

4.0 Results

The following sections present the findings from the evaluation as described in the methodology. Figures 12 and 13 detail the positive and negative themes attributed to food labelling that surround the key objectives. Data is presented for each of the key research objectives in turn below.

Figure 14 represents the weighting and importance given to each key objective by the discussion groups. This weighting is described within the summaries below.

4.1 Do consumers have an interest in food labelling?

All groups were aware of label information on food packaging and showed varying levels of interest. Interest of general label information was greatest in groups 1, 2 and 4 and lowest in group 3.

“I definitely use the labels”

4E

“If I do look, I’ll have a glance”

2B

Group 1 stated they had seen an increased awareness and interest amongst people in the supermarket, particularly in younger people. They also discussed the increased interest they had seen in members of their own family, mostly children, in cooking and learning about food.

“20 years ago you never saw people standing reading tins and bottles and jars, like they do now”

1A

A number of participants in group 4 mentioned their interest in seeing more information in terms of access to website information detailing healthy eating, nutrients and detailed information on a healthy balanced diet.

“...they could just have a little website underneath like to say, we can give you more nutrition information ...”

4D

Participants discussed a number of things that were of particular interest to them when looking at food labels, these tended to be specific nutrients that they were trying to avoid e.g. fat, calories, salt and sugar. They were avoiding these for weight control reasons or specific health reasons.

“I like to read the labels but I always look for fat, salt and calories”

4F

“I think it stemmed from when I was 19 I found out my dad had got angina so high cholesterol is hereditary so I got a bit obsessed with the whole fat thing...so I think that is driven from home life, the whole fat thing” 2D

“My husbands on a salt free diet and no fat, so I tend to read everything, I don't buy a lot of tinned goods or packet goods anyway but if I am buying something in a packet I read the ingredients but I've been doing it a long time”.

1E

“I think about iron a lot because when I was younger I had to take iron pills”

4E

“The one I really look for when I go shopping is the vegetarian one”

4B

Participants were also interested in origin and source of products, e.g. free range, made in UK and ingredients lists.

“I am quite interested in which country these things are from, it does affect me...I like to know where 'it's come from”

1D

“...I think the main things are free range that interests me more than what’s good for you and what’s bad for you”

2B

Participants mentioned a decreased interest in labels when buying ‘fresh’ food as they didn’t feel it was necessary. Participants mentioned an increased interest of labels when looking at manufactured or processed foods.

“...I’m thinking I don’t look at labels very much but that’s because I just buy fruit and vegetables that’s why I don’t look at them”

2C

“I don’t look a huge amount on the occasions I do buy processed food I don’t really look because I know it’s going to be an unhealthy meal and it’s usually a one off thing anyway. I do look at baby foods and I look at the sugar whether it’s natural sugar and the salt. I don’t generally look at the fat that doesn’t really worry me”

2E

Participants in groups 3 and a number of participants in group 4 had an obvious lack of interest in food labelling.

“I had noticed but I don’t really pay attention to it or read it sometimes if it has a big list (of ingredients) I just can’t be bothered to look through it.”

4C

“I’m not too worried, I pretty much eat what I like...”

4B

“I never look at any labelling...”

3

4.2 Do consumers trust food labelling information?

Trust or mistrust of food labels was a topic discussed by all groups. Participants had a clear distrust of manufacturers/retailers motives when it came to some food labelling information.

“...and they’re just trying to make it look better than it really is with a lot of phrases that go on the ingredient list and the nutrition labels there must be some kind of legality behind it, I trust those”

2A

“I don’t think the information [is misleading] I think the general advertising is though”

4D

“The information is there but it does make you think that they’re deliberately trying to make you think it’s a lot healthier than it is without lying it’s sort of twisting, I think that’s really unfair”

4A

Group 1 particularly discussed distrust as an issue and spent a long time detailing their lack of trust with supermarket food in general.

“...you go along and you see the little red tractor on things, it doesn’t mean it’s from this country it’s been imported and it’s been to an abattoir or whatever and they have cut it up in Britain”

1A

“...they say its Italian tomatoes on the tin but actually they’re packaged in Italy, but they come from China”

1C

“So, we don’t trust anybody, like supermarkets, we just don’t trust them”

1F

Group 2 had the greatest trust in labels and believed that information printed on packaging was trustworthy due to the labelling regulations they believed the manufacturers and retailers have to abide by. This was also mentioned by groups 1 and 4.

