

## Nurturing Trust Capital: Marketing Approaches to Food Advertising and Child Audiences

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### ABSTRACT

Children are among the most impressionable consumer groups, uniquely vulnerable to the influence of food advertising. Over the past two decades, high-calorie, low-nutrient promotions—across television, digital platforms, and influencer media—have significantly shaped children’s eating habits, contributing to rising childhood obesity and dietary disorders. Traditional scholarship has examined these trends primarily through public health or consumer protection perspectives. However, the role of **Human Resource (HR) Marketing**—a field integrating employer branding, employee engagement, and organizational reputation—remains underexplored. This paper positions HR marketing as a strategic lever for building and sustaining **trust capital** in food advertising directed at child audiences. Employing a doctrinal and thematic methodology, the research integrates legal frameworks, industry case studies, and interdisciplinary theory from 2002–2025. Trust capital is conceptualized as a dual asset: internal (employee pride and advocacy) and external (consumer trust and stakeholder legitimacy). Case studies from McDonald’s, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Tata Consumer illustrate how HR marketing strategies can mitigate reputational risk, foster employee engagement, and align organizational practices with child well-being. The paper proposes a conceptual framework—the **HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle**—demonstrating how responsible advertising, workforce engagement,

and consumer trust form a self-reinforcing system of sustainability. The findings argue that HR marketing is indispensable for organizations seeking to balance profitability with ethical responsibility, particularly in contexts where vulnerable consumers are targeted. Ultimately, this research advances HR marketing as both a **business imperative and moral responsibility**, demonstrating that nurturing trust capital not only secures competitive advantage but also contributes meaningfully to protecting children's nutritional interests in the digital era.

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## Introduction

### 1.1 Background:

In the contemporary food industry, advertising has emerged as one of the most powerful tools shaping consumer behavior. Nowhere is this influence more visible—and more concerning—than in the marketing of food products to children. Research consistently demonstrates that children, due to their developmental immaturity, are uniquely susceptible to persuasive techniques such as jingles, mascots, celebrity endorsements, and increasingly, algorithm-driven digital campaigns. Unlike adults, children often cannot critically evaluate the persuasive intent of advertising, making them highly vulnerable targets. The problem has grown more acute in the digital age. While television commercials for sugary beverages, fast foods, and ultra-processed snacks continue to dominate in many regions, digital media platforms have amplified exposure through influencer marketing, gamification, and artificial intelligence personalization. The result is a convergence of entertainment and marketing in ways that blur the boundaries between persuasion and genuine content. According to a **2025 Guardian study**, even five minutes of junk food advertising can lead to an average of **130 extra calories consumed daily by children**. Over weeks, months, and years, this exposure accumulates into harmful dietary patterns, fueling global childhood obesity rates and related health risks.

*Figure 1: Daily caloric intake increase in children based on minutes of junk food advertising exposure.*

Childhood obesity has become a global epidemic, with the **World Health Organization (2024)** reporting more than 14 million obese children in India alone—the second-highest figure worldwide. Beyond health risks, these trends carry intergenerational consequences, shaping lifelong consumption habits and embedding brand loyalty at an early age.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Public health scholars, legal analysts, and advocacy organizations have long critiqued the ethics of child-focused food advertising. Regulatory interventions exist—such as the UK’s 2023 ban on junk food advertising before 9 p.m.—but enforcement remains fragmented, particularly in emerging economies. Traditional critiques tend to focus exclusively on the marketing department’s role, arguing that companies prioritize short-term profits over long-term well-being. However, this critique overlooks a crucial dimension: the role of Human Resource (HR) Marketing. As a field that integrates employer branding, workforce engagement, and corporate reputation, HR marketing is not merely about attracting talent but also about shaping how employees embody and communicate organizational values. When food companies engage in manipulative advertising practices, the damage is not only external (consumer backlash, regulatory fines) but also internal (employee disillusionment, reputational dissonance). The absence of HR marketing-driven interventions has allowed profit-maximizing child-targeted advertising to persist, even as reputational risks multiply. Companies often underestimate how deeply advertising practices influence **trust capital**—the sum of internal and external trust that sustains organizational legitimacy.

## **1.3 Trust Capital as the Central Concept:**

Trust has always been an intangible yet invaluable organizational asset. Recent scholarship refers to this as **trust capital**—a measurable stock of trust that organizations build with their stakeholders, including employees, consumers, regulators, and investors. Unlike financial capital, which fluctuates with quarterly results, trust capital accumulates slowly, but once lost, it is exceedingly difficult to restore.

In the context of food advertising aimed at children, trust capital operates on two dimensions:

- **Internal Trust Capital (Employee Trust):** Employees must believe that their employer aligns with ethical standards and social responsibility. If advertising practices are exploitative,

employees experience value dissonance, lowering engagement and pride. Conversely, when companies prioritize responsibility, employees become vocal brand advocates.

- **External Trust Capital (Consumer & Stakeholder Trust):** Parents, children, regulators, and investors evaluate companies based on authenticity, fairness, and sustainability. Brands that market responsibly build loyalty, while those that exploit children risk consumer boycott

*Figure 2: Trust Capital Dimensions in HR Marketing*

Trust capital, when nurtured, becomes a competitive advantage—mitigating reputational risks, attracting value-driven employees, and cultivating long-term consumer loyalty. Conversely, when depleted, it exposes organizations to consumer boycotts, employee disengagement, and regulatory penalties. **Rationale for an HR Marketing Lens**

HR marketing offers a unique perspective to address the crisis of trust in food advertising. This study emphasizes three reasons why HR marketing provides a powerful lens:

1. **Employer Value Proposition (EVP):** Companies no longer compete solely for consumer loyalty but also for talent. Millennials and Gen Z employees prefer organizations that prioritize sustainability and ethical responsibility. Exploitative advertising undermines EVP, weakening both recruitment and retention.
2. **Trust Capital as Strategic Currency:** In an era of heightened scrutiny, trust is more valuable than short-term profits. HR marketing aligns employee values with consumer trust, embedding responsibility into the organizational culture.
3. **Integration of Sustainability:** HR marketing bridges the gap between internal workforce engagement and external sustainability commitments. By embedding the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 3 (Health and Well-being) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)—into both HR practices and advertising strategies, organizations align profitability with child well-being.

