimes, the packaging alone sometimes double the value of a product.

Hawkes, 2004 in his research found an impressive finding that, “the usage of labels (graphical or written) encourages the usage of that product by the consumers. The effects of using a label in healthier products is such that it leads to food choice motivations (Coulson, 2000). Other studies associated with the label usage with 2 different products, one with diets high in vitamin C and secondly, low in cholesterol (Guthrie et al., 1995) and with a lower percentage of calories from fat (Lin and Lee, 2003). In addition, disclosure of cereal brands 'sugar content (false information provided) caused consumers to switch to low-sugar cereals because of high sugar content on the product which was a false information on the label. (Russo et al., 1986), while Variyam, Blaylock, and Smallwood (1996) confirmed the influence of nutritional information on fibre intake.

Research Methodology

Primary data was collected for this descriptive research by means of a structured questionnaire to different samples of population for finding out the level of awareness about warnings and instructions imprinted on product's packaging. The survey was created online and link was sent to the respondents in India using convenience sampling. The respondents were approached through email and social media. The respondents were categorised on the basis of gender, age and occupation.

Research Tool

Questionnaire: A questionnaire is incorporated as a research tool to carry out the primary research and help companies know the shortcomings (if any), with the help of it.

Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	142	95.9
	Excluded ^a	6	4.1
	Total	148	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.852	20

Reliability analysis of the variables

The analysis shows that the value of Cronbach's alpha is **0.852**, which is much higher than that of the standard value **0.5**, suggesting that there is a **strong degree of internal consistency (reliability)** amongst the variables used in the questionnaire.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data analysis is conducted based on the research conducted on the 148 respondents; the results obtained out of the research are displayed with the help of graphical presentation as well as with the interpretation of the important statistics by using SPSS 20 software.

Correlations

	What is your age ?	In the last 30 days have you witnessed any information about the smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual intercourse, Fire safety, overprescribed use of medicines, through any medium of communication?
What is your age?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .212** 148
In the last 30 days have you witnessed any information about the smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual intercourse, Fire safety, overprescribed use of medicines, through any medium of communication?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .212** 148
		.010 148

Correlation between age and warning information on different products

The statistics infers that the $p < 0.05$ (**0.01**), which indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between age and warning information.

This also suggests that the consumers of different demographics are nowadays trying to get themselves informed and educated about the risks associated to the consumption of the hazardous products. With a positive correlation between the aforesaid factors, it can be interpreted that such communication of information should be continued in order to ensure consumer’s education and awareness remains up to date.

Correlations

	Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?	During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs?
Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N 148	1 -.255** 148
During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs?	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N 148	-.255** .002 148

Correlation between warning labels and cigarette consumption decision

The statistics infers that the $p < 0.05$ (**0.01**), which indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between warning labels and cigarette consumption decision.

It can be interpreted from the correlation data that, with the inclusion of warning labels on the cigarette packs, there lies an ambiguity to whether the consumers will try to quit smoking or not, as there is a plausibility that the smokers are not getting affected by the pictorial warnings and may continue to consume cigarettes. While on the other hand, the consumers who are in the non- smoking category or in the occasional smoking category might feel disgusted with the warning pictures and make an attempt to quit smoking.

Correlations

	Select your gender	How strongly do you agree that there must be the inclusion of warning pictures in the following products: [Alcohol bottles]
	Pearson Correlation	1
Select your gender	Sig. (2-tailed)	.234**
	N	.004
	N	148
How strongly do you agree that there must be the inclusion of warning pictures in the following products: [Alcohol bottles]	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.234**
	N	.004
	N	148

Correlation between gender and warning information on alcohol bottles

The statistical data shows that there is a significant relationship between the variables i.e. gender and inclusion of warning labels on the alcohol bottles. ($p < 0.05$)

This shows that there lies an agreement among both males and females that there is a requirement for the inclusion of pictorial warnings on the alcohol bottles. It can be derived that based on gender, opinion towards inclusion of warning pictures and labels differs for alcohol bottles. Hence perception of males and females may differ as to whether there should be warning pictures on alcohol bottles or not.

Correlations

	Residence ?	Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?
	Pearson Correlation	1
Residence ?	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194*
	N	.018
	N	148
Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.194*
	N	.018
	N	148

Correlation between region and warning labels observation

The statistics infers that the $p < 0.05$ (0.01), which indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between region and warning labels observation.

