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Special Research Report #707: Public Benefits Consumer preferences for longevity labels on cut flowers

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BACKGROUND

Consumers view cut flowers and floral arrangements as special, perishable luxury items but they are often skeptical about how long the flowers have been on the shelf resulting in uncertainty regarding their longevity. One way to reassure consumers about cut flower longevity is to label the expected longevity. In this study, longevity was defined as “how long the cut flowers will last.” The study investigated consumer reactions to longevity labels to determine consumer receptiveness of cut flower longevity labels and claims. By knowing consumer preferences, the floral industry can determine the best uses for longevity labels and claims within their businesses.

METHODOLOGY

To determine consumers’ reactions to cut flower longevity labels and claims, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire and participate in focus group discussions. To ensure participants’ representativeness of cut flower buyers, in the recruitment advertisement we specified that “you must be at least 18 years old and have purchased or received cut flowers in the past year.” The questionnaire was administered during May 2011 in Minnesota, June 2011 in Texas, and July 2011 online in the United States. There were 130 participants from Minnesota, 84 from Texas, and 525 from the online questionnaire for a total of 739 participants. The average age of participants was 45 years old, the majority of participants were female (61%), had a college diploma, were in a relationship or married, had 2 to 3 people within their households, and had an average 2010 household income between \$50,001 – 65,000.

After they finished the questionnaire, approximately 120 of the Minnesota and Texas participants participated in focus group discussions in order to gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and attitudes toward cut flower longevity labels.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In-Home Arrangement Actions: Knowing a typical consumer’s response to aging cut flower arrangements is important because it demonstrates what actions consumers take to increase the longevity of their arrangements and provides florists the opportunity to improve their satisfaction through providing longevity information. These results are important because we can infer how the flowers physically appear when consumers

decide to dispose of them. Furthermore, these results demonstrate the inconsistent longevities of flowers within an arrangement which can make accurate labeling challenging. We hypothesize that a range label with a minimum and maximum amount of days may be preferable. To determine how typical consumers react to aging floral arrangements, participants were shown photos of a cut flower arrangement where the first photo was labeled “day of purchase” and subsequent photos showed the arrangement as it aged (Exhibit 1). Participants were then asked to indicate their actions for that arrangement – “do not do anything,” “pick out the wilted and keep the rest,” “replace the wilted with new ones,” and “throw away the whole bouquet.” Next, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements concerning longevity labels. Participants were also asked their preferences for communicating different cut flowers longevities to them and label/sign language.



