

Marketing Hemp: A Qualitative Exploration of Hemp Product Labeling Perceptions of Undergraduate Students at a Land-Grant University

Raegan Ramage
Louisiana State University, LA, 70803
(662) 832-8117
rramag1@lsu.edu

Rexanna Powers
Louisiana State University, LA, 70803
(936) 462-3277
rrpowers@agcenter.lsu.edu

Tyler Granberry
Louisiana State University, LA, 70803
(903) 748-2565
tgranb1@lsu.edu

Janiece Pigg
Louisiana State University, LA, 70803
(336) 314-7191
jpigg1@lsu.edu

Richie Roberts, Ph.D.
Louisiana State University, LA, 70803
(336) 314-7191
roberts3@lsu.edu

Introduction

Recent legislation and increased recognition of the benefits of hemp cultivation has led to a resurgence of this once prohibited crop (Borkowska & Biallowska, 2019; Fike, 2016). The *2018 Farm Bill* removed hemp as a controlled substance and, subsequently, established hemp as an agricultural product with cultivation authority in Louisiana beginning in 2020 (LADF, 2020). Expanded cultivation in Louisiana will increase the likelihood of undergraduate students' interactions with the crop through methods of cultivation or hemp product consumption (Rampold et al., 2021). Prior literature has established a statistically significant and positive correlation between students' knowledge and attitudes following a hemp educational campaign (Coclasure et al., 2020). However, when designing future campaigns, students' processing response to marketing hemp must be considered during program development.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the theory of heuristic information processing (Chaiken, 1980). Heuristics are mental shortcuts that allow for quick decision-making based on cues. This process happens involuntarily when individuals feel insecure about their judgement ability (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Ethical perceptions, values, and label design functioned as the heuristic conditions for this study.

Purpose

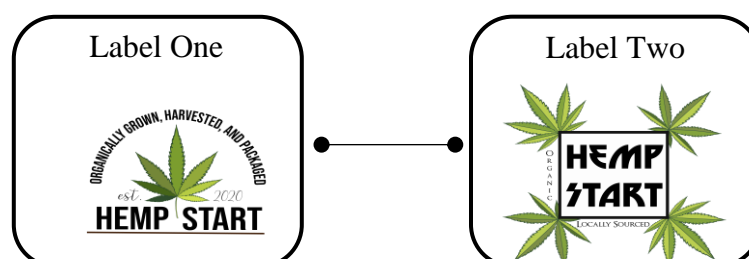
The purpose of this investigation was to explore Louisiana State University undergraduate students' processing response to hemp product labels. One research question guided this investigation: *What were the processing responses of Louisiana State University undergraduate students regarding hemp product labeling?*

Methodology

This investigation utilized an interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Quality of this investigation was ensured via Lincoln's and Guba's (1985) four standards of rigor. Data were collected electronically utilizing Qualtrics through a series of email solicitations to Louisiana State University undergraduate students enrolled in four horticulture courses during the spring 2021 semester ($N = 154$) with a response rate of 52%. During the electronic survey, participants were presented with two hemp product labels (see Figure 1). Participants were asked to indicate which label they preferred, resulting in 132 (85.51%) participants choosing label one while 22 (14.29%) participants choose label two. Further data were collected through written narrative explanations for participants' label selections. Written narratives included 154 participants, 80 (51.9%) males, 66 (42.9%) female, three (1.9%) identified other than male or female, and five (3.2%) chose not to identify. We analyzed data through multiple rounds of coding (Saldaña, 2016). Then, we used an axial coding approach to identify themes and interpret our findings through the heuristic information processing theory (Chaiken, 1980).

Figure 1

Labels Presented to Participants in this Study



Findings

Our analysis yielded three distinct themes that represented the how participants' processed various factors during selection: (1) apprehension, (2) negative stereotype, and (3) professionalism. Emergent themes are presented through a rich description of each participant's written narrative.

