



Do Organic Snack Foods Taste Differently Because of Their Label?

Yes, But Personality Also Matters...
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Introduction

With the growing movement towards 'healthy' and organic foods, it is important to better understand the influence of health claims on taste perceptions and in turn, how this may ultimately affect one's consumption habits. In particular, this study examines how organic labels on *less healthy snacks* may influence taste perceptions and consumption among different types of people.

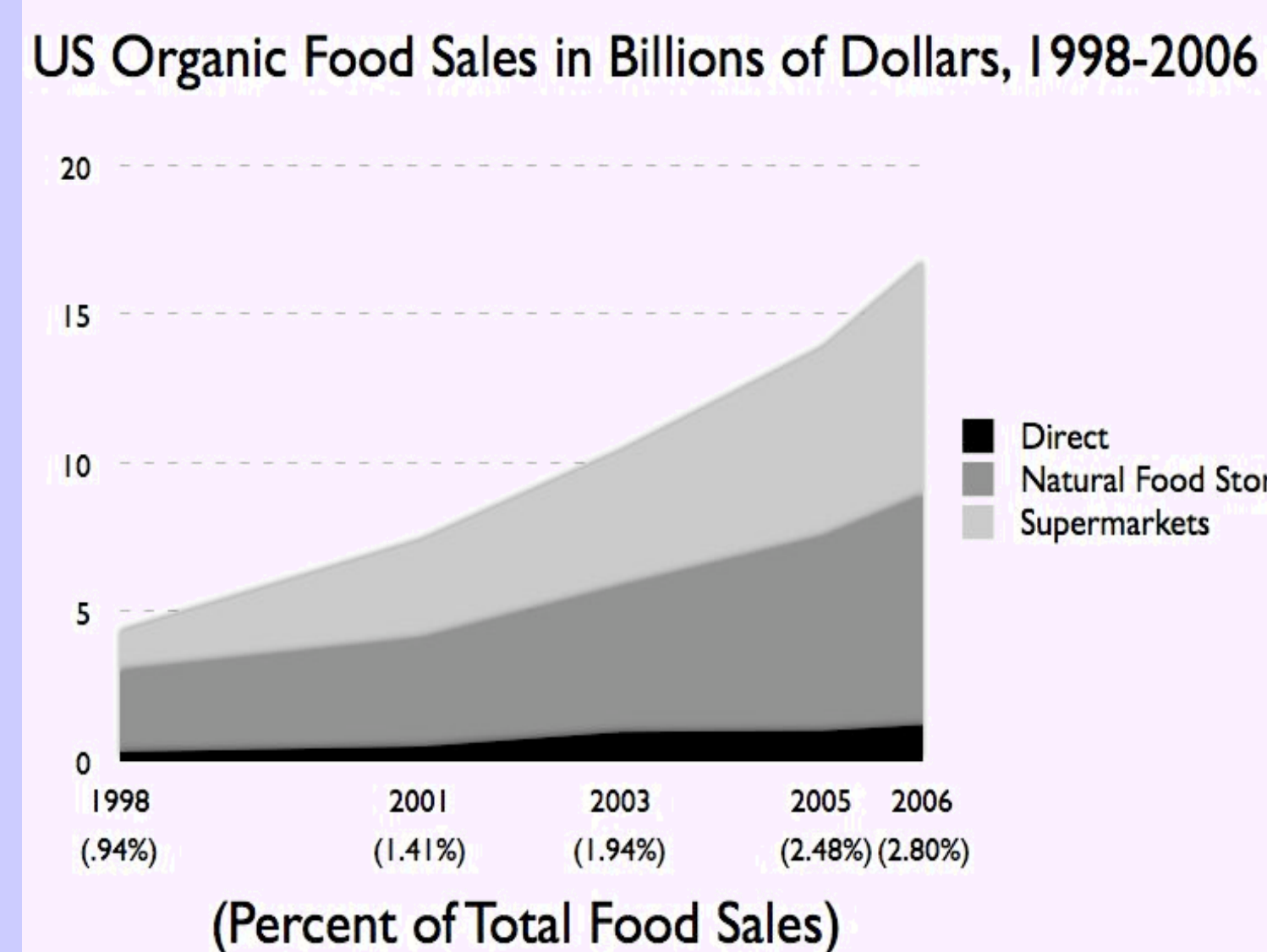
STUDY OBJECTIVES

• Do organic labels influence taste perceptions?

Hypothesis 1: Organic labels will increase taste perception ratings

• If so, which segments are more sensitive to this influence?

Hypothesis 2: Taste perceptions will be influenced by differing personality traits



Abstract

While past studies have focused mainly on the perceptions associated with organic labels, this study investigated the influence of both organic labels and personality traits on taste evaluations of less healthy snack foods.



