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## Consumer understanding of health, nutrition and ingredient claims on sweet and savoury snacks: potential tool for encouraging healthier snacking choices

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### Abstract

Health, nutrition and/or ingredient claims are frequently used on prepacked snack products. Despite much research on consumer understanding of health and nutrition claims in general, consumers' understanding and perception of claims on biscuits, cereal bars and savoury snack products is not well understood. While most of these products are treats, healthier alternatives are increasingly available, therefore claims could be used as a tool to encourage consumers to select healthier snack products.

To assess whether UK consumers understand and accept the use of health, nutrition and ingredient claims on snack products, three online surveys (Toluna QuickSurveys, Wilton Connecticut), were conducted on each of biscuits (n = 175 participants), cereal bars (n = 183) and savoury snacks (n = 180). Participants were aged 18–74 years. Each survey comprised of 21 questions, which included the Consumer Understanding Test (assessing the understanding of specific claims). The Kano Model assessed how consumers felt when each claim was placed on pack and assessed how consumers perceived a snack carrying such claims in comparison to the same snack without a claim. Participants were also asked to provide details of the acceptable nutrition profile of snacks with each claim (i.e. maximum kcals, fat, sugar and salt) per portion of snack.

Participants did not fully understand health or ingredient claims. In the Consumer Understanding Test, 76% of participants correctly interpreted nutrition claims, while 64% and 19% of participants correctly interpreted ingredient claims and health claims respectively. Participants were more accepting of nutrition claims than health claims, potentially due to their increased understanding and familiarity with them. Six claims on cereal bars were rated as attractive on pack including four nutrition claims, plus claims on 'no artificial additives/preservatives' and '100% natural ingredients'. None were attractive on biscuits, with 'low sugar' and '100% natural ingredients' attractive on savoury snacks. Participants made incorrect presumptions about certain claims, e.g. perceiving low sugar products to contain artificial sweeteners or that vegan products were healthier. Older consumers were more health conscious and wanted more claims on pack.

In conclusion, consumer acceptability of claims on cereal bars, biscuits and savoury snacks varies by product and claim type. Nutrition claims are most accepted, with health claims least accepted. Acceptance of claims on biscuits was low, potentially due to the fact these products are seen as treats. Participants, overall, were cautious about the use of claims on snacks. However, responsibly used claims directed to more health-conscious consumers might encourage healthier snacking choices.

### Conflict of Interest

Hannah Thoebald & Olivier Lescop are employed by pladis global and provided input into the study design and analysis of the findings.