Typology of nutrition labelling

It is apparent from reviewing previous research into Front of pack nutritional labelling as a whole that it has never really been structured by a framework which takes into consideration what each of the different front of pack schemes are attempting to communicate. Rather, studies have focused on simply comparing one scheme with another and trying to establish a 'winner' using a range of metrics of what constitutes the best or most effective label. A recent study performed under the auspices of the pan European FLABEL project (Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life) attempted to address this by developing an labelling typology which would allow for the categorization and comparison of all possible types of nutrition labelling and combinations thereof, both existing and hypothetical[1]. This typology recognizes the inverse relationship that typically exists between the amount of nutritional information included in a nutrition label and the extent to which the label presumes to tell the consumer which foods are healthy i.e. how directive the label is about the food itself. This type of labelling can appear front of pack or be imbedded in a back of pack scheme. The typology proposes three categories;

Non-directive (see Figures 1 and 2) – Labels in this category contain detailed numerical information within the label for the consumer to process (typically on energy, fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar per serving). The absence of an overall decision on whether the product is considered to be healthy and the absence of any benchmarks on the nutrient levels with respect to whether they are in the food at a healthful level or not means the consumer is required to decide for themselves how healthy they believe the product to be.

Semi-directive (see Figure 3) – Labels in this category contain detailed numerical information within the label for the consumer to process (typically on energy, fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar per serving). The nutrients are also overlaid with some form of interpretative information/benchmark typically by way of colour or text, indicating whether they are in the food at a healthful level or not. Whilst these types of labels do not formally communicate an overall decision on whether the product is considered to be healthy, when all the nutrients within the label for a given product are colour coded 'red' or alternatively all 'green', they do communicate at a level more in line with the directive schemes.

Directive (see Figure 4) – Labels in this category communicate an overall decision that a product is considered healthy in relation to other products in the same food category, thus attempting to simplify the 'healthy choice' options for a consumer. Typically they do not display the detailed nutrition information that would be required to make a decision on whether the product is healthful as the presence of the logo itself identifies that this assessment has already been made on behalf of the consumer.

[1] Hodgkins, C, Raats M, Barnett J, Wasowicz-Kirylo G, Stysko-Kunkowska M, Gulcan Y, Kustepeli Y, Akgungor S, Brebion B, Chryssochoidis G, Fernandez L, Storcksdieck S (2009). *Derivation of a typology for nutritional labelling*. Reported prepared for the EC. Brussels: EUFIC

Figure 1. Example of a non-directive label: US back of pack Nutrition Facts label.

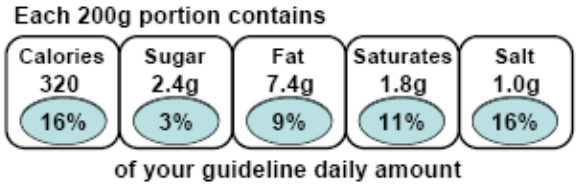

Figure 2. Example of a non-directive label: Guideline Daily Amount (%GDA) Label

Figure 3. Example of a semi-directive label: Traffic Light (TL) Label

Figure 4. Example of a directive label: Health Logo (HL) Label