



ALDI SÜD consumer information campaign on consumability of milk beyond the “best before date”

Overview

The need

Research has shown that many consumers in Germany still throw away perishable foods such as milk, even when it would still be safe to consume [1]. One reason for this behaviour is that when the product reaches its “best before date”, consumers typically don’t test if the product can still be consumed before throwing it away.

The solution

ALDI SÜD and partners tested the effect of imprinting “Smell me! Try me! I am often good for longer” on fresh milk packaging to encourage customers to check whether the milk could be consumed after the “best before date”.

The benefit

In an accompanying consumer survey, more than 75% of respondents (12% more than before the packaging change) stated that when checking the consumability of milk, they were now more likely to pay attention to external factors such as smell or taste, rather than just the “best-before date”.

Discount supermarket tests new labelling on fresh milk packaging in 400 selected stores in southern Germany; promoting sustainable consumption practices.

ALDI SÜD is a large discount supermarket based in Western Germany. It is represented in 11 countries with over 6,200 stores; employing approximately 148,900 individuals, of which about 47,100 are based in Germany [2]. The supermarket sells a wide range of products - around 1600 core range food and non-food products and 110 specials offered each week.

Background

As an organisation, ALDI SÜD is committed to climate protection. In 2015, it joined the Paris Climate Agreement; working to keep global warming well below 2°C. In 2017 it became the first large grocery retailer in Germany to achieve carbon neutrality [3]. However, beyond the internal measures adopted to reduce the organisation’s climate impact, ALDI SÜD also works to improve its customers’ awareness around the subject of climate protection.

One area of particular interest is the issue of household food waste. In 2017, ALDI SÜD started to increase its consumer communication of food utilisation and shelf life through the “[Rescue Leftovers](#) - Reste Retten” campaign; reaching approximately 12 million individuals via multiple communication channels, such as Facebook and Youtube [4]. In addition to the “Rescue Leftovers” campaign, ALDI SÜD worked with YouGov Deutschland to develop and conduct market research; determining consumer views on the topic of food waste. The survey showed that almost



"With the new notice, we are encouraging consumers to first check the status of their milk before pouring it out when it reaches its best-before date"

Dr. Annett Entzian, CR Manager at ALDI SÜD

half of all respondents (44%) discard food because they are unsure whether it is still edible [5].

This confusion over the edibility of food items can also be associated with product date labels. It is expected that household food waste is often generated because consumers throw away food when it reaches its "best-before-date", even when it would still be safe to consume.

In fact, a 2018 published German study (conducted on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture) estimated that 5.8% of all avoidable food waste that's generated in private households is disposed of because it has passed its best-before-date. Further breakdown of food types estimated that dairy products represented the largest proportion of the 5.8%; with 42,000 tonnes being discarded each year due to dairy products passing their best-before date. The study also revealed almost half (45.7%) of all foods disposed of after an expired best-before-date were still unopened; of which 52.9% was made up of dairy and finished products [1]. This study shows that more needs to be done to address consumer attitudes towards dairy product date labels.

What was the solution?

ALDI SÜD, together with its supplier Gropper, supports an initiative to encourage consumers to quality-check milk after the expiration of the best before date. This collaboration was initiated by another REFRESH partner, the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forestry (StMELF), and the Bavarian alliance, "[We save food](#)". The phrase "Smell me! Try me! I am often good for longer! - We rescue food" was printed on milk cartons to raise awareness among customers. Another aim was to understand whether this printed message would make it more likely for customers to consume fresh milk after the best before date instead of throwing it away.

The imprint was chosen to raise awareness of the significance of the best-before-date and the fact that products are often still edible after the best-before date has been exceeded. By adding this label, customers are encouraged to learn to rely more on their own senses (smell, taste).

This pilot showed that our customers perceive the information and, above all, adapt their behaviour accordingly. We are pleased that this measure enables us to contribute to a better acknowledgement of the value of food."

Dr Julia Adou, Head of Corporate Responsibility at ALDI SÜD



Figure 1: Examples of the explanatory notes added to milfina milk cartons (©ALDI SÜD)

Implementation

Since February 2018, ALDI SÜD has been testing the imprint of the MHD (best-before date) label on fresh milk in around 400 stores in southern Germany, specifically in Bavaria [6]. Their aim was to improve consumer awareness of the difference between the best before date and the consumption date by including an explanatory note on milk cartons.

The explanatory note [Figure 1] was printed on milfina fresh milk (fat levels 1.5 % and 3.5 %). The impact of the note was assessed using a consumer survey, which was commissioned by StMELF [6] and conducted by POSPulse. Two survey rounds were carried out, before and after the introduction of the explanatory-notice respectively. After having purchased milfina fresh milk at home, consumers gave feedback on their behaviour via apps. The questions related to their behaviour in relation to the best-before date in comparison to the assessment of external factors. In the second round, consumers were also asked concrete questions about their assessment of the explanatory note as such.

Outcomes

Results from the consumer survey indicate that the test consumers were sensitised to the issue of food waste by the additional notice on the milk packaging.



More than 75 % of respondents stated that when checking the consumability of milk, they were more likely to pay attention to external factors such as smell or taste than to the best-before date printed on it. This was 12 % higher than before the change in packaging design. Additionally, more than 80 % of consumers perceived the campaign as an invitation to be more environmentally conscious when dealing with food, and around 85 % rated the campaign "Save your milk" as either "important" or "very important" [6].

Thoughts for the future

ALDI SÜD was the first food retailer in Germany to decide, by the end of 2018, to print "best before" information nationwide on other selected product packaging. In addition to milk, ALDI SÜD customers will be asked to rely on their sense of smell and taste when checking the product life of other types of dairy products e.g. fresh cheese and young Gouda [6].

The measure has shown that many consumers do not know the difference between the best-before-date and the consumption date and that exceeding the best-before-date leads to uncertainty about the product life. It is therefore important to carry out such campaigns and to raise consumer awareness accordingly.

References

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