



The Business History Conference @TheBHCNews

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Welcome to the BHC's first Twitter interview #newbook #bizhis

This thread compiles a series of Q&A posts with Dr. Xaq Frohlich about his book 📖

Any questions, comments, 👍 or shares are welcome!

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Welcome to the BHC's first Twitter interview 🌟
[#newbook](#) [#bizhis](#)!

Today @TheBHCNews @ShamiltonShane are interviewing Dr. Xaq Frohlich @ComedoErgoSum

Author of  ucpress.edu/book/978052029...
@ucpress



ucpress.edu
From Label to Table
How did the Nutrition Facts label come to appear on millions of everyday American household food ...

3:26 PM · Feb 19, 2024

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@ComedoErgoSum @ShamiltoShane @cruzmosu @ucpress Q1 ---> *What inspired you to write this ?*
“Do you have a personal connection to the topic of your book, and how has this influenced your perspective?”

A1/1

 **Xaq Frohlich**
@ComedoErgoSum · Follow

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Good questions! A European friend visited me in U.S. ~2005, was looking at food packages, saw the Nutrition Facts panel and said, “That’s so American!” I knew she meant several things: typical of our diet fad culture, scientism, and also our legalism, warning labels everywhere...

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A1/2

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... got curious and wrote a grad paper on the post-1990 NLEA history leading to the FDA "Nutrition Facts" label, but discovered there were two longer back stories: one, the shift in diet science in the 1960s ("negative nutrition", became my dissertation...

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...the other was the FDA's century long battle over what I came to call the "food-drug line", how to distinguish "drug" products, with strict market regulations, from standard "food" products, which were not suppose to make extreme health claims. This is the focus of the book.

Anatomy Of A Food Label



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... @ShamiltoShane

Q2 --->How has your training in STS (Science and Technology Studies) shaped the research in this book?

A2/1

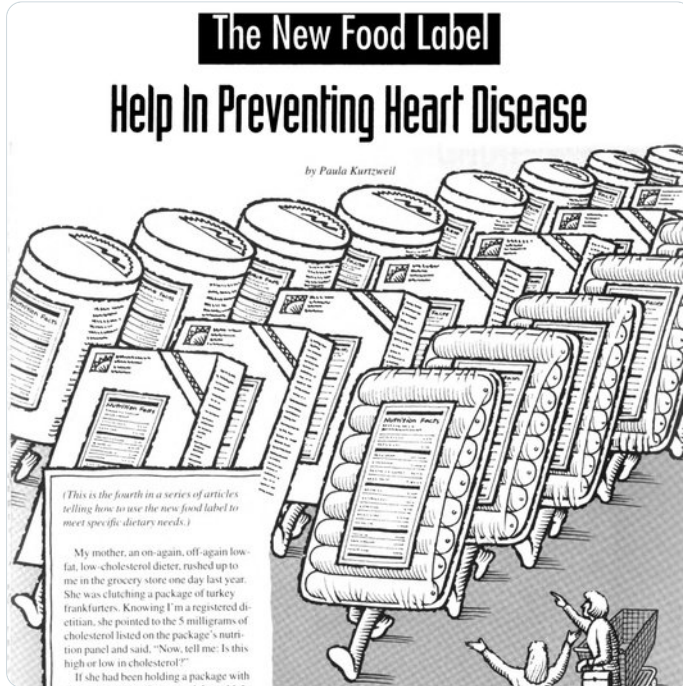


Xaq Frohlich
@ComedoErgoSum · Follow



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A big one is the book's focus on experts, how they produce knowledge that circulates in everyday life. The clearest example are "nutrition facts": 80 years ago almost nobody was talking about "cholesterol" or "saturated fats", today these are commonplace words to use with food...



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A2/2



Xaq Frohlich
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However, STS scholars often think they're the only ones looking at experts, scientists. My book studies two other groups of experts: market experts (advertisers, marketers, consumer experts) and legal experts (lawyers, courts). Each have their different angle on the food label...

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A2/3

 **Xaq Frohlich**
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I'm also interested in how things play a role in shaping people's experiences, a big STS framework. How does the design of the food label shape (configure) users' experiences with food? The food label is also an interesting junction between material concerns and symbolic ones.

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A2/4

 **Xaq Frohlich**
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What I've seen elsewhere called: "object-driven history"
[#museumstudies](#) [#materialcultures](#)

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Speaking of objects ...

Q3 ---> *Could you highlight some key #archival sources that were instrumental in shaping your manuscript?*

A3/1

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The main archive was that of Peter Barton Hutt at [@CovingtonLLP](#), a law firm that represents food industry and kept great historical records of legal debates in 1950s and 1960s on labeling. The [@US_FDA](#) Dockets and History Offices and [@USNatArchives](#) RG 88 were key for the FDA...

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A3/2

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Also [@NixonLibrary](#) for the 1969 WH Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health, [@CSPI](#) archives for 80s - 90s advocacy, [@TheHagleyCenter](#) was amazing for retailing history and consumer experts like Dichter; and nutrition scientists' papers at [@HMSCountway](#) [@RadInstitute](#) [@VandyLibraries](#)

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(reply from the audience)

 **gourmetmetrics**
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Corregulation sounds like symbiotic.

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A4/2

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... one of the conclusions of the book is that industry designs "functional" foods with regulation in mind (in particular the "food-drug line"). Labeling regulation drives innovation. There is not a "law lag", as is commonly thought...

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A4/3

 **Xaq Frohlich**
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...Instead I argue the interesting questions are, who should do the work of regulation, and how should it be done? Should regulating risks be done by the FDA? By industry actors concerned with brand management? By expert gatekeepers (such as doctors)? Or by consumers themselves?

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A4/4

 **Xaq Frohlich**
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It can be. This is kind of what Daniel Carpenter argues in his book Reputation and Power: big industry and the FDA depend on each other for reputation management. But it can also be antagonistic. It depends on the issue and the politics at the time.


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Q5 ---> *For a broader audience, what key insights or takeaways would you say they can gain from your book?*


A5/1

 **Xaq Frohlich**
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First, that labels are way more complicated than they appear. I want consumers who are curious about their foods and labels to read my book and discover a whole world behind them. There are a lot of experts working on those labels! I also want to bridge diff scholarly fields...

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A5/2



Xaq Frohlich
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For food law & policy scholars: my book shows how non-law institutions (changing public understanding of science) shape their practice. For STS scholars: how knowledge claims and contests of authority look different outside labs, in the worlds of advertising & regulatory science.



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A5/3



Xaq Frohlich
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And for a broader audience unfamiliar with business history, I think this book ads to a growing literature showing how business was one of several key 20th century institutions (along with science and law) to dramatically reshape modern living and pop ideas about food and health.

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A6/2



Xaq Frohlich
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Proponents of “informational regulation” (coined by @CassSunstein in 1993) believed gov info disclosures like FDA Nutrition Facts were more effective/efficient tools for consumer protection than command-and-control gov agencies directly regulating products like food standards...

<p>NUTRITION INFORMATION</p> <p>Per Serving Serving size = 8 oz Servings per container = 2</p> <p>Calories 560 Protein 23 g Carbohydrate 43 g Fat 33 g</p> <p>(Percent of Calories from fat = 53%)</p> <p>Polysaturated* 22 g Saturated 9 g Cholesterol* (20 mg/100 g) 40 mg Sodium (365 mg/100 g) 810 mg</p> <p>Percentage of U.S. Recommended Daily Allowances (U.S. RDA)</p> <p>Protein 35 Niacin 25 Vitamin A 35 Calcium 2 Vitamin C 10 Iron 25 Vitamin B₁ 15 Vitamin B₆ 20 Riboflavin 15 Vitamin B₁₂ 15</p> <p>*Information on fat and cholesterol content is provided for individuals who, on the advice of a physician, are modifying their total dietary intake of fat and cholesterol.</p>	<p>Nutrition Facts</p> <p>Serving Size 1/2 cup (114g) Servings Per Container 4</p> <p>Amount Per Serving</p> <p>Calories 260 Calories from Fat 120</p> <p>% Daily Value*</p> <p>Total Fat 6g 20% Saturated Fat 5g 25% Cholesterol 30mg 10% Sodium 660mg 28% Total Carbohydrate 31g 11% Dietary Fiber 0g 0% Sugars 5g</p> <p>Protein 5g</p> <p>Vitamin A 4% • Vitamin C 2% Calcium 15% • Iron 4%</p> <p><small>*Percent Daily Values are based on a diet of 2,000 calories a day. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.</small></p> <table border="1"> <tr><td colspan="2">Calories:</td><td>2,000</td><td>2,500</td></tr> <tr><td>Total Fat</td><td>Less than</td><td>65g</td><td>80g</td></tr> <tr><td>Sat Fat</td><td>Less than</td><td>30g</td><td>25g</td></tr> <tr><td>Cholesterol</td><td>Less than</td><td>300mg</td><td>300mg</td></tr> <tr><td>Sodium</td><td>Less than</td><td>2,400mg</td><td>2,400mg</td></tr> <tr><td>Total Carbohydrate</td><td>Less than</td><td>300g</td><td>375g</td></tr> <tr><td>Dietary Fiber</td><td></td><td>25g</td><td>30g</td></tr> </table> <p><small>Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4</small></p>	Calories:		2,000	2,500	Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g	Sat Fat	Less than	30g	25g	Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg	Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg	Total Carbohydrate	Less than	300g	375g	Dietary Fiber		25g	30g	<p>Nutrition Facts</p> <p>8 servings per container Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)</p> <p>Amount per serving</p> <p>Calories 230</p> <p>% Daily Value*</p> <p>Total Fat 8g 10% Saturated Fat 1g 5% Trans Fat 0g Cholesterol 0mg 0% Sodium 160mg 7% Total Carbohydrate 37g 13% Dietary Fiber 4g 14% Total Sugars 12g Includes 10g Added Sugars 20%</p> <p>Protein 3g</p> <p>Vitamin D 2mcg 10% Calcium 260mg 20% Iron 8mg 45% Potassium 235mg 6%</p> <p><small>* The % Daily Value (DV) tells you how much a nutrient in a serving of food contributes to a daily diet. 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice.</small></p>
Calories:		2,000	2,500																											
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g																											
Sat Fat	Less than	30g	25g																											
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg																											
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg																											
Total Carbohydrate	Less than	300g	375g																											
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g																											
1973 "Voluntary" Nutrition Information label	1993 Nutrition Facts label	2016 updated Nutrition Facts label																												

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Xaq Frohlich

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Today there is a lot more info about food available to consumers than in the 1970s, more food labels (in Chapter 6 I describe an explosion of “lifestyle labels” for many ethical concerns) and more info online, a problem of information overload and real doubts about reliability...



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Xaq Frohlich
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My book critiques Stigler's information asymmetry idea as limited by rational choice models of consumers. A consumer's relationship to food is emotional. The late @burkeybelsler who designed FDA Nutrition Facts panel called it a "government brand": it's about trust, not just info.

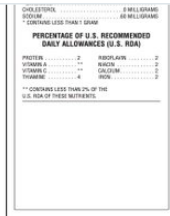


Figure 8: The Old Food Label



Figure 9

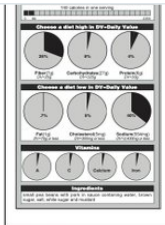


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13: The New Food Label

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Wrapping up the conversation with

@ComedoErgoSum

--- >> Would you like to highlight someone from your acknowledgments, and could you share a bit about their contribution to your work? #bizhis #scholars





Xaq Frohlich
@ComedoErgoSum · Follow



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Yes! JoAnne Yates, Deborah Fitzgerald, and Sheila Jasanoff were important for reading critically a 1st draft of the book in 2020. Roger Horowitz, fellow BHC and food historian, has been a huge support over the years, and Bruce Hunt a lifelong mentor...

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... @heather_paxson @rachellaudan both read chapters. Colleagues @Auburn_History and @utaustinihs did also. Julie Guthman and the STSFAN (stsfanetwork.wixsite.com/stsfan) gave feedback on Chapter 6. @ColdWarScience was an amazing development editor and @ucpress great for the book endgame.

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Xaq Frohlich
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I've never met or talked with them but @wcronon 's book, Nature's Metropolis (esp. the "A sack's journey" in the Grain chapter), and @mschudson2 's book, The Rise of the Right to Know, were big inspirations for my ideas on the history of food labeling and packaging...

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... other kindred spirits who work on food and STS, or FDA and regulation history: @brcohen95 @kirchhelle @dearclare @jays_tone @awmerck @LucRichert @AiHisano @aezeide @thebirdisgone @christyspackman @b_kagliwal @LisaHaushofer @singsingsolo @BartElmore @STS_News and plenty others

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Of course, above all the book is dedicated to my wife because she did so much “invisible work” these past years (i.e. COVID-times with baby = “emotional labor” “care work” “mental load”), and because I’ve learned so much from her (@Magali_ZV “There are no labels for you”).

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