

Disney's Cutest Faces Are Marketing Bad Food To Kids (Op-Ed)



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It's fact that fast food companies love to target children while simultaneously appealing to parents to satisfy children's desires out of "love." In fact, a new study done by the Children's Food Campaign showed fast-food companies used *Despicable Me's* Minions to market unhealthy foods to children. Despite Disney's promise in 2006 that 85% of foods licensing their characters would be healthy while the 15% remaining would be treats and other celebratory food items. Disney also pushes limits with Disney brands like *Frozen* and *Star Wars*.

The Plot against Children

The food and beverage industry spend a whopping \$2 billion each year on marketing to children. Meanwhile, the fast food industry alone spends \$5 million each day marketing unhealthy foods to kids. Not surprisingly, it works. Nearly half of kids' diets now come from unhealthy food options and less than a quarter of kids, aged 6 to 19, eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables every day.

Many companies market their food and beverages as healthy alternatives. This is particularly seen in cereal commercials

where whole grains combined with sugars to make breakfast “passing” for healthy while increasing risks of obesity, diabetes, and other related illnesses.

The Effect on Public Health

“Obesity of children in Europe and America are now at crisis levels, and many studies today blame television ads along with product placement in movies and video games, and through capitalizing on the licensing of franchise characters. Since many of these children do not soon control their eating habits, they grow up to become obese adults with health issues,” noted [Kristen Sanne](#).

What the Government is Doing about It

Most recently, Mexico banned companies from peddling their sugary and salty wares on TV. Even before this, the government added an unhealthy food tax. This made them less favorable to buyers, causing a drop in the consumption of soda and sugary beverages by 12% in just one year.

Other countries have looked on at this success and believe their governments should take similar action. However, in a country like America, built on free choices and the right to everything – including getting fat – imposing such laws might not prove easy.

Instead, the FTC spent the past few years instilling some fear in corporations of being reported for targeting children. This worked wonderfully for some time. However, the FTC plans to abandon this report.

The Ethical Standpoint

Many parents and the public at large call these practices by sales and [marketing](#) companies unfair and unethical. These companies continue to receive criticism for abandoning the best health interest of the masses in exchange for profit.

As a result, many work to change their image. Pepsi, for instance, sells a popular water brand as an alternative to soda; and McDonald's created a salad, which ironically contains more fat than even the Big Mac. So branding only becomes more deceptive creating the illusion of a healthier option, or actual healthier options just run alongside what already exists. This is not *change*.

As people become more health conscious and more information becomes available to the public, the food industry needs to change tactics. This means more than just using artificial sugars linked to cancer for diet soda, or selling organically-grown fruits dipped in harmful dyes after picking. Smart companies will lead this change while more reactive companies can expect to get left behind.