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Exploring Kenyan mothers’ attention and child food choice through eye tracking in a natural environment

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Abstract

The empowerment of women in poverty-stricken northern Kenya is of great interest, to enhance their own and their families’ nutritional status. It assists them in acquiring the resources and agency for their vital roles and functions in improving food security. Production of nutritious and affordable child food using traditional recipes constitutes a promising income-generating activity. If carried out by local women’s groups, it can enhance food security and overall nutrition within their communities. Nevertheless, inadequate packaging makes it difficult to have access to the formal market. This study is part of a series of initiatives that aim to empower women’s groups in northern Kenya. It aims at collectively creating appealing packaging designs to facilitate market access and penetration. Determining the key parameters driving attention and choice of local consumers at the point of sale is a challenging task. To address this challenge, a top-down (goal-directed), qualitative eye-tracking (ET) study was conducted in a real supermarket to explore the mechanisms of attention and choice. The study’s methodology was based on “Guerrilla Testing”, which originated in the field of user experience (UX). Four participants were equipped with eye-tracking glasses and given 1000 Kenyan shillings (approximately 7.60 US dollars) to select and purchase one or more child food products of their preference while thinking aloud. The number of fixations, voices, comments and the consumer’s choice were recorded and analysed. The results of this study demonstrate that familiarity and acquaintance exert a profound influence on attention capture and purchasing decisions. Conversely, an outstanding shelf position exerts an influence on fixations, but not necessarily on purchasing decisions. The findings indicate that attention-grabbing packaging designs are not sufficient to promote sales in the northern Kenyan context due to the aversion of lower-income consumers to risk and to trying new products. Consequently, local producers should devise strategies such as offering free tastings at the point of sale or direct sales in underprivileged areas to first enhance familiarity and trust in their child food products among consumers before they can successfully sell them in supermarkets.

Keywords: Child food, consumer choice, eye tracking, northern Kenya