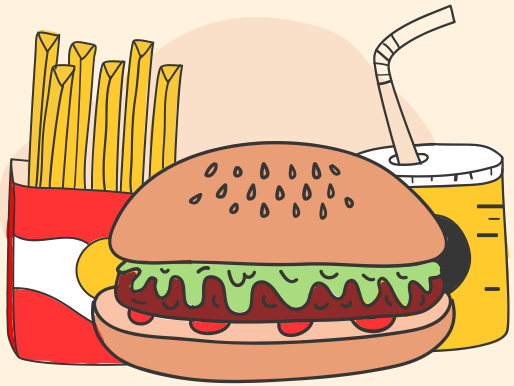


Seeing calories, choosing differently?

What a menu experiment can and cannot tell us about public health

Macey Clarke | BA (Hons) Health and Social Care (Public Health) | Intelligence Analyst

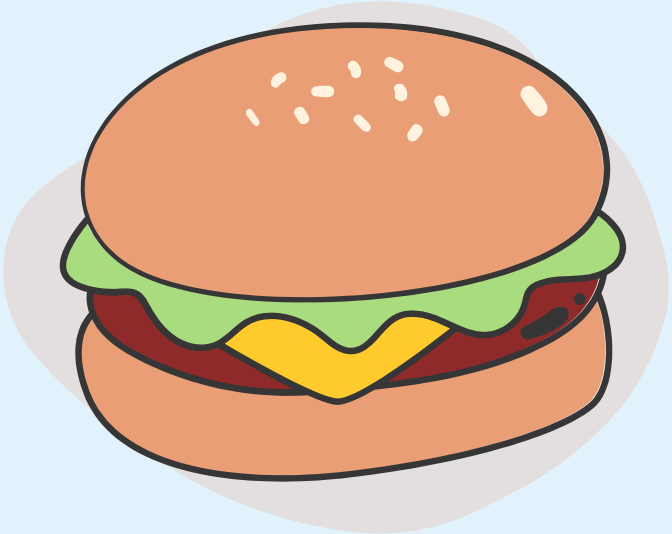
Latest McDonald's UK Menu With Prices

Item Name	Calories	Price (£)	Item Name	Calories	Price (£)
 Big Mac	551 kcal	£5.99	 McPlant (Vegan)	470 kcal	£4.79
 Quarter Pounder with Cheese	520 kcal	£5.99	 Chicken Big Mac	540 kcal	£5.59
 McChicken Sandwich	406 kcal	£4.19	 Sausage & Egg McMuffin	480 kcal	£2.90
 Filet-O-Fish	380 kcal	£5.29	 Hash Browns	139 kcal	£1.50
 Cheeseburger	303 kcal	£1.39	 Fries (Small)	231 kcal	£1.59
 Double Cheeseburger	440 kcal	£2.59	 Apple Pie	236 kcal	£2.39
 Chicken McNuggets (9 pcs)	410 kcal	£5.99	 Oreo McFlurry	412 kcal	£2.09
 McPlant (Vegan)	470 kcal	£4.79	 Chocolate Milkshake	323 kcal	£2.29

mcdonaldsmenu-prices.co.uk

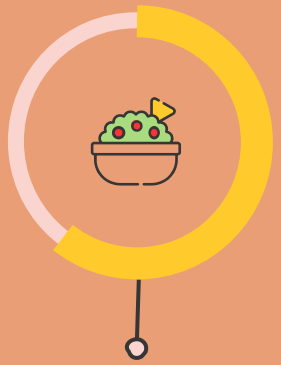
The question behind the menu

How do capability, opportunity and motivation influence 18-24-year-olds' hypothetical menu choices in response to proposed calorie labelling on the Isle of Man?



Why look at this on the Isle of Man?

