

# 20130205 - 'Facts Up Front' versus 'Traffic Light' nutrition labels - 2011

[Data] [[Normal page](#)] **PEREZGONZALEZ Jose D [ed] (2012)**. *'Facts Up Front' versus 'Traffic Light' nutrition labels*. Knowledge (ISSN 2324-1624), 2013, pages 29-30.]

## Understanding food labels

Roberto et al carried out a research on consumers' understanding of food labels in 2011<sup>1</sup>. They compared how well participants understood nutritional information when giving them an industry-generated label system ('Facts Up Front'), a government-generated label system ('Traffic Light'), and no nutritional label (control group). They also compared the effects of a short version of each label system (which included information about energy, saturated fat, sodium and sugar content) against a longer version of the same (which included above information plus protein and fiber).

Illustration 1 shows the results obtained by Roberto et al within a standardized table. The top of the table shows percentage of correct answers to a series of pair-comparisons of food products (quizzes); the bottom of the table shows subjective assessments and preferences regarding nutritional labels, originally measured on Likert-scales but here transformed to 0-100 scales.

Illustration 1: Understanding and assessment of food labels										
	5%	15%	25%	35%	45%	55%	65%	75%	85%	95%
<b>Energy quiz</b>	Control								Facts, Traffic	Traffic+, Facts+
<b>Sat fat quiz</b>						Control	Facts, Facts+		Traffic	Traffic+
<b>Sugar quiz</b>					Control, Facts+	Facts		Traffic		Traffic+
<b>Sodium quiz</b>					Control	Facts, Facts+				Traffic, Traffic+
<b>Fiber quiz</b>						Control, Traffic	Facts	Facts+		Traffic+
<b>Protein quiz</b>						Control	Traffic, Facts, Facts+			Traffic+
<b>Easy label</b>						Facts+	Facts, Traffic	Control, Traffic+		
<b>Trim label*</b>						Facts+		Control, Traffic+, Traffic	Facts	
<b>Clear label*</b>	Facts+								Control, Facts, Traffic+, Traffic	

*(Top variables represent approximate percentage of correct answers; bottom variables represent approximate subjective evaluations on Likert scales standardized to a 0-100 scale; (\*) these variables have been reversed.)*

As illustration 1 shows, participants on the extended version of the 'Traffic Light' label system ('Traffic+') scored highest in most nutrition quizzes, followed by participants on the short version of the same label system. Furthermore, although participants on the 'Facts Up Front' label system scored lower than those on

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the 'Traffic Light' label system, they still scored higher than participants in the control group. Overall, the results showed that any of the two label systems were better than no label, and that 'Traffic Light' labels, namely the extended version, outperformed 'Facts Up Front' labels when doing an objective assessment of nutrition information.

Regarding the subjective assessment of each type of label (see bottom part of illustration 1), participants considered 'Traffic Light' labels to be most understandable and least confusing, with low levels of cluttered information. The short version of the 'Facts Up Front' labels were also considered equally understandable and with the least cluttered information. The extended version of the 'Facts Up Front' labels ('Facts+'), however, were deemed the least understandable, the one requiring the most time and effort, and the most confusing of all labels. (Interestingly, the control group was shown the same versions of 'Facts+' labels for this part of the research, and they assessed the labels as being quite understandable and 'user-friendly'!)

## Methods

### Research approach

Exploratory study of consumers' understanding of two types of food labels.

### Data

Stratified convenient sample of 703 consumers who normally participate in online surveys for a reward. Participants were randomly allocated to one of five experimental groups: Control (no food labels given), Traffic ('Traffic Light' labels, short version), Traffic+ ('Traffic Light' labels, extended version), Facts ('Facts Up Front' labels, short version), and Facts+ ('Facts Up Front' labels, extended version).

### Data analysis

One-way ANOVA with post hoc Tukey tests, with Bonferroni correction for some of the tests. SPSS-v18 was used for statistical analyses.

## References


1. **ROBERTO Christina A, Marie A BRAGG, Marlene B SCHWARTZ, Marissa J SEAMANS, Aviva MUSICUS, Nicole NOVAK & Kelly D BROWNELL (2011).** [Facts Up Front versus Traffic Light food labels. A randomized controlled trial.](#) American Journal of Preventive Medicine (ISSN 0749-3797), 2012, volume 43, number 2, pages 134-141.

## Want to know more?

### [Roberto et al's article](#)

This is the original article, which also describes other variables and provides full descriptive and inferential statistics.

## Editor

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