

CHANGING CONSUMER HABITS

Image: Iris, Dubai



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Serge Chamelian of h-hotelier, **Raja Nasri** of Turnkey ventures and **Dr. Guy Assaker** from the Lebanese American University explore the new food and beverage rules set by the United States Food and Drug Administration, to see how they could be adapted to the Middle East market

In December 2014, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US unveiled a list of rules that will require chain restaurants to post calorie counts for the food they sell. A pilot study was launched a couple of months ago in the Lebanese market, based on a survey of major restaurants nationwide.

Changes in tastes and a greater concern for health issues have led to a change in consumer habits and requirements when eating out. Consumers today are more interested in nutritional information, food product characteristics, and preparation methods of food. Escalating health concerns have led many governments in developed countries to pass legislation (similar to the Nutritional Labeling and Education Act for packaged goods) compelling restaurants to post nutrition labels and specify the nutrients associated with individual dishes on the menu. Such efforts have aimed to enhance consumer knowledge and attitudes about the food they consume, influencing their food choices and helping them make more healthy decisions.

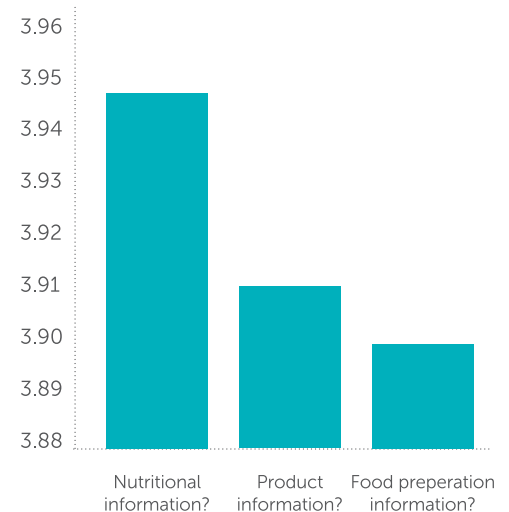
A proposal is being discussed with the Central Municipal Council of Doha, Qatar, making it mandatory for all international fast food chains operating there to include the calorific values and the ingredients

of all items. Moreover a study conducted in 2014, as part of the inaugural Abu Dhabi Diabetes Congress found that nearly a third of the Emirati population is overweight, and a third of those found to be overweight are also clinically obese. In Kuwait, 75 percent of the population is considered obese despite the high educational levels that the citizens of Kuwait have. Furthermore, the Consumer

Survey question results

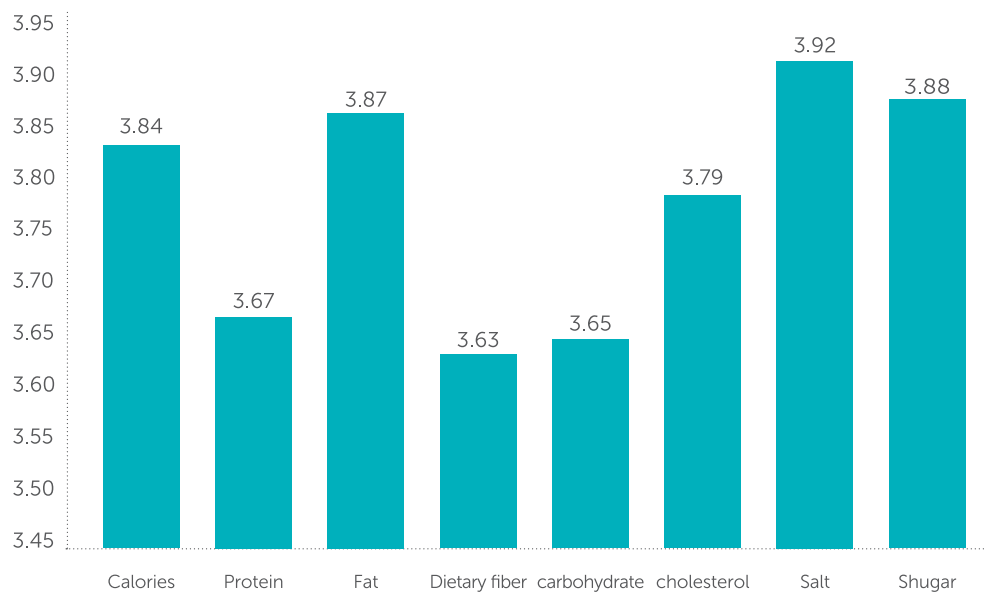
Are you in favor of passing a law that compels restaurant establishments to include the following information in their menu lists?

(1=not at all favorable - 5=very favorable.)



Survey question results

Rank the following items based on what you believe should be included on a restaurant menu in terms of nutritional information (1=totally disagree - 5=totally agree.)



“Consumers today are more interested in nutritional information”

Protection Society (CPS) in Saudi Arabia is working to make it obligatory for restaurants and other food outlets to indicate the number of calories in the food and drinks they provide to customers. (arabnews.com/node/399445).

Dr. Nasser Al-Tuwaim The chairman of CPS estimated that the ratio of obesity among young Saudi men and women is around 36 percent, and said that one of the main causes of obesity is junk food.

Results demonstrate that responses were in favor of including calorific, fat and sugar information on restaurant menus.

Responses were also in favor of including quality, quantity and merchandizing information on restaurant menus. Finally respondents were particularly in favor of including a list of ingredients on restaurant menus (Refer to graphs).

When consumers were asked if they would be in favor of a law compelling restaurants to display certain types of information on the menu, respondents were most interested in having nutritional information included, followed by product and preparation information. Furthermore, when a restaurant’s menu did include all the information that respondents wanted on the menu, they had an extremely positive perception of these restaurants and showed a high intention to revisit them and engage in positive word-of-mouth.

This brief summary of the study provides a framework for restaurant managers in

Lebanon to help them understand how to induce revisits and enhance customer attitude about their restaurant. In particular, it helps restaurant operators understand which specific types of information customers look for on the menu and, thus, helps them enhance their sales and secure revisits. It can also be helpful for policymakers in Lebanon in establishing bills and regulations that match the needs of restaurant patrons by revealing the types of information customers seek to improve their dining-out habits and protect their interests in terms of health and nutrition. This seems important for the region, where to date no such regulations compel restaurants to provide customers with appropriate knowledge about the food they consume away from home.

For the full study, please contact Serge Chamelian @ serge.chamelian@h-hotelier.com

Survey question results

Rank the following items based on what you believe should be included on a restaurant menu in terms of product information (1=totally disagree - 5=totally agree.)

