

Abstract

# Food Information Is Mostly Not Well Accessible to Consumers with a Visual Impairment—An Exploratory Phenomenological Study <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Every citizen has the right to be appropriately informed about the foods they consume. Whilst the provision of food information is regulated in the EU, to ensure a high level of health protection for consumers and to guarantee the right to such information, little is known about the accessibility of food information for consumers with a visual impairment. We, therefore, aimed to explore how consumers with such an impairment experience their access to food information by conducting a phenomenological qualitative study. The phenomenon of access to food information was studied via qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 10 Dutch consumers (above 18 years old) who are partially sighted or blind. Through reflexive thematic analysis, themes were constructed from these interviews. Participants highlighted that they did try to derive food information from labels. Often, they used websites, apps, or other assistive technologies in retrieving such information. Respondents highly differed in their information needs. Whilst the accessibility was mostly not considered to be very good, in line with the variation in needs and wants, interviewees also differed in how important they deemed this food information and its accessibility. The interviews highlighted the need to consider personal interests, health status, and the full buying and cooking procedure in analysing food information needs. Our exploratory study shows that consumers with a visual impairment often face difficulties when attempting to derive food information. Having a visual impairment does not only affect buying and cooking behaviour but has also been previously linked to decreased dietary variety. Limited access to food information may play a role in this. Our study highlights that for people with a visual impairment, deriving information from food labels is hard or even impossible, whilst citizens have the right to information to make well-informed decisions regarding their diet. Consumers with a visual impairment are inclined to stick to familiar products and recipes. Considering the global push towards adopting a healthy and more sustainable diet, which includes new products such as alternative protein, it is important to consider the accessibility of food information to the population.

**Keywords:** food information; visual impairment; European food law; dietary decisions; qualitative research



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