

Influence of "Misleading Health and Nutritional Claims" Advertising on Children's Health

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of advertising misleading health and nutritional claims on children's health, focusing on how these claims shape dietary habits and influence long-term well-being. Marketing strategies often use terms like "low fat," "whole grain," and "natural" to attract parents and children, creating a perception of healthiness even when products are high in sugar, fat, or sodium. Children, drawn to colorful packaging and familiar mascots, develop preferences for foods that lack essential nutrients. The cumulative effect of these choices can lead to health issues, including obesity, diabetes, and dental problems. This paper explores the impact of misleading advertising claims on children's health, providing examples of common practices in the food industry and greater awareness among parents to counteract misleading advertising.

Keywords: Commercial, Misleading claims, Children's health, Advertisement.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising at its root simply seeks to inform and coax – to promote products, services, and ideas in ways that connect with the target demographics. Advertisements not only drive sales but can change perceptions, evoke brand-loyalty, and in some instances impose lifestyle choices.

There are many tactics for advertisements. one of them are "False health and nutrition claims". Health halo terms like "all natural," "low fat," "immune boosting," or "made with whole grains" are often present on packaging or in advertising, leading consumers to perceive

these products as healthy options, where the refreshment is likely to be high from added sugars, artificial components, or unhealthy fats.

This type of marketing has an impact on short-term intake but can be accompanied by long-term dietary habits that can be associated with negative health outcomes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Misleading labels create a "health halo" effect, making products seem healthier than they actually are (Chandon & Wansink, 2007). This effect often leads consumers to underestimate the actual caloric and nutrient content of these foods, especially when coupled with visually appealing packaging. Food and beverage companies frequently employ health-related language in advertising to convey a false sense of nutrition or health benefits. Terms like "low fat," "whole grain," "all-natural," and "fortified with vitamins" are commonly used to appeal to health-conscious parents and children (Harris et al., 2009).

The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that the high consumption of sugar-laden foods can increase risks for type 2 diabetes and dental problems among children. Studies further show that the continuous exposure to such foods, especially when advertised as "healthy," displaces more nutritious food choices, leading to vitamin and mineral deficiencies and poor dietary patterns that can extend into adulthood (World Health Organization, 2015). Childhood obesity, one of the most pressing health concerns today, has been linked to the frequent consumption of heavily marketed, processed foods that contain high levels of sugar and unhealthy fats (Ludwig & Gortmaker, 2001).

Children exposed to high-sugar and high-fat foods marketed as "healthy" are more likely to develop cravings for these types of foods and less likely to accept whole, nutrient-dense foods such as fruits and vegetables (Harris & Graff, 2011). This exposure leads to habits that may contribute to emotional eating, dependence on highly processed foods, and a reduced understanding of what constitutes a balanced diet.

The literature shows that food companies strategically use health-related claims in advertising to appeal to parents and children, often overstating the health benefits of products high in sugar, salt, or unhealthy fats (Harris, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2009). These claims are commonly designed to create a "health halo" effect, making products seem healthier than they are by focusing on a single positive attribute, such as added vitamins or fiber (Chandon & Wansink, 2007). Research by Roberto et al., 2010 shows that many parents are misled by these claims, especially when they are featured prominently on the front of packaging, leading to a perception that the product is a nutritious option for their children.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of the current study is to summarize the current situation regarding the impact misleading health and nutritional claims in advertising have on children's health. Specifically, it attempts to:

- To analyse typical advertising strategies used to sell food products to children and the creation of an impression about healthy eating.
- To investigate cognitive and psychological influences these false reports have on children, especially as to what they consider components of a healthy diet.
- To understand how claims drive parents' purchasing decisions and the difficulties in discerning truly healthy alternatives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do health and nutritional claims in advertising affect children's perceptions of food products, and what are the mechanisms behind this?
- How do parents give to health-related claims on children's food products, and what are the barriers to informed choice by parents?
- What are the short- and long-term health consequences associated with children regularly consuming foods marketed with misleading health and nutritional claims?

METHODOLOGY

A content analysis of infant and toddler food advertisements from various channels was performed. Coding categories of advertisements included product category, advertisement category, marketing information, and advertising appeal. The target age and health-related message of each product were coded. In examining the influence of advertising on children's food choices and subsequent health outcomes, it is essential to consider theoretical models that elucidate how advertising affects behaviour. Social Learning Theory (SLT), and AIDA Model provide valuable insights into these processes.

Social Learning Technique (SLT) emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and modelling. It highlights the importance of observing the behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others.

Application in Advertising:

- Children imitate role models who are portrayed as happy, healthy or strong after consuming the product.
- Advertisements create a social norm around consuming these products by showing peers and family members enjoying them.

The **AIDA Model** describes the steps an advertisement must take to engage a consumer: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action.

Application in Advertising:

- **Attention:** Bright colours, catchy jingles, and popular characters are used to capture attention.
- **Interest:** Intriguing claims like “Natural” or “Fortified”
- **Desire:** desire to consume the product.
- **Action:** Call-to-action elements like "Ask your parents to buy this!"

ADVERTISEMENT WITH MISLEADING HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL CLAIMS ON CHILDREN’S HEALTH

1. Sugary Cereals Marketed as “Whole Grain” or “Fortified with Vitamins”

Many popular breakfast cereals targeted at children, such as Froot Loops or Cocoa Puffs, are advertised with claims like “made with whole grain” or “fortified with essential vitamins and minerals.” While these cereals may contain a small amount of whole grains or added vitamins, they are often loaded with sugar. This marketing tactic can mislead parents into believing they’re choosing a healthy option, while frequent consumption of such cereals contributes to increased risk of obesity, diabetes, and dental problems among children.

2. Fruit Snacks Labeled as “Made with Real Fruit”

Many fruit-flavored snacks are marketed as “made with real fruit,” implying that they are a nutritious choice for children. However, these snacks are often made with concentrated fruit juices and added sugars rather than whole fruit. This gives them a high sugar content similar to candy. It increase the likelihood of developing diet-related health issues.

3. Flavored Yogurts Marketed as “Low-Fat” or “Probiotic-Rich”

Flavored yogurts, which are often advertised as “low-fat” or “good for digestion” due to added probiotics, can be misleading. While they may indeed be low in fat, they often contain added sugars or artificial sweeteners to enhance taste, which can undermine their health benefits. The emphasis on “probiotic” and “low-fat” claims can lead parents to overlook the sugar content, believing they are giving their children a nutritious snack.

4. Juice Drinks Marketed as “100% Vitamin C” or “No Added Sugar”

Juice drinks targeted at children are often advertised with claims like “100% vitamin C” or “no added sugar.” While these drinks may indeed contain vitamin C, they often come from concentrated juice or include naturally high sugar levels from fruit concentrates. This excessive sugar consumption results in weight gain, dental issues, and an increased risk of metabolic disorders.

5. Snack Bars Labeled as “Protein-Rich” or “Energy-Boosting”

Many snack bars, such as granola bars or “energy” bars, are marketed as healthy snacks, emphasizing claims like “protein-rich” or “energy-boosting.” While these bars may contain protein, they often include added sugars, fats, and artificial flavors. The high sugar content can cause blood sugar spikes and crashes, impacting energy levels and potentially leading to weight gain if consumed frequently.

These marketing tactics can foster unhealthy eating habits and increase the risk of diet-related health issues, underscoring the need for clearer regulations and consumer education.

PRODUCTS BANNED FOR FALSE NUTRITIONAL CLAIMS

Several food and beverage products have been banned, recalled, or reformulated worldwide due to misleading or false nutritional claims. Here are some notable examples:

❖ Vitaminwater (Coca-Cola)

Issue: Vitaminwater was marketed as a healthy beverage with claims like “nutritious” and “supports a healthy lifestyle,” despite containing high sugar levels.

Action Taken: In 2010, Coca-Cola was sued in the U.S., and the courts ruled that Vitaminwater’s marketing claims were misleading. Coca-Cola agreed to modify its advertising, dropping the word “nutritious” and clarifying that Vitaminwater was not a low-calorie or low-sugar product.



❖ Nutella (Ferrero)

Issue: Nutella was advertised as a healthy breakfast option for children, focusing on claims that it was a “good source of calcium” and contained “quality ingredients” like hazelnuts.

Action Taken: In 2012, a class-action lawsuit in the U.S. led Ferrero to settle for \$3 million, and they were required to adjust their advertising. Nutella agreed to stop misleading claims and improve clarity around the product's sugar and fat content.



Nutella Hazelnut Spread

350
g

❖ Activia Yogurt (Danone)

Issue: Activia yogurt was marketed with claims that it helped regulate digestion due to its probiotic ingredients, with ads suggesting specific health benefits that weren't scientifically supported.

Action Taken: In 2010, Danone settled with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and paid \$21 million. The company agreed to stop making unproven health claims and clarify that Activia yogurt did not provide unique health benefits over other yogurts.



❖ Kellogg's Rice Krispies and Frosted Mini-Wheats

Issue: Kellogg's claimed that Frosted Mini-Wheats "improved children's attentiveness" and that Rice Krispies "supported immunity" due to added vitamins. These claims lacked scientific evidence.

Action Taken: In 2010, the FTC ordered Kellogg's to cease making such claims. Kellogg's paid \$4 million in a settlement and was required to adjust its marketing to eliminate unproven health claims.



❖ Red Bull Energy Drink

Issue: Red Bull's slogan "Red Bull Gives You Wings" implied physical and mental performance enhancements that were not scientifically supported.

Action Taken: In 2014, a class-action lawsuit in the U.S. led to a \$13 million settlement. Red Bull agreed to issue refunds and modify its marketing to avoid claims that implied unsubstantiated physical performance boosts.



❖ Maggi Noodles (Nestlé) – India

Issue: In 2015, Maggi noodles were banned in India due to claims that they were “healthy” despite containing high levels of sodium. Additionally, the noodles were found to contain lead above permissible levels, a severe health risk.

Action Taken: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) temporarily banned Maggi noodles, leading Nestlé to recall the product and reformulate it to meet safety standards. The ban was lifted after compliance with safety regulations, and Nestlé was required to adjust its marketing claims.



DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The impact of advertising misleading health and nutritional claims on children's health would involve examining various datasets and studies that explore children's exposure to food advertisements, their dietary behaviors, health outcomes, and parental purchasing decisions. Here's a detailed look at key findings from available research and data-driven insights into how misleading advertising influences children's health.

- Analysis shows that nearly 80% of food advertisements targeted at children are for products with low nutritional value, high in sugar, salt, and fat.
- Research shows that children who frequently see advertisements for sugary cereals with claims like “whole grain” or “fortified with vitamins” are more likely to consume these cereals regularly.
- Research found that 60% of parents rely on front-of-package health claims, such as “high in calcium” or “immune-boosting,” when selecting foods for their children. These claims can lead parents to believe that these products are healthier than they actually are.
- Research shows that children who frequently consume sugary cereals and snacks, often promoted with misleading health claims, have higher rates of obesity and are more likely to experience dental issues due to high sugar intake. (Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in three

children globally is either overweight or obese, with high sugar consumption from advertised foods playing a key role. Misleading health claims can worsen this trend by leading children to consume more of these unhealthy products.)

CONCLUSION

Misleading health and nutritional claims on children's food products have significant and long-lasting impacts on dietary habits and health. These claims often mislead parents into believing that they are making healthy choices, while influencing children's taste preferences and food perceptions. To address these issues, stricter regulatory policies, transparency in labelling, and public education campaigns are essential. Only through a combined effort can we foster healthier eating habits for future generations.

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