Arrangement on date of purchase



Arrangement A



Arrangement B



Arrangement C



Arrangement D



Arrangement E

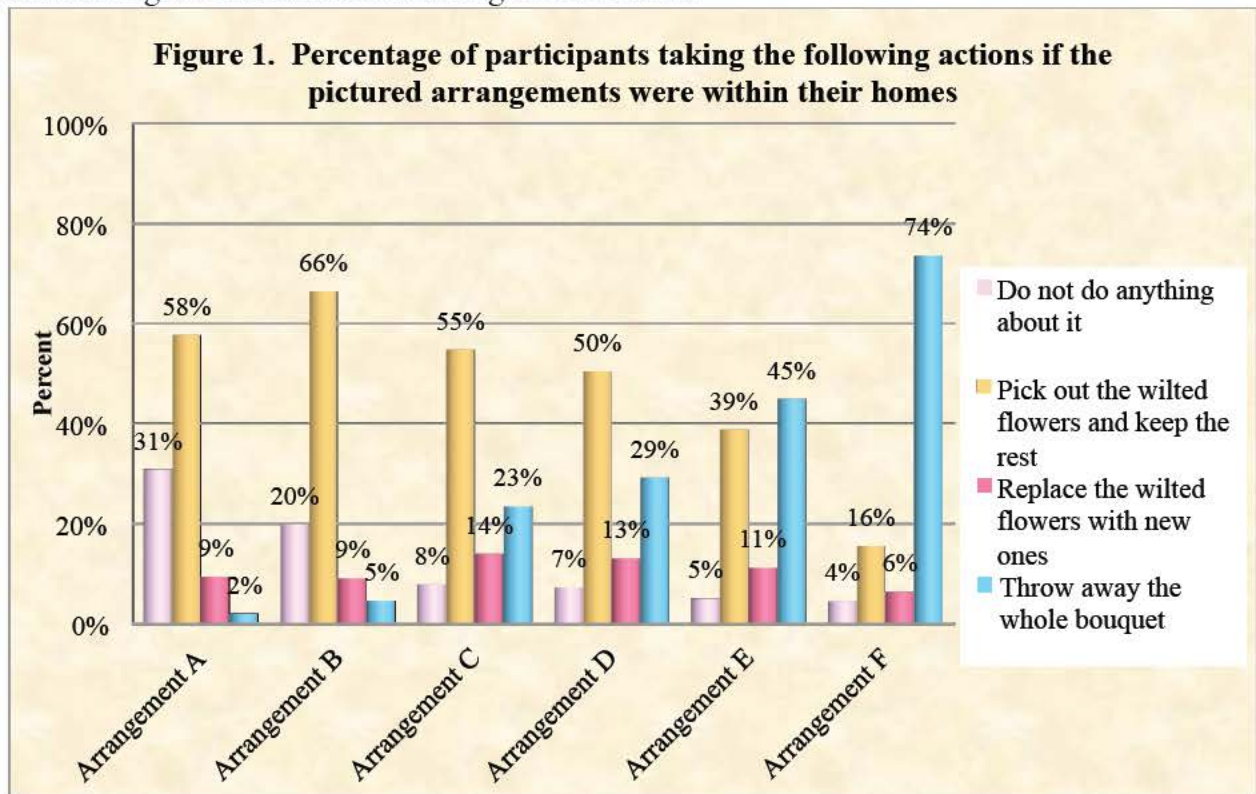


Arrangement F

Exhibit 1. Arrangements of different ages to test participants' actions

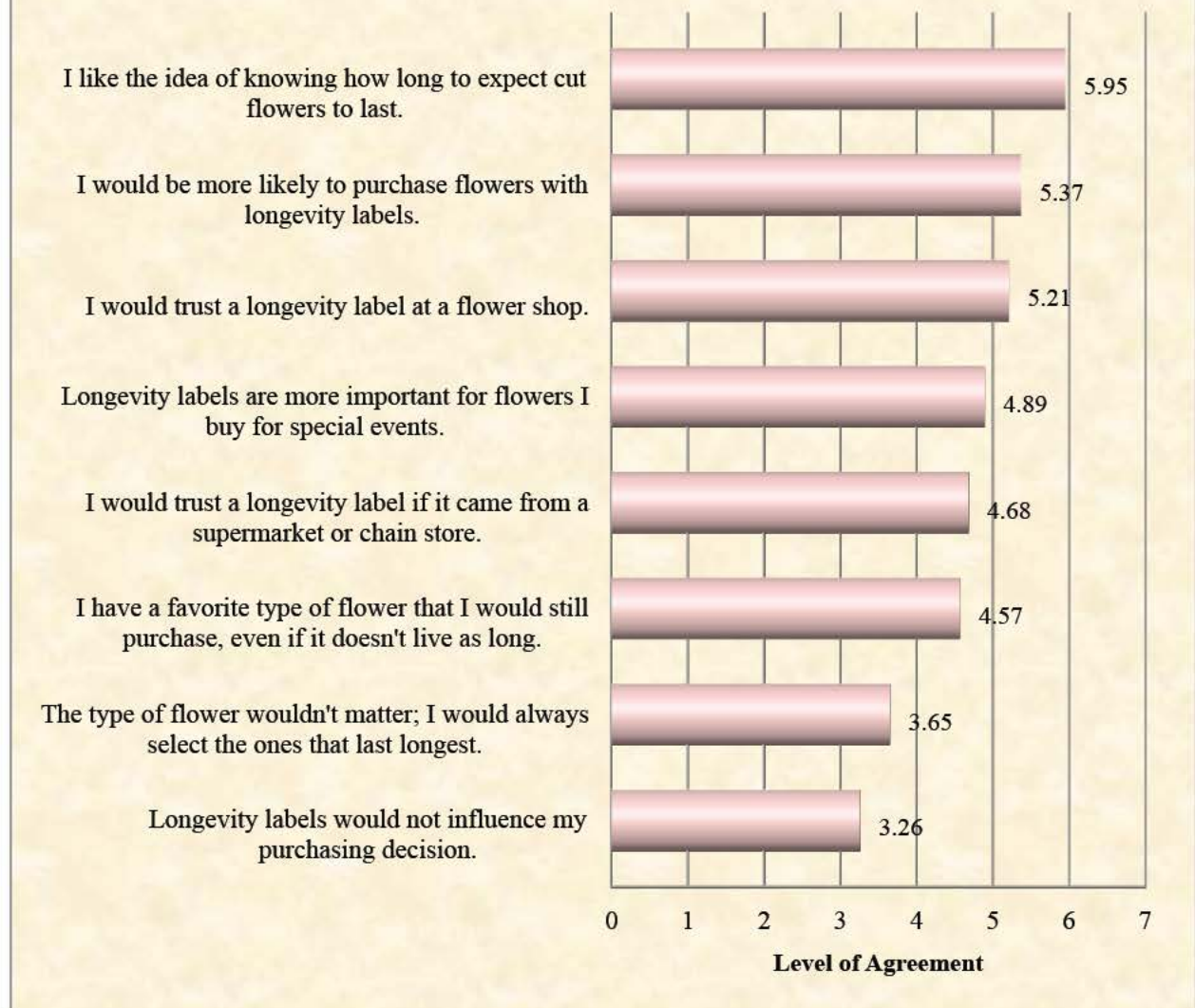
For arrangement A, 58% of participants would pick out the wilted flowers and keep the rest (Figure 1). For arrangement B, 66% of participants would pick out the wilted flowers and keep the rest. For arrangement C, 55% of participants would pick out the wilted flowers and keep the rest, and for arrangement D, 51% of participants would also pick out the wilted flowers and keep the rest. However, compared to arrangements A and B, arrangements C and D had an increased percentage of participants (23% and 29% respectively) who would throw away the arrangement indicating the arrangements were approaching a throw-away threshold point. For arrangement E, 45% of participants would throw away the whole bouquet. For arrangement F, 74% of participants would throw away the whole bouquet. These results indicate that many people try to keep the arrangement for as long as possible by removing the wilted flowers but at a certain point (by arrangement E, for example) they would simply throw out the whole bouquet. From participants' reactions to these photos, it becomes apparent that people use bent stems, petal loss, petal discoloration, and wilting as indicators to discard arrangements. Focus group participants supported these findings. They mentioned that they often moved the nice flowers to smaller vases to maintain a fuller looking bouquet. Many women held onto the bouquets as long as possible because they liked to remember what

