



Audience Insights on Unhealthy F&B Advertisements via Cultivation Theory: A Visual Communication Study

Muizzah Matusin¹, Nena Padilla-Valdez² & Mas Ayu Mumin³

^{1,2,3}Universiti Teknologi Brunei, Brunei Darussalam

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received Nov 25, 2024

Revised Dec 30, 2024

Accepted Jan 15, 2025

Keywords:

Unhealthy Food Advertising,
Visual Communication,
Advertising Regulation,
Young Adults,
Public Health,
Cultivation Theory

Conflict of Interest:

None

Funding:

None

ABSTRACT

This research explores how visual communication tactics and regulatory policies in advertisements may affect the perceptions of young adults in Brunei Darussalam on unhealthy food and beverage consumption. Following the regulations employed since 2021, this present research investigates its implications towards the young adult population of ages 18 – 26 years old who are also majorly exposed to persuasive content. The study analyses the role of visual aspects and their elements in advertisements in grabbing attention, shaping consumption behaviour, and the success and failure of the current regulatory framework, and its potential challenges in the dynamic light of contemporary media settings. Through a qualitative research design, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out among the local young adults to grasp their understandings and perceptions towards advertising, lifestyle dietary routines, as well as their awareness and opinions towards the existing regulations. Cultivation Theory served as the study's underlying theoretical framework to interpret how the process of long-term media exposure has the ability to play a role in consumers' attitudes and norms. The findings indicate that, although the respondents understand the health consequences of unhealthy food, visually appealing advertisements, especially those seen rapidly on digital platforms, continue to significantly contribute to their cravings and mindless dietary habits. Furthermore, the policies and regulations currently in place were viewed as insufficient as they did not have enough coverage in areas where permissive contents are still disseminated in digital spaces. With that concern in mind, a comparison with various reform proposals and guidelines published by international organisations, such as WHO and UNICEF, is considered to align with where the compliance and standards are not met.

Corresponding Author: Mas Ayu Mumin, University Teknologi Brunei, Jalan Rimba Gadong, BE1410, Brunei. E-mail: masayu.mumin@utb.edu.bn



© Muizzah Matusin, Nena Padilla-Valdez, Mas Ayu Mumin

This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA 4.0 international license

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

In today's constant and rapid passing of information, the message that we consciously and subconsciously receive has an impact in shaping our behaviour and decision making in our daily lives (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013). Part of media that we are constantly exposed to are displays of advertisements in our surroundings. Whether in physical or digital forms, the imagery, color, typography, and overall features are strategically adopted to appeal to its viewers' desires (Chen, Ponomarenko and Ahlstrom, 2024). However, when it

comes to the display of products like processed or junk food, the effectiveness of the marketing strategy has come under scrutiny due to its negative impact towards public health concerns (Deshpande et al., 2023). For that reason, in 2021, the Brunei Government has implemented a detailed regulation to limit the promotions of unhealthy food and beverages, particularly its exposure to vulnerable groups like children to address the rising concerns of poor dietary habits and non-communicable diseases (Shareen and Ain, 2021).

The broader contribution of the advertising policy extends to all other demographics of the population, including young adults, aged 18-26 years old. This demographic is set to be at the stage of growing their independence, including of their health consciousness (Tran and Sivistri-Elmore, 2021). Furthermore, with regular access to digital devices like mobile phones, it exposes them to unhealthy product advertisements that are not regulated to interact with its audience in a healthy manner. These varying factors at play could affect or define their behaviour as consumers- including their tendencies towards unhealthy food consumption (Montgomery et al., 2012). Hence, despite the regulations implemented, there exists a gap for opportunity considering the lack of attention in examining the interconnected factors of: visual advertisement images, extent of regulations, and its impact towards their audience's perceptions in influencing the behaviours within this particular age group.

1.2 Research Problem

In the unique context of laws regulated in Brunei Darussalam, there is an unhealthy food advertisement regulation enforced since 2021 in which it limits the abilities or features that could be displayed publicly. Although it was initially aimed at reducing the exposure towards children, there is a broader implication of the decree measures for overall consumer perceptions, including young adults, which has not been explored. Furthermore, though with the regulation in place, there is lack of attention on other affecting factors that play such as the regular exposure to unregulated digital contents. This raises a number of questions associated with the reciprocity between visual communication strategies and the advertising policy limitations, leaving a gap that remains unclear in understanding how it may shape its audiences' perception and consumer habits.

1.3 Research aims

The primary aim of this research is to examine the impacts of visual communication in advertisements of unhealthy food, and how the implemented advertisement regulation may come into effect towards their audience's experiences and consumption patterns, particularly of young adults within the ages of 18-26 years in Brunei. Through an analysis of the interactions between the factors, the study aims to offer a reflection of today's advertisement strategies and regulatory measures. In the context of this research, the effectiveness of the regulatory measures would entail as the enforcement's potential and ability to overcome varying platforms and mediums, the degree of awareness they create among the population, as well as the capacity to introduce measurable shifts in exposure to unhealthy food advertising and consumption behaviour.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Visual Communication in advertising

Visual communication techniques are increasingly utilized in today's advertising and marketing campaigns as it entails the marginal revelation of messages through the aid of pictures, colours, typography, and symbols that might appeal to the sentiments of appetency and critical thinking of their audiences. Due to that, many research has been conducted to bring light to its importance and role in influencing perceptions of consumers and companies' brands.

In a formal sense, visual communication pertains to the process of conveying messages using visual stimuli, appearing in various formats of media from static (printed), to dynamic (electronic). In the research conducted by Julia (2018) on the visual elements in advertising, it was emphasized that the role of visuals in brands indicate how it is developed and utilized to maintain a strong brand image through repetition of positive features. It was stated that effective visual identity is the key to having a consistent outlook that benefits brand recognition and in creating positive consumer attitudes towards brands (Julia, 2018). In another sense, visual communication acts as a key when it comes to identifying logos and imagery as a branding dimension that holds the attention-grabbing capacity meant to help obtain consumer attention and guide their purchasing decisions (Marticulation, 2020).

It is an understatement to recognize the central role of visual elements in the creation of their audience's perceptions from the messages conveyed. According to the findings recorded by Kim (2017) on visual communication in marketing, it was noted that the success of visual communication is an ideal unity of the components of the "Six Principles of Sticky Ideas"- which is a theoretical framework for creating

promotional content that can help audiences stir an emotional response as evidence of how visual communication strategies would work. As built on this by Yu (2007), the research on visual communication design strategies in human-centred approaches in branding and marketing presented that emotional appeal and logical reasons are involved in order to create a competitive advantage within product markets. This dual appeal also enables visuals to not only evoke consumers' emotions, but also in capturing their practical behaviours in purchases. Additionally, Marciszewska and Marciszewski (2021) also states that visual communication functions are not limited to influence purchases but also play a role in shaping their social perceptions. Therefore, the emotive correlations brought about by visual components are useful in defining consumer behaviour, proposing that visuals are both a marketing strategy and a cultural force.

It is notable that signs and images used in visual communication can always have different effectiveness depending on the cultural context. Sandoval (2024) found that the growth of the marketing industry across the world has promoted the change that information must be released in a way that would fit the needs of multicultural societies. It entails in ensuring that the different demographics in society portrayals would reduce cultural sensitivity in marketing techniques to fit the current diverse markets. This is also in support of Storhannus (2021) who discusses how culture shapes consumer evaluation of visual communication advertisements. Consumer perceptions in different countries are shaped by cultural factors and brands need to understand the expectations of the diverse audiences, in which the visual communication efforts are required to be adjusted accordingly (Storhannus, 2021).

Clark (2019) pinpointed that visuals within food advertisements are employed to meet certain rhetorical functions, whereby they utilize linguistic features that are deemed towards an effective promotion. These are the visual parts that appeal to the buyer's emotions and sensory input which consequently enhance the given advertising message. This work was then extended to show that advertisement imagery not only sells but also shapes and reflects social and cultural values through their use of semiotic approach to clearly explain how visuals function with an established framework of signals and codes construct and reflect social relations and promote their practices (Mendim & Mekahlia, 2022).

Thus, in the context of visual communication in marketing, it is not just about dominating the visual attention; it is about changing the viewpoints, establishing the bonds, and understanding the culture of overall consumers. Decades ago, visuals may have been a simple factor or element in interactions; but nowadays, they are essential features and have resonated deeply in the expressions of messages.

2.2 Effects of Advertising on Food Consumption

Various research looking into the effect of advertising towards food intake has been conducted in various contexts, including how communication strategies utilized may contribute to food selection and intake for consumers. Persuasion is usually one of the keys to achieving an effective advertisement, in which the commercialization likely involves the appeals based on passion, as stated by Oparine and Agbede (2019) in their research on fast food advertisements in South Africa. In their study, advertising puffery, one where an overemphasis on product appeal was discussed and it was suggested that to minimize these manipulative strategies, a new and clearer guideline should be established to encourage consumers to make better decisions.

Though decades ago, in 1996, research conducted by Young et al. found that advertising is only one of the input variables to children's food behaviour input, and that other factors such as individual variation and other environmental factors act as equally important determinants. Following that, Patnaik (2015) discovered that while television and social media advertisements may capture the attention of consumers, they cannot substantially enhance the sales volume to fast food units, hinting that qualities of such as food quality and proximity are more likely to drive consumer visits instead. This is according to Wray (2020) who posits that outdoor advertisements near schools are more salient to adolescents than visuals seen at home, and these images offer a connection between buying habits and attitudes about diet.

It is also important to take note of another important dimension: cultural factors that could influence food advertisements. Nyambura (2018) stated that their findings suggest that what they see on Kenyan television is not simply news or commercials, but a collection of complementary and concealed messages that people would go around to decode naturally. For instance, although the relation between an advertisement or consumption rate could not be established by pointing to the elements they are exposed to on the television, such as a drama or music, then these "advertisements" can be considered as belonging to the broader cultural configuration of food habits.

Livingstone and Helsper (2006) explained how the age difference in advertising literacy configures the response towards food advertisements, showing that although children in their teens are also impacted, it is to

a different degree than of younger children. It was stated that there is a difference in the persuasion across different age group, hence there is a need to use appropriate messages in the advertising content depending on audience's age target demography. This is further supported by these findings on food promotions having a great effect on children's preferences, as stated by Cairns, Angus, Hastings and Organization (2009) as they note that childhood advertising vulnerability exists and it has an impact towards buying and consumption rates. Not only do they support the understanding of the role of advertising in influencing the brand perception of young consumers, but also that such trend is observable internationally. McDermott et al. (2006) looked at "pester power," in which children, through their urges correlated with food advertisements, would force their parents to purchase undesirable foods. This advertising demand has been closely associated with junk food consumption among children that eventually leads to the cause of obesity; as further proved by Alhuneiti's (2007) article on the role of junk food advertisements in cartoon channels influencing children's unhealthy eating habits.

Consumption of healthy foods is proposed to be determined by the media to some degree, particularly in young adulthood. Kahiga (2016) supported that the media has a positive relationship to healthy eating attitudes more especially among post graduate students in Nairobi, with the internet being their most preferred medium of exposure to advertisements.

An accumulation of the above-stated studies implied that food advertising shapes consumer behaviour in varying groups and environments, including attitude and preference, as well as behaviour. Whether taking the form of encoded or oblique messages, food advertisements are associated with the choices of their consumers and overall health, explaining why both theoretical and methodological reflection of these marketing strategies and their contribution to trends and effects on the diet and state of health of different populations should be a matter of concern.

2.3 Effectibvnss of Advertisement policies

A review of recent studies presents a systematic analysis of several viewpoints with regards to the impact of advertisement bans in unhealthy food products, including junk food, alcohol, and tobacco products especially to young children and the youths. This review supports the idea that advertisement bans largely have different levels of impacts that consider factors such as the media, law regulations, and demographic disparity with the basic goal of reducing consumers' access to advertisements and influence.

From a public health model perspective, prohibitions of advertisements have proved to be a cost-efficient way of controlling negative consumption practices. According to Magnus et al. (2009), eliminating high-fat and high-sugar food advertisements perhaps ranks as one of the cheapest interventions, though the advertising industries are likely to resist. This assertion corresponds with that made by Coleman et al. (2022), who believe that statutory advertisement restrictions could thus result in enhanced healthcare savings; particularly in the fight against child and adolescent obesity.

Some studies find that the environment and the audience to which an advertisement is prohibited play a crucial role in the strategy's success. For instance, Amanzadeh, Sokal-Gutierrez, and Barker (2015) focused on advertising regulations in developing low-middle income country settings, where in many areas public health resources are often limited. Some claim that such practices as shifting responsibilities on industries and establishing stringent measures are useful, particularly for the most susceptible audiences like children at school. Liu et al. (2022), for one, found that the use of targeted bans at specific areas of the public domain, such as the 400-meter prohibition zone around school buses effectively eliminates exposure the unhealthy products and encourage health gains for children when bans are carried out in places that are most conspicuous.

Moreover, Goldfarb and Tucker (2011) discovered that while prohibition on alcohol advertising dropped the consumer intent by 8%, there was always the online advertisement to bridge the difference and discredit the ban. This is due to advertisers shifting and adapting to other levels of innovative media spaces, especially with the rising use of new online platforms.

There are several most observed issues concerning the efficiency of advertising bans. Researchers have identified numerous challenges in the ban of unhealthy product advertisements due to stakeholders' multiple and conflicting interests (Najafi et al., 2024). The studies emphasize the need for synergistic relations between health authorities and policymakers given that challenges can hinder the success of these bans.

Though some bands may hold some promise and potential for evidential improvements, certain research conveys their concern of mixed regards in its relations towards target behaviours. Nelson (2001) stated that

the prohibition of advertising may not actually lead to significant decrease in alcohol consumption, because advertising releases do not necessarily increase their market call. Yifru (2021) noted a similar finding in Ethiopia, where with the utilization of traditional media and implementation of advertisement bans had little impact on youth's drinking behaviour given their exposure to social media advertisings. Furthermore, Aye et al. (2022) observed that anti-smoking advertising campaigns were not very effective; in which the highest communication channels that were effective included social media and television while the lowest most ineffective methods included billboards to the youth.

Few researchers have also pointed out the cultural and social aspects in the impact of advertising bans. Yifru (2021) stated that despite enforced bans, advertisement remains a factor that impacts societal youths' behaviour, hence that these effects are conditioned by social factors. Najafi et al. (2024) stated that also due to social considerations, policy makers should involve influential stakeholders in the process of policymaking to address the issues within the same vein. Coleman et al. (2022) suggested a wider approach to include interventions in the physical environment besides complete prohibition of advertising.

The concept of effective unhealthy food advertising regulation has remained the main concern of global health strategies. Previous studies conducted by international organizations such as WHO (2020), UNICEF (2021), and ASEAN (2024), also noted that advertising restrictions are something that still requires further development. An effective regulation in this context is viewed as one with holistic coverage in both online and traditional platforms, enforced with clarity through observations and penalty methods, increases the awareness of the general population on both the policies and their objectives, and its overall capability to yield quantifiable results on the levels of exposure to unhealthy food marketing and its influencing behaviour. In cases where the building blocks are either lacking or inadequate, chances are that the regulation may lack practical value, especially in a dynamic digital space that youths are the most vulnerable (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2016).

The literature suggests that while advertisement bans can limit people's access to products of negative use, their efficacy is driven by factors such as enforcement, target, and media shift impacts. Stringent, population-wide measures backed up by targeted measures in certain settings seem to provide the most benefit to the community. However, advertising alone are often ineffective to alter behaviour, indicating the requirement of wide-ranging strategies targeting multiple socio-cultural factors in a population level alongside promoting healthful option to exist across the broad consumer culture.

2.4 Underpinning Theory: Cultivation Theory

Cultivation Theory, coined by George Gerbner in the late 1960s, proposes that the perception that people have about society and reality is in some way influenced by the content of media, especially television. The theory indicates that the possibility of a correlation between high levels of media content exposure and the understanding or a creation of narrative as reality exists, and that in the long term, this 'cultivated' vision reconstructs people's frames of mind, perceptions, and actions- configuring media as a strong sociocultural factor (Romer, Jamieson, Bleakley & Jamieson, 2014)

Although the theory initially originated its area of study around the contributions of television, the study conducted by Morgan, Shanahan and Signorelli (2014) in their research on Cultivation Theory in the Twenty-First Century explored how industrialized, and mass-media story telling in other media platforms, such as social media, is also highly perceptible in constructing messages that are able to shape people's perimeters of reality. At its core, Gerbner insisted that a stable and consistent message plays a significant role in shaping people's and society's outlook, even though the idea is diverse (Shrum, 2017), and today the theory remains relevant with the age of new media technology and social networks. Further pointed out by Nevzat (2014), even platforms such as Facebook today produces pseudo-reality narrated messages, modifying the theory in a contemporary use and context.

Contemporary academics have acknowledged the need to extend Cultivation Theory to incorporate new media technologies into consideration. Nevzat (2014) follows his observation claiming that social media platforms bring about an intricate form of curated and mediated content that may leave an impact on behaviour and perception. A broader understanding of how various media in different formats collectively create the audience's beliefs needs to be taken into account, especially in extending the theory to the digital scale.

The theory has also been integrated into several domains, including health communication. Cultivation research has been employed in research within the context of fast-food consumption and preferences. A study carried out by Russell and Buhrau (2015) found that an extensive television viewing of fast-food

advertisements carries a distorting relationship on adolescents' views of fast-food consumption. Elaborately, the more television an adolescent observes, the less negative perception they would have about fast food and its health risks. The findings are similar with research conducted by Alladin (2015), in which he noted that American television programming had a positive effect on the attitude towards fast food among adolescents, reflecting the correlation between their cultural norms and media exposure. In a similar context, Northup (2014) also demonstrated that regular television watchers often overlook or neglect healthy eating as messages in the media would vary in their contradicting diet information.

Dutta, Kaur-Gill, and Tan (2017) noted that cultivation effects in health communication further depend on cultural, peer, and educational factors. The results of their research echo the need to incorporate cultural differences into the regulation policies that are put in place. For instance, extending the evaluation of fast-food advertising messages content and observing how it is portrayed in the entertainment media helps to reduce predominantly negative perception of unhealthy foods (Dutta, Kaur-Gill, and Tan, 2017).

Cultivation Theory provides a solid basis in making sense of the relationship between media use and social attitudes. It is for this reason that its application in historical and present context means that the theory is still a valuable means of studying the role of media in health relevant to behavioural change.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This research adopts a qualitative method using narrative descriptive research to explore the visual communication tactics and policy implementation through insights from young adult audiences in terms of their health practices about unhealthy food advertisements. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a qualitative approach would best fit the study as it helps to comprehend the exploration of respondents' experiences, attitudes, and actions in aiming to identify the complex interaction between visual communication, regulated policies and the young adults of Brunei Darussalam.

3.2 Target Population

The target population for this study involves Bruneians within the category of young adults, age 18 to 26, due to their high exposure to digital media, advertisements, and the awareness of the regulatory policies. This age group is important for the assessment of effective visual advertising and the degree of sensitisation as young adults are active consumers who are growing in independence and in control of their dietary choices. Furthermore, this demographic may have a higher susceptibility to samples used in advertisements and therefore suitable for determining the correlation between the factors of this research (Smith and Anderson, 2018; Vaterlaus et al., 2015).

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured individual interviews were carried out in person and via online video calls to capture the respondents' personal views on unhealthy food and beverage advertisements, and their understanding of its visual communication elements and tactics. Additionally, the advertisement policy was also discussed to explore their awareness and reflections of its implementation. By providing open-ended questions during the interview, it allowed the respondents to express their perceptions and responses freely.

The interviews carried out took about 30 – 45 minutes per respondent, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. In order to triangulate and ensure the validity of the findings, a respondent validation method was used whereby upon completing the initial analysis, key interpretations and observable themes were shared to the respondents to verify the accuracy and resonance of the findings in regard to their intended responses. This process allowed for reflections of the participants and reduces researcher bias in the interpretation of data (Birt et al., 2016).

3.4 Data Analysis

The data and findings obtained from respondents are to be analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process in order to identify, describe and interpret any noticeable existing patterns and meaning within the qualitative data. This analysis includes a form of coding to discover any common patterns and groups of concepts belonging to the categories of research factors, theme gatherings and development from related codes that meet the requirements of research objectives, and an interpretation in which the themes should identify or create the wider picture of analysed findings.

4. Findings

4.1 Respondents of the study

This chapter presents the main findings from the qualitative interviews conducted with ten (10) respondents between the ages 18 – 26 years old. The research feedbacks focused on their insights about advertisements on unhealthy food and beverages in Brunei, particularly in terms of the effectiveness of visual communication tactics and the corresponding differences of the advertisement rules and regulations through their personal exposure experience. Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit ten (10) respondents, varying in gender and diverse occupational backgrounds. Individual demographics of the respondents are as summarized in the following table:

Table1. Demographic of participants

Respondent	Age	Gender	Occupation
1	23	Female	Undergraduate Student
2	26	Female	Junior Marketing Exec.
3	22	Male	Undergraduate Student
4	25	Female	Postgraduate Student
5	19	Male	Undergraduate Student
6	22	Female	Undergraduate Student
7	24	Male	Junior Developer (Tech)
8	25	Female	Freelancer
9	24	Male	Software Developer
10	26	Female	Postgraduate Student, Part-Timer

The findings are organized according to the research objectives and themes derived from the respondents' insights. The observable themes include Presentation and Understanding of Visual Tactics in Advertisements. Interpretations and Impact on Consumption and Lifestyle Habits, Insights on Advertisement Regulations and Digital Oversight and Suggestions for Regulatory Improvement and Health Promotion.

4.2 Presentation and Understanding of Visual Tactics in Advertisements

To address the first objective of this research of examining how unhealthy food and beverage advertisements are visually presented and understood by young adults in Brunei, this section presents an analysis of how the advertisements are designed and understood by the respondents, and the noted tactics that may prompt action for them to consume such meals. From the interview responses, several respondents focused on the fact that quality visual imagery, celebrity and influencer recommendations, and distinctive posts could grab their attention and psychologically appeal to trigger their cravings and hunger. Not only was it noted by the respondents, but they also interpreted them as deliberate efforts employed to appeal to their audiences within their daily media environments. Through an analysis of their comments, it explored how the visual strategies implemented are tailored to catch the attention of young adult audiences and subtly shape their attitudes and behaviours.

Table 2. Overview of Respondents' Exposure to Unhealthy Food and Beverage Advertisements

Ps	Primary Platforms for Ad Exposure	Frequency of Exposure	What Attracted Their Attention in the Ads	Remarks
1	Instagram, TikTok, Physical posters, billboards	5 or more per day	Vivid colours, dynamic visuals, catchy music, local influencer representations, trendy content	The ads seen does lead to purchases, e.g. promotional posts motivated purchase
2	Instagram, TikTok	5-10 per day	Bright colours (red and orange), close up shots of products, visual aesthetic	Watching online reviews has led to purchases and impulsive consumption
3	Instagram	About 10 per day	Watching people eat, appealing food visuals	Open to sampling promoted new meals; virtual persuasion is similar to friendly encouragements
4	Social media platforms	3-5 per day	Bright and vivid colours, HD images of food, languages	Timed ads (posts that come across during lunch time) may

			(crispy, spicy)	affect spontaneous purchasing
5	Everywhere, more so on Instagram; Banners/buses in public	About 5 per day	Portion sizes, portrayals of sensory effects, good editing, sound effects (crunch sounds)	Convenience and location may be a contributing factor for purchase
6	Online, malls, posters, standees	Minimum 7 per day	Bright colours, close up shots of food, catchy phrases, promotional offers	Occasionally can get tempted, but has improved practice of self-control
7	Instagram, TikTok, gaming apps	8-10 per day	Cinematic photographic shots, animations, catchy tag lines	Affected particularly when tired or hungry
8	Instagram, TikTok	5-7 per day	Bright colours, creative shots, influencer affiliations, design	Ads seen are deemed impactful in prompting immediate action
9	Instagram, mobile games	Few times per day	Appealing shots of food, bright and eye-catching colours, big texts, promotions and deals	Frequently encouraged to make purchases to satisfy cravings from promotional posts
10	Social media	3-5 per day	Colourful images or scenes, mentions of new flavours, aesthetic	Being active on social media and increase of exposure to ads leads to more purchases of food items

4.2.1 Visual tactics capturing audience attention

Based on the responses obtained during the interview, it was evident that visuals powerfully shaped how the respondents saw and paid attention to advertisements. It reflects how advertisers strategize the use of aesthetic designs and the right words to shape the food and drink choices of its audiences, in this context, of Bruneian young adults.

A few of the respondents stated that an attractive and colourful photograph of the product emphasized not only the tasty look of the meal, but also made clear of the brand, which quickly grabs their interest and recognition from the start. As mentioned by Respondent 5, the contrasting colours and visuals of runny cheese in such ads usually succeed to make them crave, even if they are not hungry to begin with. Respondent 3 added the portrayal of people eating ultimately drives them to decide, stating, *“Watching people eat them in ads easily catches my attention the most. They kind of create an odd pleasure for me that drives me to crave the food as well”* (Male, 22).

Most of the time, visual appeal is enhanced with graphics and motion, such as the fast-paced videos that are posted on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Respondent 2 shared, *“Bright colours, especially red and orange, always grab my attention. Or video ads that had editing technique of getting a crystal-clear close up of the food and high-energy song- that really sparks my attention”* (Female, 26). The respondent explained that style and presentation, in addition to content, affect how much attention the viewers would give to certain advertisements.

Furthermore, several respondents discussed how working with celebrities or social media influencers has an impact towards brand partnerships. For instance, Respondent 1 shared, *“They also tend to incorporate local influencers in their marketing, or hop on trendy content, making it seem much more connected with the audience”* (Female, 23). This implies the integration and collaborative efforts with recognizable local figures is also a promotional strategy for brands as it makes it appear more attractive or reliable. Hence, when they are tied to real individuals, it is possible that the relationships with their audience can strengthen through integrating a desirable lifestyle or trend as a marketing strategy.

In addition, the explicit notice of prices, available discounts, and promotional signs are also elements that could affect users' prompt for purchase and consumption. Respondent 6 pointed out, *“I wouldn't mind myself a “Buy 1 Free 1” offer”* (Female, 22). This response is consistent with citations of previous literatures, in which the use of big promotional texts, bright colour hues, and urgent terms such as *“today only”* or *“while supplies last”* are strong psychological strategies to prompt action from the viewers.

4.2.2 Young adults' understanding and interpretation of visual tactics

In addition to merely being aware of the visual tactics, some respondents also reported that through mobile, it allows advertisement contents to blend right in with other information that they consume. In which, Respondent 3 stated, *“I think I know I'm exposed to them, but I don't always realize it until later. Most of the time I do come across it online”* (Male, 22). This indicates that the advertisements online are often so similar to normal posts that it follows the idea of native advertising, so sponsored posts appear regular and unintentional among other posts to reduce resistance and subconsciously appeal to the audience.

Overall, the interviews suggest that the persuasion of unhealthy food and beverage advertisement in Brunei towards young adults mainly depends on the mix of not only featuring the product, but the strategic and technical aspects of the advertisement itself. This means using pictures, narratives, influencing collaborations, and promotions, that ultimately appeals to their audience and ensuring that they are noticeable on the platforms commonly used by young consumers.

4.3 Interpretations and Impact on Consumption and Lifestyle Habits

To capture the second objective of this study of obtaining insights from young adults on the advertisement on unhealthy food and beverages and its correlation on their health practices, this section goes over how the advertisements are reflected and how it contributes to their health practices. The findings examine the respondents' dietary patterns, frequency and reasons for their consumption of unhealthy food and beverages, and how their lifestyles may affect their decisions. From the span of habitual indulgence to conscious moderation, the data reflects a spectrum of behaviours from the responses based off different key contributing factors from convenience, emotional state, time pressure, health-consciousness, and their personal lifestyle routines, as well as their tendencies to consume, resist, or moderate unhealthy consumption.

Table 3. Overview of Respondents' Dietary Habits and Contributing Factors

Respondent	Frequency of Unhealthy Food Consumption	Main Factors	Remarks
1	At least 3 times/weeks	Convenience, cravings, emotions	Tend to choose accessible food options for a quick and satisfying fix
2	3-4 times/week	Accessibility, cravings	Typically has quick snacks as regular consumption of unhealthy food
3	Regularly / Almost daily	Convenience, affordability	Long school hours that keeps from prioritizing healthy diet
4	1-2 times/month	Nutritional impact on self	Conscious about keeping a balanced diet
5	3-4 times/week	Convenience, cost	Often snacks while studying; does not prefer to cook
6	Few times/week	Time	Only consumes fast food as a quick option; has become more health conscious recently
7	3-4 times/week	Convenience, time	Does not have a set diet and not health conscious, especially during busy periods
8	2-3 times/week	Time, mood, cravings, promotions	Eats home-cooked meals most days, but indulges in unhealthy food once in a while
9	3-4 times/week	Convenience, affordability	Prioritizes efficiency over nutrition; sometimes prompted by reminders to eat through food postings
10	1-2 times/month	Digestion, health awareness	Intentionally limits intake of unhealthy consumption; health concerns is a factor

4.3.1 Consumption patterns and coping mechanisms

One of the most prevalent patterns throughout the interviews was the interaction of convenience and the pressure of time for the respondents. All five of the respondents, 1, 2, 3, 7, and 9, talked about long hours of busy schedules and social situations that put them on the path of convenient and easily accessible food, in which the choices are usually high in sugar, salt, or fat. As commented by Respondent 9, *"I live off of easy food, especially at times when I work under a project with tight deadlines to meet"* (Male, 24).

Their dietary habits can also be described as of impulsive and emotional natures, especially when related to cases of feeling stressed or during leisure time. Respondent 2 said, *"Though, when I'm rushed or stressed, I typically grab a quick snack- which shows that I don't mind a regular consumption of unhealthy food"* (Female, 26). Such remarks show that evidently, food is occasionally used as one of the coping mechanisms to support their existing habits and manage stressful or busy periods.

Another strong driving force that shaped the respondents' eating behaviour are their cravings, which is frequently stated to be heightened by the visuals they see appearing online. Respondent 9 expressed vividly- *"At times when I wasn't even hungry, I thought I was because of the posts I saw on my feed. It's a powerful move and somewhat even subconscious"* (Male, 24). This implies that in most cases, consumption does not

necessarily come because one is hungry, rather due to the psychological cues such as visual or emotional stimuli they are exposed to in their environment.

4.3.2 Resistance and health-conscious practices

Although there is a notable pattern associated with convenience and impulsivity of dietary habits, there are also some respondents that shared their attempts to curb unhealthy eating and engage in more health-seeking behaviours.

For instance, Respondents 4 and 10 displayed an awareness of efforts to have a balanced diet as prompted by their health concerns or an active lifestyle change. Respondent 10 noted that she rarely eats unhealthy food following the developments of her digestive problems, indicating how personal health history may be quite a powerful driving force. In the same vein, Respondent 4 shared that her state of being contributed in her being more deliberate on her food choices, stating- *“My choices tend to be more on nutritional value based meals and how they may impact my energy and nutrition in general”* (Female, 25).

With that, a few subjects also referred to preferring home-cooked meals as one of the strategies to avoid consuming unhealthy food, which may indicate greater levels of self-efficient food management for the individuals.

Therefore, the results indicate different causes of food preferences of the respondents. Although unhealthy food was, in most cases, promoted by convenience and time pressures, some showed high levels of self-control and awareness about their health and employed certain practices to avoid unhealthy food and focus their choices on more deliberate, health-driven decisions.

4.3.3 Insights on advertisement regulations and digital oversight

To address the third objective of the study, this theme examines the differences between unhealthy food and beverage advertisements and the current regulatory policy in Brunei, and identifies any notable gaps as reflected by the respondents. Additionally, this sections also responds to the research questions on how the young adults interprets the effectiveness, limitations, and visibility of advertising regulations of unhealthy food and drink advertising regulations in Brunei.

The interviewed respondents noted that though the restrictions are implemented, especially in terms of its physical and public broadcastings, they also think that the circulation of unregulated advertisements in digital and social media content is poorly overseen. These reflections indicate that there is an observed disparity between the formal regulation processes and the experienced reality of digital media exposure, highlighting areas where enforcements may have been overlooked.

Table 4. Overview of Respondents' Awareness and Opinions

Ps	Awareness of Ad Regulations	Views on Effectiveness and Gaps	Remarks
1	Vaguely aware	Ineffective, lack of attention, requires improvements	Lack of control on social media makes the restriction ineffective as people still frequently come across ads online
2	Aware, but not of its details	Out-dated, ineffective	Technological advancements have evolved and regulatory oversight requires more effort
3	Unaware	Doubtful of effectiveness, there is lack of restrictions	Online ads are still released without restrictions, and the prominent amount nulls the regulatory efforts
4	Somewhat aware, acknowledges lack of it	Useful to lower exposure, but digitally falls short	Young adults are spending a lot of time online, and yet the lack of restrictions there shows that the regulation has not yet caught up with modern times
5	Aware of limits, but unaware of regulations	Null, ineffective	To their age group, it was deemed null as they do not consume traditional media as much as online platforms, where ads are still able to find them regardless
6	Aware	Poorly executed	As it mainly operates traditionally, it comes across as poorly executed as there are more ads online that is far more difficult to control. Reach is still present, only in different form
7	Somewhat aware	Inapplicable to their age group	It may not be as effective to young adults in

8	Vaguely aware	Ineffective	comparison to other age groups. Ads have only increased online and strategies have shifted to keep up with modern times
9	Vaguely aware	Not confident of its effectiveness	They are constantly flogged with ads and paid promotions online, which sometimes do not even appear like ads at all. New methods of marketing has evolved in narration Online contents appear to be a form of loophole. Though the regulation may change a few things, online promotions only grew as businesses changed their advertising methods
10	Somewhat aware	Requires an update for online reach	Reduction of physical ads evens itself out on online platforms, so a stronger enforcement needs to be made for further, digital reach

4.3.4 Awareness and understanding of current regulations

Although there are a significant number of respondents who were somewhat informed of the advertising regulations upheld in Brunei, most of them noted that such restrictions do not seem to apply for contents posted on digital media platforms. This implies a fragmented experience of how the policies are executed and where they are applied.

It was also noted that there were some respondents who were entirely unaware of the restriction employed. In which, Respondent 3 stated, *“Actually, before this interview I didn’t even know that Brunei has these rules about advertising food products that aren’t healthy,”* (Male, 22) indicating that a number of young audiences may miss the existing messages and attempts on related regulations. The lack of clear information or visible communication regarding these policies may contribute to the idea that the regulations are ineffective or irrelevant, particularly among young adults.

4.3.4 Reflections on its effectiveness and gaps in enforcement

Beyond its awareness, the respondents raised their concerns with the level of effectiveness and enforcement of the existing policies, particularly in the context of digital platforms. Respondent 6 highlighted the issue, stating, *“I believe it comes across as poor execution. It operated for the traditional format, but not for digital platforms. Where ironically, there are a lot of unhealthy product ads, and those are much more difficult to regulate”* (Female, 22). Emphasizing that the current regulations fail to keep up with the way most media consumption happens today- online.

Looking into the details of their perception on its implementation, Respondent 3 and 7 both highlighted that bypassing around the rules and regulations are quite simple. Respondent 7 stated, *“I doubt that the present method for reducing public exposure produces effective results. From my perspective, online ads are still being released without any form of regulation, and the numerous amounts of fast-food ads I find daily remain prominent. So it is kind of redundant for the government to reduce physical ads, yet have no restrictions at all on digital platforms”* (Male, 24). This comment, as similarly mentioned by other respondents, reveals that the existing regulations might no longer be useful as the internet continues to evolve rapidly in emanating posts and contents.

On a similar branch, several people expressed doubts that the rules are up to date and are practiced effectively. Respondent 2 shared, *“I think they’re somewhat out-dated. The digital world has evolved dramatically since most media consumption happens through online platforms now. Perhaps online platforms should receive the same regulatory oversight for efforts to achieve its full effectiveness”* (Female, 26). This presents that there is a wide gap in restrictions and enforcements to produce significant results for the wide population.

All things considered, the respondents’ viewpoints point to a significant need for alteration in the policies and re-enforcing it to fit the present conditions in media use. Though the authorities drew a strong regulation for advertisement in public spaces, most people use online social platforms in which the regulations do not match the exposure. Thus, the respondents raised their concerns that the lack of digital policies could likely lead to further loss of the regulations’ effectiveness.

4.3 Suggestions for Regulatory Improvement and Health Promotion

To reach the third objective and uncover findings that fulfil the third research question on the gaps and opportunities on the current regulation policy, this section presents the recommendations suggested by the

respondents on how they believe the existing restrictions could be developed and how the efforts on improving the public health could be enhanced. Their responses suggest that there should be better controls on social media platforms, while others stated that the current media regulations do not fit with how people consume media now.

Beyond identifying the limitations, respondents also provided creative ideas for supporting healthy food promotions through digital methods. The identified suggestions not only indicate their reflections on noted existing gaps, but also the possible ways of complementing such restrictions by active health promotions, especially in platforms frequently visited by young adults.

Table 5. Overview of Respondents' Reflections on Policy Gaps and Suggestions

Ps	Observed Gaps in Regulation	Suggestions for Improvement	Remarks
1	Despite current regulations ads still continue to flood screens	A proper set of guideline for online content; Development of alternative campaigns	A well-developed content in terms of advertisement could lead to positive changes, hence the same amount of attention should be given to promoting healthy alternatives
2	Current preventive measures focuses on conventional media outlets	Online content requires a stricter monitoring; food ads need to declare their products as unhealthy	Healthy alternatives should meet the attention that unhealthy food promotion gets; Warning displays/calorie counts on ads needs to be made explicit
3	Digital spaces needs a stronger regulation	Focus efforts on platforms that are frequently used needs to be taken into consideration	The current regulations seem to be made back when traditional media was mainly consumed. But it does not meet the technological demands today and its exposure to filter the environment
4	Lack of restrictions online	Sponsors and partnerships with healthier restaurants; advocating for cheaper healthier food	Most campaign prohibitions are aimed at traditional channels, they have to start catering to platforms where people actually are aware of the content they consume
5	Policies do not meet current demands	Make healthy food as cheap as fast food and more accessible	It is too easy for anyone to post their products online and market it effectively. Hence, the regulations ought to include online ads as well
6	Regulations are not aligned to current expectations	There is a need for more attention towards online contents, particularly influencer posts	Influencer posts can be tricky as they might not appear as ads sometimes. This strategy may fool the audience as they primarily intend to sell
7	Ads can appear indirect and less upfront	Promote interesting, and inventive campaigns that promise healthy food as well as appeal, and do it in a way that can connect	If regulations fail to reach platforms where their largest target group is, they are missing the point. Especially as ads may be more harmful as they appear less upfront for audiences/consumer
8	Regulations are not aligned with current time and setting	Proper funding for further support of healthier businesses could off-set current uneven balance	Regulations should incorporate collaborations and partnerships that can propagate fast food contents, especially as the competition is of different scales in promoting healthier diet
9	There is a requirement for content guidelines online	Strengthen and update the regulations, and monitoring should be carried out more	The current regulation does not seem to be as relevant or effective as it would have been before, but the consumption of digital media is more prominent today
10	Lack of monitoring on social media	Incentives for healthy food brands to market creatively to encourage action from audiences	There is no telling when you are being marketed to anymore. Hence, why it is important for authorities to know where young adults are exposed to, through mobile screens

4.4.1 Strengthening digital advertisement regulations

The respondents raised their concerns, stating that the current regulation does not seem adequate enough to cover the many ways people have access to, and utilize digital media. In which, Respondent 10 pointed out, *“Authorities need to know where its [time] really spent by the young people, through mobile screens”* (Female, 26). Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, were frequently mentioned as spaces and platforms where they are more prone to encounter unhealthy food content, and yet these sites remain unregulated.

Furthermore, a recurring pattern noted by the respondents was on how online promotions can be carried out under the radar as messages are being told through local influencers and creators, who are able to narrate it in a more “natural” way as opposed to a paid marketing service. Respondent 6 stated, *“Some of the time, we don’t even know that it’s actually a paid promotion unless they are being honest about it, which pretty much fool us as the audience sometimes, as their feedback are mainly intended to sell”* (Female, 22). Respondent 7 added, *“A good deal of marketing these days is indirect- sometimes they even collaborate with content creators to make something less so upfront about the fact that it’s an ad”* (Male, 24). This makes it clear that it is time for new rules and a more adequate enforcement of regulations when it comes to online advertising, as expectations and strategies have bypassed old ways of encouraging consumerism and purchase to an audience, which may be especially damaging when it comes to the consumption of unhealthy dietary meals.

4.4.2 Promotion of healthy alternatives

In addition to identifying gaps, the respondents also shared their ideas for overcoming with the mentioned regulatory gaps. Respondent 3 recommended offering students’ special prices and grabbing the public’s attention through interactive campaigns that promote the importance and significance of healthy dietary consumption. Respondent 10 proposed *“Incentives for the healthy food brands to market in a creative manner, such as wellness challenges, or raising awareness with health influencers. You can even reward points for healthy purchases, for instance, just to trigger and encourage people to act and participate instantly”* (Female, 26).

Moreover, Respondent 7 noted that involving local creative people is important to ensure that the campaign released related well to the community, stating, *“Rather than merely heading odd unhelpful ads, why not promote interesting, inventive, campaigns that promise healthy food just as much as appeal? Maybe engage local creatives to do it in a way that will connect [to the audience]”* (Male, 24). This idea demonstrates the intent that combining various cultures and reliability within the audience and products can improve how young adults respond to such campaigns. With the varying prepositions for action, it evidently portrays how the respondents shared a similar opinion about the inconsistencies in the current system and is interested in an active and well-incentivized strategy that can make healthier food the obvious, better option, in varying aspects.

Overall, the respondents recognized that the current regulations still fail to address the access the public has today on digital media. Majority, if not all, of the respondents agreed that and update towards the regulations are more than necessary, especially to reach such social platforms that manages to run advertisements that reaches them relatively frequently. Despite the restrictions and regulations in place, if it is not employed on stated digital sites, it may significantly limit the outcomes of the restrictions entirely.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the study’s main findings are interpreted in connection to the research objectives, previous literature, and established theory as explored in earlier chapters. The primary aim was to examine how exposure to advertisements for unhealthy food and beverages interacts with young adults based on Brunei’s regulations for advertising, as guided by three research questions that addressed: (1) the use of visual tactics in unhealthy food advertisements as understood by young adults, (2) the insights held by young adults in regards to advertisements and its contribution to their health practices, and (3) the noted gaps and opportunities that could inform more effective interventions within the existing policy.

This chapter are structured by themes, as determined in the previous findings chapter, on: (1) Presentation and Understanding of Visual Tactics in Advertisements, (2) Interpretations and Impact on Consumption and Lifestyle Habits, (3) Insights on Advertisement Regulations and Digital Oversight, and (4) Suggestions for Regulatory Improvement and Health Promotion, corresponding to the primary aims of research. Additionally, the discussion thoroughly discusses its relations with the research’s employed theoretical framework- the Cultivation Theory, to look into how constant media can interact with the audience’s perception on normalising certain consumer behaviours.

Through this discussion, the study reflects on the interplay between visual communication tactics, young adults’ consumption behaviour, and the existing advertising regulatory framework in Brunei. This research

also seeks to explore what these findings mean for the public health policy, advertising practice, and future research.

5.1 *Presentation and Understanding of Visual Tactics in Advertisements*

The findings in this theme demonstrate that the visual aspects of an advertisement greatly affect their audience's perceptions and opinions on unhealthy products. Respondents often mention that flashy advertisements, the recognition of well-known celebrities, and a beautiful visual design successfully captured their attention which eventually triggered their cravings. Similarly mentioned by previous scholars, advertising, especially those in the context of food, benefits from the incorporation of colour, composition, emotional ties, and familiar brand connections, among other factors (Julia, 2018).

As the respondents would describe the advertisements as “tempting”, “visually delicious”, or “eye-catching”, it suggests that they worked best by targeting their audience's senses and emotions. It is persistent to the view that food advertisements do not merely sell their products through an informed description of its features, but rather through constructing a sort of desire, often bypassing rational decision-making processes (Harris, Bargh, and Brownell, 2009). These techniques and strategies are particularly potent when targeted towards a younger audience, those who are more likely to interact with online contents (Marciszewska and Marciszewski, 2021).

Another convincing factor of advertisements notably mentioned are messages endorsed by celebrities or any recognizable and admired influencers. The perceived credibility and trust of a product can grow in cases where individuals have a parasocial relationship with the people it is associated with (Shabahang et al., 2024). As a result, advertisers would opt to employ more than just attractive images but also share personal stories and narratives of individuals that could directly connect with their audiences, their desires, and social belonging (Shabahang et al., 2024).

To sum up, the primary reasons for the effectiveness of unhealthy food advertisements varies from being able to instantly catch their audience's attention instantly, move their viewers' emotions, and create a sense of connection between their meal time and a desirable social and emotional comfort. The findings indicate that more media knowledge and awareness is necessary, particularly when attempting to combat a strategic promotional initiative that is beyond the utilization of adequate visuals.

5.2 *Interpretations and Impact on Consumption and Lifestyle Habits*

Based on the findings collected, it was discovered that a significant number of young adults in Brunei demonstrate a broad spectrum of unhealthy food and drink consumption habits, shaped by varying factors from mood, situations, and lifestyles. While a few respondents shared their efforts to control their portions, awareness, and focus for health, some respondents admitted their frequent indulgence was often due to the convenience and accessibility of fast food. This is consistent with the findings of previous literatures, as what and how people consume their meals throughout the day is not only affected by regulations or awareness, but also a great contribution to their usual habits and norms (Young et al., 1996).

Notably, convenience was a significant and recurring reason mentioned by the respondents on why they chose the consumption of unhealthy food. This matches the apparent trends evident in other sources, where eating fast food is a popular choice as it is readily available and fast, especially among young adults working or attending school (Patnaik, 2015). Not only that, but emotional state, such as stress, was also found to trigger consumption, which is similar to previous research findings that suggests emotional eating leads to the seek for high-fat, high-sugar food as a form of coping mechanism to help manage their emotions (Donohue, 2016).

Furthermore, despite a few of the respondents' remarks on attempting a healthy dietary habit from regular indulgence tendencies, it is not fully consistent or practiced strictly. This indicates a gap between awareness and behaviour, in which knowledge and awareness alone may not be strong enough to impact an improvement in behaviour, especially when pitted against other surrounding influences that are much more convenient in comparison (Sobal and Bisogni, 2009). With the current visibility and availability of unhealthy food options, it continues to provide instant and accessible gratification for consumers, despite the regulatory restrictions upheld.

In essence, this theme reveals that the factors affecting the purchasing habits of young adult consumers in the context of dietary consumption is not advertising and the restrictions that are executed to regulate it, but also their overall habits and routines, emotional needs, and convenience, among others. Hence, it signifies the importance to consider the broader structural and media exposures when strategizing an intervention aimed to promote a healthier dietary consumption among the public.

5.3 *Insights on Advertisement Regulations and Digital Oversight*

This theme explores on the respondents' perceptions towards the effectiveness and limitations of the current advertising regulations in relations to unhealthy products. Despite being aware of the stringent rules established, particularly on traditional and physical mediums, most users thought the restrictions may not have a significant enough impact towards shaping behaviour and perceptions. It was stated that it is not very well enforced and executed, lacking in areas where it matters such as digital social media sites, which tend to be the main platform for food contents.

This discrepancy points to a significant implementation gap, whereby despite its enforcement since 2021, the campaign has little effect on the young adults' population mainly due to its sole focus on targeting offline services. Those involved in this study mentioned that they still encounter numerous amounts of eye-catching promotions for unhealthy food on social media, in which the videos and contents of these advertisements appear unregulated. Previous studies have also expressed similar concerns, stating that it is definitely a challenge for regulations to be effective in online environments, especially when rules and restrictions have not evolved as quickly as media consumption has, as observed by Yifru (2021).

Not only that, but a common factor observed from the respondents may be that ineffectiveness could have been caused by the fact that many of them are uninformed of the details of the regulation. As majority of them could not point to the bill's details, it proved that the government may have not properly informed the public of their efforts. The same principle has been noted in earlier studies, which suggest that for health regulations to help, they must not only exist but be actively supported and seen as accurate by the community (Cranney et al., 2022). When the public do not understand them and they are not enforced strictly, it is expected for the regulations to often fail to have practical effects. Additionally, several respondents further expressed their skepticism on how the regulations are carried out to achieve significant results. They suggested that such policies fail to consider the rapid changes happening in media and the behavior of modern consumers. Though certain individuals believed that although this regulation can benefit children, young adults may remain largely unaffected as most of their media consumption is through unregulated online spaces. In summary, this theme recognizes that policy design and the way media is utilized in daily routines are often at odds. Besides its inability to reach many areas, Brunei's advertising regulations fail to interact within the digital culture. This suggests that the current rules require hefty adaptations to match the modern ways young adults connect with food contents.

5.4 *Suggestions for Regulatory Improvement and Health Promotion*

This theme goes over the respondents' insights about the current food advertising regulations, and the conditions on why it may not be enough, as well as their suggestions for improvements. As discussed in the previous theme, the results present that the existing laws mostly address platforms that are rarely in the radar of young adults. Rather, they are concerned of the contents easily found on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which faces little to no restrictions. With that concern, it suggests that digital channels have a strong role over consumers and can cover a wide reach of audiences unregulated but are not closely evaluated in the efforts to reduce its exposure (Buchanan, et al., 2018).

The presented evidence is consistent with previous studies that found that organizations regulation efforts in the context of advertising have not progressed fast enough in the digital world (Boyland, et al., 2024). In today's era, concerns have been raised on regulations' growing need to consider digital marketing and sponsored influencers as an important factor as they greatly shape the way people perceive and make decisions, including in their views of their meals (Tatlow-Golden et al., 2021).

As stated in the Code of Responsible Marketing of Food and Beverages to Children (Ministry of Health, 2021), current legislations on advertisement in the requirements for approval, it states that the restrictions strictly apply to exhibitions outdoors, including the exterior surfaces of buildings and premises. With that, Brunei's existing law also does not go far enough to extend to other channels and mediums, which may be challenging to enforce as there is a lack of collaboration with tech companies or programs to essentially help people evaluate what they come across online (Ministry of Health Brunei, 2021).

Consequently, besides the reduction or elimination of harmful promotional messages, the interviewees made suggestions for implement, such as:

- 1) Using equally attractive photos to market healthy food options.
- 2) Working with influencers to narrate their understanding of healthy food in a better understanding, and;
- 3) Creating entertaining public campaigns that utilize similar strategies as opportunities for the community to promote healthy habits as new norms

The stated suggestions are in-line with the overall global strategies in health communication of utilizing encouragement and teamwork to cultivate healthier good habits as opposed to merely forbidding unhealthy consumptions (Taylor, Dhillon, and Hwenda, 2012). The goal remains for continuous efforts to keep finding ways to reduce exposure and replace such content with better alternatives.

Not only that, but this brings up the underlying issue of the lack of channel for the public to raise their noted concerns to the policymakers. In the absence of these initiatives of dialogue and active engagement of the population, there is a threat that control may be disconnected from the lived experiences and needs of the public. In fact, advertising regulations may be made more effective and socially accepted when transparent channels provide opportunities that allow the population to share their concerns, observations, and recommendation are available (Moodie et al., 2013).

Additionally, this theme clarifies that integration among policies is important. Numerous respondents recommended that efforts go beyond implementing a set of regulations but move further to tackle the issue from an educational point of view- presenting a consistent mindset from different angles. For instance, media literacy lessons should be normalized and offered in schools as part of public information to ensure that all audiences are aware of how businesses may try to persuade them to make purchases through varying marketing strategies. Such awareness could play a bigger role to construct a more critical perception of the audiences, as Hobbs (2010) previously suggested that integrating media literacy into school curriculums could empower individuals to be able to critically analyse media contents and help them to make more informed and reflective decisions.

To sum up, while Brunei's laws are significant efforts and progress towards the right direction, they do not match the rapid pace of change happening in media today. Members interviewed highlighted a need for improved health policies and alternatives in digital spaces and heartened the need for changes to encourage healthier habits among varying parties to make health information and communication strategies more accessible, relevant, and impactful.

5.5 Theoretical Reflection: Cultivation Theory

From a theoretical perspective, research on the Cultivation Theory supports the instance that the frequency of exposure to positive portrayals of fast food in digital media can affect people's normative beliefs and preferences on food and lifestyle (Carroll et al., 2024). As the respondents often referred to fast food as their go-to option despite its nutritional issues, it might be resulted from the years of marketing and influence (Carroll et al., 2024). While the Bruneian authorities try to shield children from such content, young adults remain exposed to unregulated advertisements circulating on digital platforms.

Moreover, the theory also illustrates how seeing the same kinds of advertisement repetitively may affect how the audience views it and shapes their perception over time (Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli, 2018). In this context, such exposure might help the audiences to view the food products as desirable, familiar and normal, or even a form of reward. Along with the awareness of some respondents on the advertisement's interactions, despite them being aware that it is unhealthy further proves the harmful and subconscious effects of saturation in media environments.

What is especially particular in Brunei is that though traditional media is regulated, its dissemination and access on digital platforms are not restricted with the same measures. Thus, how the online advertisements are continuing to be strategically created continues to affect young adults' attitudes, often bypassing the governmental efforts mainly because they are set up to target specific platforms, visually optimized for viewing, and integrated into their online engagements (Kelly et al., 2010).

Furthermore, although physical advertisements must follow such stringent rules, the continuous exposure to the media cultivates an attractive and culturally ingrained attention towards unhealthy food. Through regular mentions of fast-food marketing campaigns and its promotions, it demonstrates how exposure, even if only through digital platforms, can undermine the employed policies meant to encourage healthier consumptions (Boyland and Halford, 2013).

From a theoretical standpoint, the insights offered by the respondents reinforce the long-term implications of the Cultivation Theory. It suggests that regular exposure to attractive images of unhealthy food, including through all digital mediums in this context, encourages young adults to adopt such unhealthy norms and routines. Due to this, insufficient regulation in digital food narratives might counteract and cancel out the health-promoting efforts for benefits brought about by the standard policy laws enforced.

5.6 Comparison with Global Advertising Policy Frameworks

As mentioned previously, the efforts carried out in Brunei to limit the exposure of unhealthy food advertisements primarily targets traditional mediums and methods. This localized enforcement is contrary

with the broader international standards that stress the inclusion to regulate digital platforms, where most young adults now look at for most of their content.

Both UNICEF and WHO organizations have acknowledged the recent changes in regular methods of media consumption for the public. One of their stated guidelines as stated in the WHO/UNICEF Global Code of Practice on the Marketing of Unhealthy Food and Beverages to Children (2012) is to apply protections for children and youth in all types of media channels, including digital platforms, to effectively curb unhealthy food marketing exposures. Similarly, UNICEF's programme on the Prevention of Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents Advocacy Strategy and Guidance (2020) asserts that mandatory legislation is necessary to hinder aggressive advertising strategies from reaching youths in places like social networks, influencer channels, and online platforms that are essentially powered by algorithms.

Moreover, the respondents in this study mentioned that despite the regulations, they are still able to come across tempting food photos and videos through online platforms more easily than ever before. Not only that, but a varying raise of concerns about how the messages are curated and presented were also brought up. This aspect is especially inadequate as this unregulated digital flow is inconsistent with what has been advocated by WHO and UNICEF, which emphasizes on an integrated policy approach that includes surveillance systems, transparent labelling practices for paid promotions, and digital monitoring, at the very least (UNICEF, 2020). Furthermore, not only does Brunei's code lack a concrete enforcement of mechanisms and penalties to ensure compliance, but several of its scope is voluntary and non-binding in nature which significantly limits its practical impact (Ministry of Health Brunei, 2021)

Essentially, the discussion suggests that the current policies and media practices do not meet the requirements of global standards. The current actions carried out seem to be far more restricted in scope and agility. Hence, in order to align it with the global frameworks, it may require Brunei to explore a thorough policy update to reinforce a stricter digital governance, initiatives, and proactivity in monitoring and overall online marketing. By considering and implementing the recommendations from WHO and UNICEF to use, it would not only realign with their mission but also improve on the current policy's effectiveness in protecting the dietary habits of young adults.

6. Conclusion

This research seeks to explore how visual communication tactics in unhealthy food and beverage advertisements and the existing advertising regulation play a role in the health practices of young adults in Brunei Darussalam. By taking the implemented restrictions upheld since 2021 by the Ministry of Health into consideration, this study aims to determine the extent of its efficacy in the context of young adults between 18-26 years of age as these demographic encounters extensive advertisements in numerous media channels and platforms, most of which remain unregulated.

The results show that there is a mismatch between the strategy of regulation and the new digital-first media space. Although the policies in Brunei are an indication that the country is working towards healthy consumptions, their minimal applicability in online settings makes them ineffective among the youth. The study further demonstrates the necessity of new comprehensive regulations, including frameworks that extend to online content, as well as community-driven health promotion efforts. This research contributes to the knowledge on the role of media towards dietary behaviour and provides practical implications to policymakers, advocates of public health, and advertisers in shaping future policies.

The research also revealed that although young adults have a certain awareness of the availability of advertising restrictions, there is limited knowledge about its contents and those that are implemented are hardly effective in altering their consumption behaviours. The restrictions, albeit with good intentions, are primarily carried out in traditional and physical media and locations, which fails to reflect the reality in exposures of the media today.

Additionally, the evidence supports the view that unhealthy consumption is not only due to advertisements, but inevitably connected with matters of convenience, moods, and routines, among other things. Such complexities imply that regulatory action alone cannot help. Rather, a more holistic solution should be implemented; one that involves varying parties to overcome different perspectives and influences.

In conclusion, though the efforts upheld in Brunei to control the advertising of unhealthy food is deemed as significant progress, its inability to reach the wide scope of digital spaces reduces its overall effectiveness. To pursue a real solution to poor dietary patterns among the population, it is necessary for policymakers to update a new, broad-based, and culturally relevant set of policies that substantially reflects the rapidly evolving media environment. This research provides a foundation for these improvements, emphasizing the importance of digital monitoring and active participation of people in the formation of healthy consumption habits.

References

- Alladin, F. M. (2015). Media exposure and attitudes of adolescents toward fast food. *J East Caribb Stud*, 40(3), 1–23.
- Amanzadeh, B., Sokal-Gutierrez, K., & Barker, J. C. (2015). An interpretive study of food, snack and beverage advertisements in rural and urban El Salvador. *BMC Public Health*, 15, 1–11.
- Aye, S. S., Suwardi, A. S. bin, Mazlan, N. A. B., Peter, S. A. P., AP, K., & Muniandy, R. D. A. P. (2022). The Effectiveness of Anti-Smoking Advertisements: The Roles of Media. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 64–72.
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: a tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation?. *Qualitative health research*, 26(13), 1802-1811.
- Boetti, R. (2020). The relevance of context: analysing the linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic contexts for branding and advertising.
- Boyland, E., Backholer, K., Potvin Kent, M., Bragg, M. A., Sing, F., Karupaiah, T., & Kelly, B. (2024). Unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children in the digital age: global research and policy challenges and priorities. *Annual review of nutrition*, 44.
- Boyland, E. J., & Halford, J. C. (2013). Television advertising and branding. Effects on eating behaviour and food preferences in children. *Appetite*, 62, 236-241.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Buchanan, L., Kelly, B., Yeatman, H., & Kariippanon, K. (2018). The effects of digital marketing of unhealthy commodities on young people: a systematic review. *Nutrients*, 10(2), 148.
- Cairns, G., Angus, K., Hastings, G., & Organization, W. H. (2009). The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence to December 2008. World Health Organization.
- Carroll, J. E., Emond, J. A., Griffin, L. L., Bertone-Johnson, E. R., VanKim, N. A., & Sturgeon, S. R. (2024). Children's perception of food marketing across digital media platforms. *AJPM focus*, 3(3), 100205.
- Chen, S., Ponomarenko, V., Lv, L., & Ahlstrom, D. (2024). Visual complexity, brand gender, and ad effectiveness. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*.
- Clark, L. C. (n.d.). RECOGNIZING VISUAL PERSUASION: MEANING-MAKING STRATEGIES IN MAGAZINE FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS.
- Coleman, P. C., Hanson, P., van Rens, T., & Oyeboode, O. (2022). A rapid review of the evidence for children's TV and online advertisement restrictions to fight obesity. *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 26, 101717.
- Cranney, L., Thomas, M., Cobcroft, M., Drayton, B., Rissel, C., Bauman, A., & Phongsavan, P. (2022). Community support for policy interventions targeting unhealthy food environments in public institutions. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 33(3), 618-630.
- Deshpande, B., Kaur, P., Ferraris, A., Yahiaoui, D., & Dhir, A. (2023). The dark side of advertising: Promoting unhealthy food consumption. *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(9), 2316-2352.
- Donohue, A. (2016). The Stress-Eating Relationship: How food can be used as a coping mechanism for stress and emotions.
- Dutta, M. J., Kaur-Gill, S., & Tan, N. (2017). Cultivation in health and risk messaging. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*.
- Freeman, B., Kelly, B., Vandevijvere, S., & Baur, L. (2016). Young adults: beloved by food and drink marketers and forgotten by public health?. *Health promotion international*, 31(4), 954-961.
- Gamiz Sandoval, J. (2024). Globalization of visual media in marketing: the impact of immigration in marketing media in Finland.
- Goldfarb, A., & Tucker, C. (2011). Advertising bans and the substitutability of online and offline advertising. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(2), 207–227.
- Hakanpää, J. (2018). Visual elements in advertising to build strong brands: A case study of a Finnish retail chain in Russia.

