

THE MARKETING OF SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES TO YOUNG PEOPLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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By

Aimee Lee Brownbill

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Abstract

Sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) consumption is high in Australia, particularly among adolescents and young adults. The need to reduce added sugars in the diet, with SSBs a notable contributor, is attracting increased attention from health agencies interested in curbing obesity and associated non-communicable diseases. While the marketing of unhealthy food and beverage products to children has been a focus of research and policy interest, little attention has been focused on the marketing of such products to adolescents and young adults. The increased usage and importance of social media for young people, paired with the unique opportunity provided by social media platforms for the continuous monitoring and facilitation of social interactions, consumer engagement, and peer-to-peer relationships, makes young people vulnerable to highly personalised and targeted digital marketing campaigns by the food and beverage industry.

This study investigates the ways in which SSBs are marketed to people aged 13-25 years old on Facebook through a content analysis of the top SSB Facebook pages ranked by Australian followers. Using a social constructionist paradigm, descriptive and thematic analysis was conducted on all official company posts made to these pages during the 6 month period of 1 January to 30 June 2015.

Results found that SSB brands share highly engaging content on Facebook which seamlessly integrates their content into the lives of young people today. Further to this, brands align their products with common sociocultural values and practices such as masculinity, femininity, friendship, and leisure, which are regarded as important by young people today. In doing so, they portray their products as having a normal place within the everyday lives of young people.

This study contributes to the evidence base which shows young people are specifically targeted in the marketing of SSBs. Further to this, it adds to current literature by drawing attention to social media as a relatively new medium through which SSBs can uniquely target young people in their marketing. The findings of this research can help inform future public health policy and interventions regarding the marketing of SSBs to young people.

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