they looked like and the positive emotions they felt when originally obtaining the flowers. Some techniques focus group members used to gain greater longevity include drying the fillers (such as babies breathe), cut off dead florets on stalk flowers so the remainder looked nice, saving and drying the petals, and placing the bouquet in the refrigerator overnight. Other participants threw out the flowers when they started wilting, turned brown, left a mess on the table, had bent stems, became unpleasantly fragrant, or when 80% of the bouquet was wilted. Many participants felt price and size influenced the length of time they kept their flowers. For instance, an inexpensive (less than \$10) or small bouquet would be thrown out shortly after it started wilting whereas with a more expensive or larger arrangement they would pick out the wilted flowers and rearrange the remaining flowers. Larger bouquets have more sustenance leaving consumers a nice sized arrangement even after removing wilted flowers.



Attitudes towards Longevity Labels: Participants were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements about longevity labels (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree). Most participants agreed that they “like the idea of knowing how long to expect cut flowers to last” with a mean of 5.95, “would be more likely to purchase flowers with longevity labels” (mean=5.37), and “would trust a longevity label at the flower shop” (mean=5.21) (Figure 2). Participants also agreed that “longevity labels are more important for flowers I buy for special events” (mean=4.89), “I would trust longevity labels if they came from a supermarkets or chain store” (mean=4.68), and “I have a favorite type of flower that I would still purchase even if it doesn’t live as long” (mean=4.57). Participants agreed less with “the type of flower wouldn’t matter; I would always select the ones that last longest” (mean=3.65) and “longevity would not influence my purchasing decision” (mean=3.26).

Figure 2. Participants' level of agreement with the statements regarding longevity labels (1=strongly disagree; 7=strongly agree)