It can be seen with the significant relationship between the mentioned variables that based on the region where the consumer belongs from, differs in their observation towards the warning labels and instructions on the product's packaging. It can be said that the consumers belonging to the urban region tends to read the warnings and instructions labels more than that of the consumers in the rural region.

Select your gender * In the last 30 days have you witnessed any information about the smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual intercourse, Fire safety, overprescribed use of medicines, through any medium of communication? Crosstabulation

Count

		In the last 30 days have you witnessed any information about the smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual intercourse, Fire safety, overprescribed use of medicines, through any medium of communication?			Total
		Yes	No	Not noticed	
Select your gender	Male	34	11	22	67
	Female	53	9	19	81
Total		87	20	41	148

Select your gender * Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying? Crosstabulation

Count

		Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?			Total
		Always	Rarely	Never	
Select your gender	Male	23	40	4	67
	Female	35	40	6	81
Total		58	80	10	148

Select your gender * During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs? Crosstabulation

Count

		During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs?			Total
		Yes	No	Not Applicable	
Select your gender	Male	21	36	10	67
	Female	20	43	18	81
Total		41	79	28	148

Cross tabulation of gender and various factors

It can be inferred from the statistical analysis that on the basis of gender, there lies a great amount of disparity in the view towards impact of warning and instruction labels on their perception.

The male population is more oblivious than the female population when it comes to noticing information about the smoking, drinking, unsafe sexual intercourse, Fire safety, overprescribed use of medicines, through any medium of communication. Hence, there is a requirement to focus in educating the male population more about the observation of such labels and making them aware of the hazards that such products possess.

Neither male nor the female population has agreed to stop smoking even after observing the warning pictures on the cigarette packaging. Majority of the female respondents responded in favour of not quitting smoking despite of such pictorial warnings. Most of the male population agreed that they don't even notice such information on the cigarette packaging.

Select your occupation * Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?
Crosstabulation

Count

		Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?			Total
		Always	Rarely	Never	
Select your occupation	Student	32	44	2	78
	Business Man	4	4	0	8
	Employee	19	30	8	57
	House Maker	3	2	0	5
Total		58	80	10	148

What is your annual income? * Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?
Crosstabulation

Count

		Do you read instructions/warning labels on the products before buying?			Total
		Always	Rarely	Never	
What is your annual income?	0 -2,50,000	26	47	0	73
	2,50,000-5,00,000	17	10	6	33
	5,00,000-10,00,000	7	13	4	24
	More than 10,00,000	4	8	0	12
Total		54	78	10	142

What is your annual income? * During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs? Crosstabulation

Count

		During the past 12 months, have you tried to quit smoking by looking at warning labels on cigarette packs?			Total
		Yes	No	Not Applicable	
What is your annual income?	0 -2,50,000	18	33	22	73
	2,50,000-5,00,000	19	14	0	33
	5,00,000-10,00,000	2	22	0	24
	More than 10,00,000	2	10	0	12
Total		41	79	22	142

Crosstabulation of income and occupation with various factors

It can be inferred that people belonging to the lower income group and very high income group do not tend to observe warning labels and instruction labels on the product's packaging neither tried to quit smoking even after being exposed to such pictorial warnings. People with middle level income, do try to observe such information on the product's packaging and in proportion to other income level groups tries to quit smoking. Mostly students from the very early age are being taught about the importance of observing such information about the harmful products and thus making them aware in their foundational stage only. Businessman and employee class do not even make an effort in observing such information. With this it becomes evident that which income group class requires more intense education and awareness about the consequences of not reading such valuable information on health risking products.

