

iGet it?ca
junk food counter-marketing project

JUNK FOOD DENORMALIZATION PRO- JECT FOR STUDENTS

OVERVIEW

RSEQ

VIE SAINE

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*Junk Food Denormalization Project for Students – An Overview
Produced by the provincial RSEQ in cooperation with Jaldhara Jacinthe Ledoux*

The issue of junk food and its consequences is a major challenge for 21st-century society, one which requires actions that are concrete, complementary, and immediate. Concerned by the urgent need to address it, and boasting a solid track record in the promotion of healthy eating habits and denormalization in the tobacco industry, the RSEQ¹ is now involved in denormalizing junk food in schools. Basing its actions on a summary of collected writings, findings from group discussions with young people, and a process of reflection conducted jointly with a committee of experts and consultants, the RSEQ proposes a ground-breaking project aimed squarely at countering the marketing strategies used by the junk food industry.²

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ISSUES OF OBESITY, DISEASE AND JUNK FOOD

The sharp rise in cases of obesity among young people and the early onset of such chronic diseases as Type 2 diabetes are major concerns for the health and well-being of Quebec's population. For the first time in the history of humanity, the current generation of children is at risk of more disease and a shorter life expectancy than the previous generation.

UPWARD TREND (In Canada)

2X excess weight among 2-17 year-olds in 30-year period
3X obesity among adolescents
Almost 4X obesity among 7-13 year-olds

Junk food = Crucial factor
Fat, sugar, salt +++

WORRISOME INCIDENCE (In Quebec)

ONE in FIVE children is overweight
In the 2-5 and 12-14 age groups, ONE in FOUR children is overweight
- ↑ Type 2 diabetes among children and adolescents
- ↑ early high blood pressure and cholesterol level (American studies)

HIGH COSTS

Chronic diseases

\$80 billion/year in Canada
2/3 of deaths attributed to Type 2 diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases

Obesity

\$1.5 billion/year in Quebec
(half the costs of tobacco use, could soon surpass because tobacco use ↓ and obesity ↑)

HEALTH RISKS

↑ Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, cavities, osteoporosis

Note: For reference sources, see *La dénormalisation de la malbouffe auprès des jeunes. Constats issus de la littérature.* Fédération québécoise du sport étudiant, 7 June 2010, p.1-2: www.rseq.ca and click on *I Get it ?*

Junk food – foods which are high in fat, sugars, and salt – emerge as a crucial factor in excess weight and obesity as well as chronic diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is drawing attention to the saturated and trans fats, free sugars¹, and salt in foods being consumed by young people, as these ingredients are known to be tied to the risk of early-onset Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancers. Furthermore, the WHO and other experts point particularly to these factors as convincing and likely causes of obesity:

- excessive consumption of foods which are **high in calories** and **low in nutritional value**;
- **the consumption of fast food and sweet beverages**;
- the **massive marketing** of these foods and of fast-food restaurants.

YOUNG QUEBECERS AND JUNK FOOD

JUNK FOOD IN THE DAILY DIET

- Only 6%-11% of young people eat the minimum daily allowances from the 4 food groups recommended by the Canadian Food Guide;
- ONE QUARTER of daily calories, fat, and sugar come from soft drinks, energy drinks, candy, French fries and potato chips;
- ONE in TWO adolescents eats fast food at least once per week; 8% of 15-16 age group does so more than 3 times/week;
- Nearly HALF of adolescents include snacks, soft drinks, and candy in their daily menu;
- Up to ONE in FOUR students brings commercial prepared foods in their lunch box.

³ «Free sugars» are all monosaccharides (simple sugars) or disaccharides (sugars composed of two monosaccharides), and include such refined forms as cane, beet and corn sugar. They are added to foods by the manufacturer, the cook or the consumer or occur naturally in honey, syrups, and fruit juices.

DIFFERENT REASONS FOR JUNK FOOD

- Appealing taste (sweet, salty, calorie-rich/fat)
- Perception that junk food tastes better than healthy foods
- Quick and convenient
- Inexpensive
- Easily accessible (omnipresent)

Note: For reference sources, see La dénormalisation de la malbouffe auprès des jeunes. Constats issus de la littérature. Fédération québécoise du sport étudiant, June 7, 2010, p. 4-5. <http://www.resq.ca> and click on I Get it ?

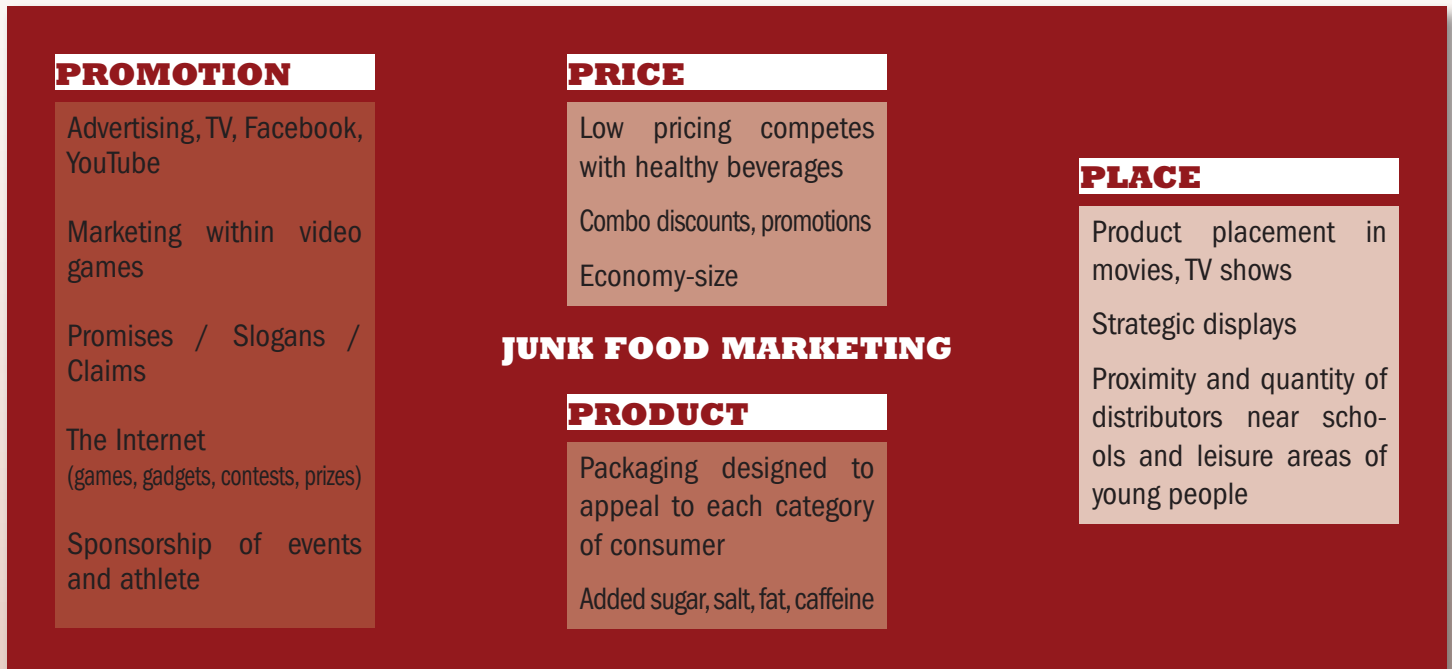


JUNK FOOD MARKETING

A HOST OF STRATEGIES

When we talk about “junk food marketing,” we are including all forms of promotion used by the food industry. In spite of these foods being so high in fat, sugar or salt content that they pose health risks, they are widely and heavily promoted by the industry because they are such lucrative products in terms of profit margins.

A wide variety of strategies are used to achieve “the four Ps” which are the basis of commercial marketing – that is, Product, Price, Place (distribution) and Promotion.



