

Exploring the Influence of UTZ Food Labelling on Consumers' Purchase Intention of Food Products: Does UTZ Matter?

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Abstract

Introduction: An ever increasing demand for sustainable food products, brought on by environmentally conscious consumers, has seen the implementation of sustainable food labels such as UTZ in South Africa. Although not a mandatory requirement on sustainable food products in South Africa, it is not certain if this label has any effect on the purchase of sustainable food products. Sustainable food labels are under researched within the South African food industry and even less research exists regarding consumers' intention to purchase sustainable labelled food products through the use of the UTZ label, that has led to the purpose of this study.

Methodology: A qualitative exploratory study using convenient, purposeful and snowball sampling methods to recruit 16 participants via Facebook, who have heard of sustainable food labelling within the borders of South-Africa, was undertaken. Data gathering was conducted through individual semi-structured interviews, conducted over Microsoft Teams until saturation was achieved. Content analysis was performed after data transcription to identify concepts and categories pertaining to the questions. Principles of trustworthiness was applied to the study design and data analysis. Ethics clearance was obtained prior to data gathering.

Results and Discussion: Consumer recognition of UTZ labelled food products was associated with products containing cocoa and a well-known food retailer in South Africa. Consumer knowledge of UTZ sustainable labels identified sustainable farming methods, sustainably sourced cocoa powder and products containing cocoa pertaining to UTZ. It was recognized at specific retailers and associated with sweets, products containing cocoa and coffee. UTZ attributes specific to the red colour, spelling, shape and placement of the UTZ label attracted attention to the label. The label incited thoughts of sustainable product farming and a concern for the environment and the associated cost of UTZ sustainable labelled food products in retail.

Conclusion: Through exploring consumers, understanding of UTZ sustainable labelling, purchasing obstacles that may negatively affect the purchasing intention of UTZ certified labelled food products have been identified. Importantly, the use of aspects that would attract consumers to UTZ sustainable food labelling can improve the identification of UTZ labelling to flag sustainable food products.

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Prof Elizabeth Louise Kempen, obtained her PhD in Philosophy from The University of Liverpool in the UK. Further qualifications obtained from the North West University include a Masters in Home Economics, Honours in Home Economics and BSc in Home Economics. She is currently a full professor in the Department of Life and Consumer Sciences at the University of South Africa. Prof Kempen was the Head of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences from 2012-2020 and received the SARIMA award for a Distinguished Contribution in Research Management in 2020. Her research interest is in Consumer Decision Making and Purchasing Behaviour within the fields of clothing and foods. She is currently pursuing further research interests in consumer behaviour towards South African indigenous products and sustainable purchasing decisions.