

CONSUMER'S ASSOCIATIONS WITH SUGAR: THE EFFECT OF FRONT-OF-PACK NUTRITION LABELLING

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Over the last 50 years, sugar consumption has tripled worldwide and has been associated with the increased prevalence of several non-communicable diseases. Front of package (FOP) nutrition labelling has been adopted as a strategy to encourage consumers to reduce their sugar consumption and different schemes have been proposed for this purpose. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of two FOP nutrition labelling schemes on consumers associations with sugar. Participants (n=1232; 18-65 years old) were randomly allocated to one of the three experimental conditions: (C1) without information about sugar content (n=417), (C2) health logo (n=411) and (C3) nutritional warning (n=404). They were asked to complete a word association task using the following instructions: "Please, write down the first four words that come to your mind when you think about SUGAR". Content analysis based on inductive coding was used to classify the responses into categories and dimensions. Frequency of mention (FM) of each category and dimension was determined by counting the number of consumers who mentioned words within that category or dimension. Responses were classified into 53 categories, which were subsequently grouped into eight dimensions: foods, sensory characteristics, negative health effects, negative associations, positive associations, nutrition, sugar and sweeteners, and others. The majority of participants (79%) mentioned specific foods and sensory terms of sugar. Negative effects were mentioned by 47% of the participants, while 20% related positive hedonic reactions and emotions. FM of the dimensions ($\chi^2 = 34.20$, $p=0.0019$) and categories ($\chi^2 = 210.38$, $p=0.001$), significantly differed between the experimental conditions, suggesting that exposure to packages with FOP nutrition labelling modified the participants associations with sugar. The results suggest that nutritional warnings can make the negative effects of sugar consumption more salient in consumers' mind, which can encourage them to select products with lower sugar content.

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