“I think they wouldn’t dare you know, there’s so many trading standards and all different things they have to follow “

2A

“Yes, well you have to [trust the information on labels], if they say it you could sue them, well what I mean is, if you can sue them it must be right”

1A

“I trust that [nutrition information]”

“There must be some kind of legality behind it”

4

Participants discussed some of the claims and messages on packaging as untrustworthy as they believed it to be marketing jargon, placed there to encourage consumers to purchase the product.

“It’s more marketing material [FOP label] to get you to buy the product”

3

“I think they just want to try and sell, sell, sell, they’re not really thinking about what people want”

4A

“they’re just trying to make it look better than it really is with a lot of the phrases that go on...it’s just putting frills on, to make it look better”

2E

[Discussing a *Stay Active* message on one packet]

“It’s a contradiction but that is crafty because if it’s on there it makes you think they’re aware of it and they’re talking about healthy eating then it can’t be that horrendous for you”

1A

There was a clear distrust of serving size information across the groups. Serving size information was felt to be unrealistic. Participants felt ‘ambiguous’ serving information meant the companies were trying to fool them into believing the product may be healthier than it actually is.

“...and then you’ll find if you’re looking closely that some of them can be really misleading because some of them will say per 100g, some will say per third of a pack”

2D

“...and the ones that are really bad for you they tend to say per 50g rather than per 100g and you think it’s better for you and it isn’t”

2D

“I’m just looking at this one, [150g bag crisps] ‘each 40g serving gives you...’ who’s going to sit there and eat 40g, you’d polish them off so that’s completely misleading really because you’re focusing in on what the % is”

2C

“One thing I find really difficult with labelling is a lot of things will say per 100g and then there will be no weight on what you’re eating...”

4D

“The other day I found that I needed to know how much it was, it was quite ambiguous like you felt they’re trying to trick you”

4B

“So with the whole trust thing it makes me think I can’t really trust them because they put 30g [cereal serving] in really little writing so you think it’s healthy but it’s

not quite as much as they're saying it so I think if they're going to do that to me and lie to me what else are they going to lie to me about, that's the impression I get from these things especially when they're putting things on and you can hardly see it"

2B

There was also distrust and uncertainty surrounding allergen labelling. Participants discussed how everything seemed to have nuts in it and the allergen declaration appeared to be there as a disclaimer rather than information.

"They had a loose statement to say they couldn't guarantee that it all wouldn't be nut free"

1C

"Well, it's just to cover themselves...it's a disclaimer isn't it"

1F

"You can't trust it because the packaging changed and then I didn't know whether my friend could have it or not"

4A

4.3 Do consumers value food labelling information?

All groups mentioned specific information they were looking for on food packaging when choosing products. They believed it was important to know this information in order to allow an informed choice. This was seen in particular when participants had a specific dietary or health need.

"I'm very interested in the subject partly because I'm diabetic and I have to be careful about what I eat"

1E

"At least if it's there you can choose to ignore it if you want to...at least they've made an informed decision not to look as oppose to wanting to know and not being able to find the information" 4F

However, in the case of general nutritional information such as the FOP schemes, participants did not believe the information was applicable to them as they felt they had a good understanding of healthy diets and food. There was a clear distinction across the participant groups that this information may be more applicable to other people and not themselves.

“I think generally I trust my own knowledge as to whether something is good or bad and to whether I’m going to let myself have it or not...”

2A

“There are some things you just know about, you don’t need to look at the label”

4D

“I know what’s good for me”

3

“I think it would help some people to make informed choices”

4F

“People who are less educated might not understand”

4D

“I think I have a pretty varied diet and I always have done which means I don’t check stuff like that and I just assume I’m getting my 5 a DAY I think it’s people who are more fussy eaters or don’t like fruit and veg. that’s a lot more important the labelling”

4D

Participants also stated that they knew what food was bad for them and needed to be avoided and if they were to have this food it was as a treat or only once in a while and therefore it was less important to know the information.

“You’re not eating those things every day”

1F

"I'm not too worried because I pretty much eat what I like, if I see red I think yeah, but I don't have it every day"

4B

Participants in group 4 particularly felt they did not need to know this information as they are young and the information was less relevant to them it might be to older people.

