

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**CONSUMERS' AWARENESS AND
KNOWLEDGE OF NUTRITIONAL
LABELLING: A CASE STUDY IN
KUALA LUMPUR AND KOTA
KINABALU**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science**

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management

February 2008

Abstract

A total of 1200 questionnaires were distributed at supermarkets/hypermarkets in Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu. This study is carried out using the mall-intercept technique. These supermarkets/hypermarkets were selected randomly. 608 (50.6%) was the return rate. The purpose of this study was: (1) to determine the demand and type of information consumers look for in nutritional labelling when making purchase decisions for food items, (2), to identify socio-demographic differences on the use of nutritional labelling, (3), to determine whether the use of labels is related to the dietary, health, religious or ethical needs of the consumers and (4) to determine the relationship between knowledge on nutrition and the use of nutritional labels. The socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the sample analyzed in this study are age, gender, ethnic group, marital status, and total household income, and academic qualification, field of expertise, location, special needs, and families with or without children at home. Female respondents represent half of the total respondents in this study. The findings suggest that respondents generally give priority to nutritional content related to general health when purchasing food. While the majority of age group is less than 30 years old with 327 respondents married, most of the respondents refer to nutritional labelling when making food purchases. Most of the respondents (71%) look at the nutrient content of the food when they read nutritional labelling. This suggests that respondents generally give priority to the nutritional content of foods that they are purchasing. The results show that reading of nutritional labelling on food packages is quite prevalent among Malaysian consumers in the urban areas where the sample is drawn. It is evident that the reading of nutritional labelling is influenced by awareness about the health aspects of food only in general term, rather than based on specific knowledge. This study revealed an interesting finding that Malaysian consumers in Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu take interest in reading nutritional labelling when making purchasing decisions. It is recommended that future research be undertaken to include all States in the country especially those States with less urban status.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Datin Professor Dr. Toh Poh See for her keenest interest in my research, guidance, encouragement and support without it which it would have been impossible for me to complete this thesis. I have been blessed to work closely with her, she is an exemplary scholar, educator, and a great person with warm heart. I would like also to express my appreciation to my second supervisor, Associate Prof. Dr Naim Kamari for his guidance, idea and interest in my study.

My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to my family and especially to my mother who has been a constant source of my inspiration. She allowed me to share my problems and being the patient person she is, she took time to understand what I was going through and provided constant support throughout the duration of this study.

My thanks also goes to Kak Norizan Ahmad for her help, understanding and assistance especially with my data analysis and my thesis as well.

I would like to also express my gratitude to my employer Universiti Malaysia Sabah for giving me the opportunity and the support to further my study. Thanks you Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam for sponsoring my study for two years.

The completion of this thesis would not have been a success without the efforts, assistance, and prayer of many friends and well-wishers who have been directly and indirectly involved since the very beginning. Last but not the least, I express my sincere thanks to who have made my research a success story.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Candidate's Declaration	
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Table	x
List of Figures	xi
List of Abbreviations	xiii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Background Of The Research	2
1.1.1	Amendments To The Food Regulation 1985	5
1.1.2	Foods Requiring Mandatory Nutritional Labelling	5
1.1.3	Introduction To Retail Food Sector In Malaysia	7
1.1.4	Factors That Changing The Retail Food Sector	7
1.2	Rationale Of The Study	9
1.3	Scope Of The Study	9
1.4	Significance Of The Study	10
1.4.1	The Policy Makers	10
1.4.2	The Food Industry	11
1.4.3	The Consumers	12
1.5	Problem Identification	12

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The trend towards healthier eating has resulted in an increase of interest among Malaysian consumers for detailed and accurate information regarding nutritional contents of food. In the past, consumers use a wide range of source of information including media, doctors, dieticians and more recently nutritional labels. Nutritional labels on food package provide a vital information for consumers who need to help themselves in improving or protecting their health. Evidence indicates that nutrition labelling is indeed very useful in helping consumers choose more healthful food (Kreuter et al, 1997, Neuhouser et al., 1999, Silverglade et al., 1998).

More Malaysians have started to realize the importance of healthy lifestyle due to the increase number of chronic diseases among Malaysians. The main causes of death in Malaysia are heart diseases, cancer, chronic lower respiratory diseases and diabetes. MySoN (Malaysian Shape of the Nation) study is an eye opener for all Malaysian to find that Malaysians are obese in the Asian region with 48 percent men and 62 percent women. Previous study by Kasmini et al., 1997 found male to be more obese than to female.

Ismail & Vickneswary, 1999 discovered that there is an increase of obesity among Malaysian children from 1 percent in 1990 to 6 percent in 1997. A survey by Ismail & Tan (1998) demonstrated an increased obesity among children. For 7 years old children, the increase in obesity is 6.6 percent while for 10 years old children the increase is 13.8 percent. 12.5 percent also suggest that boys are more obese compared to girls.