

# Information disclosure and food labeling regulations in Tunisia

Qualitative Research

Mai 2021

# The challenge

The nutrition facts mark found on prepacked food is a label that many countries require on most packaged foods to indicate what nutrients are added. Official nutritional rating systems are typically used to establish labels. Accordingly, most countries do require comprehensive nutrition guides on packaged food. While in Tunisia and regarding law n° 66 of August 6, 1982, regarding standardization and quality, adding nutrition facts to prepackaged food products is non-mandatory. Labeling only becomes compulsory for foods with nutritional claims (Art. 47). This policy has remained unchangeable for 39 years.

## Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

**Serving size** 2/3 cup (55g)

**Amount per serving**

**Calories** 230

**% Daily Value\***

**Total Fat** 8g 10%

Saturated Fat 1g 5%

Trans Fat 0g

**Cholesterol** 0mg 0%

**Sodium** 160mg 7%

**Total Carbohydrate** 37g 13%

Dietary Fiber 4g 14%

Total Sugars 12g

Includes 10g Added Sugars 20%

Source: K-State Research and Extension News



# Why does labeling food products matter?

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The prime purpose of food labels is to educate customers about the nutritional value and ingredients, as well as the manufacturer, health claims, and any potential allergens or other potentially dangerous food information. Including them on every package to be imparted to consumers is thus of great significance and should be cardinal for a plethora of reasons



We conducted a qualitative study to highlight the importance of labeling food products and explore its effects on health and eating habits, in order to encourage policy change.

# Information Disclosure

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Information Disclosure accentuates that individuals have the right to know what they are consuming with regard to their food composition: its calories, macronutrients, minerals, and vitamins.

Added to that, the storage methods, the best-before or use-by date are fundamental information that needs to be at everyone's disposal. That way, they can assess the choices at hand and make informed decisions regarding the food they purchase. Access to information is critical for enabling them to enter into an informed course of actions that can affect their lives.



# Nudge Theory

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Food labeling can nudge people to eat healthier. Nudging, according to Nobel Prize-winning economist Richard Thaler, is something that influences behaviors without forcing anyone's hand.

Therefore, nutrition facts when added can inform consumers about their intake of sugar, salt, and saturated fats, encourage them to limit and restrain this intake, and consequently direct them to make better choices that lead to a balanced diet.

# Transparency

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Food producers are significantly investing to turn out detailed, honest, and accurate labeling for their products. This is a powerful way to gain the trust and loyalty of their customers and reflect transparency.

According to BrandFabrik, more than half of consumers consider "Additional Information" to be relevant when selecting a brand, based on a 2016 study into the relationship between transparency and confidence. Furthermore, 73% of those surveyed said they would pay more for a product that is completely transparent. As a result, labeling should be considered overriding for food producers.

# Health Issues

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People with health issues should be more cognizant of nutritional and dietary information, especially as the number of food-related health problems has significantly escalated.

Monitoring the intake of micronutrients is thereby paramount to fight illnesses like diabetes and certain types of heart disease, to avoid certain food allergies, and avoid deficiencies like iron and Vitamin D. For that, food labels should be strictly present to guide affected people to make informed decisions that do not endanger their lives.

# Qualitative Research

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In order to assess how labeling can affect health and eating habits, we carried out qualitative research to gather the needed insights. For that, we conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with consumers to further learn about their experiences and perspectives with respect to food labeling.

Furthermore, we opted for focus groups to generate discussion among deliberately selected people. The participants were able to interact and provide us with information regarding their nutrition facts' knowledge and the prepacked food they are consuming. Our research also involved observations and experts' interviews.



# Main Findings

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- The trend identified in the past three years has been toward consuming healthy food and being more mindful about eating habits, as health has significantly become at the forefront of every concern. Given that diseases and problems associated with poor eating habits are now getting to be more conspicuous, people want to be more informed about what they are consuming. With this rising awareness, the number of individuals who regularly consult food labels has also increased.
- Consumers who are more engaged in reading these food labels are the ones involved in food shopping for their household, predominantly mothers who buy food and snacks for their children. They feel responsible for ensuring a balanced diet and the healthy well-being of their families.

# Main Findings

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- Consumers who or whose relatives have health issues such as diabetes, heart diseases, and allergies or who follow a certain diet that requires them to monitor their calories and intake of nutrients including the percentage of sugar always tend to read the nutrition facts found on the packages, as they want to avoid any convenience that can be caused by the food and to effectively maintain and reach their dietary goals.
- The number of calories, percentage of sugar, and percentage of fats are what people generally aspire to find most. When not found, consumers can feel extremely exasperated and be dissuaded from buying certain products. Companies need to take this into consideration in order to not lose customers.

# Recommendations

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The qualitative research we conducted revealed that food labeling is primordial. Labeling can particularly guide individuals who have certain diseases and health conditions like diabetes or deficiencies to keep track of their sugar intake and avoid certain nutrients that can put their health and well-being on the line. Additionally, it can nudge people, even the ones who do not scrutinize nutrition facts, to a healthier lifestyle.

Companies, as well, can reinforce transparency, establish trust, and upgrade their reputation when including labels on their products, as research showed that customers are discouraged from buying a product with a label that contains little information. However, this is not the case for all companies in Tunisia, as only a few brands are labeling their products. Others are adding nutrition facts to some and overlooking the rest. Nutritional information is sometimes found incomplete, for example, saturated fats or calories are not included.



That being the case, producers should follow certain guidelines when adding labels. The latter should be attractive and appealing with clear colors, images, or font. This way, they can effectively attract consumers and urge them to read the nutrition facts. Information should be simplified using uncomplicated wording in order to be easily understood. The use of scientific terms for ingredients or nutrients, for instance, should thus be avoided and the number of calories should be added by the gram or by portion when appropriate.

People have the right to be well briefed about the nutritional value of the food they consume. Disclosure of such information should be statutory. On this account, mandatory nutrition facts policy is being enacted in all developed countries: Researchers and policymakers are now endeavoring to further put it into practice by adding paces, colored labels, and nutrient facts to non-packaged food.