

Northern Ireland consumer perceptions of reformulation of food

Area of research interest: [Behaviour and perception](#)

Study duration: 2018-01-01

Conducted by: 2CV

Background

In January 2018, we commissioned 2CV and Community Research to conduct independent research to explore Northern Ireland consumers' perceptions of food product improvement by the food industry in NI among identified categories of food from [the Eatwell Guide](#).

We needed a strong evidence base to inform future engagement with industry and support on-going conversations and potential partnerships.

Research was also needed to inform our own consumer messaging as part of the [Eating Well Choosing Better programme](#) and helped us provide support to SMEs around communication and information provision for their consumers.

Objectives and approach

Our research aim was to explore consumer perceptions and acceptability of reformulation (reduction in sugar, saturated fat or salt/decrease in portion size) by the food industry in NI.

Key objectives:

- Determine consumer perceptions of the reasons the food industry may choose to reformulate or reduce the portion size of their products (including consumer awareness of government initiatives on reducing sugar, salt, saturated fat, calories and portion size, and how this features over the consumer perception of 'shrinkflation')
- Determine how acceptable consumers find reduction in portion size and reformulation (reduction in sugar, saturated fat, salt)
- Identify what information, if any consumers would like to see on packaging/labels in the media of food that have been reformulated/decrease in portion size
- Explore shopping behaviour in relation to food products that have been reformulated/decrease in portion sizes

A multi-method and staged approach was used, combining traditional and experimental research techniques. Qualitative focus groups and digital diaries explored what informs consumer perceptions and the real-world context in which people make decisions about what food they eat and buy. This was followed by quantitative engagement with consumers to measure acceptance, purchase intent and the impact of framing on acceptance. The methodology drew on best-practice behavioural science thinking to get closer to consumers' actual purchase behaviour.

Research report

Northern Ireland

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