



# Targeting and Packaging Low Fat Products: Uncontrolled and Controlled Variables



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## Abstract

Marketing low fat products has to pay attention to both, personal variables and packaging design variables. On the one hand, personal factors such as socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, income and education), involvement, time pressure, motivation and lifestyle affect food-buying process. On the other hand, packaging variables such as colour, graphics, size, shape, typography also affect the buying decision.

**Keywords:** Low fat product, Decision-buying process, Personal factors, Packaging factors

## Introduction

Packaging is becoming a relevant variable to sell foods products [1-2]. According to [3-4], this importance is based on three marketing and consumer behavior trends: increasing efforts on sales promotions and on point of purchase communications, buying decisions are made in the retailing shop and, the need for a more intensive product differentiation from competitors in the shop. As regards low fat aliments, they can be seen as a marketing response, including the low fat packaging design, to current consumer life styles and eating habits, such as high-calorie foods, high in sugars and saturated fats, hydrogenated oils or poor fiber intake [5] that result in overweight and obesity among other diseases [6].

## Personal Uncontrolled Variables Affecting Packaging Design for Low Fat Products

### Socio-demographics

Research has probed that factors affecting consumer preferences for nutritional labeling are clearly related to the health status of the individuals, information use -whether or no individuals read nutritional labels- and socio-demographics i.e. education, income, age and gender [7-8]. Individuals with higher education are aware of nutritional benefits of low-fat aliments and search in the packaging this information more than less educated consumers. Also, older and higher income buyers tend to favor the search for healthy products. Regarding gender, women seem to be stronger buyers of low-fat aliments than men and search packages with healthy claims largely due

to protective feelings regarding family and children. A result also supported by [9] who found that women are significantly more involved in food than men, being also more worried than men about weight control and health. Regarding age, according to [10] children and adolescents react towards some food and beverage companies announcing healthy products.

### Involvement

In low involvement situations, consumers do not search extensively for information or process it about the brands, evaluate or compare their characteristics, and make a weighty decision on which brand to buy or like [11]. According to [12] going to food markets cannot be considered as a low involvement activity. Consumers are used to search for specific brands and are really concern about the food products they want to buy. In case they are worried about obesity and other nutritional disorders, they will search for packages that clearly explain the advantages and/or the risks of the food products. However, and on the contrary, other stream of literature states that packaged food products remain low in involvement for many consumers. From this point of view, consumer acquisition of food products is done without carefully examining brand and product information. The lack of commitment and attention implies that information on the package has little value for consumers [13]. Therefore, depending on consumers' level of involvement with the product, their interest in the evaluated products and their reaction towards packaging information and design variables will be different [14]. Thus, involvement

could be useful as a segmentation variable when launching new low fat foods to the market in the way that low fat aliments should strongly attend involved people, clearly showing its advantages, because these people are more concern against unhealthy products that noninvolved people, ready to by almost everything.

### Time pressure

Underline that time pressure is becoming an ever more important factor that packaging designers should address. When buying food products, the influence of packaging visual elements on choice is stronger when consumers have less time in which to make the product choice, and weaker when they do not have time pressure. It means that the influence of informational elements on choice is stronger when consumers have more time to make their choice. When people have time pressure, they tend to perceive less information from the package, and thus, the influence of informational elements will be weaker. However, technology is somewhat of a special case relative to the other types of informational elements, because packaging technology is often linked to convenience food products, and convenience has become increasingly important [15]. Thus, if consumers are worried about time saving, they will pay more attention to claims of new technology, because of technology's association with convenience. New packaging technology or new technology claimed on packaging has a more positive effect on the purchase decision under time pressure than without it [13]. Therefore, when firms want to sell low fat products, they have to pay attention to the factor that time pressures in the point of purchase will not help the selling. For this reason, the use of technologically advanced packaging can be a weapon to gain consumers. In this regard, one of the latest advances has been launching light packaging to attract consumer's attention.

### Motivation

Consumers have different motives to buy food. According to [16], research suggests that individual differences in motivation to process nutrition information impacts consumers' processing, use, and evaluation of nutrition information. A construct understood as a disposition to attend to nutrition information that reflects goal-directed arousal, and which has an influence on how and what nutrition information is attended [16]. In this line of research, several papers have addressed the motivation of mothers when buying healthy products for their children and the difficulties to know to whom the packaging should be addressed [17]. In this particular case of healthy food products for children, both children and mothers have to be attracted to the product. The psychological effects of packaging should not be underestimated, especially in an increasingly competitive retailing environment where a product on shelf has one-tenth of a second to spark off purchase.

### Lifestyle

Lifestyle variables perform a significant role explaining how consumers make food decisions, i.e. consumption of functional products [18-19]. Healthy lifestyle is understood as the general way of life based on the interaction between the living conditions in the broadest sense and individual patterns of behaviour determined by sociocultural factors and personal characteristics [20]. As this author proposes, this healthy lifestyle considers sports, food consumption, sleep and rest. According to [21] people change their dietary habits to maintain and improve their health and use functional foods to reach a healthier life. In this line of research, [22] researched the relationship among food patterns, sleep habits and sport activity. Related to physical activity, the review by [23] identify several studies where the relationship between physical activity and nutrition is evident in both secondary and high schools' students. Also [24] defend the link of sport practice and food intake.

### Companies Controlled Factors to Pay attention when Packaging Design for Low Fat Products

#### Non-verbal and verbal cues

Visual cues (graphics) include layout, colour combinations, shape, typography, and product photography, all of which create an image [13]. When scanning packages in the supermarket, the differential perception and the positioning of the graphics elements on a package may make the difference between identifying and missing an item [25-26] stated that claims that emphasize "heart healthiness" might have an accompanying symbol, such as a large red heart on the front of the package or next to the menu item. [14] found relevant the presence of a picture on the label showing the most important variables, regardless of consumers' involvement with the product. A result supported by [27-28] who asserted that impulsive consumers, to assist in their choice, tended to rely intensively on the extrinsic attributes of the packaging, especially pack photography. Regarding colour, some colours denote more health than others denote, i.e. green [29]. More natural-looking shapes, medium size and easy to use packaging seems to be effective attributes for addressing low fat products [13,30-31]. For his part, [32] also highlights the importance of a multisensory stimulation when designing a brand's packaging, including attributes such as colour or shape.

Written cues on the package can assist consumers in making their decisions carefully as they consider product characteristics. However, packaging information can create confusion by conveying either too much information or misleading and inaccurate information. Manufacturers often use very small fonts and very dense writing styles to pack extensive information onto the label, which lead to poor readability and sometimes confusion [13]. Many consumers appreciate food labelling but are not satisfied with standard

formats [13]. As [13] found, while no tall consumers use it, the trend seems to be toward increasing attention to label information. Partly, concerns about food safety and nutritional health drive this trend [33]. Research by [9] confirm the relevance of packaging informative cues over visual cues for adolescents highly worried about weight control and health. However, when looking for healthy and low-fat aliments visual cues (size, colours, images etc.) are more important for consumers than informational cues (label design, easily understandable words, size of the letters). Additionally, age is a pertinent variable to explain alternative packaging strategies, because adolescents and young adults do not pay equal attention to both packaging cues [34].

## Conclusion

When designing marketing for a low-fat product package a set of variables with higher or lower control level by companies should take into consideration. Some are related to the potential consumer characteristics and some others to the packaging itself. Regarding personal characteristics, it can be said that a low-fat consumer is a woman, of mature age, with medium/high level of income, having a medium/high education level and involved about food and health. As regards package characteristics, this should have a picture on the label showing the benefits of the product (i.e. a healthy heart), green colour, medium/small sizes, easy to use and natural-looking shapes.

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