

The case for and against control on advertising aimed at children

[Sociology](#)



Report Examine the case for and against control on advertising aimed at children." By s of Date

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INTRODUCTION

Children in the United Kingdom spend more time watching television than they spend on any other single daily activity except sleeping (Kotz 1994), and the average adolescent spends more time watching television each year than attending school (Powers 1996).

While absolute consensus has yet to be reached on the impact of advertising on children and adolescents, many experts agree that television has a unique capacity to influence children both cognitively and behaviorally. Studies of cognitive effects generally focus on a child's ability to distinguish between commercials and television programming and to understand that advertising is simply a tool used to sell products.

UK GOVERNMENT POLICY ISSUES

The UK Government's 2000 National Diet and Nutrition Survey, confirms the poor state of children's diets. British children eat less than half the recommended portions of fruit and vegetables a day and the vast majority; have intakes of saturated fat, sugar and salt which exceed the maximum adult recommendations (Food Standards Agency, 2000).

These government policy estimates indicate that 9% of boys and 13. 5% of girls in England are overweight and the corresponding figures for Scotland are even higher (10% for boys and 15. 8% for girls), (Chinn 2001). The rate of increase in the proportion of overweight children is alarming and childhood levels of obesity in the UK have been described as ' epidemic'

(Dietz 2001).

FOR CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING

Advertising is not the only influence on children's diets and their health. Family and friends, teachers and other professionals, government and private sector policies all have their role to play. However, advertising also affects all of these influences, as well as appealing directly to children, and it is designed to be powerfully persuasive. There is also the creative side of advertising that needs to be considered. There are many spheres in the advertising world, and creative advertising for children is one of them (Hill 1997).

AGAINST CHILDREN'S ADVERTISING

Television content analyses undertaken by Leeds University have shown that child-orientated adverts are more frequently repeated and are more likely to use animation, pace and central characters, magic and fantasy, together with a wide range of emotional appeals (fun, action, adventure and achievement). The researchers conclude that children's television adverts are designed in a manner to engage attention and emotional response (Lewis 1998).

Reviews of related research confirm that young children, especially, do not grasp the motives behind advertising or realise that the products advertised may not be good for their immediate or long-term health (Bjurnstrom 1994). Advertising is often viewed as either entertainment or as a source of reliable information, or both (Young 1998).

CONCLUSION

Children have a right to grow up free from commercial pressures to buy – or

pester their families to buy – fatty and/or sugary and/or salty foods that put their current and future health at risk.

The UK Government needs to introduce legislation to protect children from advertising and promotions, targeted directly at children, which promote foods that contribute to an unhealthy diet. These include confectionery, crisps, savoury snacks, soft drinks and other processed products containing high levels of fat, sugar or salt, excessive consumption of which is known to be detrimental to children's health. Voluntary approaches are not working, so statutory controls are needed to end commercial activities which promote these foods specifically to children.

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