

## The Impact of Nutritional Marketing Claims on Consumer Behavior and Food Choices Based on Medical Ethics

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**ABSTRACT:** The impact of claims made by nutrition marketing has a major influence in shaping consumer behavior and influencing food choices, but there is a fairly complex ethical side that needs special attention. Claims that are often marketed are related to solutions to health problems, but often simplify information or manipulate consumer perceptions. This will lead to unrealistic expectations and misinformation. Ethical issues also arise in vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, people with disabilities, or groups with minimal access to literacy. This group will be most affected, because the accumulation of misinformation will be seen in old age, such as health problems. The emergence of unrest regarding claims made by the marketing department has raised concerns about which priority is profit or public health. It is important for policymakers to balance commercial profit with health and of course integrity and transparency to prevent misinformation. We used a systematic review procedure, the literature was reviewed to examine the impact of nutrition marketing claims on consumer behavior and food choices based on medical ethics. We selected journals in the last 10 years through the PubMed, Elsevier, ProQuest, and Google Scholar databases with keywords: nutrition, health, marketing. Journals that do not meet the keywords will be excluded from the review. The study has shown that, while nutrition claims may encourage some consumers to increase their nutritional knowledge and choose healthier options, they may also encourage consumers to increase their overall food consumption and energy intake. The study has shown that, while nutrition claims may encourage some consumers to increase their nutritional knowledge and choose healthier options, they may also encourage consumers to increase their overall food consumption and energy intake. This has the potential to undermine efforts to address health issues such as overweight and obesity. This study explores the factors that influence shopper attitudes, by examining the impact of demographic, socio-cultural and individual attitudes on health claims made through nutrition marketing.

**Keywords-** Nutritional Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Food Choices, Medical Ethics

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Claims made by the nutrition marketing department have a significant influence on consumer behavior and food choices, claims that promise health benefits and nutritional fulfillment (Steinhauser et al., 2019). However, behind this there are ethical issues that are quite complex and full of questions. In recent years, marketing claims have raised ethical questions about transparency, veracity, and profitability versus public health.

This research aims to discuss why ethical problems can arise in claims made by the nutrition marketing department. The essence of the ethical problem lies in the potential for misinformation and manipulation provided. Although claims are often made to provide valuable information to consumers, they can also simplify complicated and misleading nutritional language to influence consumer perceptions.

For example, labeling such as “low fat”, “sugar free”, or “natural” can have a manipulative effect, so that consumers perceive the product as healthier than others. This can lead to expectations that are not entirely correct and undermine consumer autonomy, because it makes people choose food products based on incomplete or inaccurate information.

In addition, inaccurate information about health through nutritional marketing claims poses a danger regarding which is more prioritized, whether profits or consumer health. When profit is the primary driver of nutrition and nutritional messaging, conflicts of interest can arise, leading to the spread of biased or misleading information. This not only erodes consumer confidence but also undermines efforts to improve health and well-being.

Based on this, it becomes clear that ethical issues in nutritional marketing claims are multifaceted and require appropriate consideration. When consumers increasingly rely on labels marketed by the marketing department in choosing food, transparency is needed in communicating or providing good nutritional information. By overcoming these ethical issues, stakeholders can improve nutrition marketing to be fairer and more responsible and prioritize consumer health and safety above all else.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

Using systematic review procedures, the literature was reviewed to examine the impact of nutrition marketing claims on consumer behavior and food choices based on medical ethics. We selected journals in the last 10 years through the PubMed, Elsevier, ProQuest and Google Scholar

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databases with the keywords: nutrition, health, marketing. Journals that do not meet the keywords will be excluded from the review.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Result**

Based on the journal entitled "assessment of packaged foods and beverages carrying nutrition marketing against Canada's food guide recommendation", the journal discusses how many products use marketing language that follows nutrition marketing standards according to recommendations from the CFG (Canada's Food Guide). The results are more More than half of the beverage products in the sample show the use of marketing language. Nutritional content claims are the most common, followed by claims about the use of healthy ingredients (Franco-Arellano et al., 2019).

Comparative nutrition claims showed a negative value (i.e., a product is likely to “not conform to CFG standards” if this claim appears on the label), but was not significant ( $p = 0.42$ ). Products with nutrition Comparative claims were further analyzed to determine possible reasons for the lack of association and it was found that 56% of foods with such claims included snacks ( $n = 51/335$ ), meat, and meat alternatives including most ham, salami, burgers, bacon ( $n = 66 /335$ ), ice cream and desserts ( $n = 58/335$ ) and sugar and honey ( $n = 15/335$ ); This food category is not recommended in dietary guidelines. Such results are not surprising because, for example, all products containing sugar and honey were classified as “Other” and 78% of snacks were classified as Level 3 and Level 4.

When the adjusted model was analyzed, all types of nutrition and health claims were found to be significantly more likely to be “in line with CFG standards”.

According to the journal "Nutrition: ethical issues and challenges", for nutrition and related scientific disciplines, ethical considerations related to research are often complicated by various factors ranging from the use of experimental research designs that are too holistic to the inextricable relationship between nutrition research and marketing (Rucker & Rucker, 2016).

As a consequence, constant vigilance is required to assess and address apparent conflicts of interest. Additionally, there are few disciplines defined by cultural, religious, or political codification as much as nutrition. In many cases, research is closely related to marketing decisions, which may bring researchers into the marketing process. For example, those conducting commodity-oriented research often have to deal with marketing agencies, commodity boards, or other types of corporate affairs because of the importance of the investigation to producing material change or impacting stakeholders at some level.