A VERY PERSUASIVE INFLUENCE

According to the WHO and the Institute of Medicine of the CDCs4 (USA), food marketing has a real power of persuasion on young people. The practices which are employed strongly influence their preferences, their choices, the demands they make of their parents and their positive perceptions of junk food.

IMPACT OF JUNK FOOD MARKETING ON YOUNG PEOPLE :

PREFER JUNK FOOD TO OTHER FOODS AND DEMONSTRATE BRAND LOYALTY

- Soft drinks, restaurants, cookies, candy, etc.

ASK THEIR PARENTS TO BUY IT

- ¾ of foods asked for are advertised on television
- first demand is made by at the supermarket for 75% of children
- give their opinion on 50% of family's purchases

PERCEIVE ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

- popularity, happiness, energy, performance, freedom, etc.

The young are especially vulnerable to influence. On the one hand, until the ages of 8 to 11, children have not developed the ability to defend themselves against the persuasive power of a commercial message or to discern its commercial nature. On the other, adolescents are vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated marketing tactics, which are now prevalent on the Internet.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention du National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion au U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

TEENS AND ADOLESCENTS: PRIME TARGETS FOR VIRAL AND INTERACTIVE DIGITAL MARKETING

Due to their

- vulnerability to visual advertising and addiction
- tendency to be impulsive
- desire for instant gratification
- buying power on the upswing
- quick to adopt new media technologies
- enthusiasm about creating, participating, buying and interacting socially via the Internet

CUSTOMERS

- develop loyalty quickly
- are disposed to consume
- are ready to spread the word to their peers

A NORMALIZATION TREND THAT MUST BE COUNTERED

The evolution and persuasiveness of food marketing have resulted in the creation of **new social norms which make junk food acceptable as part of a daily diet**, both among youths and in society in general

It is now considered normal – that is, acceptable and desirable – that

- junk food is consumed daily or frequently;
- the junk food industry uses its full marketing power to influence the food choices of young people and make them loyal to their products.

Literature is filled with studies and comments demonstrating that giant food corporations are largely shaping the food habits and environment of young people and are doing so with irresponsible disregard for foods which promote good health.

Irresponsible food marketing has, nonetheless, become normal, in spite of the unhealthy effects of frequent consumption of junk food, especially among the young.

DID YOU SAY DENORMALIZATION?

SHAKING UP AND REVERSING THE NORM

The term “denormalization” emerged from battles waged against tobacco use and addiction. The concept has also been recently used on alcohol consumption and to counter the preoccupation with body image (thinness) among the young. It also prompted numerous experts to reflect on the issue of obesity and junk food and to make recommendations.

Effective denormalization of junk food involves, on the one hand, **shaking up and reversing the “normal” status** attributed to junk food products and to food industry practices and, on the other, **countering the means used to construct, maintain or reinforce this norm.**

- According to experts from anti-tobacco lobby groups and the experiences yielded by a number of campaigns by the American government, they are the **actions which “denormalize” industry products and practices most effectively.**

DENORMALIZING IRRESPONSIBLE JUNK FOOD MARKETING

To take action on the issue of junk food from a perspective of denormalization of irresponsible marketing practices used by the food industry means to take action with regard to the public’s perceptions, attitudes, and opinions on junk food and, consequently, to change the social norm that permits strong pro-junk food messages to influence the dietary environment of young people.

This does not mean that we are attacking the commercial vocation of this industry or demonizing occasional consumption of junk food. Rather, we are seeking to modify the norms associated with marketing tactics which lead to undesirable and unhealthy effects on the food environment and on health and wellness.

Denormalization is done using **a set of strategies** which have been proven effective, such as counter-marketing, laws and regulation, policies, etc.

Counter-marketing consists in countering the irresponsible marketing ploys used by the industry, and it looks promising as an approach to denormalization. In particular, it lessens the impact of pro-junk food messages and stimulates positive behavioural changes in young people.