"Like when you're older you might think about it more ... but now I know I eat fruit and veg. and I'm not worried about it"

4C

4.4 Do consumers understand food labelling information?

Participants did understand the link between certain nutrients and dietary issues e.g. salt and high blood pressure, sugar and diabetes, fat or calories and weight control. This was more likely to be understood by people with particular health concerns, those with a greater interest in health and those looking for specific nutrient information on labels. There was a good understanding of what should be avoided in food.

[Cutting out] "sugar and carbohydrates, mainly those two now...[diabetic participant]"

1E

"I generally don't put salt in my food but then you look at some of these foods and they're really high in salt ...I'm thinking it's bad for me"

2D

[Looking at] "Usually calories and fat ...it depends what diet I'm on at the time"

4D

Participants had good awareness of the 5 a day message but there was limited understanding as to the benefits of increasing intake of fruit and vegetables. There was generally little understanding of nutrients that should be included or increased

in the diet, what foods these can be found in and information relating to this on food labels.

“...if it’s got loads of calories in it I wouldn’t know the difference...I don’t know why I’m looking at them”

2A

“I never look at protein or carbs., I don’t even know...what figures you should be having”

2D

“I have no idea what I’m supposed to eat...”

4A

“...is there calcium and protein [on the labels]...I never look at them”

2A

There was a lack of understanding of some terms used on food labels. Particularly scientific terms used in ingredients list.

“...typically contains, what does this mean, if it doesn’t normally contain this what does it mean”

3

“A lot of the ingredients don’t say what it is it’s just a long line of scientific complex chemical names”

4E

Large amounts of information presented on packaging was felt to be confusing and thought to lead to misuse.

“There are far too many labels on foods”

1B

“Too many traffic lights I’m confused”, 3

“There’s too much information, I don’t think I would follow any of it”

3

Group 4 found the FOP labelling systems the easiest to understand, even though they had the lowest general nutrition knowledge. Group 1 had the lowest understanding of the labels. Group 3 showed little interest in the systems but did understand what they meant when shown packaging with it on.

“I think they’re all understandable to me...self explanatory” 4D

Participants were more familiar with the traffic light labelling schemes, all groups had heard this advertised and were aware of it. A number of participants understood this information to be on all packaging and were confused when GDA information was pointed out as not being colour coded.

“I know the traffic light symbols”

1

“I’ve seen the one in Sainsburys”

4

“Well the colour ones particularly, the information to tell you ...there’s different systems aren’t there, but they’re all using a traffic light I thought of some sort ... I thought they were all colour coded”

2E

Colours were liked and understood as simple, effective and easy to understand at a glance. There was confusion across the groups around the colour coding on retailer and manufacturers labels that did not use the traffic light schemes. Participants felt confused by what they represented and what significance they had and found them difficult to relate to use.

“At least you’ve got the red there where as this [Tesco packet] the colour coding is terrible, it doesn’t say”

2D

“You don’t know what the colours mean ...those colours don’t mean anything”

4F

“That’s confusing, those colours are rubbish they don’t mean anything”

3

GDA was recognised by participants, they had seen it before, but found the figures and % confusing, particularly when looking at the FOP information in relation to the back panel of nutrition information.

“20% of your daily salt, what does that mean”

3

“This is what puzzles me, you look at the nutrition panel, and then the GDAs and I don’t see where they come together”

1E

GDA was most liked by group 2 as they felt it told you more accurate information about what there were eating and gave them information that would enable them to eat things in balance.

“It wouldn’t make me not buy the product but I might buy it in balance with something else”

2D

“I’d only really look if it said a % of daily because you can almost figure it out in your mind, like that’s really bad for a whole day”

2A

Participants discussed the need to see uniformity across FOP labelling as they believe this would make it easier to understand. Participants felt that the different systems in place confused consumers and led to a lack of use.

“It needs to be universal, a standard thing so people can look”

4A

“I think they should all be the same”

3

“I think all of this information can be quite confusing, if I don’t understand I’m not going to bother”

4C

Participants discussed uniformity of labelling systems may aid education and the need for education to accompany labelling to help increase understanding.

“...train people more, but if it’s not consistent you can’t educate/train”

2C

“People would get more used to it then and you could use it to educate and train people”

2

“They should teach provide this information in schools

3

“I think there should be more information about what it actually means...”

