Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessing nutrition and other claims on food labels: A repeated cross-sectional analysis of the Canadian food supply

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Reviewer: Giovanna Fiates

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Assessing trends in nutrition claims on food labels when new regulations and guidelines emerge: A cross-sectional analysis of the Canadian food supply

Dear authors,

I congratulate you on addressing an important topic, and giving a significant contribution to the body of knowledge on the study of claim regulation. The manuscript is well written and of potential interest to the readers of BMC Nutrition.

Please see below for some minor suggestions to improve the manuscript's clarity:

1) Title

It appears to me that your study was about claims (and not nutrition claims specifically), since you analysed nutrition claims (health related ingredient claim and nutrient claim), health claims and other claims.

2) Abstract

I do not agree with you when you write that "Nutrition claims are considered an important public health tool used to nudge consumers towards healthy eating". Many studies conclude otherwise, stating that nutrition claims are more of a marketing strategy than an educational tool.

A more definitive conclusion is lacking, one that reinforces your findings. The same applies to the general conclusion at the end of the manuscript.

3) Introduction
Nutrition labelling has been identified as one of the most cost-effective prevention strategies for NCDs, compared to other interventions, since diet is a major modifiable risk factor. References mentioned (3-5) do not support the affirmation. As a suggestion, you can change it to "Accurate and easy-to-understand nutrition labeling is a worthy public health goal that should be considered an important strategy among many to address obesity and poor diet." (ref 3 - Improving the design of nutrition labels to promote healthier food choices and reasonable portion sizes). The sentence in line 76 ("Well-designed food labels can have the potential to nudge consumers towards healthy eating") is also more explanatory.

Abbreviations such as DRNC are confusing, I suggest you write the whole thing.

Line 172 - what are "natural health products (n=1)"?

4) Method

Line 133 - authors define how claims were classified and use the expression "nutrition claims classification", and dividing them into i) nutrient content claims, ii) health claims, and iii) general health claims. But in the Introduction section, lines 84-91, a different definition is given.

"It also established requirements for the use of nutrition claims such as nutrient content claims (NCC), which describe the account of a nutrient in a food, and diet-related health claims, which are statements about the healthful effects of a certain food or food constituent consumed within a healthy diet on a person's health (e.g., disease risk reduction claims [DRRC] and/or structure function claims [St/Ft]). Other 'general health claims', which broadly include 'healthy' claims, symbols, logos, or check marks, were found on labels, and are not specifically regulated by the Government in Canada, although all such claims must be truthful and not mislead consumers [13].

As it can get quite confusing along the manuscript, I suggest you adopt one classification and mention it throughout the document.

5) Discussion

This section is my main concern regarding the paper's quality as a whole. It seems to me authors are mixing two different concepts, i.e. Health-related ingredient claim (which is a type of nutrition claim) and health claim.

For instance, lines 263-265 mention "Although, we expected the overall prevalence of nutrition claims would be significantly higher in 2013 compared to 2010 since many new health claims were approved by Health Canada during that time, this was not the case". The "new health claims approved" are not part of "nutrition claims".

The discussion section would benefit from a clearer division of types of claims, since they differ in essence.
Also, authors could include one or two paragraphs mentioning the lack of consensus regarding the use of nutrient-related claims as information or marketing strategy.

6) Conclusion

Authors state that "In conclusion, nutrition claims on food labels continued to be an important tool to provide nutrition information to consumers". I do not think this is what the manuscript evaluated at all. Please reflect more about results so you can provide a more consistent conclusion instead of focusing on the results.

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?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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