Effectiveness of social marketing strategies to reduce youth obesity in European school-based interventions: a systematic review and meta-analysis

In the past three decades, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has nearly doubled, especially among children and adolescents. This is especially worrying as they are at greater risk of developing health problems that can become chronic by adulthood. Once established, obesity is very difficult to treat, hence the necessity to develop prevention interventions. Social marketing strategy “based on influencing voluntary behaviour to improve personal welfare is one possible tool with which to reduce youth obesity.” The objective of this review was “to assess the effectiveness of European school-based interventions to prevent obesity relative to the inclusion of social marketing benchmark criteria (SMBC) domains in the intervention.”

SMBC includes eight domains: customer or participant orientation, behaviour, theory, insight, exchange, competition, segmentation and a methods mix. The school environment provides a strong setting for the implementation of a range of intervention because it reaches a “large, similar, non-selected population.” The systematic review included 32 interventions. It was reported that the use of five SMBC was more likely to increase the effectiveness of interventions to reduce body mass index. Specifically, studies incorporating five SMBC were 28% more likely to be effective in reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity. Overall, this review shows that the inclusion of a large number of SMBC in the design and implementation of interventions were more likely to favour the intervention group by reducing body mass index and/or the prevalence of overweight and obesity.