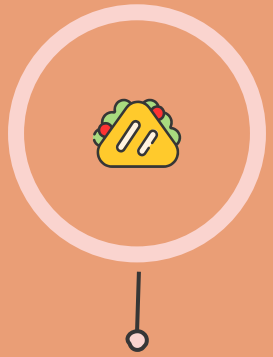
64%



Obese

On the Isle of Man

Food Environments



One part

Of a much wider picture

The island had not introduced mandatory menu calorie labelling at the time of the study (this remains)

Why did I focus on young people?

Independence

Transition

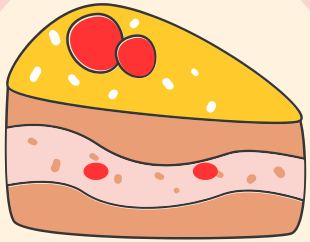
Choice



What did earlier research tell us?

Labels can increase awareness

Studies report mixed and often modest changes in selection or purchasing



Potential unintended effects also matter

Local evidence was missing for this age group

COM-B: why might the same labels affect people differently

Capability — Can I understand and use the information?

Opportunity — Does my environment allow me to act on it?

Motivation — Do I want to, or am I guided by habit or preference?


OUR BURGERS
Classic Beef Burger
820 calories
Grilled Chicken Burger
430 calories

Four things I wanted to find out

Aim 1

Did calorie labels change calories selected?



Aim 2

Did COM-B scores help predict who changed?

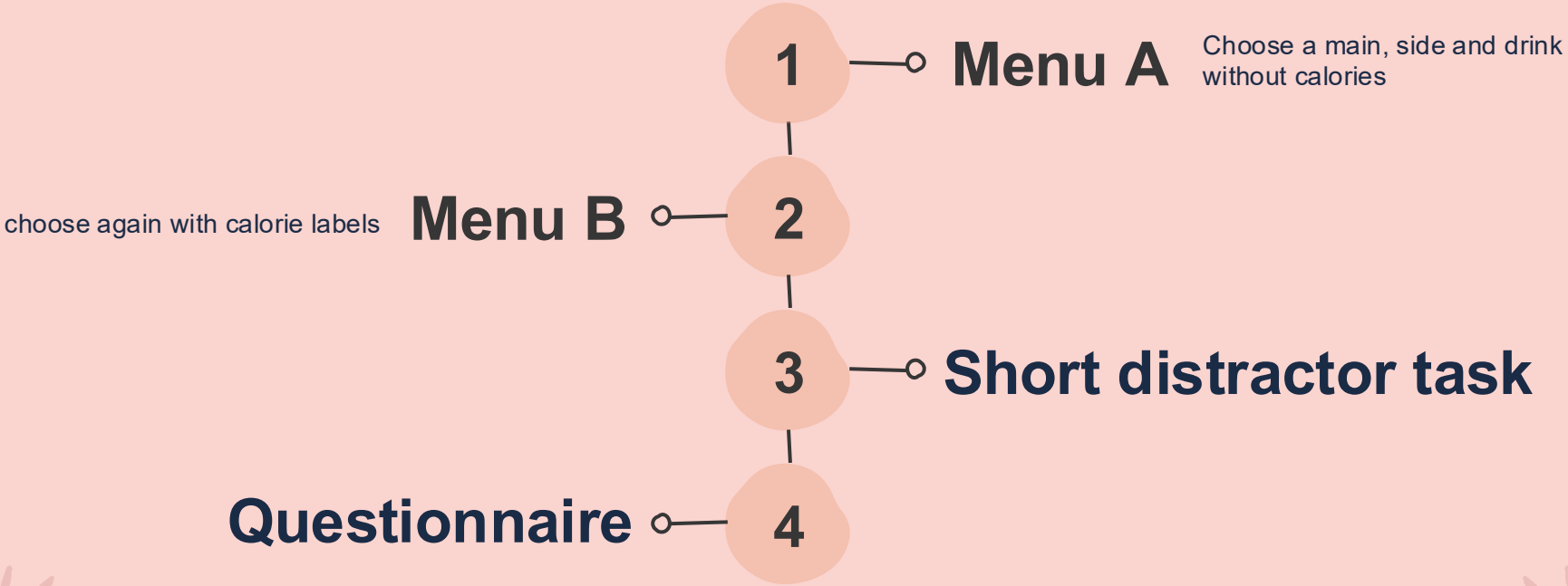
Aim 3

What reasons did participants give?

