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# Consumer Studies Research Overview

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# Nature of the Studies

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- All are experiments.
- All present information (label claims or ad copy) about substance-disease relationships.
- All test ways to communicate the level of scientific support for this information.
- All measure consumers' reactions to this information.



# Different Research Methods

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Focus group:  
“Consumers **MAY** believe or feel that  
Label X .....”

Experimental study:  
“Label X **LEADS**  
participants to  
believe .....”

Survey:  
“% of US  
consumers  
**SAY** Label X .....”



# Independent Variables

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- **The experimental studies manipulate label or ad characteristics:**
  - **By qualifying scientific support differently through:**
    - < The use of words, and/or,
    - < The use of report card grades
  - **Using different types of claims or guidance**
    - < Health claims, structure/function claims, dietary guidance statements
  - **Using single claims vs. multiple claims on the same product label**



# Dependent Variables

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- The information communicated by label claims or ad copy may affect consumers' judgments and inferences about the:
  - level of scientific support for the label claim
  - likelihood of obtaining the claimed benefit
  - overall healthfulness of the product
  - quality and safety of the product
  - intent to purchase the product



# Dependent Variables

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- The studies measured consumers' reactions by first showing them an ad or a product with a health claim, and then asking them to provide a “rating” in response to a specific question.
  - Example: On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “very uncertain” and 5 means “very certain,” how certain are scientists that (substance X) may reduce the risk of (disease Y)?



# Data Analyses

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- When researchers analyze the scores consumers give to the different claims, the analysis compares the average scores for different groups of consumers.
  - Example: 60 consumers in Group 1 see a health claim with a strong disclaimer, and 60 in Group 2 see the same claim with a weak disclaimer. Each consumer then rates the level of scientific support. Does the average rating for Group 1 differ significantly from that of Group 2?



# Other Considerations

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- It is sometimes important to consider and analyze factors other than the independent variables that can affect the results.
  - Gender, age, race, education, income, geography
  - Product use
  - Product-specific beliefs
  - Claim-specific knowledge and attitudes
  - Health status
  - Attitudes toward government and industry



# Important Reminders

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- **As you listen, keep in mind that:**
  - **These studies evaluate the communication effects of different ways to talk about a substance-disease relationship.**
  - **The focus of this research is not on the substance-disease relationship itself, but on the different ways that the claimed relationship can be presented.**