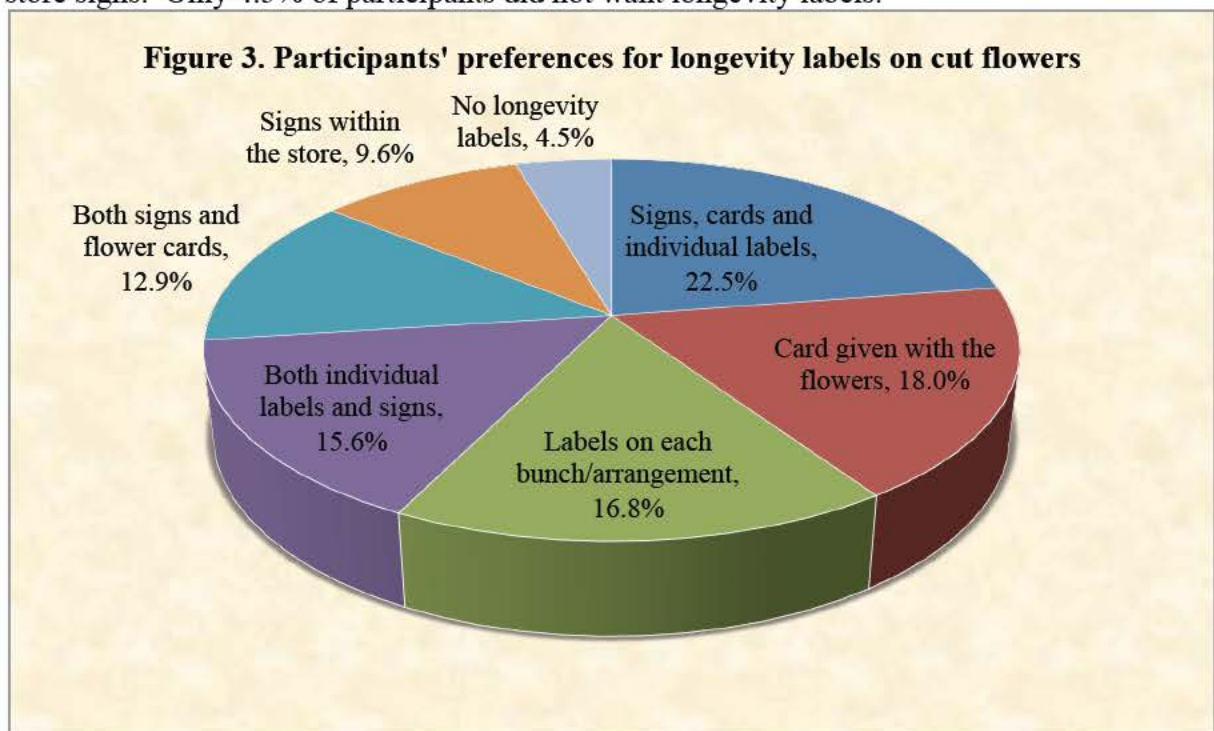


Focus group participants supported these findings in that many felt that longevity labels would be nice, especially for gifts, expensive flowers, and unfamiliar flowers. Frequent purchasers in the focus groups felt confident in their own knowledge from past experiences, but they also enjoyed learning about new flower types and having that information readily available would influence their purchasing decisions. Participants were generally positive about longevity labels, especially at florist shops since they are specialty shops and are expected to know more about their products than their mass retail counterparts. Additionally, focus group participants felt flower longevity for special occasions was very important because they reflect on whoever brought them, resulting in a positive or negative reflection depending on performance.

Some participants felt longevity claims would not influence their decision to purchase at all. Some reasons included having a favorite type of flower they preferred, feeling