Theme One: Apprehension

In the first theme, apprehension, participants indicated an uneasiness with the second label due to perceived aggressive labeling tactics and the increased number of hemp leaves on the label. For example, Participant #54 described, "four leaves in the second label just feels like overkill to me." Other participants expressed their apprehension by explaining that the second label "stands out too much" (Participant #62) or "incites the idea of more of a recreational use of the product" (Participant #94).

Theme Two: Negative Stereotype

Further, throughout theme two participants expressed a disassociation with the second label due to stereotypes of individuals who might purchase the product. Participant #13 explained they did not select the second label because "the font makes it seem like the product is being sold to a specific demographic." Participants also identified specific stereotypical groups of individuals they perceived would purchase label two. Participant #69 explained this sentiment by stating the label was "something a 'stoner' would buy or someone who used hemp because they smoke weed." Participant #110 shared they would not purchase the second label because "Label 2 appeals to more of a recreational marijuana demographic." Also, participants identified negative connotations to sellers of hemp products with the second label by explaining "the second logo looks more like a weed shop logo" (Participant #58).

Theme Three: Professionalism

Through the apprehension and negative stereotypes of label two, participants described that the professional aesthetic led them to choose label one in theme three. Participants associated professionalism with a higher degree of trust, reliability, and higher quality label. For example, Participant #149 explained, "the first is more professional, I trust the font and design, makes it feel more safe." While other participants identified a professional tone of the label due to the simplistic and straightforward representation of the product. Participant #53 shared they felt label one was "a lot more professional... its marketing is simple and looks to be a lot more reliable." Participants also perceived the first label to "be taken seriously" (Participant #114) when compared to the second label. Overall, participants processed label one through a more positive lens due to the label's perceived professional characteristics.

Conclusions/Recommendations

This investigation provided insight into the processing of visual cues by undergraduate students based on hemp product labels using the theory of heuristic information processing (Chaiken, 1980). We recommend hemp educational programs account for processing methods when designing material and campaigns. Further research should continue to explore undergraduate student's perceptions and knowledge of hemp cultivation and product consumption, with special emphasis on biases of product based on visual cues and logos.

References

- Borkowska, B., & Bialkowska, P. (2019). Evaluation of consumer awareness of hemp and its applications in different industries. *Scientific Journal of Gdynia Maritime University*, *110*(19), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.26408/110.01>
- Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *39*(5), 752-766.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/82f3/bd71f38a7b8d2269f1e471e2e8bc300fb880.pdf>
- Chen, S., & Chaiken, S. (1999). *The Heuristic–Systematic Model in its broader context*. In S. Chaiken, & Y. Trope (Eds.), *Dual-process theories in social psychology*. The Guilford Press.
- Colclasure, B. C., Ruth, T. K., Brooks, T. D., & Holmes, A. (2020, May 18 -21). *Hemp, hemp, hooray: The impact of a hemp educational campaign on college student's attitudes and knowledge of industrial hemp*. American Association for Agricultural Education Research Annual National Research Conference, Virtual.
<http://aaaeonline.org/resources/Documents/National/2020Meeting/2020AAAEPaperProceedings.pdf>
- Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LADF). (2020, November 17). *LADF Accepting 2021 Industrial Hemp License Applications*.
<https://www.ldaf.state.la.us/news/ldaf-accepting-2021-industrial-hemp-license-applications/>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Rampold, S. D., Bryam, Z., Kandzer, M. S., & Baker, L. M. (2021, February 8 – 10). *Can I smoke that or no? Examining knowledge and (mis)perceptions to explain Florida consumers' stance on legalizing hemp as an agricultural commodity* [Proceedings]. American Association for Agricultural Education Research Annual Southern Research Conference, Virtual.
http://aaaeonline.org/resources/Documents/Southern%20Region/2021SouthernConference/ProceedingsWithDiscussantRemarks_SR_AA AE_2021.pdf
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage