



## REASONS AND NECESSITY TO HAVE CONTROL OF FOOD ADVERTISING IN CHILDREN TV PROGRAMS

**Children are often deceived by advertisements!**

It is a well-established fact that diets are important to child development and growth. Wellness and quality of life of children and youth today has changed in a way that we should be worried. That is, 97% of Thai children watch television more than other age groups do.<sup>1</sup> The period that children watch TV is also the period they consume cracker snacks the most. Because children spend most of their time learning from media, they tend to follow western culture and be stimulated by advertisements they watch. This influences their eating behavior, belief, attitude both in the long term and short term. From the monitoring and watching food and beverage advertising in children programs on free TV 2014, it is found that 94% of advertisements are advertisements for unhealthy food, not suitable for children's health. These advertisements employ techniques that persuade and invite children to consume the advertised products such as presenting celebrities, popular figures, cartoon characters, making the size of food larger than its usual size, emphasizing taste encouraging over-consumption and replacement of the advertised product to a meal, representing that the advertised product contain nutritious value, cheap, and the consumption will make the consumer looks superior to others who do not consume it. Moreover, some of them present sexually explicit content which is not suitable for young audience and indirect advertisement in every form.<sup>2</sup>



Children and youth, as targeted consumers under marketing schemes of food and beverage industry, may lack of maturity in taking careful consideration regarding the advertised information that promote consumerism and peer pressure. TV advertising is a crucial part that encourages consumption.



## Advertisements attract children's appetite

Information from a survey on TV advertisements targeted children in the U.S., Australia, and 8 other countries in Europe, finds that the frequency in displaying advertisements on TV (number of advertisements per hour) has a correlation with the overweight condition, especially advertisements of food and beverages containing high level of fat and food with low nutritious value. That is, the more the number of advertisements are shown on TV, the more likely that children will become overweight.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a study situations regarding advertising schemes on TV during children programs 2006 – 2008 finds that the form, frequency and the number of advertisement broadcasted has an clear impact on children's eating behavior.<sup>4</sup> The study result shows that food and beverage advertising in children program stimulates the desire for food consumption, especially food that lack proper nutrition, clearly affecting children's health.



## Food advertising in children programs remains unregulated

The concern over the problems mentioned above leads to an enactment of the Notification of the Government Public Relations Department on Control of Advertising B.E. 2551 (2008). However, once the Broadcasting and Television Businesses Act B.E. 2551 (2008) was enacted thereafter (as published in the Government Gazette on 4 March 2008), the Notification of the Government Public Relations Department became ineffective. It is, therefore, not surprising that there is a high number of advertisements during a children program and each advertisement is broadcasted for a quite a long period of time<sup>5</sup>, especially advertisements of food that has an impact on health. There are also advertisements that are contrary to other law such as the Food Act B.E. 2522 (1979) in case that the required warning is missing from the advertisement.



## The lack of tool to control advertising in children

TV programs is as if letting children faced danger by themselves.

**What do we get in return:  
the results of controlling food  
advertising in children programs**

### 1 Safeguard quality of life of children

The prohibition on advertising food that is unhealthy to children will reduce 18% and 14% of overweight and obesity problem in children the age of 3-11 years old, and 12-18 years old respectively.<sup>6</sup> Children will be better quality of life as they spend more time participating in other activities which benefit movement, creativity, skills in communication, thinking, decision-making, problem solving, and the emphasis on subjective value instead of materials. These activities include playing in the field, biking, reading, participating in activities with friends or parents.

The World Health Organization recommends that governments adopt highly cost-effective measures that manage risk factors at the population level. That is, control of advertising is to be implemented to manage consumption of unhealthy food which leads to chronic uncommunicable diseases. The results of controlling advertising are as follows:

### 2 Lower the government's expenses and social cost

The total social cost arising from the overweight and obesity problem amounts to 12,142 million baht, or 0.13% of GDP. It can be divided to direct cost from medical care which amounts to 5.584 million baht, whereas the indirect cost from death at young age and missing workforce amounts to 6,558 million baht.<sup>7</sup>

If control of advertising is in place, the government will be able to spend the money otherwise spent to cover the social cost above for many other development programs.





## The possibility of a measure that controls advertising

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### Other countries have implemented strict regulations on advertising

Other countries have adopted strict control of food advertising that targets children. The U.K., via Ofcom, controls food advertising by allowing broadcasting advertisements on the main-stream media (radio, TV) only for food that contains nutritious value in accordance with the regulation.<sup>8</sup> Quebec, Canada, is the only local government that enacts consumer protection law that prohibits all kind of advertisements that may mislead children the age lower than 12 years old, including food advertising to children in a TV program and in other forms which may persuade children in any way, an addition of nutritious information to consumers, and support of consumption of vegetables, fruits, fiber food, and exercise.<sup>9</sup> Denmark places control on advertising and only nutritious food will be permitted to broadcast in children programs.<sup>10</sup> Australia places control on the advertised content in advertisements broadcasted before, during and after a children program, and also limits the number and frequency of an advertisement. The U.S. places a limit on the advertising air time and only permits advertising of nutritious food in a children program.<sup>7</sup>

2

### Consistency with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Plan

Thailand is a member to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and has ratified the guarantee of protection of children's right. The government, therefore, has a duty under the Convention to duly provide protection to children. In addition, the support of physical and mental health of children is the mission consistent with the life-long learning scheme of the sustainable human resources development under the National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 11 and the Children and Youth Development Plan, which are public policies aiming at eliminating media that are socially harmful and supporting positive development of children and youth.



3

### How to start



The Broadcasting and Television Businesses Act B.E. 2551 (2008) empowers the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission in protecting children and youth through prescribing the air time of certain programs under section 34. In addition, section 37 allows the Commission to prohibit the broadcasting of programs that may affect morals and public order, contain obscene subjects, or present depressive subject against the public mind and health. For the control and monitoring of program quality, a clear mechanism and practical guidelines are set forth in section 39 which requires ethical standard and control within the broadcasting profession comprising the persons obtaining a permit to broadcast, program producers, and persons carrying on public relation occupation. The law requires that an ethical board is established and, under section 5(1) the board must evaluate the program quality by taking into account benefits to the society and public order. In any event, the protection for children and youth guaranteed under the Act has not been enforceable in practice. An improvement and modification should be done in order to facilitate enforcement as the legal provision has provided an effective way to control advertising as such.



# Q&A ABOUT ADVERTISING

# Q & A



1

## Control of advertising will put children program out of the market

It is argued that control of advertising will discourage sponsorship for children TV programs, but in reality, the government can implement measures or approve budgets to support TV programs that are beneficial to children and youth without having to rely on unfit advertising.

2

## Food and beverage industry can control itself

The lack of cooperation from the private sector including the manufacturers and advertisement producers can be improved by implementing measures that encourage self-monitoring between the manufacturers and advertisement producers to take into account protection of children and youth in using TV media. In addition, measures that raise moral and ethical awareness for advertisement producers should be encouraged such as offering an award of honor to advertisement producers who create moral and ethical advertisements for children and youth.

3

## Control can be done simply by monitoring contents and requiring warnings



Involving parties must take responsibility in effectively monitoring, following and inspecting contents and warning required by the rules on advertising of food and beverages in children programs, and implementing sanction under their power and duty in a timely manner. In addition, the process of following and inspecting may be carried on by way of supporting other entities or opening for cooperation with other agencies responsible for research or consumer protection, or other relevant social organizations, in order to strengthen the control of advertising as such

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