Do green traffic-light labels signal healthy, tasty, and filling? How traffic-light labels impact food perception and food choice in self-service canteens

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Abstract

Governments have sought to help consumers make healthier food choices, and increasingly suggest manufacturers to use traffic-light labels (TLLs) on food products. In the context of a self-service canteen, we investigate how a TLL ("Nutri-Score") on prepared dishes influences food perceptions (healthiness, taste, and satiety) and food choice. An online experiment shows that a green TLL can positively influence perceived healthiness, which positively influences perceived taste, and that this, in turn, positively affects perceived satiety. However, we find that a red TLL does not influence these dimensions of food perceptions. Further, the use of the Nutri-Score does not significantly increase the choice of green dishes but rather decreases the choice of red dishes overall, though surprisingly not for people who chose at least one unhealthy product, which represents the group targeted by the TLL. The underlying mechanisms of a TLL could partly explain the failure of this intervention.

Keywords: *traffic-light label; food perceptions; healthy food choice*

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