



# Claims & Cues 2026

Navigating Category Attributes



# How claims and cues guide purchase decisions—and what marketers must know

Consumers are navigating a complex signal environment—where claims, ingredients and packaging cues compete to communicate benefits. At the same time, rising concern around processing—especially ultra-processed foods and industrial ingredients—is reshaping how these signals are interpreted. As a result, consumers no longer take claims at face value—they actively question, interpret and seek proof.

For brands, the mandate has shifted: messaging alone is insufficient—meaning must be signaled with clarity, credibility and contextual relevance.



**Claims and Cues 2026** uncovers:

- How consumers interpret and prioritize claims across categories
- Which signals build trust vs. trigger skepticism
- How claims intersect with taste, price, health and convenience
- Where claims must be backed by proof—and what counts as proof
- How to optimize signals to strengthen brand positioning

**Report published: March 31, 2026**

**Report length: 89 slides**

**Format:** PowerPoint, Executive Report, PDF and Excel data tables

## *Claims and Cues: Navigating Category Attributes interprets the evolving language of food*

This report provides a rigorous decoding of how consumers interpret, prioritize and validate claims and cues across categories—revealing which signals drive trust, which dilute it and how different consumer segments assign meaning to quality and value.

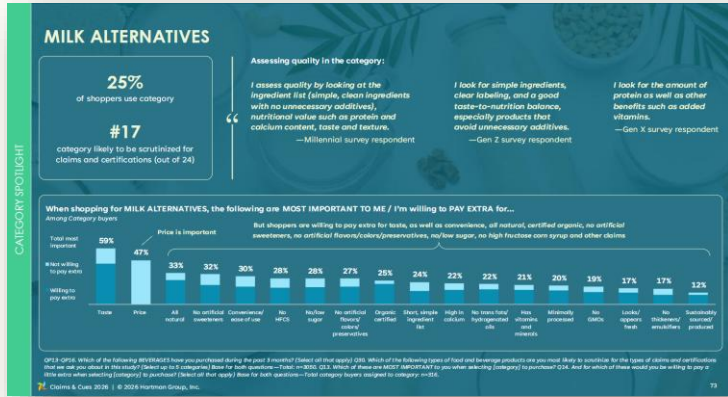
At its core, the report reframes claims and cues as a system—revealing the strategic opportunity created by the tension between signal saturation and the rising demand for proof.

### Table of contents:

- Methodology
- Executive summary
- Claims & cues: Navigating guideposts for food and beverage purchase decisions
- Select claims: Spotlight on processing, health/nutrition and sourcing/ethics claims
- Organic: Spotlight on the evolving meaning of organic
- Category dashboards: Prioritization of claims across key categories
- Implications: A playbook for executing on claims

# Learn how to navigate the signal economy reshaping everyday food decision-making

Category dashboard spotlight

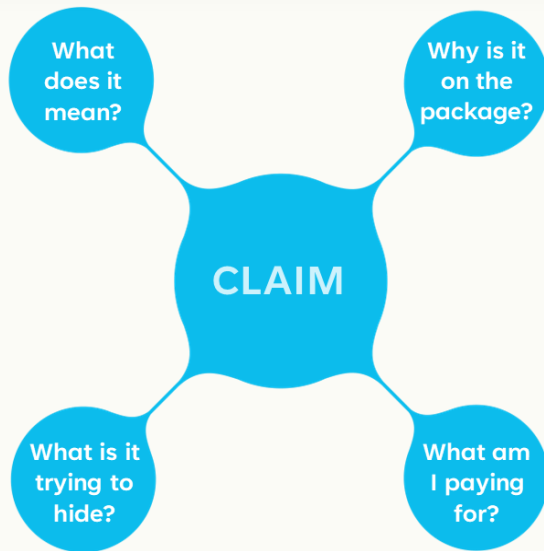


Understand how claims and certifications can simplify purchase decisions—and why clarity and proof are now central to category growth, competitive strategy and brand relevance.

Category dashboards help you analyze consumer prioritization of claims across 24 food and beverage categories—ranked by level of scrutiny—plus five foodservice channels to identify where claims command a premium.

Enhance your understanding of claims and cues by exploring:

A range of inputs influence consumer purchase decisions



- How consumers cut through complexity with clear, recognizable claims
- How concern around processing is redefining perceptions of quality, health and trust
- Why transparency, validation and substantiation now matter more than messaging
- How consumers evaluate claims relative to price, category and convenience
- Which packaging, sourcing and brand narrative signals cue values-alignment
- Specific tactics brands can implement to design clear, credible signal systems that guide—rather than overwhelm—consumer decision-making

Stand out by aligning claims and cues with how consumers interpret value: seeking signals that guide, clarify and validate decisions rather than complicate them

### Processing claims

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- Processing concerns are mainstream and rising
- While broader cues signaling "clean" set expectations for consumers, specific claims reinforce credibility in context

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**33%**

say “**unfamiliar ingredient names**” help them determine if a product is ultra-processed

### Health & nutrition claims

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- Health is a primary and evolving driver of food and beverage choice
- Broad benefit cues attract consumer attention, while specific and measurable claims build credibility and trust

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**#6**

**No/low sugar claim**  
(ranked sixth among 40 processing, nutritional and sourcing claims)

### Sourcing & ethics claims

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- Sourcing claims signal value—but must connect to tangible impact to influence choice
- As such, consumers seek proof of care, clear standards, recognizable certifications and relevance to their lives

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**47%**

include “**absence of growth hormones**” when defining organic

# Gain powerful insights (qualitative and quantitative) with actionable guidance —without the cost or time of custom research

## Robust integrated methodology

**Quantitative:** Online national survey fielded January 29–February 27, 2026, n=3,050 U.S. adults aged 18–78. (MOE)  $\pm 1.8\%$  at 95% confidence level.

**Qualitative:** Digital ethnographies: n=14 participants. Multi-day immersive engagement (journaling, prompts, photos and videos) via asynchronous virtual platform. Follow-up in-depth interviews: n=7 selected from digital ethnography participants for 60-minute follow-up 1-on-1 interviews.

## Turning insights into action: Claims and Cues

A customized Activation Session helps clients take informed next steps with the insights from the *Claims and Cues* report

For more details or an example of a session agenda, contact [melissa@hartman-group.com](mailto:melissa@hartman-group.com)

## Report published March 31, 2026

**Report Price: \$15,000\***

*\*included in all Hartman Retainer Services packages*

An in-depth PowerPoint report includes implications, strategic recommendations and a complete analysis of relevant data supported by robust charts and visuals.

An Executive Report is also included with purchase.

Accompanying the report are detailed Excel data tables that enable flexible analysis with key demographic breakdowns.

# Order your copy of *Claims & Cues 2026* now

To align your claims and cues with today's evolving consumer expectations, contact us:

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## ABOUT HARTMAN GROUP

Our mission is to translate consumer behavior and food culture into strategic growth opportunities for our clients. Since 1989, Hartman Group's anthropologists, social scientists and business analysts have been immersed in the study of American food and beverage culture, using ethnographic observation, quantitative tracking surveys and deeply studying trends. What we have learned and continue to uncover allows us to upend many notions of our traditional American eating and drinking patterns, identifying unique opportunities and winning strategies for our clients.

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