FEASIBLE DENORMALIZATION STRATEGIES AGAINST JUNK FOOD MARKETING

LEGISLATE, REGULATE, ESTABLISH POLICIES

Examples

- Tax soft drinks
- Reinforce and broaden the Quebec law on children's advertising
- Regulate sugar content or product range
- Support the policy restricting the sale of junk food in schools or other environments (cafeterias, soft drink vending machines, etc.)
- Regulate zoning laws for fast-food restaurants
- Policies governing food prices
- Policies on funding and sponsorships

FOILING JUNK FOOD MARKETING STRATEGIES

(Counter-marketing: 5 types of actions)

- Develop a counter-advertising campaign
- Education about the media, their power, and their tactics
- Launch and distribute counter-information in the media
- Encourage public participation
- Facilitate oral advocacy by citizens and organizations in the media and within the community

COUNTERING JUNK FOOD NOW

THE YOUNG ARE READY TO TAKE ACTION

Young Quebecers say they are aware of the issues with junk food and the way it is marketed. Nine discussion panels were held with 76 youths between the ages of 10 and 17 in 2010 by the RSEQ2. The findings reveal that they are aware of the influence in their food environment on their junk food habits. Although they feel powerless (to do anything about it), they state that they are willing to learn more about the subject and inclined to make tangible gestures that are within their capabilities.

I GET IT? A GROUND-BREAKING PROJECT IN SCHOOLS

As part of the I Get it? project, various strategies will be used to bring children gradually to the point where they will be able to make critical interpretations of junk food marketing practices and express opinions/demonstrate attitudes which are open to junk food denormalization. The project will be implemented in three phases from January 2011 to June 2012. Schools will be a favourable environment in which to promote and implement the project. The home environment can also be enlisted to support the children throughout the process.

The purpose

To contribute to a reduction in the consumption of junk food by young people through a change in perceptions, opinions, and attitudes about the industry's food-marketing practices.

⁵ These discussion panels were organized in cooperation with the Mire firm.

The means

- Use a set of strategies aimed at creating a healthy food environment
- Denormalize junk food marketing practices
- Base efforts on a counter-marketing approach
- Adapt to the reality of the school environment

Target clients

- Young people ages 13 to 17 (high school)

The objectives

- Awareness-raising of the effects of junk food marketing on them and their environment
- Education about marketing practices
- Stimulate critical and ethical thinking about junk food marketing

Basic principles

- Discuss marketing practices by targeting product categories
- Secure the active involvement of as many youths as possible
- Encourage participants to get their friends and family involved

FIRST TARGET CATEGORY OF JUNK FOOD: SWEET BEVERAGES (CARBONATED SOFT DRINKS AND ENERGY DRINKS)

This category was chosen by the RSEQ and its panel of experts based on specific criteria:

- big seller, very popular with kids
- promotion by the “4 Ps” of marketing
- huge consumption among children, and rising
- negative impact on health, society, the environment

HAUSSE IMPORTANTE DE LA CONSOMMATION DES BOISSONS SUCRÉES (BS)...

- Hausse de 100 % de la consommation des boissons gazeuses entre 1977-1997 (61 % chez les adultes)
- ½ litre par jour de boissons gazeuses (garçons) et 1/3 litre (filles) = 20 % calories quotidiennes *
- 1 boisson énergisante chaque semaine chez 20 % des 15 à 17 ans (30 % chez garçons seulement) **

* Canadiens de 14-18 ans (2008)

** Jeunes Sherbrookoises (2010)

Note : Boissons sucrées incluent boissons gazeuses et boissons énergisantes.

... ET GRAVES CONSÉQUENCES

- Une BS au quotidien ↑ de 60 % le risque d'obésité chez enfants
- 2-3 BS par jour à l'enfance = ↑ IMC et adiposité à l'adolescence
- BS consommées de façon chronique ↑ obésité et diabète de type 2 + maladies cardiovasculaires, carie dentaire, ostéoporose, cancer
- BS ↓ la qualité globale de l'alimentation car va de pair avec une consommation élevée d'aliments de restauration rapide
- Les jeunes boivent moins d'eau, de lait et de jus de fruits purs

Note: For reference sources, see La dénormalisation de la malbouffe auprès des jeunes : Les boissons sucrées : première catégorie de produits ciblée. August 2010. <http://www.rseq.ca> and click on I Get it ?