Findings

- 53% of respondents agreed that they always read the instructions and warning labels before buying the product. The data analysis also shows that a very less percentage of the respondents out of the sample of 148 respondents, answered that they never read the warning and instruction labels.
- The maximum of the respondents 78% agreed to the fact that the pictorial warnings on the product packaging do have an effect on their decision to buy hazardous products. Whereas 22% of the respondents were still apprehensive of this fact and responded with a no for the same.
- 45% of the respondent falls under the category of being a non smoker indicating that the number of non smokers is increasing day by day and consumers are getting informed about the hazards of smoking.
- It does require for the government to come up with more of the ad campaigns in order to tap the remaining 55% of the majority respondents who smoke either 'daily' or 'more than once a week' or 'more than once a month'
- 53% respondents answered that the pictorial warnings on the cigarette packs do not alter their decision to buy cigarettes. Whereas 27% of the respondents agreed that such labels do make them to control their urge of smoking.
- More than 80 out of 148 have noticed the information about the products causing health risks to consumers through different mediums of communication. There is a very small number of respondents who have answered that they have neither noticed nor have come across any such information.
- The majority of the respondents have strongly agreed and agreed on inclusion of warning pictures on variety of products that can cause harm to the consumer on its excessive consumption.
- Majority of the respondents have agreed to the fact that inclusion of warning pictures must be there on the cigarette packs, followed by suggestion of inclusion of such label on alcohol bottles and on pharmaceutical products. It also suggests that the respondents think that inclusion of such labels would not be beneficial for the cold drink manufacturers as well as energy drink manufacturers.
- A majority of the respondents agreed that instructions and warnings must bag in their presence in the communication mediums like newspapers, e-mails, street plays and FM radios.
- Almost 110 respondents agreed that they tend to focus more on MRP/Price when they first see a product, followed by warnings on the product packaging and ingredients thereon.

- Maximum respondents agreed that the best medium to educate the consumers about the warning advertisements is through social media coverage, followed by television commercials and in between movie commercials.
- With majority of smokers 55 out of 148 respondents buying the cigarette packs, it can be inferred that they are getting exposed to the pictorial warnings and might be considering it to breaking the urge of smoking.
- The next big chunk of smokers 39 out of 148 respondents, are believed to be unaware of the fact of the pictorial warnings as they do not buy the entire pack and prefers buying it loose.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be concluded that packaging and labelling does play a very important role in altering and defining consumer buying decision. It can also be said that, the warning labels and instruction labels have become an important constituent of the product's packaging, that helps in educating the consumer and making them informed about the product they are buying.

The following recommendations could be helpful in making the packaging, labelling and communication of important information more viable:

- There is a requirement for the government to come up with more of the ad campaigns in order to tap the majority of the consumers who smoke either 'daily' or 'more than once a week' or 'more than once a month'.
- This analysis helps us to infer that there is a still long way to go for educating the consumers about the health risks that smoking causes and for that new and innovative forms of ad campaigns, such as NukkadNatak (street plays), social media coverage, seminar programmes by health experts in schools, etc. are required to be incorporated to make the consumer informed about the hazards of smoking.
- As per analysis most of the respondents answered that they do notice warning labels and instructions on the product's packaging. Thus, this information will help the government in knowing about where else they can tap the advertisement apart from pictorial warning labels to educate consumers about the hazardous products.
- There was a majority of respondents who agreed on the inclusion of the pictorial warnings on the alcohol bottles, that would definitely be a great move as it will help in educating the consumer about the consequences of over consumption of alcohol.
- Alternative platforms for instructions and warnings must be that they should bag in their presence in the communication mediums like newspapers, e-mails, street plays and FM radios. This will help in making the reach of such information an effective one among all the consumers of such products.
- There is a requirement for the companies to redesign the packaging labels in such a way that the other mentioned element gains consumer's attention rather than just the price.

- Communication of information regarding the health risking products should be continued in order to ensure consumer's education and awareness remains up to date.
- There must be an initiative by the government and NGOs to educate the people belonging to the rural areas about various risks related to various products and how they should use certain products in avoiding such risks, like health risks associated with over consumption of alcohol, harmful chemicals usage, not using condoms leading to STDs, etc. and to educate them about how to read warning and instruction labels on product's packaging.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

1. Geographical Limitation: The research is confined to India only and does not necessarily shows a pattern applicable to the global perspective.
2. Some respondents were reluctant to divulge personal information which can affect the validity of all responses.
3. In a rapidly changing industry, analysis on one day or in one segment can change very quickly. The environmental changes are vital to be considered in order to assimilate the findings.
4. Limited respondents: A sample of just 200 respondents was tested in order to conduct the research and that such sampling represents the entire population cannot be known, therefore it is not sensible to generalize the results beyond the specific sample used
5. Response bias: As some owners, employees may be casual, uninterested or become neutral, there exists a chance for the data to be biased as well.

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