Participants consuming snacks labeled 'organic' estimated them to be lower in calories, and rated them to be more appetizing in appearance and higher in fiber content than those who consumed snacks without the 'organic' label. In particular, the presence of the 'organic' label seemed to have the greatest impact on buyers of organic food, as well as on those who tend to read nutrition labels, leading them to underestimate calories. On the other hand, people who claimed to be more environmentally aware were found to be *more* critical of the 'organic' label, and perceived the organic snacks as tasting less natural and more artificial.

Therefore, it may be possible to identify segments with certain personality characteristics that are more sensitive to health label claims

Conclusions

Major findings. . .

1. Snacks labeled 'organic' are perceived by college students to be lower in calories, more appetizing, and higher in fiber.
2. People most affected by such health claims are those who typically buy organic foods and those who typically assess the nutritional value of foods using nutrition labels.
3. Contrary to what we might think, nature lovers appear to be *more* critical of organic labels—those who reported greater enjoyment when spending time with nature or going on walks or hikes perceived snacks with the 'organic' label to taste less natural and more artificial than snacks *without* the label.

These findings suggest that...

Health labels may stimulate increased purchase, and in turn consumption, of organic or more 'healthy' foods for some individuals. The influence of such claims may depend on one's personality characteristics.

Methods

- 54 college students, 24 male and 30 female
- Participants randomly assigned to 2 conditions, tasting either cookies labeled 'organic' or not labeled 'organic'
 - Cookies were actually organic Oreos in both conditions
- Participants were asked to rate the nutritional, value, and sensory attributes of the cookies
- They also completed questionnaires about their environmental awareness and behavior (recycling, enjoyment of nature, etc.), as well as their food shopping habits (tendency to buy organic foods, read nutrition labels, etc)

Results

Organic Labels Improved Taste Evaluations...

Participants who consumed cookies labeled 'organic' rated them to be lower in calories ($t=3.95$, $p<.001$), more appetizing in appearance ($t=-2.27$, $p=.03$), and higher in fiber ($t=-2.63$, $p=.01$) than participants who consumed cookies that were not labeled 'organic'.

Organic Labels Make Foods Taste Differently

	Without 'Organic' Label	With 'Organic' Label	p-value
Number of Calories	Mean (SD) 233.04 (17.41)	Mean (SD) 140.90 (15.50)	<.001
Appearance ('Seemed appetizing')*	5.96 (0.37)	7.11 (0.35)	0.03
Tastes high in fiber*	2.12 (0.34)	3.37 (0.33)	0.01

*Items rated on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 9 (highest)

Results (Continued)

...But Personality Characteristics Also Matter!

- Using the Fisher r-to-z transformation, we found significant differences between participants in the two conditions, in terms of the correlations between their calorie estimates and food shopping behaviors:
 - The 'organic' labeled cookies were rated as being lower in calories by those who claimed to typically buy organic foods ($z=+2.44$, $p=.01$) and by those who claimed to typically assess the nutritional value of foods ($z=+2.72$, $p=.007$).
- We also found significant differences between participants in the two conditions in terms of the correlations between their environmental awareness and whether the cookies tasted natural or artificial:
 - Those who claimed to enjoy going on nature hikes or leisurely walks rated cookies with the 'organic' label as tasting *less* natural ($z=-3.82$, $p<.001$), as did those who claimed to enjoy spending time with nature ($z=-3.55$, $p<.001$).

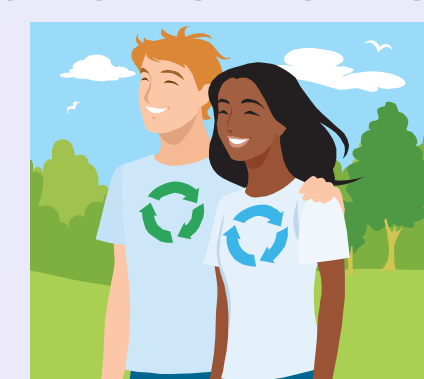
Who's most likely to underestimate calories in organic foods?

People who say they:
"...usually buy organic foods"



"...typically assess the nutritional value of foods using nutrition labels"

Who's also influenced by organic labels?
Nature lovers Hikers & Leisure walkers



The Bottom Line For Organic Producers. . .

Segment consumers based on personality characteristics (e.g., hikers, leisure walkers, nature lovers, etc.), not just based on demographics!



Selected References

- Chandon, Pierre and Brian Wansink (2007), "The Biasing Health Halos of Fast Food Restaurant Health Claims: Lower Calorie Estimates and Higher Side-Dish Consumption Intentions," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34:3 (October) 301-314.
- Wansink, Brian and Se-Bum Park (2002), "Sensory Suggestiveness and Labeling: Do Soy Labels Bias Taste?" *Journal of Sensory Studies*, 17:5 (November), 483-491.

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