DENORMALIZATION MESSAGES

All denormalization messages explain the different tactics used, based on the “4 Ps,” to make soft drinks and energy drinks appealing to young people and to increase their consumption of such beverages – to the detriment of their health – in spite of the fact that these products do not deserve this popularity. The messages strive to show youths various traps or misleading messages, based on factual evidence of specific marketing practices used to sell soft drinks and energy drinks.

Seven priority denormalization messages

- #1 (product): The industry makes its products with ingredients that please the taste buds or can cause “addiction” or whose real effects are kept secret.
- #2 (product): The industry increases portions and format sizes to increase consumption.
- #3 (product): The industry multiplies products and adapts its packaging as pulling power.
- #4 (price) The industry prices products that defy all competition so that they can dominate the market.
- #5 (promotion): The industry makes false claims or associations about the product or about the brand image.
- #6 (promotion): The industry uses social media (such as Facebook), Internet games, contests, movies or other popular activities to attract young people.
- #7 (place): The industry displays its products in strategic locations so as to make them omnipresent and dominant in many of the places where young people like to spend free time.

For more details on these messages, read the document Cadre d’intervention provincial du projet de la dénormalisation de la malbouffe en milieu scolaire, along with the technical spec sheets for the I Get it? project of the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec. (<http://www.rseq.ca> and click on I Get it ?)

PROJECT PHASE 1

The approach favoured by the RSEQ is to implement a counter-marketing campaign, NEWDRIVE.CA, with the focus on how carbonated soft drinks and energy drinks are marketed. The goal of this campaign is to give young people an understanding of the many clever strategies the industry uses and how they use them to influence beverage choices and consumer habits.

Phase 1 of the project will take place from January to May 2011.

Objective: to educate about marketing, its power and its tactics.

Chosen means: a creativity contest

Students will be asked to create the packaging for a fictional beverage (in this case, water) and to use different marketing strategies to make the product a “seller.” After doing this, they will be brought to:

- understand and monitor how the industry works to influence their food choices;
- to draw a parallel with marketing tricks used irresponsibly by the industry to promote frequent consumption of junk food;

and, in a later phase of the project:

- how to cope with these industry tricks;
- make informed choices about what and how they choose to consume.



Campaign microsite www.newdrive.ca

- Interactive;
- adapted to the lifestyles of the young;
- attractive environment with introductory video, creative contest and creation software, information tools, a quiz and useful links;
- a tab for teachers and other school staffers ;
- a tab for parents.

Campaign promotion and follow-through

The project has been promoted in high schools in Quebec since November 2010 via regional RSEQ agents throughout the province. Promotional tools were designed and a contest likely to interest school workers was organized. The prize -- a stylish overhaul of the teacher's lounge by professional interior decorators -- was definitely an attention-grabber! Naturally, social media will be used to reach the students. Lastly, promotion and follow-up activities will continue in schools and with RSEQ network partners.

Evaluation

An evaluation plan was developed by the RSEQ in keeping with the approach favoured by Québec en forme, which is focused on project results and its effect on the students.

Phase 1 of the project will end in May 2011. A short assessment will then be done in order to produce a campaign report, identify the impediments and facilitating elements, and issue recommendations for Phase 2, which we will roll out in fall 2011. Various tools have been developed to document the activities and follow-up in schools and on the microsite www.moncarburant.ca

**Denormalization of junk food for young people
A challenge we can meet together, now, to help create a healthy food environment for our children!**

HOW ABOUT YOU? What can you do to support this project?

- Read the reference documents on the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec website <http://www.rseq.ca> and click on I Get it ?
- Contact the RSEQ office in your area to participate in project initiatives <http://www.rseq.ca> (click on your region to get the location information)
- Contact us at igetitproject@rseq.ca



FINANCÉ PAR:

