

Marketing Health on Screens: A Cross-sectional Qualitative Content-Analysis of Health-Related Advertisements Accessible in Nepal

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Abstract

Screen-based media plays a central role in advertising health-related products that may influence people's health behaviors. Little is known about which health related products are frequently advertised through screen-based media, such as TV and YouTube, particularly targeting Nepali viewers. This study aims to explore what and how screen-based media advertise health-related products to Nepali consumers. The study used a qualitative content analysis approach to assess the current status of health-related product advertisements through screen-based media. Three Nepal-based and one India-based television channels, along with YouTube, were purposively selected to observe advertisements related to ten health-related products. The observation was conducted from mid-to late November, 2023. All observations were video-recorded, and notes were also maintained during the observation. A matrix was developed to extract the information related to the research questions, which was subsequently analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings show that most advertisements focused on messages related to energy, nutritional benefits, and awareness. The target audiences included youth, children, athletes in particular, as well as people of all age groups in general. The advertisements ranged from 19 seconds to 102 seconds. Although the types of products advertised varied across channels, the advertised products seemed to be predominantly nutritionally poor food and beverage items. The study raises a critical concern that such advertisements may mislead Nepali people, particularly those who are frequently exposed to such information, and may encourage the consumption of less nutritious or unhealthy foods. The study underscores the urgent need to formulate policies to regulate health-related advertisements and protect people from exposure to misleading information.

Keywords: Advertisements, content analysis, health product, health-related, scree-based, Nepal

Introduction

Screen-based media is considered a key platform of advertising health-related products that may influence people's health behaviors. Mass media, particularly television (TV) and YouTube channels, display a plenty of advertisements concerning health-related products every minute, to which a large number of people are exposed, potentially influencing their consumption behaviors (Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010). Advertising is an effective strategy for expanding the market for selling products by deliberately shaping consumers' attitude towards certain products. This strategy is not based the principle of consumer demand but is guided by creating demands among consumers. While television advertising has been increasing globally (Nhemaphuki, 2011), its impact on social and health

behavior remains contested (Thapa, 2016), as one study demonstrated that the average person encounters more than 600 advertisements per day (Clow & Baack, 2009).

Nepal Television (NTV) is one of the oldest government-funded TV stations, which began broadcasting in 1984 (Adhikari, 2016). Currently, there are more than 12 TV stations at the national level (Top Nepal, 2019). Nepal's first printed advertisement in the Nepali language began in 1919 BS through "Mokshashiddi". However, advertising through TV commenced with the establishment of NTV in 2041 BS (Journalism & Mass Communication, 2009). Nepal Television and AP1 appear to be the most popular Nepali channels among Nepal-based TV channels, whereas among foreign entertainment channels, Colors and Zee TV are the most-watched channels by Nepali people (Market Research and Survey in Nepal, 2015/016). Nationally, roughly 72.5% of urban households and 52.7% of rural households own a television set (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2021).

With the exponential development and expansion of electricity connectivity and information technology, the coverage of TV channels has constantly increased (Acharya, 2022a). As a byproduct of these developments, the chances of viewers' exposure to advertising have also been increasing. Advertising is a marketing and communication activity that presents and promotes goods or services on behalf of an identified sponsor (Strategy, 2017). In Nepal, the volume of advertisements for health-related products on television is continuously growing, leading viewers to be exposed to them unintentionally. Because health is a sensitive aspect of human life, health-related advertisements may directly influence people's beliefs about health, nutrition, medical care, and physical activity (Acharya, 2022b). These effects have been reported by studies such as Menger-Ogle et al. (2018). At the international level, the WHO's (2023) has developed guidelines on marketing restrictions, considering the potential negative consequences of advertisements of health-related products on consumers' health and behavior (Boylund et al., 2016). Little is known about how health-related products are actually portrayed in screen-based advertisements in the context of Nepal. Thus, this study aims to explore what and how screen-based media advertise health-related products to Nepali consumers.

Methods

This study was based on a qualitative content-analysis approach (Schreier, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Three Nepal-based national television channels, namely NTV, Avenues, and AP1, and one India-based- Zee television channels, along with YouTube, were purposively selected as the research sites for the study. The rationale for selecting these channels was that they were highly watched television channels in Nepal at the time of data collection. Two YouTube advertisements were included to make the study more comprehensive and balanced. Since YouTube offers a vast array of advertisements, it was not possible to cover the entire scope; however, the scope of advertisements on TV appears relatively limited. The selected channels were observed to identify advertisements related to ten health-related products. The selected channels were observed four times, with gaps between observations. Observations were conducted between mid-to-late November, 2023, from 7 PM to 9 PM, because this time is considered prime time for watching television. All observations were video-recorded, and notes were also maintained during the observation by the first author. The recorded videos were reviewed, and only advertisements related to health products or health messages were

transcribed into Nepali. The first author then translated the transcripts and observation notes into English.

The first author read and reread the translations multiple times to familiarize himself with the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2019). A matrix (see table 2) was developed to extract information related to the research questions. The product name, duration, setting, target group, language, and given message were extracted into the matrix. These data were coded inductively (Byrne, 2022) in alignment with the research objective, and the codes were grouped and regrouped based on their similarities in nature, subsequently leading to the development of descriptive themes (Braun et al., 2022), which were particularly illustrated through tables followed by their detailed descriptions.

Results

Proportion of Health-Related Product Advertisements by Channel

Table 1: *Detailed Message Content of the Ten Observed Health-Related Product Advertisements*

S.N.	Product	Message content of the advertisement
1	Dabar Glucose D	Final match, sudden temperature; the ball is in the feet of the sky. Strong shot, Sure to be a goal; in the sunny reason, not only the body but the mind also are tired. "Take it Dabar Glucose which quickly empowered body and fresh the mind" (Ajay Devgan). Sky tightened his shoe.
2	Red Bull	A man is running over the snowy hill; there is a hillside. Then he stops there and thinks, "The challenges of my life are found out." Two players appear wearing helmets printed with Red Bull. Then the aero-plane printed with Red Bull appears there and a man as Spider man jumps over the hill side. A boy drives a bike on that snowy hillside. A naked boy dives in sea, he flies the Motorbike, boating in the sea, jump from the ceiling. At last, the Can of Red Bull juice appears.
3	Navaratna Oil	A male is breaking the coal; a female is busy making chilis. Some women carry water pots on their heads with music and song. Then a group dance of male and female follows – cold-cold, cool-cool ("Thanda Thanda, kul kul"). Tension in mind, pain in body muscles, beloved comes, bringing Navaratna oil ("sir me he tensions badan me darda wa, le ke aai saiya Navaratna tela wa"). In the background, the figure of Navaratna oil appears with pieces of ice. Male (Govinda): "O chandramukhi, we become happy"; Female sits on the male's lap. A group dance of females follows. Song: cold-cold, cool-cool. At last, the appeal is made that Navaratna oil relieves headache, fatigue, and sleeplessness.
4	Health Insurance (I)	Images show patients being treated by health personnel, operations, and medicine distribution. It is stated that no one should be deprived of health services due to lack of money, and that the Government of Nepal has implemented a health insurance program. A family can receive health services worth NPR 50,000. Registration is required to access the service; support is available at home. Each family of up to five members pays NPR 500 per person yearly, and NPR 425 per additional member beyond five. A special provision exists for poor households. The poster also shows an awareness campaign. The advertisement closes with the message "Insure your health in

S.N.	Product	Message content of the advertisement
		time and reduce the financial burden of health care” – “Government of Nepal, Social Health Security Development Committee.”
5	Health Insurance (II)	In Narka (the underworld), Chitragupta is turning the pages of a file while Yamraj's wife plays a Bina nearby. Two soldiers approach Yamraj. Yamraj: “Today also empty-handed?” Chitragupta: “Our efforts have failed because of the health insurance programme launched by the Government of Nepal.” Yamraj: “What is this health insurance?” Yamraj's wife plays the Bina, and a notice is shown: the program allows universal access to health services; a family of five pays NPR 2,500 yearly, and NPR 425 per additional member beyond five; special provision exists for the poor. Yamraj: “Oh, that's the matter! Health insurance is good for Nepalis... Let's do health insurance, let's be safe from the financial burden.”
6	Coca-Cola	Three friends (a girl and two boys) are sitting together. A boy brings a bottle of Coca-Cola from the fridge; the group smiles. He offers it to a girl. They read the message printed on the bottle. A boy passes the bottle to another girl; both smile at each other. She opens the bottle and drinks. The pair walks ahead with the drink, looking back at their friends. A can of Coca-Cola appears on screen with the tagline “Taste the feeling, share the feeling.”
7	Kurkure	An airplane taxis on the runway. A girl cycles up to the pilot's window and says, “I have something to say.” Pilot (surprised): “What?” Girl (holding up Kurkure): “Kurkure, ten pe ten – for only ten, or with a guarantee.” Passengers watch curiously from the windows. Pilot: “Wow, yes!” The Kurkure packet appears, and the girl is shown eating it.
8	Phulkumari Chiya Patti	An elderly father-in-law wearing daura-suruwal sits reading a magazine in the corridor. His daughter-in-law, in a sari-blouse, brings him tea. Father-in-law (sipping): “Wow, how sweet!” A neighbor calls from outside: “O Phulkumari, a sweet smell fills your whole house.” Both look toward the road, smiling, as passers-by notice them.
9	African Paints	A boy sits in a room with cracked walls, playing on a mobile phone. He tells his mother, “My eyes and stomach are aching.” A doctor arrives holding a box labeled African Paint and explains: “The cracks in your walls are affecting your child's eyes, which is causing the stomach ache.” Tagline: “African Paints.”
10	Condom	At night, a husband and wife discuss family planning in bed. Husband: “Darshan suggests we use condoms for birth spacing – it is better than other methods; we should use it from now on.” Wife (shyly): “It isn't difficult to use, and it slips on easily.” He takes one from his pocket; she shyly agrees, and they retire under the blanket. Days later, the wife shows morning sickness. Husband: “Why are you feeling sick – are you pregnant? I used a condom – have you been unfaithful?” Wife: “Mind your words – nausea doesn't always mean pregnancy.” They agree to test for pregnancy. Tagline: “Use condoms properly for birth spacing.”