4F

“You can’t legislate what people eat but you can teach it”

3

4.5 Do consumers use food labelling information?

A number of barriers to label use were discussed;

- Size of writing on labels, discussed as an issue by all groups,
- Time, people don’t have time to read long lists of information or look at all the information available,
- Lack of interest
- Lack of understanding

- Familiarity, brands people had bought before and what they recognised

“When you turn it over this is where the ingredients list is [points to small section at bottom of packet] and it’s the smallest print on this packet”

1F

“I never look at the labelling because I’m not bothered”

3

“Pretty much buy the same thing every week”

2E

“sometimes it’s got 100 or 200g that’s ok for the serving but sometimes it’s 83g, what am I suppose to do with that!”

4F

“If you looked at everything you wouldn’t have time, you can’t”

1A

A number of other factors were mentioned when discussing what affects food choice;

- Mood
- Money, participants did not discuss money as a barrier but were motivated by special offers when making food choices
- Storage, participants discussed not liking to buy a lot of fruit and vegetables that then went off if they didn’t use it quickly enough.
- Access, mentioned by group 1, felt they were limited to shops as they had no car or could not walk long distances,
- Quality, Group 1 and 2 particularly mentioned the importance of quality when buying certain fresh foods e.g. meat, they would buy this from the butcher and therefore not use labels to make a choice but the butcher as a trusted source.

“I think it would depend what mood I’m in and how healthy I’m being”

2

“I’m looking more at BOGOF than labels”

2E

“I buy all the veg. in...and I’m working or doing this and that and I go to cook and my veg. has gone off”

2B

“I’m always cooking for one which makes it really difficult...if you buy fresh fruit and veg. it just goes off”

4D

“I never buy meat, unless I’m desperate, in the supermarket, always go to the butchers”

2E

Participants in group 2 were most likely to use food labels to make purchase decisions and the FOP information. Participants in group 3 were least likely to mention factors that came into consideration when shopping, they were buying food they wanted or liked irrespective of labelling.

“I do look at them on most things”

2D

“Most of the time I just go and shop and get what I want, I don’t look at the label at all”

3

Participants mention using labels to look for specific information of interest to them.

“I look at fat, calories and salt”

4E

“I quite like local food, I like knowing where it’s come from”

2C

“I think the most important thing is origin”

1D

Those with specific needs were more likely to use.

“My husband’s diabetic, he’s also on a salt free diet and no fat, so I tend to read everything”

1D

“I’m a vegetarian so I make sure I get protein in my diet”

4F

All participants discussed not using nutritional labels when buying fresh food as they felt it was unnecessary. They were also not looking at labels when buying simple products like eggs or dried pasta. Labelling information was more likely to be used when looking at processed or manufactured foods.

“Its manufactured products isn’t it really, things liked tinned soup”

1B

“Generally I tend not to look at labels but that’s because I pick up things that are quite fresh...”

2C

“I think it’s important on man made food”

1C

“I wouldn’t look at the information on eggs or milk, I know that”

3

Traffic lights were mostly used on one off purchases or snack purchases, for example sandwiches at lunch time. Participants used traffic lights to compare foods within a product category to make what they believed was a healthier or better choice. This was particularly used when buying new products. Some participants discussed the use of this information when at home and making a meal choice.

“I look if its lunch time and I’m looking for a sandwich”

2B

“I wanted a pork pie and I went into Tesco and there were lots of different brands and I compared them and bought the one with less fat”

3

“When it comes to something like a soup that I wouldn’t normally have, I would look and compare”

1C

“...if [husband] is going to be home late and there’s a choice between a red one and one with a green, I’ll give him the green one”

2D

Participants discussed label use at this point as more common they were not in so much of a rush and can take the time to choose what they want.

“You spend less time picking [weekly shop] than you do a sandwich, you can go back to that, I spend more time picking that [a lunch time sandwich]”

2A

There was some discussion around the red colour making them stop and think about what they were picking up. However, this was also seen as a negative by some participants.

“I think if you did see that everything was red you would think twice”

2A

“I think the red makes you stop, it’s a stop colour”

4A

“I find the colours really annoying...I feel like someone else is trying to make my decision for me with the colours”

4D

The GDA system was discussed the least. Participants discussed their interest in the system and that they would use the information but limited discussion on how they were actually using this information to make purchase decisions. Participants appeared to have only a general interest in this information.

“Seen it but never ever one day thought right what have I eaten, what do I get, have I had my daily allowance of this that and the other”

2E

“I do sometimes glance at and go oh that’s interesting”

2A

“I read the information if it’s in front of me on the breakfast table”

4

Participants discussed that reading the labels had made them more aware of what is in foods particularly products that they believed were healthy but in retrospect maybe weren’t as healthy as they thought once they have read the label.

“It’s made me far more aware of what’s on food and what I’m looking at”

1E

“...and I think it’s quite surprising like some things you wouldn’t have thought that it would be bad and you look and it’s like, oh there’s actually quite a lot of red there” 4A

Figure 12: Key objectives and the themes that emerged from them

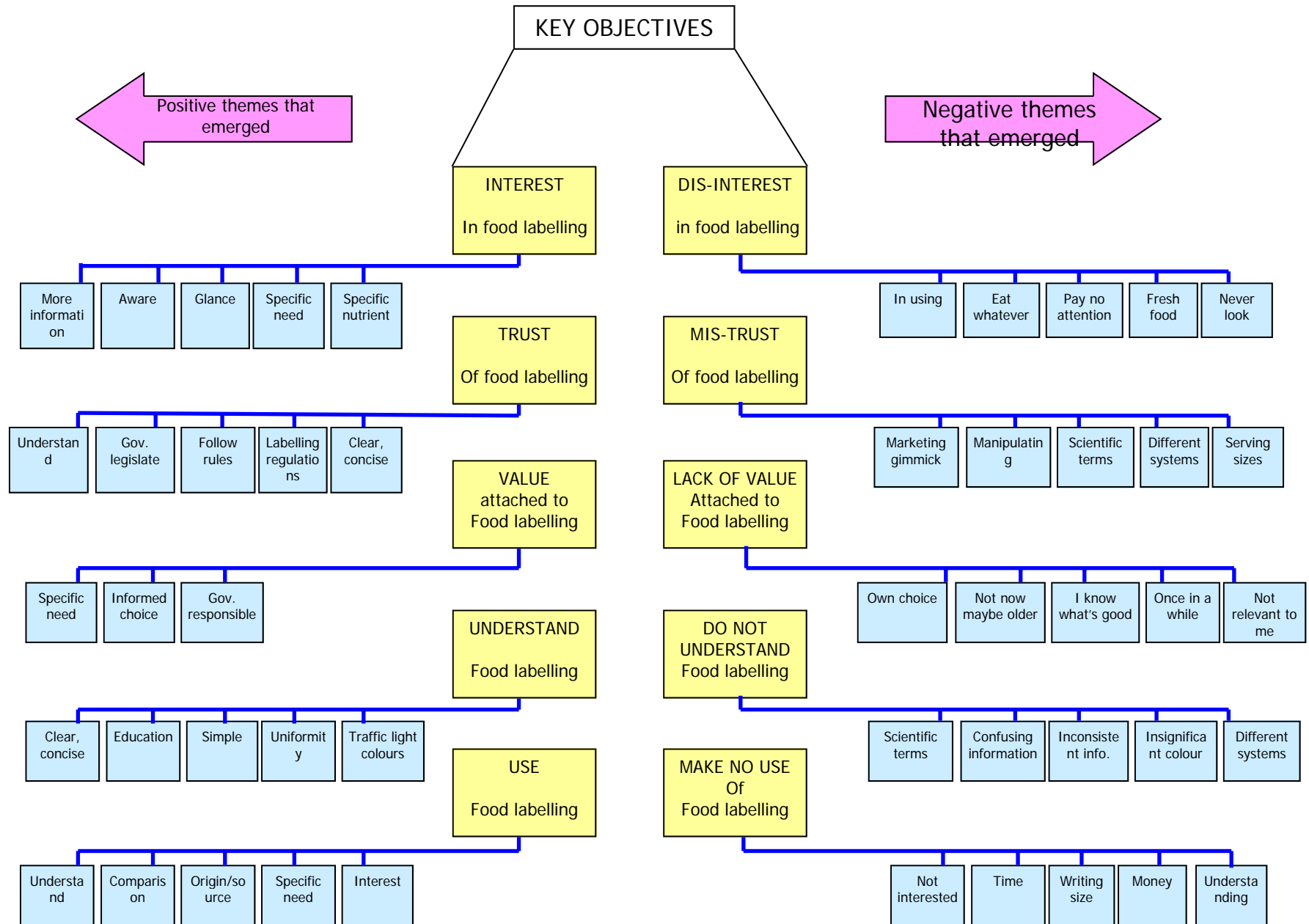


Figure 13: The importance attached to each key objective by each of the four groups