Aim 4

How much support was there for mandatory labelling?

How the menu experiment worked:



Responses

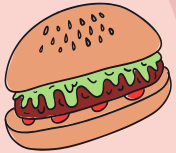
103 initial responses

Purposive recruitment through social media

94 in final analysis

18-24-year-olds living on the Isle of Man

Finding 1: The average choice change



923.97 kcal

Without calorie labels



790.23 kcal

With calories

Mean reduction of **133.73 kcal**

Finding 2: Noticing is not the same as changing



94.2%

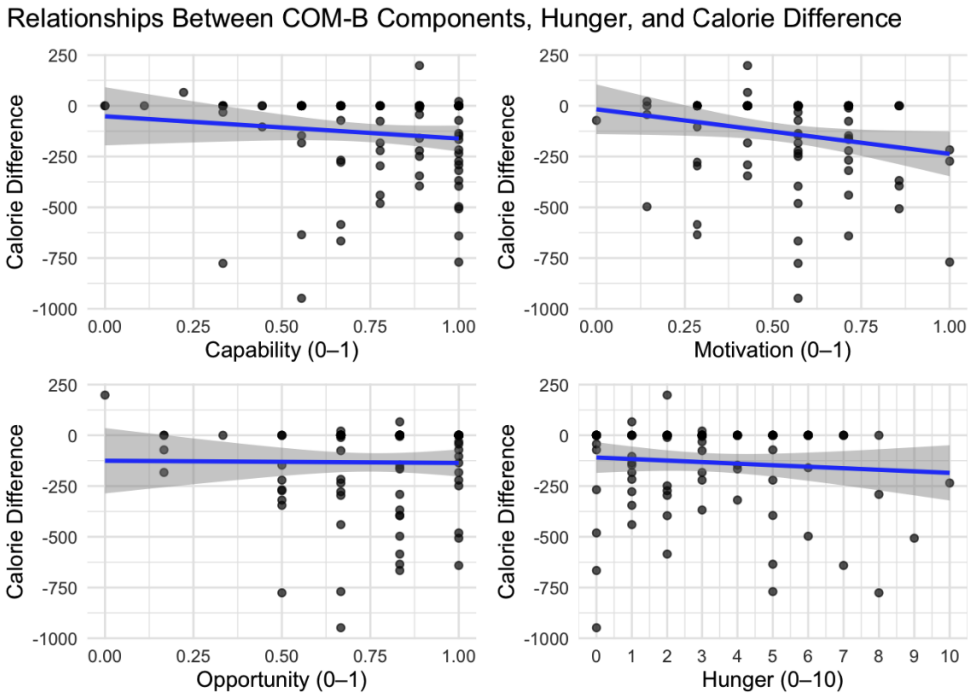
Noticed calories



53.2%

Still did not change their choice