- Harris, J. L., Bargh, J. A., & Brownell, K. D. (2009). Priming effects of television food advertising on eating behavior. *Health psychology*, 28(4), 404.
- Hautala, K. (2020). The development of visual advertising in the era of data analytics.
- Hawkes, C., Smith, T. G., Jewell, J., Wardle, J., Hammond, R. A., Friel, S., ... & Kain, J. (2015). Smart food policies for obesity prevention. *The lancet*, 385(9985), 2410-2421.
- Hobbs, R. (2010). Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action. A White Paper on the Digital and Media Literacy Recommendations of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. Aspen Institute. 1 Dupont Circle NW Suite 700, Washington, DC 20036.
- Kelly, B., Halford, J. C., Boyland, E. J., Chapman, K., Bautista-Castaño, I., Berg, C., ... & Summerbell, C. (2010). Television food advertising to children: a global perspective. *American journal of public health*, 100(9), 1730-1736.
- Kim, J. (2017). Visual communication in marketing.
- Labrecque, L. I., & Milne, G. R. (2013). To be or not to be different: Exploration of norms and benefits of color differentiation in the marketplace. *Marketing Letters*, 24, 165-176.
- Liu, W., Gage, R., Park, H., Pearson, A. L., Chambers, T., Smith, M., Barr, M., Shortridge, A., & Signal, L. (2022). The distribution of harmful product marketing in public outdoor spaces and the effectiveness of marketing bans. *Health & Place*, 76, 102861.
- Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. J. (2006). Does advertising literacy mediate the effects of advertising on children? A critical examination of two linked research literatures in relation to obesity and food choice. *Journal of Communication*, 56(3), 560-584.
- Magnus, A., Haby, M. M., Carter, R., & Swinburn, B. (2009). The cost-effectiveness of removing television advertising of high-fat and/or high-sugar food and beverages to Australian children. *International Journal of Obesity*, 33(10), 1094-1102.
- Marciszewska, B., & Marciszewski, P. (2021). The visual arts in society: their role in marketing communication and shaping social attitudes.
- Ministry of Health Brunei. (2021). Code of responsible marketing of food and beverages to children. https://ugc.production.linktr.ee/ecdb216b-c044-447d-b980-2c3ecf8e6bc1_CODE-OF-RESPONSIBLE-MARKETING-OF-FOOD-AND-BEVERAGES-TO-CHILDREN-2021.pdf
- Montgomery, K. C., Chester, J., Grier, S. A., & Dorfman, L. (2012). The new threat of digital marketing. *Pediatric Clinics*, 59(3), 659-675.
- Moodie, R., Stuckler, D., Monteiro, C., Sheron, N., Neal, B., Thamarangsi, T., ... & Lancet NCD Action Group. (2013). Profits and pandemics: Prevention of harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and drink industries. *The Lancet*, 381(9867), 670-679. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(12\)62089-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(12)62089-3)
- Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2014). Cultivation theory in the twenty-first century. *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, 480-497.
- Morgan, M., Shanahan, J., & Signorielli, N. (2018). Yesterday's new cultivation, tomorrow. In *Advances in foundational mass communication theories* (pp. 170-195). Routledge.
- Mosharafa, E. (2015). All you need to know about: The cultivation theory.
- Najafi, M., Mosadeghrad, A. M., & Arab, M. (2023). Challenges and Solutions to Banning the Advertisement of Unhealthy Products: A Qualitative Study.
- Nevzat, R. (2018). Reviving cultivation theory for social media. *The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film Conference*.
- Northup, T. (2014). Understanding the relationship between television use and unhealthy eating: The mediating role of fatalistic views of eating well and nutritional knowledge. *The International Journal of Communication and Health*, 1(3), 10-15.
- Oparinde, K. M., & Agbede, G. T. (2019). Visual Hyperbolism: A Semiotic Analysis of Fast Food Advertisements in South Africa. *Alternation*, 25.
- Romer, D., Jamieson, P., Bleakley, A., & Jamieson, K. H. (2014). Cultivation theory: Its history, current status, and future directions. *The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory*, 115-136.
- Russell, C. A., & Buhrau, D. (2015). The role of television viewing and direct experience in predicting adolescents' beliefs about the health risks of fast-food consumption. *Appetite*, 92, 200-206.

- Sacks, G., & Looi, E. S. Y. (2020). The advertising policies of major social media platforms overlook the imperative to restrict the exposure of children and adolescents to the promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(11), 4172.
- Sacks, G., Swinburn, B., & Lawrence, M. (2009). Obesity Policy Action framework and analysis grids for a comprehensive policy approach to reducing obesity. *Obesity reviews*, 10(1), 76-86.
- Shabahang, R., Kim, S., Chen, X., Aruguete, M. S., & Zsila, Á. (2024). Downloading appetite? Investigating the role of parasocial relationship with favorite social media food influencer in followers' disordered eating behaviors. *Eating and Weight Disorders-Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity*, 29(1), 28.
- Shareen Han and Ain Bandial. (March 9, 2021). Brunei to ban junk food ads aimed at children. *The Scoop*. <https://thescoop.co/2021/03/09/brunei-to-ban-junk-food-ads-aimed-at-children/>
- Shrum, L. J. (2017). Cultivation theory: Effects and underlying processes. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, 1, 1–12.
- Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>
- Sobal, J., & Bisogni, C. A. (2009). Constructing food choice decisions. *Annals of behavioral medicine*, 38(suppl_1), s37-s46.
- Storhannus, M. (2021). Consumer perception of foreign cosmetic advertisements: A cross-cultural study of creating trust with social media advertising.
- Tatlow-Golden, M., Boyland, E., Jewell, J., Zalnieriute, M., Handsley, E., & Breda, J. (2016). Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: trans-disciplinary perspectives. *Children's rights, evidence of impact, methodological challenges, regulatory options and policy implications for the WHO European Region*.
- Taylor, A. L., Dhillon, I. S., & Hwenda, L. (2012). A WHO/UNICEF Global Code of Practice on the Marketing of Unhealthy Food and Beverages to Children. *Global Health Governance*, 5(2).
- Tran, D. M. T., & Silvestri-Elmore, A. (2021). Healthcare-seeking behaviours in college students and young adults: a review. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 26(4), 320-338.
- Unicef. (2020). UNICEF advocacy strategy guidance for the prevention of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents. New York.
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2013). The differential susceptibility to media effects model. *Journal of communication*, 63(2), 221-243.
- Vaterlaus, J. M., Patten, E. V., Roche, C., & Young, J. A. (2015). Social media and health: A review. *Health Education & Behavior*, 42(5), 617–624. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198115572127>
- Wickramasinghe, K., Hetz, K., & Zhiteneva, O. (2021). Digital Marketing of unhealthy products to children: evidence from the WHO CLICK framework. *European Journal of Public Health*, 31(Supplement_3), ckab164-186.
- Young, B., Webley, P., Hetherington, M., & Zeedyk, S. (1996). The role of television advertising in children's food choice. *A Critical Review of Some of the Recent Literature*. London: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Authors:

Muizzah Matussin (<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0001-5027-4291>), Centre for Communication, Teaching, and Learning, University of Technology Brunei. Her research interests include media effects, audience perceptions, and the intersections of digital media and culture. Email: muizzahmatussin2902@gmail.com

Nena Padilla-Valdez (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8169-1207>), The dean of Centre for Communication, Teaching and Learning (CCTL), Universiti Teknologi Brunei, Jln Tungku Link, Gadong, Brunei. Her research interests include Communication, Language, Sociolinguistics, and Slang. E-mail: nenavaldez@utb.edu.bn

Mas Ayu Mumin (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5167-250X>), Assistant Professor at the Centre for Communication, Teaching and Learning (CCTL), Universiti Teknologi Brunei, Jln Tungku Link, Gadong, Brunei. Her research interests include Communication, Language, Sociolinguistics, and Slang. E-mail: masayu.mumin@utb.edu.bn