Reviewer’s report

Title: An analysis of the potential barriers and enablers to regulating the television marketing of unhealthy foods to children at the state government level

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Reviewer: Samantha Graff

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Review of “An analysis of the potential barriers and enablers to regulating the television marketing of unhealthy foods to children at the state government level”

This is a compact manuscript that highlights a component of the debate in Australia around food marketing to children that, according to the authors, is not well understood—namely, the attitudes of those involved in the policymaking process. Because I don’t know much about the Australian context, it is hard for me to assess the importance of the contribution this article will make. What I can offer are some questions and comments aimed at honing the manuscript within the bounds it sets out for itself. I will leave it to the editors to decide whether addressing any of my feedback is compulsory as opposed to discretionary.

1. Title

The title suggests that the paper covers more ground than it does. I would recommend that the title refer to the stakeholder perceptions studied by the authors.

2. Methods

I am curious about why the authors chose to focus only on participants deemed to be content experts on unhealthy food marketing. Because this study assesses attitudes rather than technical knowledge, it seems it would be worth capturing the ideas of people who may not be content experts but who nonetheless might have an impact on the policymaking process.

3. Power of industry

It isn’t immediately clear why industries’ sizable marketing budgets comprise a barrier to the regulation of food marketing on TV. I imagine the link is that the food industry has a huge financial stake in continuing to advertise on TV and will therefore exert political pressure on government not to interfere. In any case, this should be spelled out.

Can “the idea of collaborating with industry” be elaborated upon? Did participants suggest what that collaboration would look like?

4. Evidence of community support
I’m not a social scientist, so I imagine “rich point” is a term of art. But to the extent this is aimed at a wider audience, it might be worth explaining what a “rich point” is.

5. Discussion

I’m not clear whether the discussion section is meant to provide an objective analysis of the potential significance of the findings about stakeholder attitudes, whether it is meant to cover a broader swath of reflections about the prospects for future regulation, and/or whether it is meant to identify advocacy strategies for pursuing food marketing regulations.

6. A national approach

This section starts by describing the participants’ preference for a national approach and noting that this preference makes a national approach more politically feasible.

Then, out of the blue, there are two sentences about how evidence suggests national regulation is likely to be efficient and that one group has floated a national legislative proposal. These observations seem out of place because they are commenting on the general prospects for national regulation, not on what the study participants think.

Then the last paragraph comes back (I think) to the study findings, noting that the barriers to state and territorial regulation as identified by the study participants are not insurmountable.

7. Food industry power

The first paragraph says that “approaches” to mitigating the barrier of industry power and influence would need to include comprehensive regulation that restricts unhealthy food marketing through media and other avenues. It seems to me that these aren’t approaches to mitigating the barrier but instead are the policy goals that the authors would like to see implemented if the barrier of industry power and influence can be overcome.

I’m not sure how the second paragraph is meant to flow from the first. The observations in this paragraph do not appear to be connected to anything the authors found in the participant interviews, nor are they directly connected to the issue of industry’s economic and political power. Instead, they seem to be suggestions the authors are proposing about how to counter industry’s individual responsibility frame.

8. Evidence

The first and second paragraphs each describe a type of evidence considered in the policymaking process, note that there is abundant data to support each type of evidence, and question why the evidence doesn’t seem to be reaching the relevant stakeholders. Then the third paragraph talks about how governments
internationally are showing support for action on unhealthy food marketing. I think the point of the third paragraph is that, if other countries pass policies, there may be opportunities to study the impact of regulation. But this paragraph seems a bit out of place following upon the above two paragraphs which say the research is there but public awareness is not.

9. Final comment

My basic point about the discussion section is that it could be be clearer about what it is trying to convey. Given the material currently covered by the discussion section, my suggestion is for each subsection to be organized as follows: (1) explain what the participants had to say about the topic; (2) speculate about what implications the perceptions of these participants might have for future policymaking prospects; and (3) describe any relevant evidence that supports or contradicts the participants’ perceptions and speculate about how that evidence might be brought to bear to confirm/correct/shape stakeholders’ perceptions.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.