Content Analysis of Food and Beverages Advertisements Targeting Children and Adults on Television in Sri Lanka

Shamini Prathapan, MBBS, MSc, MD, Kumudu Wijewardena, MBBS, MSc, MD, and Wah Yun Low, PhD

Abstract
Introduction. Food marketing is one of the main factors in the increase in childhood obesity. The objective is to compare the strategies used for promotion of food and beverages advertisements on Sri Lankan television for children and adults. Method. Among 16 analog television channels in Sri Lanka, 50% of the channels were selected randomly after stratifying according to language. Recording was during weekdays and weekends. In total, 95 different food and beverages advertisements were analyzed irrespective of the channel. Results. Among all food and beverages–related advertisements, 78% were child focused, and among these 74% claimed health benefits. A statistically significant difference was found in terms of implications related to nutrition or health (P < .05). None of the advertisements contained disclaimers. Conclusion and recommendations. The Ministry of Health needs to pursue all food and beverages–focused advertisements for policy formulation and implementation.

Keywords
food and beverages advertisements, strategies, disclaimers

Introduction
Overweight or obesity in children, which is considered to be an epidemic, is attributed to the marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods to children.1 Food marketing targets children who are too young to perceive the truth in advertising.2 Thus, it strongly influences children’s food preference requests, which is known as “pester power.”3

The first television advertisement was telecast in the United States in 1941. Since then, there has been a strong influx of advertisements, with various strategies that promote food and beverages specially aimed at children. A few countries and even provinces within countries have decided that the evidence on the influence of advertisements on children is strong enough to take

1University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka
2University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Author:
Shamini Prathapan, Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.
Email: shamini@sp.ac.lk