Who Uses Calorie Information Available in The Restaurants to Choose the Menu?

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Objective

This study investigates sociodemographic characteristics of individuals who are more likely to use the calorie information available in the restaurants to choose the menu.

Significance

People tend to underestimate the number of calories they are taking when they eat out (Chandon & Wansink, 2007). Accordingly, they tend to exceed the recommended daily caloric requirement levels. Excessive intake of calories, coupled with a sedentary lifestyle, can increase the risk of obesity and other health-related issues. Requiring restaurants to post calorie information on menus may help reduce caloric intake and also reduce the incidence of gaining body weights (Auchincloss et al., 2013; Kreiger et al., 2013). It is reported that people tend to eat lighter when they were provided the calorie information (Liu et al., 2014). However, very little is known about the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals who are likely to use the calorie information available in the restaurants to choose menu.

Method

The 2016 Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey asked the respondents about whether the calorie information available in the restaurant help them to decide what to order (CDC, 2016). The survey also collected the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals and state of their residency.

We model the use of calorie information available in the restaurant by individuals to depend on their sociodemographic characteristics while controlling for state-specific unobserved heterogeneity. Since we analyze our research question as a binary choice, logistic regression is used to estimate the parameters.

Results

Preliminary results indicate that the use of calorie information available in the restaurant varies among respondents based on their socio demographic characteristics. For instance, females, whites, or more educated individuals had higher odds to use calorie information to decide their menu.

Conclusions/Relevance

Findings of this study are policy-relevant for various reasons. Since average American consumes nearly 33 percent of their calorie intake from the food prepared outside the home (USDA ERS, 2019), making them aware of the amount of calorie intake may help change their eating behavior. As our findings suggest the use of calorie information varies among respondents based on their sociodemographic characteristics, public agencies may find this finding useful to target their outreach efforts, aimed to improve public health. For instance, public agencies may focus outreaching to the sociodemographic groups who are less likely to be influenced by the calorie information available in the restaurants and educate them about the consequences of taking excessive calories.

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