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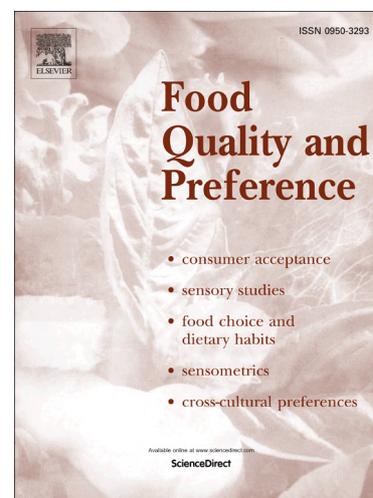
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**Does attention to health labels predict a healthy food choice?
An eye-tracking study**

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Abstract

Visual attention to health labels can indicate a subsequent healthy food choice. This study looked into the relative effects of Choices logos and traffic light labels on consumers' visual attention and food choice. A field experiment using mobile eye-tracking was conducted in a Dutch university canteen. Participants (N=48) walked to the shopping area wearing an eye-tracking device and chose one pack of yoghurt out of 12 from the refrigerated shelf. The packages varied in health label format (traffic light label, the Choices or no logo), fat content (low-fat, semi-fat and full fat), and brand. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: with or without time constraint. The results revealed that participants fixated longer and more often on the traffic light labels compared to the Choices logos. Participants in the time constraint condition demonstrated less visual attention to health labels compared to participants without time constraint. General Health Interest (GHI) moderated the effect of time constraints. The condition without time constraints increased attention to health labels for participants with high GHI, but not for participants with low GHI. However, visual attention to health labels was a poor predictor of the subsequent healthy choice. The results suggest that attention to health labels might indicate the interest towards an unfamiliar food label, but it does not necessarily indicate a healthier food choice.

Keywords:

Visual attention; health labels; food choice; General Health Interest; mobile eye tracking

1. Introduction

Helping consumers to choose healthy food is important for public health, considering the steady growth of diseases related to overweight and obesity. The World Health Organization considers nutrition labelling an essential part of its global strategy on diet and health (World Health Organization, 2014). Recently, the focus has shifted towards the front of the food package with simplified and visible summary information on nutritional quality. During the last decade the number of products with front-of-pack labels, such as traffic light labels and Choices logos, has increased substantially and continues to grow (Bonsmann et al., 2010; Lobstein & Davies, 2009; Van Kleef & Dagevos, 2015).

Health labels are intended to help consumers to understand the relative nutritional quality of a

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