

The prevention of childhood obesity would require stricter advertising regulations

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Spain ranks fifth among European countries for childhood obesity. Sugar-sweetened beverages and soft drinks are consumed by 81% of Spanish children weekly. Mireia Montaña and Mònika Jiménez, researchers of the Open University of Catalonia and the UPF Department of Communication, respectively, have performed a study based on the assumption that advertising is one of the factors that contributes to the obesogenic environment.

This study, published in May in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, correlated longitudinally the nutritional values of sugar-sweetened beverages and [soft drinks](#) and [advertising](#) discursive strategies between 2013 and 2018 for all Spanish advertising media.

"The aim of this study is to find associations between advertisements for sugar-sweetened beverages and soft drinks in different media (TV, leaflets, radio, Internet, etc.), the language used, and the products' low nutritional value. To do so, we selected campaigns carried out by the top 10 companies in these categories between 2013 and 2018 in Spain," the authors write.

The authors applied a mixed-methods approach that included a quantitative analysis of advertising spend data, a [content analysis](#) and a study of the discursive strategies used in advertisements. In addition, the Nutri-score system was used to determine the nutritional quality of the beverages. Nutri-score classifies products into colours ranging from red

to green, depending on their nutritional value. Red is for low nutritional value products, orange is for medium nutritional value foods and beverages, while green is for products of high nutritional value. Spain approved the application of the Nutri-score system in 2018.

The results were analysed considering the PAOS strategy, which is the standard for the prevention of childhood obesity that regulates advertising aimed at children under twelve. The main results point to an association between low nutritional value beverage advertisements and a discourse based on hedonistic elements. Happiness, the ability to make friends and to stand out from the rest of the group are some of the discursive elements used in advertising.

In addition, the results indicate that none of the advertisements analysed refer to the product's intrinsic properties, as determined by the regulatory framework established by the PAOS strategy. The analysis also determines that the companies supporting the PAOS code, and showing an initial commitment to respecting the [regulatory framework](#) contained therein, constantly violate it in their advertising.

The study concludes that in order to reduce and prevent [childhood obesity](#) in Spain, there is a need for tighter advertising regulation, especially with regard to the language used to present products and celebrity endorsements.

More information: Mireia Montaña Blasco et al, Soft Drinks and Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Advertising in Spain: Correlation between Nutritional Values and Advertising Discursive Strategies, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17072335](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072335)

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