

On demand but not on display. A comparative analysis of nutrition labelling in online grocery retailers.

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Introduction

Recent decades have seen a concomitant increase in the prevalence of diet related non-communicable diseases and revolutionary developments in digital technology. The long-term shift from bricks-and-mortar to online in the grocery sector has accelerated through the pandemic, during which a new model of grocery retail characterised by App-based purchasing and rapid delivery has arisen.

With almost two-thirds of adults in the UK overweight or obese, a multitude of interventions have been proposed and nutrition labelling has been demonstrated to be effective in influencing consumer behaviour towards healthier food choices^{1,2}. Current UK regulations for prepacked foods, including online purchases, require retailers to display a back of pack (BOP) nutrition declaration whilst a colour-coded (traffic light) front of pack (FOP) label is voluntary. The BOP information must be available to the consumer “before the purchase is concluded”. Previous research has found inconsistencies in the presentation of nutrition labels in online supermarkets in the UK, whilst recent international studies have found nutrition information to be frequently missing from online listings^{3,4}. The aim of this research was to assess the presence, visibility, and formatting of nutrition labelling in the online listings of traditional and emerging UK grocery retailers.

Methods

Four traditional and 4 emerging online grocery retailers were selected and 216 listings from 9 popular food categories were assessed between February and March 2022. Where available, 1 supermarket branded, and 1 leading-brand private-label product was assessed from each store. App listings were accessed using mobile devices and website listings were accessed using the same browser. Listings were assessed for the presence, visibility and format of FOP and BOP nutrition labels. Statistical comparisons were performed using Fisher's exact and McNemar tests.

Results

The presence of FOP and BOP labels for each item within a store was identical between the App and website listings and there was no statistically significant difference between the visibility of the FOP labels between app and website ($p=0.180$). The presence of FOP ($p<0.001$) and BOP labels ($p<0.001$) was significantly higher in listings of traditional stores (FOP =67%, BOP=96%) than emerging stores (FOP =0%, BOP=18%).

Conclusion

With an increasing emphasis on convenience in the online grocery sector, the importance of prominent nutrition labels has arguably never been greater, yet there is substantial variation between retailers with respect to the inclusion and visibility of voluntary FOP nutrition labels. More concerningly, in a high number of listings, there is a conspicuous absence of both voluntary FOP and mandatory BOP nutrition labels especially amongst emerging retailers including those who are members of the British Retail Consortium (BRC).

Topics

- The Nutrition and optimum life course Theme is defined by activities encompassing exercise and Sports Nutrition, healthy ageing, weight management, pregnancy/childhood/adolescence,; alternative diets such as vegetarianism/veganism; chrono-nutrition,

Additional Info

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