The role of socializing agents in communicating healthy eating to adolescents: A cross cultural study

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background

- Obesity is a global problem
- Estimated economic costs of obesity in developed countries: 2-7% of health care costs
- Obesity is related with psycho-social problems
Communicating healthy eating to children/adolescents

- Seen as a socialization process
- Socializing agents: parents, government, teachers/schools, peer groups, food marketers
- Health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO)
Obesity problem in Denmark

- Estimated that over 155 million overweight children and youth in the world
- Over-weight among children and adolescents aged 4-18 in Denmark increased from 11% in 1995 to 14% in 2000-2
- One in every seven children is obese
Government publicity in Denmark

- Aimed at balanced, increase fruit and vegetable intake
- Limited success
- Messages too abstract (Holms, 2003)
Obesity problem in Hong Kong

- Estimated that over 155 million overweight children and youth in the world
- In HK: obesity among primary school students in HK increased from 16% in 97/98 to 21% in 07/08
- Over one in every five children in HK is obese
- They also suffer from high blood pressure, blood sugar or abnormal blood fat levels
Hong Kong context

- Densely populated
- 42% of population aged under 34
- Educational system: exam-oriented, spoon-feeding, emphasis on academic performance
- Favorite leisure activities: TV, computer games, surfing on the Internet
- HK children extremely inactive
Government publicity in HK

- Launched since 2005
- 3 series of TVC that aim at parents and children
  - Healthy diet: 3+2 is the way
  - Healthy lunch box for elementary school students
  - Healthy snacks at schools for elementary school students
- No publicity targeted at adolescents
Healthy lunch box
Healthy snacks at schools
Key concepts and the link

- Perceived influence from socializing agents
- Attitudes toward heavy messages (from media)
- By theory of planned behavior, will have positive influence on behavioral intention
Research questions

- How do adolescents in Denmark/HK perceive about different socializing agents of healthy eating
- How do they respond to different advertising appeals
- The role of individualism/collectivism in responses to different advertising appeals
method

- Construction of 5 ads (popularly, love, achievement, news, and fear)
- Sample: grades 7-9 students (aged 12 to 15): 152 in HK; 234 in Denmark
- Response rate: 95% (HK), 98% (Denmark)
- Conducted in 2007
- Established scale of measuring individualism and collectivism at individual level
questions

- How often (socializing agents) encourage you to eat healthy food? (1=never, 5=very often)
- How effective are they?
- Do you like this ad?
- Do you think this ad is effective?
Figure 1. Frequency with which socializing agents encouraged the respondents to eat healthy

1=never, 5=very often
Figure 2. Perceived effectiveness of socializing agents in encouraging respondents to eat healthy food

1 = very ineffective, 5 = very effective
Socializing agents

- Parents and government often encourage them to eat healthy food (HK and Denmark)
- Parents and government most effective (HK)
- Parents and friends most effective (Denmark)
Every year, over 100,000 young people like you in the world have quit drinking soft drink. Come on, join us and enjoy a healthy life!

Consume less soft drink!
Stay in shape and stay attractive to the one you love. Soft drink has too much sugar and it ruins the body.

Consume less soft drink!
Don’t you want to be the winner? Consume less soft drink to keep your body fit for accomplishment.

Consume less soft drink!
Health news announced: 1 can of soft drink contains 7 teaspoons of white sugar. It can make you overweight.

Consume less soft drink!
Consumes less soft drink!

Dare to swim this summer?
Soft drink has too much sugar and it ruins the body.

fear appeal
Figure 3. Liking of the five advertising appeals

1 = dislike very much  5 = like very much

- Popularity: Denmark = 2.96, HK = 2.89
- Love: Denmark = 3.28, HK = 2.98
- Achievement: Denmark = 3.35, HK = 2.99
- News: Denmark = 3.02, HK = 3.1
- Fear: Denmark = 3.51, HK = 2.88
Figure 4. Perceived effectiveness of the five advertising appeals

1=very ineffective  5=very effective
Advertising appeals liked

- Love, achievement, and fear appeals more likeable (Denmark)
- All five appeals equally liked (HK)
Advertising appeals perceived effective

- Fear appeal most effective (Denmark)
- Fear and news appeals most effective (HK)
Value orientation

Danish adolescents more collective; HK adolescents more individualistic
Possible explanation

- the different approaches to primary school learning and socialization in the two culture
- Danish primary schools have traditionally been more attentive towards the weaker students and the creation of a sense of community among all students
- schools in Hong Kong have their roots in the British educational system, and focus on the development and performance of the individual student
findings

- Individualism scores did not contribute to the prediction of liking or perceived effectiveness of advertising appeals.
- Collectivism scores demonstrated positive correlation with liking and perceived effectiveness of advertising appeals.
- Respondents endorsing collectivism values are more ready to be influenced by persuasive health messages.
Conclusion: to promote healthy eating

- Two-pronged approaches: directly targeting the increasingly independent adolescents; or indirectly through parents
- Government: use fear and news appeal