Author’s response to reviews

Title: An Interpretive Study of Food, Beverage and Snack Advertisements in Rural and Urban El Salvador

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
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Dear Dr Mackey,

Thank you for sending us the helpful comments from two reviewers about our manuscript “An Interpretive Study of Food, Beverage and Snack Advertisements in Rural and Urban El Salvador” that we recently submitted to BMC Public Health. We note here (in italics) how we have responded to each point made by these referees and the Editor.

Referee 1:

1. At present there is a great deal of discussion in the results section as well as a separate discussion section. This should be changed. Due to the qualitative nature of the study I would recommend that the sections are changed to fall under one heading of results and discussion. This would also mean that some of the discussion repeated in the current discussion could be removed since there is some duplication. E.g., hydration discussions and sports discussions. We have adopted this suggestion, making a single heading for Results and Discussion, and, as much as possible, streamlining the Discussion segments to avoid repetition.

2. Lines 21 to 22 pg 8. Are the 100 ads all different or do they included repetitions of the same ad? If they do this needs to be clarified in terms of numbers. We have clarified in the Methods section that any and all duplicate photographs of advertisements were eliminated, so the total sample of 100 comprises unique representations.

3. There needs to be a table or description of where the ads were placed. Initially walls are mentioned and later also trucks, umbrellas, community centre etc. How many were in these different places or were only walls targeted. We have included in the text a paragraph describing the general physical location of these ads.

4. Table 1 needs to indicate whether the ads were all different. This is now made clear in the legend to Table 1.

Tables 2 and 3 should include numbers (%) adverts in each category. The use of numbers and percentages in interpretive qualitative study can be very misleading particularly when, as in this study, a non-random, convenience sample was involved. To minimize any possible confusion and potential erroneous interpretation of numbers or percentages, we chose not to present
such information in the tables. Numbers (%) will not, for example, provide any meaningful sense of the distribution of specific images or communication strategies in the overall population of advertisements along these roadways in El Salvador, but merely show the distribution of photographs in our sample. We have added the requested information in the Tables along with a caveat in the legend to the table. Each photograph was coded/classed as representing up to three distinct themes, one being described as a major theme with up to two minor themes. In the manuscript text, each photograph is referred to by the major theme present in the image. In Table 2, each theme is presented in order of relative frequency of occurrence discerned during coding.

Minor essential corrections

1. The word “ads” is used in the abstract and throughout without being first written out. We have noted the abbreviation “ad” in the Abstract and again after the first time the word “advertisement” appears in the main body of the text.

2. There are many references to low in” nutrients” throughout the document. This should be replaced by micronutrients since carbohydrates, and fats are also nutrients, albeit macronutrients. Thank you for pointing out this correction. Throughout the text, we have changed ‘nutrients’ to “micronutrients.”

3. Please rewrite the sentence on Pg. 5 line 11 starting...”with the message”. It doesn’t make sense. We have re-written this sentence.

4. Page 6. Indicate that chronic malnutrition is low height for age. As requested, we have done this in the text.

5. The inclusion of alcohol, tobacco and medicine is confusing. Was this a criteria that was always followed when taking photos on walls. On pg. 9 it reports that 21 such photos were taken. Were they repetitions or 21 different photos in urban and 21 in rural. Be specific. These were not inclusion criteria. During analysis, when we examined the images captured by the digital camera we discerned that a total of 21 photographs, in addition to 100 main photographs that comprised the dataset, a total of 21 additional photographs were taken and examined to determine the context in which our sample was found. These additional photographs were not thematically analyzed but rather were examined to discern what images they contained and where they were placed in relation to the photograph in the sample. These additional photographs generally contained images of alcohol, tobacco products, or medicines. The 21 photographs came from either rural or urban locations. In some instances the advertisement in our sample itself also contained these
“additional” images; in other instances, the contextual advertisements of food, snacks or beverages were located in close proximity to advertisements in the sample. The alcohol items depicted were either wine or liquor. As explained in the text, beer was regarded as a ‘beverage’ item equivalent to soda or other drinks and therefore was included in our study.

6. The caption “modern” concerns me a bit. Would it not be better to use “affluence and status”. I noted these were not included yet they have been very prolific in some studies. Indeed, “affluence” and “status” are often found in similar studies of this and related topics. In general, those terms originate in a specific older but still very common and useful style of sociological theory/analysis. “Modern” is an alternate word with similar connotations but is derived from later, more contemporary theoretical work. Both are correct descriptions of the same phenomenon underpinning the psycho-social processes discussed in this manuscript. The meaning of “modern,” however, tends to extend slightly beyond ideas of wealth, affluence and social status to include also cognitive and cultural shifts in an individual’s knowledge, beliefs and aspirations. For this reason, we tend to use the word “modern” in this manuscript.

7. Pg.20. the terms subliminal and explicit are referred to so a few examples should be provided. The section at the bottom of pg. 23 should be reduced and included into the introduction where it has already been mentioned. Examples of subliminal and explicit appeals are now included in the text.

8. Consider having a recommendations section, which would include much of pg. 24. Thank you for this suggestion. We have included a section headed Recommendations.

