Consumer Effects of Front-Of-Package Nutrition Labeling: An Interdisciplinary Meta-Analysis

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Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.

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Abstract

As the world keeps struggling with issues related to obesity, front-of-package health and nutrition labels have appeared with the goal of bringing nutrition information to consumers in a more understandable format. The marketplace is filled with a variety of different front-of-package labels, but their true effects remain unclear, along with which front-of-package label works 'best'. We address this question through an interdisciplinary meta-analysis, generalizing the findings of 97 articles studying the impact of front-of-package labels on outcomes like consumers' ability to identify healthier options, product perceptions, purchase behavior and consumption. The results show that overall, front-of-package labels help consumers identify healthier products, though their influence on making healthier choices and especially consumption is more limited. We find most support for the implementation of evaluative summary indicator labels, like star ratings. Importantly, some labels may lead to halo-effects, positively influencing vice products as well as virtues.