Finding 3: COM-B did not necessarily change decision-making



5.4%

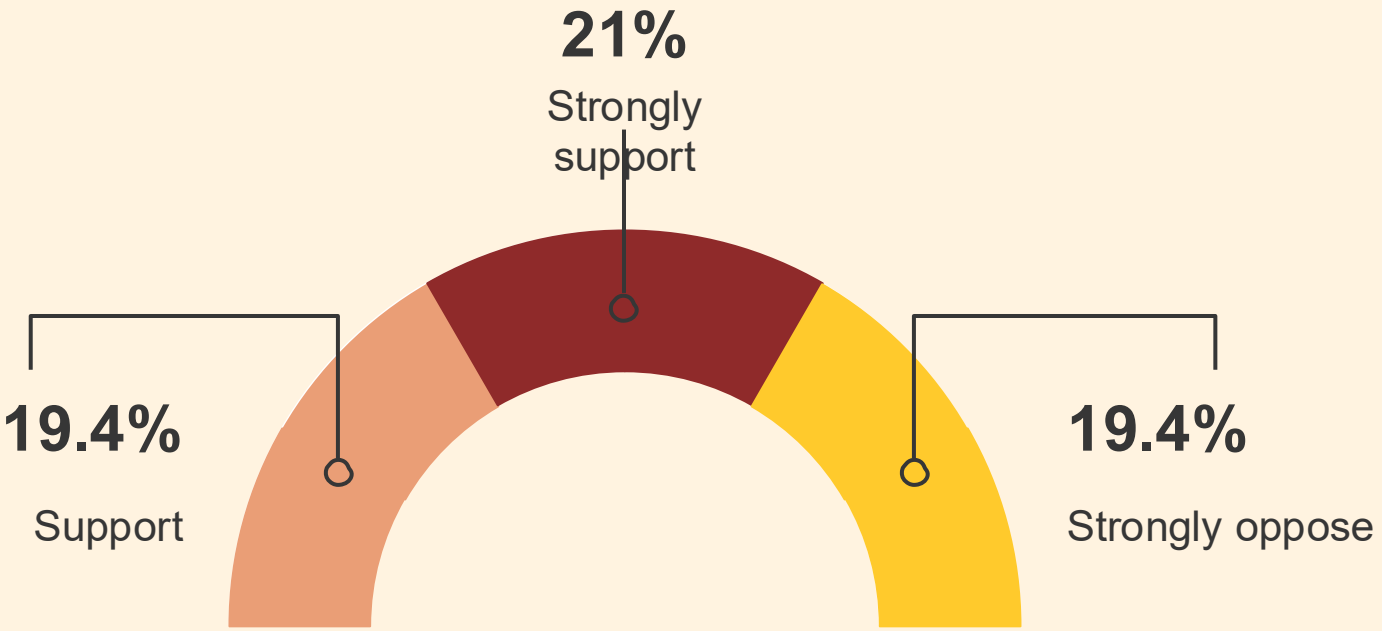
P = .289

Motivation was the strongest predictor

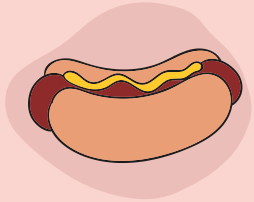
What participants said

Capability	Opportunity	Motivation
“I didn’t change my answer because the calorie information doesn’t matter to me”.	“Seen as there was no information regarding portion sizes, I would usually go for a smaller portion if I am eating out”.	“I wanted to eat what I wanted to”

Finding 4: Policy support was mixed



What else did participants think might help?

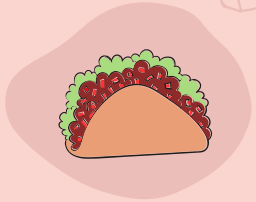


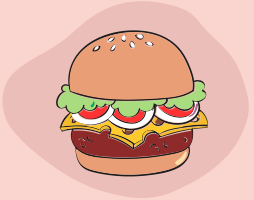
69.9%

Selected nutrition and healthy-eating education

54.4%

Selected regular health screenings

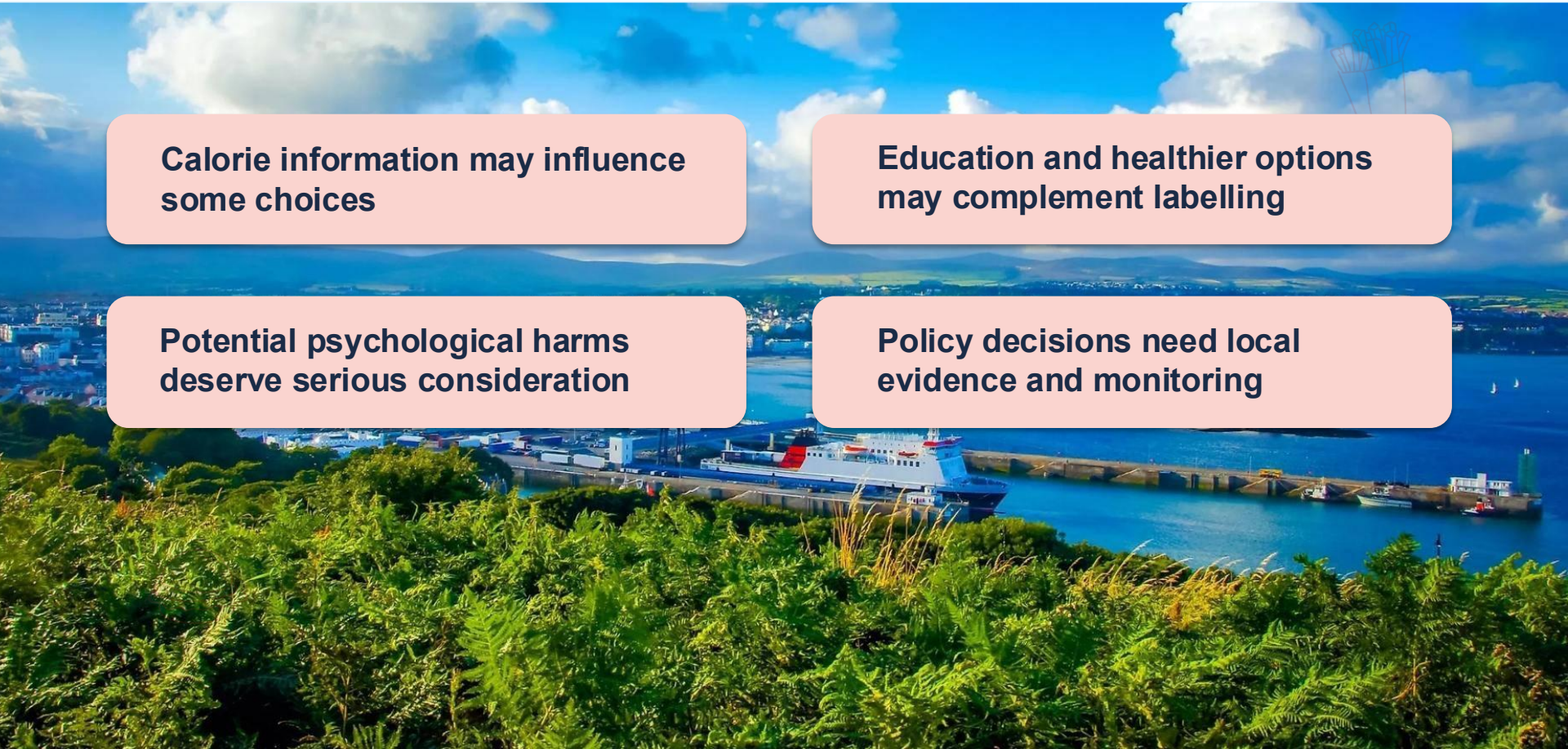




42.7%

Selected calorie labelling

What could this mean for the island?



Calorie information may influence some choices

Education and healthier options may complement labelling

Potential psychological harms deserve serious consideration

Policy decisions need local evidence and monitoring



- Each participant completed both menu tasks.
- COM-B provided a theoretical framework.
- Quantitative and qualitative findings were combined.
- Menus were adapted for the Isle of Man.



- Hypothetical rather than real purchases.
- Menu order was fixed.
- Small, female-heavy sample.
- One open-ended question only.
- Findings may not represent all age groups.

What should happen next?

01 Test real purchasing behaviour in food outlets

02 Recruit a larger and more representative sample

03 Use interviews or focus groups to explore experiences

04 Evaluate labelling alongside education and other approaches

The takeaway



1

133.73

Mean reduction in calories



2

COM-B

Did not predict changes



3

Mixed

Policy views



4

Local

Real-world task

Any questions?