Reviewer's report

Title: Perceptions of typical users of plain vs. branded cigarette packs among young smokers and non-smokers. A between-subjects experimental survey

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Reviewer: Ahmed Fathelrahman

Reviewer's report:

Comments to the Author

Review report

Manuscript Title: Perceptions of typical users of plain vs. branded cigarette packs among young smokers and nonsmokers. A between-subjects experimental survey

This work is important, methodologically properly designed and nicely written. However, addressing certain issues would improve it and help increasing its scientific value.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Minor Essential Revisions

1. In page 8, the sentence saying “Bivariate analyses (Table 1) showed that there were significantly more boys in the group exposed to plain pack versions who thought that smoking helps smokers stay slim” is more relevant to the “results” section rather than the “method” section.

2. In table 2; percentages represent the proportions who assigned at least one positive users’ characteristic to the branded pack versions, whereas odds ratios represent the likelihood of giving at least one positive users’ characteristic for branded compared to plain package. First; I think that it would be nice to put the percentages first in the table followed by the odds ratios. Second, it is not clear whether these Ns placed on the third columns refer to the percentages or to the odds ratios. I think they would be of different values for each.

3. For the odds ratios, please provide the 95% confidence intervals.

Discretionary Revisions

1. The description “of typical user” creates some confusion about the meaning of the title whether it is talking about “how typical users of plain vs. branded cigarette packs perceive something” or “how the study respondents perceive typical users of plain vs. branded cigarette packs”. I know that the correct meaning is the latter one but it would be nice to remove confusion. It seems to me that modifying the title into “Perceptions towards typical users…etc” would improve clarity of the meaning.

2. It is mentioned in page 5 that “In Norway, the health authorities are
considering introducing plain packaging within the next four years (2012-2016)”. As we are in the last four months of the year 2013; and if the introduction of the plain packaging in Norway is still going on according to its scheduled plan, it would be better that you say “within the next two years (2014-2016)”.

3. The ages of the participants ranged between 15 and 22. However, in certain parts of the manuscript you described them as adolescents. May be it is more appropriate to call them adolescents and young adults.

4. Regarding “analyses”, it seems to me that using “the repeated measures analyses” was more appropriate for this type of data.

5. According to table 3; you performed the statistical testing for the significant differences between branded and plain descriptor versions, then between plain descriptor and plain versions, and finally between branded and plain versions. This means in each case you used t test three times and this theoretically increases the statistical error. I think for such situations using ANOVA plus any post-hoc test such as Bonferroni or Tukey was more appropriate.

6. Although your sample consists of smokers and non-smokers (nonsmokers are more predominant?), you did not differentiate in analyses between the two categories and you did not assess the possible differences between them in perceptions. Maybe, there is no difference between respondents exposed to plain and branded packs in terms of smoking status, but there may be differences between smokers and nonsmokers in terms of the perceptions. This may also explain the differences in findings between males and females (it is not shown in the study the proportions of smokers and nonsmokers among each gender).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests