

Youth Voices on Harmful Commercial Marketing

Natalie in Hong Kong, **Daria** in Russia, **Komari** in Japan, and **Claire** in the UK aged 15 – 17 came together to at the Learning Planet Festival in January 2023 to discuss their experiences of harmful commercial marketing, its impact on them and possible solutions. They are all passionate about health and wellbeing because of personal experiences of ill health, curiosity, and the belief that every child has a right to a happy and healthy life.

Young people around the world are constantly being bombarded with harmful advertisements. Companies make enormous profits from selling to children and their families, yet there are few regulations to protect children from the negative impact. The harm may be caused by the products itself, such as sugary drinks, junk food or gambling apps, or by how the product is marketed, for example advertisements that promote an unhealthy body image.



Personal experiences of harmful marketing were shared at our discussion:

Daria shared that she is concerned about the number of advertisements for video games that she is exposed to, and that this can lead to poor physical and mental health among her peers.

Many of **Claire's** friends are addicted to Diet Coke, often because of advertisements portraying it as a healthy option. She recently learnt that, although it has less sugar, its contents are harmful and it perpetuates a culture of fast food. Companies take advantage of laws aimed at lessening the intake of sugar and people's ignorance of the negative impacts of sugar alternatives, for their own profit.

In Hong Kong, **Natalie** has noticed the aggressive marketing of baby formula, with claims that babies will become smarter than with breast milk. Actors portraying medical professionals or real doctors appear in these advertisements to promote trust in the products. **Natalie** even recognised a doctor in one of the advertisements! Learning from research, she recognises that the claims made by companies are false – breast milk is better for children's health.

Everyday on **Komari's** way to school, she sees advertisements for cosmetic surgery to give women double eyelids. Images of European women are used and promote a beauty standard that is extremely harmful for young women in Japan. It fosters insecurities and low self-esteem, which can lead to poor mental health.

What should be done?

Policy suggestions:

We asked what these young people wanted to be done to combat harmful commercial marketing to children. They told us:

Natalie

Influencers often promote harmful products like e-cigarettes or extreme weight loss to a young audience. There should be regulations against influencers making money from marketing harmful products to children.

Daria

Claims made in advertisements regarding video games on TV should be restricted or verified – just saying something is 'bad' is not helpful. There should be positive campaigns about healthy eating on TV and social media platforms.

Claire

Social media is so prevalent in the lives of children. Platforms that are known to be popular with children and young people should be targeted and advertisements to children should be taken down if they promote unhealthy products.

Komari

More policies need to be developed to protect children from snack advertisements. Warnings could be added to packaging and advertisements to remind parents of the harms of these foods. False claims made by companies should be regulated. Companies shouldn't be allowed to claim products are healthy when they aren't!