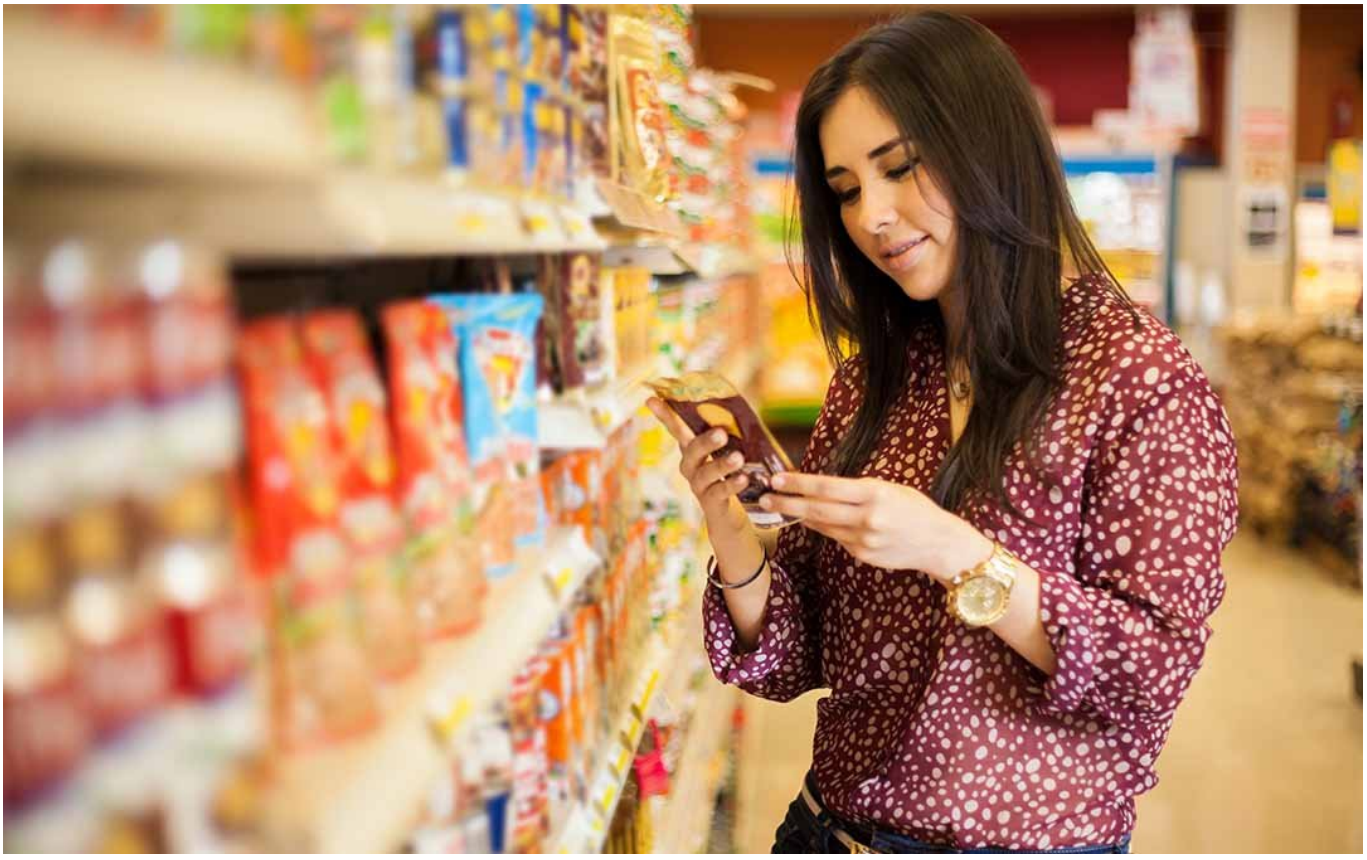
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# Global experts hail warning labels as most effective FOPL to help Indian consumers

Health Star Rating does not do well among Indian population and it will never support in achieving the goal of FoPL: Experts

By **Manbeena Chawla** | May 16, 2022



2

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**Health Star Rating does not do well among Indian population and it will never support in achieving the goal of FoPL: Experts**

Experts unanimously hails that warning labels are the most effective FOPL to help Indian consumers identify and avoid unhealthy foods. They also expressed their strong disagreement towards the food regulator, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for moving ahead to introduce a Health Star Rating (HSR) label in Indian market relying upon a limited study carried out by a business school by ignoring the global best practices and evidence around it.

To help consumers make healthier choices, Australia and New Zealand had introduced the voluntary HSR system in 2014. But studies shows that the system is highly flawed as unhealthy products are still able to get a high score. This is because the rating is based on the overall nutritional value, and the inclusion of healthy ingredients (i.e. fibre, protein and vitamins) cancel out the unhealthy ingredients (i.e. sugar, saturated fats and salt). More importantly, the system does not effectively assist the vulnerable consumers who need it the most.

These views emerged out of a webinar organised by CUTS International to hear to experts on the topic “Why Health Star Rating (HSR) is not suitable for India?”

George Cheriyan, Director, CUTS International, and a member of Food Authority (FSSAI) as a special invitee, while strongly objecting to some of the finding of the IIM A study, quoted in his key note address that the policy makers of our country should remember that Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contribute to 62 percent of total deaths in India; of concern are the preventable premature deaths, which account for a staggering 48 percent of mortality. Presently, the food regulator, who is having the mandate to ensure safe food to the people of this country, totally ignored the aspect of NCDs, linkage with food high in sugar, salt and fat, and the role FoPL can play, while choosing the format for FoPL. He said, it was generally felt that the very objective of all the stakeholder consultations chaired by the FSSAI, which were heavily dominated by the packaged food industry, was to come up with a labelling system, which is ultimately more industry-friendly rather than for addressing the needs of the consumers in India.

Dr Lindsey Smith Taillie, Assistant professor at the University of North Carolina**,** gave a detailed presentation touching upon different kinds of label particularly given the context touching upon the HSR label and the warning label. She pointed out that even after 8 years of implementation of HSR label in Australia there is still no evidence of it creating a significant impact on the nutritional quality of people's food and beverage purchases.

Infact this type of label promotes ultra-processed food products by confusing the consumers. She further added that a warning label, which has a wider global acceptance help to achieve two most important goals of a labeling system i.e., inform consumers and reduce consumption of unhealthy foods. She also highlighted few evidences to prove her stand and even spoke about a field experiment done in India very recently to test whether FoPLs helped Indian consumers identify 'high-in' foods and reduce intentions to purchase them.

Participants were randomized to one of five FOPLs: a control label (barcode), warning label, HSR, Guideline Daily Amount (GDA), or traffic light label. Fewer than half of participants in the control group (39.1 percent) correctly identified all products high in nutrient(s) of concern. All FOPLs led to an increase in this outcome, with the biggest differences observed for the warning label (60.8 percent) followed by the traffic light label (54.8 percent), GDA (55.0 percent), and HSR (45.0 percent).

The virtual webinar was attended by around 55 delegates from across the country and abroad, including health experts, representatives from national and international organisations, industry representatives, AIIMS, Indian Medical Association, academic and research Institutions from more than 14 states.

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Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/news/29/18918/global-experts-hail-warning-labels-as-most-effective-fopl-to-help-indian-consumers.html

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