9. Tables should conform to journal format of not having lines. The journal format specifies: “Columns and rows of data should be made visibly distinct by ensuring that the borders of each cell display as black lines.” We have kept the lines but please let us know if this needs to be changed.

10. The numbering of the article sections is not usual to journal style. We have reviewed the journal’s style and amended our use of headings and sub-headings to conform to the journal’s practice.

Referee 2:

1. The research question is rather generally stated ‘rural vs urban’ 'how advertisements interact with nutrition transition' are both mentioned. However it is not clear what the question exactly is. While it is interesting in and of itself that the data captures 'in process' of nutrition transition, I think this part of the paper needs further clarification. If it is a ‘exploration
of the advertising of food in the moment of nutritional transition' this should be clearly stated. Thank you for pointing out the need for greater clarity with respect to the basic intent of the paper. We have tried to be more transparent and show that the primary intent of the paper was indeed to “explore the advertising of food, snacks and beverages in the moment of nutritional transition” in El Salvador.

2. The data is very rich and very interesting. It offers the potential for a deeper visual discourse analytical potential, which I think, is not fully realized. I would suggest the authors look at Gillian Rose's 'Visual Methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials' 3rd edition (2011). The data is genuine and authentic, and very interesting; I just think it could be 'unpacked' a little more. We thank the referee for the very helpful reference. We have reviewed the book by Gillian Rose and have incorporated concepts from the book to clarify the visual methodology and analytic processes that were used. While we agree the data could be “unpacked” and further analyzed a little more, we are reluctant to do so in this manuscript. Just this level of analysis, presentation of findings and discussion has resulted in a long and somewhat complexly organized paper. Were we to do more analysis and present it now, we worry that the paper would become unwieldy, its organization even more complex, leading to confusion. So we have chosen to not add to the current analysis. Rather, we intend to continue engaging in a deeper analysis that will eventually appear in a second paper.

3. The themes identified, while useful are sometimes confusing. For example while you identify the 'modern theme' as one that is 'urban' rather than rural, there are clearly modern themes within the rural images as well (photos 6 and 7). We try to make it clearer in the text that the modern theme was, indeed, found in both rural and urban areas but that it tended to predominate in the urban area.

4. I think you could build upon this overall 'modernity' theme as well as the 'cheapness if these foods' as the key themes driving the nutrition transition. In the work by Pechy and Ulijaszek (2012) economic data shows a rise in population level obesity rates with changes in type of government and economic policy/ideology. This is a strong explanation for your data. You refer to the effects of CAFTA as one of the reasons for the fact that coke is cheaper than water. This is an extraordinary fact, processed, unhealthy foods are cheaper than clean drinking water, because of unequal trade agreements between the US and Central American governments. It would make a much more 'macro' level explanation for your data. Also if possible look at the increase in visual advertising in public places since CAFTA came into place? Thank you for
the comment. We have reviewed a couple of new references and have included a short description on this subject. While we agree that this is an important subject, we also realize that the full description of this subject might be outside of the scope of this article. We have also clarified that the difference between the price of water and soda has been a repeated field observation and so is a data point, rather than being derived from a specific citation of this paper.

5. Some minor points that need to be fixed up: □ —— The statement about the 'triple burden' ...of food in high income economies could be supported with a reference.

———“Today, high income countries are as likely to experience the triple burden of malnutrition — underweight, overweight and micro-nutrient deficiencies — as low income countries” Similarly, the statements about the working poor could be better supported with a reference.

—— “What is new about the hunger statistics in high income countries is the presence of large numbers of ‘working poor’: those who are formally engaged in the labour market but whose incomes do not resemble a living wage. The data from Food Banks in Australia, Canada and the UK provide the evidence here"

———Section on labour market practices and effect on food, may be useful to bring in the examples of 'King Korn' the story of corn syrup in the industrialized US food chain.

Thank you for the above suggestions; in order to keep the focus of the discussion on low-middle income countries we have reduced the parts that pertain to high-income countries.


7. Overall the paper needs revision in line with more I depth visual analysis and some macro level theoretical framing, but interesting work and great data. Thank you! As you will see in the answers above, we have incorporated more analysis and theoretical framing, as much as the scope of this paper would allow. We hope to continue our work on this subject, and offer more in depth macro level theoretical farming in subsequent publications.

Editor’s Comments
1. .... We recommend a major compulsory revision addressing all reviewer comments and suggestions.  *We have done this, as detailed above.*

Specifically, authors should focus on comments from reviewers regarding restructuring the article so that there is a single discussion section that more aligns with the methods section. Authors should also make it clear regarding the appropriate description and differences between ads. Authors should also be clear about what the research question is, identification of themes in the results, and its translation to health policy. Though we point out these particular comments, authors should address all reviewer comments in a point-by-point rebuttal letter and revised manuscript."*We have addressed all these points, as described above.*

3. Additional Editorial Request: 1.) Copyediting: We recommend that you copyedit the paper to improve the style of written English.  *We asked our editor to review the manuscript again and further copyedit the paper.*

*Thank you and please let us know if you have any further questions.*

*Regards,*

*Baharak Amanzadeh, DDS, MPH*