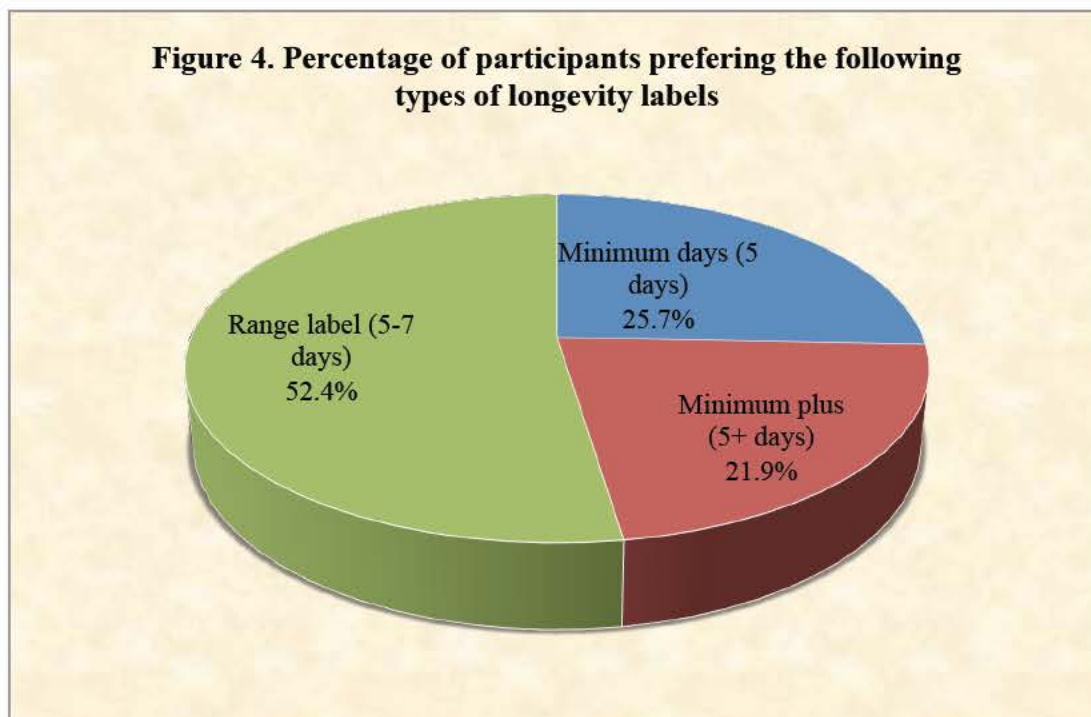
confident in their own abilities to choose the freshest flowers, and only needing the flowers for the initial impact or day. Although these participants did not believe they would be influenced by longevity labels, several still felt they would be beneficial for other consumers.

Longevity Label Information: When asked about how to communicate a cut flower's longevity to consumers, 22.5% of participants preferred the combination of in-store signage, cards given with the flowers, and individual labels on each bunch or bouquet (Figure 3). Cards given with the flowers were next with 18% of participants selecting this option, followed by 16.8% of participants selecting labels on each bunch/bouquet, 15.6% of participants selecting both individual labels and in-store signs, 12.9% of participants selecting both in-store signs and cards, and 9.6% of participants selecting in-store signs. Only 4.5% of participants did not want longevity labels.



Participants were also asked what type of label they would prefer for cut flower longevity labels if there was no guarantee. Fifty-two percent of participants selected a range label such as *5 to 7 days* (which reflects the fact that most people pick out the wilted flowers and keep the rest as an arrangement ages), 26% preferred a minimum days label such as *5 days*, and 22% selected a minimum plus days label such as *5+ days* (Figure 4). Focus group participants felt that range labels were acceptable but that they should be conservative. By being conservative, participants felt they received greater value because the arrangement greatly outlasted their expectations.

Figure 4. Percentage of participants preferring the following types of longevity labels



Focus group participants inferred cut flower longevity through past experience and knowledge, bloom stage, color (darker petals indicates older flowers), type of flower, number of buds, by observing the display and seeing how similar arrangements are holding up, or by asking when they were picked. They also used price as an indicator of quality and longevity. Participants often associated greater longevity with a fresh appearance, closed buds, no wilting/damage/browning, thin petals, healthy foliage, sturdy looking flowers, or by mentally comparing them to similar looking flowers. When unsure of flower's longevity, many participants asked the florist, searched online, or searched in gardening books. For many participants, floral longevity was much more important when purchased for gifts than for themselves due to increased risk of disappointing the recipient. Emphasizing this point, some participants called the gift recipient to ask if the flowers lasted.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INDUSTRY

Considering participants' in-home actions to extend cut flower longevity, reactions, and positive opinions about longevity labels, it becomes apparent that the floral industry would benefit through developing a longevity labeling system. The in-home arrangement actions results indicate that consumers utilize various visual cues (bent stems, petal loss, petal discoloration, and wilting) as indicators to discard arrangements or throw away a single flower from the arrangement. By being aware of these cues, florists can use a range label on arrangements to clearly indicate the minimum and maximum days consumers can expect their arrangement to last. Most people prefer date-range labeling for arrangements because it gives them a general idea of the longevity of that flower/arrangement. By implementing a longevity labeling system, more customers would be reassured of their purchases and go outside of their typical safety zones. Longevity labels are especially important for gifts, expensive flowers, and flowers they

are not familiar with. However, these labels need to be realistic to reduce consumer skepticism and increase satisfaction.

When developing a longevity label system, many people want readily available longevity information throughout the store. As such, they like the idea of tasteful in-store signage, cards with each purchase, and individual labels with each arrangement/bouquet. By having so many diverse options, more people will be educated about the longevity of different types of flowers and feel more comfortable using alternative flower choices.

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