Does the modified Nutrition Facts Panel improve consumers’ understanding?

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Motivation and Objectives

- The FDA recently passed legislation to update the format of the Nutrition Facts Panel (NFP) for the first time since 1992.
- Major changes include: placing more emphasis on calories and serving size; removing calories from fat; including added sugars content; and adding a dual column label for some multi-serving foods.
- This study examines whether consumers understand the nutrition information on the modified panel better than the current panel.
- Independent Variables: nutrition knowledge, demographics

Results

- Objective comprehension was fairly high among consumers.
- Simple location tasks were easier for consumers to answer correctly than manipulation tasks using information on the NFP when assessing objective comprehension.
- Lower objective comprehension scores for modified panel explained by limited understanding of new added sugars information.
- No significant effect of the modified panel on objective comprehension when added sugars question is removed.
- Objective nutrition knowledge was positively related to label comprehension.
- The effect of nutrition knowledge did not differ by label condition.

Conclusions

- Though the modified NFP is intended to improve consumer comprehension of nutrition information, we do not find significant gains in comprehension. Rather, we find consumers struggle to understand the newly included added sugars information.
- For the modified NFP to improve consumers’ understanding and, ultimately, food choices, education will be needed to help consumers correctly interpret new information on the NFP.