Claims Of Mistaken Identity: An Examination Of U.S. Television Food Commercials And The Adult Obesity Issue

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Keywords
advertising, advertising appeals, advertising effects, advertising legislation, advertising regulation, advertising strategies, content analysis, marketing, mass communication, mass communication theory, cultivation theory, framing theory, semiotics theory, media, television advertising, television commercials, adult obesity, obesity, overweight, weight loss, health, health claims, health communication, health promotion, nutrient claims, public health, wellness, food, food advertising, nutrition, science, business, consumption, consumer affairs, consumer perceptions, consumer protection, Federal regulation, government

Abstract
Obesity is one of the major public health issues in the United States, often regarded as part of a global crisis. Companies invest billions of dollars each year towards television advertising campaigns aimed at convincing audiences how their ground-breaking discovery ‘battles the bulge’ or somehow offers an increased health benefit. This study examined how advertisers presented health-related claims, including health and nutrient-content claims, in U.S. adult-targeted television food commercials. The claims were compared to FTC, FDA, and USDA laws, regulations, and recommendations. A content analysis of food advertising was conducted of commercials from major and cable network programs broadcast during prime-time in the first quarter of 2009. The majority of claims match current regulations when compared to Federal references. The results show that Nutrient and Wellness claims were the most frequently cited. The type of benefit, Healthy Eating, emerged almost 3 times more than any other benefit type. This is also similar to those results which suggest advertisers’ intentions were to promote overall wellness in their content delivery. As such, the Wellness Approach was identified and conceptualized, leading towards full development of a Wellness Effect theory. Implications and future research opportunities are discussed on both a theoretical and practical level.

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US Preventive Services Task Force. Screening for and Management of Obesity in Adults, 2012. Available at: http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspsobes.htm. Accessed 12 5 12. Obese children may also experience more mental health and psychological issues such as depression and low self-esteem compared with non-obese children. Cost. The direct medical cost of overweight and obesity combined is approximately 5.0% to 10% of US healthcare spending. Important obesity-specific issues to consider on history-taking and examination are listed in Table D. Blood pressure. Measuring blood pressure is important, requiring appropriate cuff sizes for obese patients. In recent years, the food and beverage industry in the US has viewed children and adolescents as a major market force. As a result, children and adolescents are now the target of intense and specialized food marketing and advertising efforts. Food marketers are interested in youth as consumers because of their spending power, their purchasing influence, and as future adult consumers. Currently 15% of US youth are overweight, a prevalence nearly twice as high in children and three times as high in adolescents compared to 1980 prevalence rates. [13] Almost two-thirds (60%) of overweight children have at least one cardiovascular risk factor (e.g., hypertension, hyperlipidemia) [14] and the prevalence of type 2 diabetes mellitus is increasing in youth. The association between television viewing and childhood obesity is directly related to children's exposure to commercials that advertise unhealthy foods, according to a new UCLA School of Public Health study published in the American Journal of Public Health. The study, conducted by Frederick J. Zimmerman and Janice F. Bell, is the first to break down the types of television children watch to better determine whether different kinds of content may exert different effects on obesity. The researchers gathered data from primary caregivers of 3,563 children, ranging from infants to 12-year-o