

## **It is Time to Obligate the Warning Messages on Junk Food Packages and Advertisements: A Step to live long**

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### **Opinion**

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Business is always profitable when it is done with our inalienable basic needs- food, clothing, shelter, education and healthcare. To survive and thrive in huge competition, every company uses several promotional tools. For successful marketing of a product, four promotional tools are typically used- advertisement, sales promotion, public relation and direct marketing. The expenditure of food industry, whose marketing policy targets children and teenagers, is more than \$1.6 billion per year for advertisement alone [1]. Nearly all foods featured in advertisements targeted towards young people are junk foods and several researches suggest that food advertising have substantial impact on dietary habit of the young, particularly on increased consumption of snacks, fast foods and sweetened beverages and hence elevated increase in body mass index (BMI) [1,2].

The foods which are high in sugar, salt and fat such as chocolates, sweetened drinks, nut-based spreads and snacks such as crisps, chocolate bars or candies are referred to as junk food [3]. They are highly palatable, heavily processed, calorie-dense, nutrient-poor and deprived of vitamins. In developed, as well as developing countries, obesity is increasing at an alarming rate. About one-third children and adolescents of USA are overweight or obese and the rate of increase in diet-related diseases among the young is unprecedented [1,4]. Some studies showed that increased consumption of total carbohydrate, total energy, confectionary, soft drinks and fast foods has contributed to such rocketing of obesity [5,6]. To get a healthy diet, we need to focus on the sources of calorie, as sugar calories promote fat storage and hunger whereas calories from fatty meals induce satiety [3].

Junk food is known to harbor a number of metabolic derangements such as obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular diseases [3]. In a study conducted in Iran, it has been shown that junk food may even increase the risk of psychiatric illness and violent behavior in children and adolescents [7]. Taking junk foods during pregnancy has shown to increase fondness for high-fat diet in offspring and also the risk of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease in animals [8,9]. Whereas, homemade, nutritious food helps in control & prevention of diabetes mellitus [10].

Most of the junk food packages are colorful and persuasive. Packaging can also be an important promotional tool besides other promotional modalities that helps in creating favorable brand image. While comparing, Some even argues that a package may provide more promotional effect than advertising and hence the marketers strive to create packages that are viewed positively and enhance purchase intentions [11,12]. Warnings and disclosures are particularly important tools of communication in case of potentially hazardous products. Such communications counterbalance the positive corollaries attained from package design, advertisement or other promotional tools [12]. Small warnings within the frame of commercial speech right may transmit powerful messages and help in promoting social awareness.

Moreover, People get wrong message from the promotional activities by the companies. For instance, some soft drinks and beverages companies, like Coca Cola, Pepsi, Mountain Dew etc. sponsor several sports teams and games of physical strength [3]. People think

it's alright if one consumes soft drinks and have adequate physical exercise. This is utterly a wrong message. The least we can claim from these industries, a warning label with messages like "Fast food/Obesity kills", "Soft drinks/Extra sugar are injurious to health", "Obesity is a risk factor for diabetes" which will mitigate the deleterious effect of marketing to some extent. The primary intent of warning labels is to communicate health risks that are distinctly frightening and punitive so that consumers' perceptions and intentions can be influenced. In a study conducted in Canada, about one-fifth of participants reported to smoke in less amounts as a result of warning labels [13]. Same consequences should occur if warning labels are forced to make mandatory during food advertising and packaging. Moreover, children ask their parents to buy the food shown on advertisements both during advertisement and during shopping. As we know that food habit is usually developed within first five years of life, it is very important that the parents get some messages and tools as evidence to motivate their children and teach to balance the meals from early ages.

It will be harsh to ban junk food promotional activities altogether as it is also important to twist the tongue with a variety of tastes at weekends. Nevertheless, commercial profit at the cost of population health cannot be tolerated. If celebrity endorsement or association of junk food with sports cannot be intervened, warning message on each box delivered or on TV commercials should be made obligatory. Then, it will be solely the choice of an individual whether to consume rationally or indiscriminately.

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