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“A Study of Perceived Product Quality Transparency in Online Shopping Product Description Pages - Focusing on Description Categories and Methods for HMR Products”

(Korea Society of Basic Design & Art, Korea)

First Author: *Jungwoo Christine Yoon*

The category and method of product description are expanding as the genre in Home Meal Replacement(HMR) products expand, and as the consumers' demand for transparency in product quality increase. Studies encourage utilization of photographic images to increase product transparency. With rapid increase in novel HMR products and brands, it is necessary to analyze current online product description pages and identify ways to improve product transparency. This study first conducted a hierarchical analysis of consumer awareness and corresponding product description categories related to product quality transparency. Second, we looked into whether the font-centric or image-centric description is a more transparent way of communicating information for each product description category. The investigation started with a literature review, followed by a case study analysis of product description categories and description methods in current online food and grocery shopping markets. An online survey was employed to investigate hierarchy in product quality transparency among product description categories and description methods. The study found that the product description categories that consumers perceived as most to least transparent in terms of providing product quality were product summary, food images and descriptions, packaging and storing information, customer reviews and questions, how to eat/cook/store, brand, check list, delivery information, and related products. The results also illustrated that photographic product descriptions do not necessarily improve transparency. They do, however, provide a general explanation of the product. Text descriptions can be more supportive in providing transparency in product quality in some categories of product description, such as brand and produce. The study could be helpful for designing the layout of product description information and selection of transparent product description methods.