Influence of food companies’ brand mascots and entertainment companies’ cartoon media characters on children’s diet and health: a systematic review and research needs

Previous systematic reviews have recorded that food marketing practices strongly influence children’s food preferences. A key food marketing strategy involves the use of brand mascots and media characters to promote products high in added sugar, salt and fat, all of which contribute to unhealthy weight gain and poor diet quality for children. This systematic review compiled evidence from eleven published experimental studies involving children aged 2-11 years to evaluate collective insights about the influence of brand mascots and cartoon media characters on children’s diet-related cognitive, behavioural and health outcomes.

When looking at the influence media character branding can have regarding the consumption of healthy and unhealthy foods, the included experimental studies suggested that cartoon media character branding could positively increase children’s fruit or vegetable intake compared with no character branding use.