Table 1 shows that across the five selected sources, most of the advertisements were displayed on Nepal-based TV channels. Out of 10 products, seven were displayed on Nepal-based channels. For instance, three advertisements were observed on YouTube, two on NTV, while one product was displayed each on Avenues and AP1. Moreover, three advertisements were found to be displayed on Zee TV.

Content of the Advertisements

Content analysis of the health-related product advertisements was a key focus of this study. While Table 1 presents the detailed message content of each of the ten observed advertisements, Table 2 provides a detailed, channel-wise summary of the advertisements in terms of display duration, video setting, messages conveyed, characters, target audience, broadcast slot, purpose, and language.

Table 2. *Matrix of Selected Health-Related Product Advertisements on Television and YouTube*

Product	Category	Duration	Setting	Message	Character	Target	Broadcast slot	Purpose	Language	Channel
Dabar Glucose (D)	Sugar drink	35 sec	Sport/game field	Provide energy	Sports celebrities (player, Ajay Devgan)	Players, children, youth	Mid Indian serial (8:55 PM)	Market promotion	Hindi	Zee TV
Red Bull	Energy drink	60 sec	Snowy hills, sport field, helicopter	Energy, nutritional benefit	Models, bike riders	Youths	First break, 8 PM news	Market promotion	English	NTV
Navaratna Oil	Pain/fatigue relief	55 sec	Working place	Pain and fatigue relief (song and dance)	Film actor/actress	Adult male and female	Break of tele-serial Sakkigoni (9:15 PM)	Market promotion	Bhojpuri	Zee TV
Health Insurance (I)	Health insurance provision	60 sec	Hospital	Awareness	Film actor (R. Hamal), patient	Family members	Second break, 8 PM news	Health promotion	Nepali	NTV
Health Insurance (II)	Impact of health insurance	46 sec	Narka (mythological underworld)	Insurance reduces mortality/morbidity	Yamraj (mythological character)	General public	Own convenience (~5 PM)	Health promotion	Nepali	YouTube
Coca-Cola	Soft drink	45 sec	Party/restaurant	Energy and enjoyment	Models	Adolescents, youth	Around 7 PM news	Market promotion	English	Avenues
Kurkure	Salty snack	19 sec	Airport	Taste appeal	Models	General viewers	Mid tele-serial Kumkum Bhagya (9 PM)	Market promotion	Hindi	Zee TV
Phulkumari Chiya Patti	Tea	45 sec	Home and road	Good taste (mitho chiya)	Model	Adult and elderly	Own convenience	Market promotion	Nepali	YouTube
African Paints	Wall paint	34 sec	Home	Prevents cracks, protects eyes/stomach	Model and doctor	Adult and teen	Mid Nepali serial (8:56 PM)	Market promotion	Nepali	YouTube
Condom	Male contraceptive	1 min 42 seconds	Bedroom/home	Prevent pregnancy, birth spacing	Model	Married male and female	Mid 8 PM news	Health promotion	Nepali	NTV

The analysis shows that home, bedroom, party venues, sports fields, hospitals, roads, and restaurants were the most common settings or contexts of advertisements. The target audiences of the health-related advertisements include adolescents, sportspeople, children, youths, teens, adults, married couples, travelers, family members, and the general Nepali public.

The contents included in the product advertisements primarily focused on messages related to energy, nutritional benefits, and awareness. They tried to convey the message that these products could contribute to human health through dietary or health supplements. Looking at these products from the clinical point of view, it can be argued that these products were often nutritionally energy-dense and nutrient poor. For instance, Dabar Glucose, Coca-Cola were sugar heavily sugar added products, whereas Kurkure was salt-dense product. Advertisements related to health insurance and condoms would spread the positive message in promoting awareness about health insurance and the benefit of birth spacing. In contrast, the *Phulkumari Chiya Patti* product conveyed relatively little health message.

The Red Bull and health insurance advertisements used different persuasive approaches. In advertisement of Red Bull, a catchy narrative of a young boy was used, where he runs down a snowy hillside, after some time he stops and then reflects and declares that challenges of his life were found out. On the other hand, advertisement of the health insurance was based on a folkloric narrative, in which Yamraj (the mythological god of death) appeared to be happy, but his soldiers returned from the earth without bringing any dead people. This tries to extend the message that less people were dying because of health insurance programs launched by the government of Nepal.

Most of the health-related product advertisements used model characters, while some used film actors or doctors. The health insurance advertisement that used the Yamraj character to convey its message was notably distinctive. Most advertisements were broadcast during the 8 PM news break, with some appearing between segments of tele-serials. The analysis of these advertisements indicates that the main purpose of advertising health-related products was to promote either the market for the products or healthy behavior. However, only three advertisements, namely health insurance and condoms, seemed to be intended for health promotion, while the remaining seven were exclusively intended to expand their market, paying little or no attention to public health benefits.

Discussion

The present study analyzed what and how screen-based media advertise health-related products to Nepali consumers. The findings show that the health-related products displayed on screen-based media were highly dominated by sugar-dense and nutrient-poor food and beverage products, although a few advertisements were related to health, safety and awareness. The finding aligns with a previous study conducted in Nepal, which reported that advertisements of products specifically targeting children mostly contained high levels of saturated fat, sugar, and sodium (Powell et al., 2007; Menger-Ogle et al., 2018). These findings together indicate that screen-based media often promote foods and beverages that may pose risks to human health when consumed frequently or in excess.

The main purpose of product advertising is to attract consumers towards products and encourage their consumption. Advertising agencies and product manufacturers are primarily guided by commercial interests, which may receive greater attention than potential public health consequences. They often try to change consumers' attitude towards their products, by repeatedly presenting attractive messages through media to which consumers are frequently exposed. The finding of the present study demonstrated that most advertisements appeared to focus on expanding the market of the products, while only few, for instance, health insurance and condom advertisements were intended to encourage health promotion. This implies that all health-related advertisements may not necessarily promote healthier choices, rather they may encourage for unhealthy food habits. It is also important to note that all consumers may not be equally aware of the health benefits or potential health risk associated with the products being advertised (Khanal, Budhathoki, Devkota, et al., 2026; Khanal et al., 2025; Khanal et al., 2023; Khanal, Budhathoki, Sharma, et al., 2026). More importantly, children and young who are exposed to advertisements may be attracted to lucrative messages (Kelly et al., 2010). Previous studies suggest that such exposure contributes to positive attitude towards nutritionally poor foods and beverage products (Sadeghirad et al., 2016). The present finding raises concerns about the extent to which health-related advertising through screen-based media is consistent with the WHO's recommendations marketing restrictions (WHO, 2023).

Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, only ten health-related advertisements were observed over a limited period, which may have limited the representation of other advertisements displayed before and after the observation period. Second, only four television channels were selected conveniently; therefore, other popular TV channels may have been excluded. The study also included YouTube alongside broadcast television channels. Because of YouTube, the advertisements displayed on the platform largely depend on algorithms, which may vary depending on users' interest and engagements. This algorithmic nature of YouTube may have resulted in the delivery of specific advertisements.

Conclusion

This study explored what and how screen-based media advertise health-related products to Nepali consumers. The findings of this study suggest that health-related advertisements were not equally distributed across channels. The health-related products displayed on screen-based media were highly dominated by sugar-dense and nutrient-poor food and beverage products, although a few advertisements were related to health, safety and awareness. The analysis shows that children and youth were highly targeted by the advertisements. Moreover, models and popular figures played the role of specific characters, which could attract the target group. The findings imply that all health-related advertisements may not necessarily promote healthier choices, rather they may encourage for unhealthy food habits. The study underscores the need to develop and enforce clear regulatory standards that distinguish genuine health-product advertising from general food and beverage marketing.

Declaration

Use of artificial intelligence. The cloud-based generative artificial-intelligence tools were used under author direction for language editing and for structuring and consistency-checking the manuscript text.

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