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In this case, there are several questions that can be used as benchmarks that lead to ethical actions. As a marketing case study, the nutritional supplement industry and its lobbies are often viewed as the “gorilla in the room” of nutritional companies, especially given the strength of the efforts made to modulate political, regulatory, and judicial interference to produce positive outcomes on behalf of the supplement industry. Again, under DSHEA, dietary supplements do not require strict FDA approval before marketing the product. It is the company's responsibility to provide assurance that its products are safe and efficacious.

Based on the journal "Eating for the better: a social marketing review (2000-2012), The present study sought to identify both the ingredients for success and the potential impediments to social marketing effectiveness for healthy eating behavior, focusing on studies conducted over the last 10 years (Carins & Rundle-Thiele, 2014).

A total of 673 records were obtained from the search. After removal of duplicates and application of exclusion criteria, a total of thirty-four empirical studies remained. The final thirty-four studies were healthy eating studies published from 2000 onwards that self-identified as social marketing and were focused on examining behavioural change. Of the remaining studies, sixteen targeted children (aged up to 11 years) in school and child-care settings, three targeted adolescents (aged 11–19 years), seven targeted adults, two targeted the elderly (aged  $\geq 55$  years) and six targeted communities. Studies focused on changing behaviour in a number of areas: eighteen focused on increasing fruit and vegetable intake, fourteen focused on the consumption of healthy choices (e.g. snack or meal alternatives with lower fat, energy, salt, sugar or higher fibre), three focused on low-fat choices and eleven focused on other behaviours (policy making, whole grains intake, variety, novel foods, fibre intake, low sodium intake, consuming healthy breakfasts, healthy school lunches). Six studies targeted multiple behaviours.

Social marketing interventions were categorized into two subsets. The results for each subset are detailed next.

Subset 1 described social marketing as a planning process to guide the development and staging of components of their intervention, consistent with definitions of social marketing made by Andreasen and Herzberg. The distinguishing features of these studies was the use of a social marketing process that frequently commenced with consumer-oriented research to produce an intervention involving a full marketing mix. A total of sixteen (47 %) studies were classified into subset 1. Studies in this subset were characterized by a strong consumer and external (e.g. competition) focus which often involved competitive and environmental analysis to inform the development of the social marketing intervention.

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Studies in subset 2 identified themselves as social marketing but a clear marketing orientation was not apparent. The distinguishing feature of these studies was the use of the social marketing process (to varying degrees) to produce promotion, communication or advertising materials. A total of eighteen (53 %) studies were classified into subset 2. For example, social marketing techniques were used in the HEALTHY study to develop communications and promotion materials such as posters, banners, T-shirts and messages

The effectiveness of social marketing to change eating behaviour was next analysed to gain insights into factors that may enhance social marketing intervention success. Most studies reported some positive changes to healthy eating behaviour, although some acknowledged that these changes were small, mixed or did not follow a clear pattern.

### **Discussion**

While there is a growing body of literature that addresses the ethical issues in nutrition-related public health interventions, it is noteworthy that a significant portion of research in the field of nutrition marketing overlooks the ethical implications. This gap in the literature presents a critical area for further exploration and discussion.

Nutritional marketing claims have a profound influence on consumer behavior and food choices, often shaping dietary habits and health outcomes (Spiteri & Moraters, 2015). However, the ethical considerations of these claims, particularly within a medical context, are not always adequately addressed in the literature. This oversight can lead to a lack of transparency and potential misinformation, which can have serious implications for public health.

One of the key ethical issues in nutrition marketing is the responsibility of food manufacturers in providing accurate and ethically sound information to consumers. While some studies have explored this aspect, many others have not considered the ethical dimensions of this responsibility. This lack of focus on ethical considerations can lead to a situation where marketing claims are not always supported by robust scientific evidence, potentially misleading consumers and impacting their health.

Similarly, the role of regulatory bodies in ensuring ethical marketing practices is another area that is often overlooked in the literature. Regulatory oversight is crucial in maintaining the integrity of nutritional marketing claims and protecting consumers from potential misinformation. However, the ethical implications of regulatory practices and policies are not always thoroughly examined in the literature.

Moreover, the literature often fails to consider the broader societal and public health implications of nutritional marketing claims. These claims can significantly influence dietary patterns

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and health outcomes at a population level. However, the ethical considerations of these broader impacts are often not adequately addressed in the literature.

While there is a growing recognition of the ethical issues in nutrition marketing, there is still a significant gap in the literature. More research is needed to fully understand and address the ethical implications of nutritional marketing claims, particularly in relation to the responsibilities of food manufacturers, the role of regulatory bodies, and the broader public health impacts. This will help to ensure that nutritional marketing practices are transparent, ethically sound, and supportive of public health outcomes.

### **CONCLUSION**

The field of nutrition marketing is marked by a diverse range of approaches to ethical claims, leading to inconsistencies and potential confusion among consumers. These differences in approaches underscore the pressing need for systematic standards to ensure ethical integrity in nutrition marketing. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of ethical considerations in nutrition marketing, there is a significant gap in the literature and practice. Many studies and marketing practices do not adequately address the ethical implications of nutritional claims, leading to potential misinformation and adverse health outcomes. The lack of systematic standards for ethical claims in nutrition marketing poses a significant risk. Without these standards, consumers may be misled by inaccurate or exaggerated nutritional claims, potentially impacting their food choices and health. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the development and implementation of systematic standards for ethical claims in nutrition marketing. These standards should ensure that nutritional claims are scientifically accurate, transparent, and ethically sound. They should also provide clear guidelines for food manufacturers and regulatory bodies, promoting ethical integrity in nutrition marketing. The differences in approaches to ethical claims in nutrition marketing highlight the need for systematic standards. By implementing these standards, we can minimize the risk of ethical problems in nutrition marketing, protect consumers from potential misinformation, and promote healthier food choices.

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