Reviewer's report

Title: Does additional support provided through e-mail or SMS in a Web-based Social Marketing program improve children's food consumption? A Randomized Controlled Trial

Version: 3 Date: 17 Jan 2018

Reviewer: Maxine Sharps

Reviewer's report:

The topic is interesting and is definitely worthwhile of investigation. I think that web-based interventions are necessary for the future, especially since people spend a lot of time on technology, and this is a potentially accessible way of reaching parents. I do have some concerns however, which I have mentioned below.

Abstract

* In your conclusion of your abstract and of your discussion you state that there is no one size fits all answer. However, your results suggest that Email did not provide any (significant) additional benefits over the web, regardless of food groups targeted. So this should be rephrased to suggest that the web-based improved consumption of x,y,z, and the addition of sms resulted in a positive change for veg, but email did not influence behaviour.

Introduction

* Why is it important that this is the first study to look at children from this specific area? How do they differ from other areas? As you state in your introduction, among the adult population of Switzerland, only 19% of men and women consume their 5 a day. So you need to make clear why this specific region is important.

Method

* Line 208-209 you use the term baseline, I might be wrong, but I don't think you've explained that BL is baseline prior to this, I think you only do it after, so just include it where you first use the term.

* Did children complete the food diaries themselves or did their parents help them? If children completed it alone, how confident are you that the children knew exactly what was in their food?
In my experience, even 10-11 year old children don't really know what is in their evening meal, they tend to just know the name of it e.g. lasagne.

* You mention that the children did not report portion sizes, so did the children just report what they ate, rather than the amount? So just listed what was on their plate? Did the question ask them only to say what they'd eaten as I know children can sometimes include food, especially vegetables, which were on their plate but they didn't actually eat them.

* Please give some examples of some of the food you coded for in line 232 onwards. Do soft drinks include fizzy and still juices? Do sweets include cakes and chocolate? Did you consider fats from oils, butters and things like avocados?

Results

* Was there a way of monitoring how frequently the parents accessed the website and excluding participants whose parents didn't visit the website? I understand from such a large sample this may not have been possible.

* Did you examine whether gender or BMI had an effect on the results? It is possible that weight-status may have affected children's change in eating behaviour.

Discussion

* Line 338: You state that the email had a positive effect on fat meat and fat fish, can you just clarify what you mean by positive effect here.

* Explain in more detail what your results mean. How much did children's fruit intake increase? Was this an important amount or just a small effect? Discuss the implications of these findings.

* Include how these results can be generalised outside of this region. How are they applicable to other parts of Switzerland, other European countries?

* Line 355, why is it important that this is the first study to investigate parents and children in this specific area?
* Provide more suggestions for future research. For example, line 377, you suggest that the effects may have been due to other causes than the intervention. How could this limitation be addressed in future research?

* I think you need to be point out the novel parts of the study early on in your discussion to show the reader what is new and how it contributes to the field.

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An article of importance in its field

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