Reviewer’s report

Title: Textual health warning labels on snus (Swedish moist snuff): Do they affect risk perception?

Version: 0 Date: 29 Mar 2018

Reviewer: Kate Bartlem

Reviewer’s report:

Advice on the authors' responses to reviewer 3 feedback: PUBH-D-17-03357

"Textual health warning labels on snus (Swedish moist snuff): Do they affect risk perception?

Reviewer 3 made six main comments, for which the authors have addressed reasonably overall. In regards to the original reviewer's comment 6 regarding the conclusions made from this study, the authors have now made more valid conclusions, focusing on textual labels and risk perception, rather than their impact on snus cessation. However, the following author responses could be further clarified:

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Reviewer 3, comment 1: Despite some helpful changes to the paper in this revision, I still find the results overly complicated and confusing. The findings in my mind are rather straightforward: The new warning is likely to be more effective in communicating the ill effects of snus tobacco products than the prior warning. There could also be more effective warnings that explicitly mention cancer as an outcome, at least as far as severity of health effects. But this would have to be tempered by the lower levels of perceived prevalence of ill effects compared to the new warning (again in Table 3).

Author response: The results are simplified for Study 1 page 8 from line 189, and for Study 2 page 13 from line 292.

Comment on the response: The results have been simplified and improved, however, are still complex. The separation of results of study 1 by each hypothesis assists in simplifying, however the results for study 2 do not seem to be separated by hypothesis. Keeping presentation of the results of the two studies consistent (by similarly adding hypotheses for study 2) would assist in simplifying these results further.

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Reviewer 3, comment 2: I do not find the second experiment very convincing in regard to the absence of differences. Since the new warnings have been in place, it is not surprising that
prejudgments are similar to the level observed for the new warning (around 5.9 in Table 5). And once respondents have committed to a severity judgment shortly before exposure to the different warnings, it is not surprising that their ratings do not change. The comparison of the various labels in the second study adds to the conclusion that the new warning is likely to be more effective in communicating the health effects of snus.

Author response: We answer to this argument at page 15 line 356.

Comment on the response: I cannot clearly see how this comment has been responded to. I agree with the previous reviewer that the baseline measure of risk perception will be influenced by the introduction of the change in warning in 2016, as mentioned by the authors in the introduction. Participants will have already been exposed to these more severe messages (i.e. with the removal of 'can') outside of the study environment, hence manipulation of the text messaging (to be less severe) is like to have little impact, as the judgement has already been made based on the more severe textual warnings that are in place outside of the study. This original comment needs to be more clearly addressed, and the impact of this key issue addressed in the limitations.

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Reviewer 3, comment 4: Some more minor comments. On page 8 line 175, the authors refer to a magnitude rating as a Likert scale. It is not. Further down on that page, mention is made of an addiction assessment. But no results are presented with no apparent explanation. I assume the 7 categories of prevalence judgments were coded from 1 to 7 in the analysis, but this is not clear.

Author response: "Likert" is removed. The addiction variable is analyzed at page 9 line 195, and page 13 line 296.

Comment on this response: It remains unclear why the 'ease of addiction' items are included. Though the authors state where the results are presented (these are only presented in an association analysis with measures of risk), it is unclear how the inclusion of this item relates to the aims or hypotheses.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?  
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?  
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?  
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