



The Impact of Advertising and Media on Adolescents' Food Choices

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Dear Editor

In today's digital age, adolescents are increasingly exposed to a variety of advertising messages that influence their daily decisions, including those related to food consumption (Marzban and Emami, 2023, Tsochantaridou *et al.*, 2023). The role of advertising and media in shaping dietary habits has gained significant attention; particularly as unhealthy eating patterns contribute to rising rates of obesity and related health issues among youth (Kucharczuk *et al.*, 2022, Marzban and Masoomi, 2022). This letter seeks to highlight the profound impact of advertising and media on adolescents' food choices, underscore the potential consequences of such influence, and propose recommendations for mitigating its negative effects.

The influence of advertising on adolescents is unparalleled in its reach and intensity (Neufeld *et al.*, 2022). With the proliferation of social media platforms, adolescents are bombarded with targeted marketing campaigns that promote

energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods such as sugary snacks, fast food, and carbonated beverages (Bragg *et al.*, 2021). Research has consistently shown that exposure to advertisements for unhealthy foods directly correlates with increased consumption of these items, particularly among impressionable age groups (Molenaar *et al.*, 2021). This impact is compounded by the sophisticated strategies employed by advertisers, such as endorsements by influencers, appealing packaging, and promotional discounts that attract the attention of younger audiences (Demers-Potvin *et al.*, 2022).

Media, particularly digital platforms, creates an environment where unhealthy food choices are normalized and even glamorized (Molenaar *et al.*, 2021). Advertisements often present junk food as an essential part of a fun, social, and aspirational lifestyle (Maksi *et al.*, 2024). Adolescents, who are in a critical phase of identity formation, are particularly susceptible to such messages. As a result, they are not only drawn to these unhealthy

options but may also develop long-term habits that contribute to poor dietary practices (Kelly *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, these advertisements overshadow healthier food options, leading to a knowledge gap in understanding the benefits of nutritious eating (Kucharczuk *et al.*, 2022).

One of the most concerning aspects of such influence is the impact on health. The aggressive promotion of unhealthy foods has contributed to a noticeable increase in obesity rates among adolescents (Bragg *et al.*, 2021). Obesity is a major risk factor for numerous chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain types of cancer (Kelly *et al.*, 2024). Beyond the physical health consequences, poor dietary habits can also negatively affect cognitive development, mental health, and academic performance in adolescents (Demers-Potvin *et al.*, 2022). For instance, diets high in sugar and processed foods have been linked to poor concentration and increased anxiety (Kelly *et al.*, 2024).

Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach involving key stakeholders, including parents, educators, policymakers, and the food and advertising industries (Tsochantaridou *et al.*, 2023). Parents and educators play a crucial role in guiding adolescents toward healthier food choices by providing education on nutrition and fostering an environment that prioritizes balanced meals (Demers-Potvin *et al.*, 2022). Schools can integrate nutrition education into their curriculums, helping adolescents critically assess the messages they receive from advertisements and making informed decisions about their diet (Neufeld *et al.*, 2022).

At the policy level, stricter regulations on food advertising targeted at adolescents are essential. Governments should consider implementing guidelines that limit the marketing of unhealthy foods during programming or on platforms frequently accessed by adolescents (Demers-Potvin *et al.*, 2022). Lessons can be learned from policies in some countries, where restrictions on advertisements for sugary and high-fat foods during children's television programming have demonstrated positive outcomes (Tsochantaridou

et al., 2023). Furthermore, the promotion of healthy foods through subsidies, endorsements by influencers, and strategic marketing can help balance the narrative and encourage healthier dietary behaviors (Molenaar *et al.*, 2021).

The food and advertising industries also have a responsibility to prioritize ethical marketing practices that consider the long-term health of their audiences (Maksi *et al.*, 2024). Initiatives such as reformulating products to contain less sugar and saturated fat, as well as offering healthier alternatives, demonstrate a commitment to corporate social responsibility (Tsochantaridou *et al.*, 2023). Collaboration between industries and public health institutions can also lead to creative campaigns that make healthy eating appealing and accessible for adolescents (Molenaar *et al.*, 2021).

In conclusion, the influence of advertising and media on adolescents' food choices is undeniable and has far-reaching consequences for their physical and mental health. However, these effects are not irreversible. By implementing evidence-based strategies, empowering adolescents through education, and fostering collaborations between stakeholders, it is possible to counteract the negative impacts of advertising and promote healthier dietary behaviors. Adolescents are at a pivotal stage of life, and it is our collective responsibility to provide them with the tools and opportunities they need to make informed and healthy choices.

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