

Consumer Perceptions: Dairy Milk and Plant-based Milk Alternatives

October 29, 2018

Background

- DMI and The National Dairy Council wanted to better understand consumer perceptions toward Dairy Milk and Plant-Based Milk Alternatives, particularly regarding nutritional content.
- IPSOS, a global market research and consulting firm, was commissioned to explore consumer perceptions of dairy milk and plant-based milk alternatives, particularly regarding nutrition.
- The learnings from this study will be used to inform DMI across departments as well as dairy industry partners.

Methodology

- A nationally representative survey of 2,010 adults age 18+ (general population) was fielded online August 10-14, 2018. The survey lasted 12-minutes and included both closed-end and open-end questions.
- Data is reported for the total general population as well as exclusive dairy milk buyers (purchase dairy milk once a year or more often and do not purchase plant-based milks, n=914), dual buyers (purchase both dairy milk and plant-based milks once a year or more often, n=789) and exclusive plant-based milk buyers (purchase plant-based milk once a year or more often and do not purchase dairy milk, n=110).

Purchase Behavior

- Dairy milk has high penetration (90% purchased in past year) relative to plant-based milks (46% purchased in past year).
- Dairy milk and plant-based milks share nutrition as a key purchase driver.
 - 53% exclusive dairy milk buyers cite nutrition as important to their purchase decision; 62% exclusive plant-based milk buyers cite as important.
- Other purchase drivers vary in importance.
 - Taste and price are more important to dairy milk while health, digestive benefits and longer shelf life are more important factors to plant-based milk purchasing.

Top of Mind Perceptions

- The word “milk” prompts neutral to positive thoughts with dairy milk buyers mentioning more positives and exclusive plant buyers leaning more negatively.
 - Forty-seven percent of exclusive dairy milk buyers mention positives e.g., good health when prompted with the word “milk” compared to 22% for exclusive plant-based milk buyers. In contrast, 43% exclusive plant-based milk buyers mention negatives (e.g., unhealthy) when prompted with “milk” compared to 9% exclusive dairy milk buyers.
- Milk associations that come to mind on an unaided basis relate largely to food/dairy products. Exclusive plant-based milk buyers are more likely to mention plant milks and nutrients, vitamins and ingredients.
 - Cheese is the top food product that comes to mind for both exclusive dairy milk buyers (40%) as well as exclusive plant-based milk buyers.
 - Twenty-five percent of exclusive dairy milk buyers mention dairy milk types, similar to exclusive plant-based milk buyers at 23%.
 - Exclusive plant-based milk buyers however, are more likely to mention plant-based milk varieties (25% mention) compared to dairy milk buyers mentions of plant-based milk varieties (2%).
- Health is interconnected with nutrition in consumers’ eyes and both dairy milk and plant-based milks are purchased with nutrition in mind.
 - Nutrition means “health” to 72% exclusive dairy milk buyers and 65% to exclusive plant-based milk buyers.

Product & Nutrition Associations

- Dairy milk products are highly associated with “dairy milk”, yet a significant minority of consumers do associate some plant-based milks with dairy milk.
 - The association of plant-based milks with dairy milk is strongest when the term “milk” is more prominent on the package.
 - Consumers who purchase both dairy milk and plant-based milks are most likely to associate plant-based milks with dairy milk.
- Exclusive dairy milk buyers associate nutrition and health overwhelmingly with dairy milk. In contrast, exclusive plant-based milk buyers perceive plant-based milks as much more strongly linked to nutrition, health, vitamins & minerals and protein. Dual buyers of dairy and plant-based milks however, do not see a difference between the products on overall nutrition or protein but do perceive dairy milk as more strongly linked to vitamins & minerals.
- The majority of consumers perceive almond, soy and coconut milks as having the same/more protein and key nutrients as dairy milk.
 - 78% adults view almond milk as having the same or more vitamins as dairy milk; 77% believe almond milk has the same or more protein and 68% believe it has the same or more key nutrients (e.g., calcium, potassium).
 - 73% adults view soy milk as having the same or more vitamins as dairy milk; 75% believe soy milk has the same or more protein and 66% believe it has the same or more key nutrients (e.g., calcium, potassium).
 - 71% adults view coconut milk as having the same or more vitamins as dairy milk; 62% believe coconut milk has the same or more protein and 66% believe it has the same or more key nutrients (e.g., calcium, potassium).
 - Plant-based milk buyers express stronger views.

Labeling Perceptions

- The top reason consumers believe plant-based milks are labeled as “milk” is because the products are comparable on a nutrition front with more than half citing this as a reason.
- If plant-based “milks” were to be labeled as “drinks” or “beverages”, the majority of current plant-based milk buyers say they would be at least /more likely to purchase them.