Reviewer's report

Title: The publics’ understanding of daily caloric recommendations and their perceptions of calorie posting in chain restaurants

Version: 2 Date: 11 December 2009

Reviewer: Carl Lachat

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The authors have made substantial changes to the text. There are only a number of Minor Revisions left.

The authors refer to “calorie intake or requirement”. Please use “energy intake/requirement”. One does not require calories but energy. When numbers are quoted however, (eg. 600 calories) this should probably read “kilocalories or kcal” (600 kcal). The term “calorie posting” would be acceptable if this is the term used in the US.

p4. Should “Food Standards Association” not be “Food Standards Agency”? A reference would be appropriate for the statement as well.

P 8 We observed no differences in caloric knowledge by body weight or educational attainment. Should be “We observed no differences in caloric knowledge by BMI category or educational attainment” change in all tables:

“body weight category” should be “BMI category”

“Healthy weight” should be “BMI< 25” (note that BMI < 18.5 is not considered “healthy”) It is not necessary to add P<0.05 to each statement referring to a statistical significant finding.

A number of important methodological remarks were addressed in the rebuttal letter and it would be good to insert the answers in the final version. I suggest adding a summary of following paragraphs to Methods sections

“We included both open-ended and close-ended questions regarding caloric knowledge. We purposely asked open-ended question first so as not to prime the respondent with the response categories for the closed-ended questions. For the open ended caloric knowledge question there was only one missing value. There were no “Don't know” or “Refused” responses. For the categorical caloric knowledge questions, there we no missing values and the percentage of respondents who answered “Don’t know” or “Refused” was less than ten percent for each question. So, we treat those responses as missing at random as they
would have minimal contribution to any selection bias.”

Discussion section:

The survey was conducted using a bi-weekly service commonly used by media organizations. Due in part to experiences with election polling, the news media are acutely aware that polling over a long time risks missing changes in attitudes and behavior influenced by specific events [1]. As a result, such surveys are generally in the field for a short period. Our survey relies on reweighting to help ensure representativeness. Independent studies have shown that the results of statistical reweighting of the data are similar to those of an analysis based on the higher response rate in opinion surveys of long duration [2-6]. The results presented in the paper were statistically reweighted to reflect the actual composition of the adult population of the United States, calculated on the basis of data from the Census Bureau, according to age, sex, education level, region, race or ethnic background, and household size [7]. Because the news media do not rely on response rates as the best way to measure the accuracy of a poll, weekly survey services used mainly by the media do not generally report or even keep track of response rates. Therefore, we are unfortunately unable to provide a response rate for the survey. The populations which rely entirely on cell phones, are homeless, or which live in homes that cannot afford land lines would be excluded from this survey.

The authors however, cannot substantiate the claim “Because these groups likely come from different SES brackets, we believe any possible SES bias may be neutralized.”

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests