The future of food recalls

Area of research interest: Innovative regulator
Study duration: 2018-07-02
Planned completion: 31 December 2018
Conducted by: Community Research and 2CV

Background

In 2016, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) commenced this review to better understand how industry and enforcement authorities complied with their legal obligations to ensure unsafe food was withdrawn from the market and recalled from consumers.

The 2016 research (conducted by Kantar Public) established that consumers' level of engagement with recall notices was low. They had low awareness of the channels of communication and were generally not proactive in seeking out recalls. This was in part because recall notices were not effectively placed and designed for reaching them. There is no industry standard across food businesses as to what food recall notifications look like or what information they include, and consumers see a need for a more consistent and efficient communication approach.

The Kantar Public research recommended that the way consumers are notified about food recalls needed to be improved and the introduction of 'a standard industry recall notification template accompanied by best practice procedures for food businesses to follow in their communications with customers'.

FSA/FSS commissioned further research to build on the existing evidence base and provide further insight work with consumers to better understand the exact nature of their requirements for a standardised food recall/allergy notice template, which food businesses can use to alert people to a food recall. Further to this, FSA/FSS wanted to test their own digital assets used to communicate about food recalls (social media and website) to test how well these are performing for consumers, and how they could be improved.

Objectives

In July 2018, the FSA and FSS commissioned 2CV and Community Research to conduct research with the general public to understand the channels, content and style that most support effective consumer awareness of, attention to and (if desired or necessary) action around food recalls.

The overarching research aims were to inform:

- style and appearance for a standardised food industry recall notice/allergy alert for consumers
- including informing the style and appearance of FSA/FSS's digital assets (website and social media)
- necessary content to be contained within a standardised food industry recall notice/allergy alert for consumers
- including informing the content of FSA/FSS's digital assets (website and social media)

- best location for food industry food recall notices (both in store and on-line)
- effective channels for industry to use to communicate recall notices to consumers

Research approach

The research approach was designed to ensure that this research moved the FSA and FSS beyond its existing starting point of relative consumer understanding surrounding food recalls/allergy alerts communications to a position of confidence regarding the needs and priorities of both businesses and consumers. As such, a staged, iterative approach (taking on board the views of FSA and FSS industry stakeholders at critical stages of the research) was chosen to gather public views on how to co-create and develop designs that would meet consumer needs. A critical element of our approach was to work closely with a creative design partner, Perfect Day London, to design and tweak recall notifications to test throughout the process.

Research report
CSV
View The future of food recalls raw data as CSV(Open in a new window) (2.57 MB)

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

PDF
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