### **Research Gap**

Most studies on children’s food advertising focus on three domains:

- **Consumer psychology:** How ads influence children’s preferences and “pester power.”

- **Public health:** The contribution of advertising to obesity and dietary disorders.
- **Legal frameworks:** Regulations restricting harmful advertising.

What remains underexplored is the **intersection of HR marketing, trust capital, and child nutrition**. This gap is especially significant in the Global South, where weak regulatory mechanisms allow aggressive food promotions to persist, often under the guise of digital engagement and influencer marketing.

By reframing food advertising through the lens of HR marketing and trust capital, this study fills an important scholarly and practical void.

### **Research Objectives**

The study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine how HR marketing can nurture **trust capital** in food advertising to children.
2. To analyze the relationship between employee engagement, organizational culture, and consumer trust.
3. To propose a **Trust Capital Cycle** model illustrating the self-reinforcing nature of responsible advertising.
4. To provide recommendations for organizations, HR managers, marketing teams, policymakers, and academia.

### **Research Questions**

The inquiry is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does HR marketing influence internal and external trust capital in the food industry?
2. In what ways can responsible advertising enhance both employee pride and consumer trust?
3. What barriers prevent organizations from aligning profitability with trust capital?
4. How can a conceptual model operationalize HR marketing as a driver of trust-based sustainability?

### **Significance of the Study**

- **Academic Contribution:** Extends HR marketing scholarship by integrating the concept of trust capital into food advertising studies.
- **Practical Contribution:** Provides organizations with actionable strategies for aligning HR and marketing in trust-building efforts.
- **Policy Contribution:** Informs public debate on advertising standards, particularly in emerging economies like India.

### **Structure of the Paper**

The research is organized as follows:

1. **Introduction:** Establishes the problem, objectives, and rationale.
2. **Literature Review:** Examines children's vulnerability, HR marketing evolution, and trust capital theories.
3. **Methodology:** Outlines doctrinal and thematic approaches.
4. **Analysis & Discussion:** Explores the HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle with case studies.
5. **Findings:** Summarizes key insights.
6. **Recommendations:** Provides strategies for multiple stakeholders.
7. **Conclusion:** Reinforces the centrality of HR marketing in nurturing trust capital.

***Includes Figure 3: HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle***

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Children's Food Habits and Media Influence**

Children differ from adults in their cognitive capacity to evaluate persuasive messages. According to **Piaget's stages of cognitive development**, children under the age of 12 struggle to recognize advertising intent. This makes them particularly susceptible to marketing that uses mascots, bright

visuals, jingles, and celebrity endorsements (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). Research shows that when exposed to advertisements, children often perceive products as entertainment rather than persuasion, blurring ethical boundaries.

## **2.2 Scale of Advertising Exposure**

Children are frequently exposed to high-calorie, low-nutrient food promotions across multiple media:

- In Australia, children aged 5–8 view **over 827 unhealthy food ads annually** (Obesity Evidence Hub, 2024).
- A 2025 *Guardian* study revealed that **five minutes of junk food ads adds 130 calories to children’s daily intake**.
- In Spain, children from low-income households are exposed to nearly **double the volume of unhealthy ads** compared to wealthier peers (BMC Public Health, 2023).

This uneven exposure introduces a **justice dimension**, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds face compounded health risks.

## **Influence on Behavior and Health**

Meta-analyses confirm a strong link between food advertising and childhood obesity (Boyland & Whalen, 2015). The mechanisms include:

- **Increased Preferences** for sugary or fatty products.
- **Pester Power**, where children pressure parents into purchases (Cairns et al., 2013).
- **Early Brand Loyalty**, as children identify emotionally with advertised products.

India illustrates this trend vividly: with rapid dietary transitions away from traditional foods, urban children increasingly consume processed snacks and sugary beverages promoted through television and mobile advertising (Kaur & Singh, 2021).

## **Emerging Trends: Digital and AI Marketing**

While television remains influential, the rise of digital advertising has intensified risks. YouTube influencers, TikTok challenges, and gamified promotions target children through **stealth advertising**

(Montgomery et al., 2023). Personalized AI-driven ads further exacerbate vulnerability by tailoring messages to predicted preferences. Scholars warn that such techniques compromise data privacy and blur distinctions between play and persuasion.

### **Evolution of HR Marketing**

HR marketing combines principles of **human resource management (HRM)** and **marketing** to align employee engagement with consumer-facing branding. Initially focused on **employer branding** and talent acquisition (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), HR marketing has evolved into a broader discipline integrating sustainability, employee advocacy, and organizational reputation. Employer branding literature emphasizes the **Employee Value Proposition (EVP)**—a blend of pay, benefits, culture, and values. Increasingly, employees value companies that align with social responsibility. Research shows that ethical branding reduces turnover and increases engagement (Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Reputation is a long-term intangible asset, shaped by employee behaviors and consumer perceptions. Employees disengage when they perceive inconsistencies between organizational values and external practices (Edwards, 2010). Thus, HR marketing ensures that **internal values align with external communication**, preventing reputational dissonance. Modern HR marketing aligns with **CSR** (Corporate Social Responsibility) and **ESG** (Environmental, Social, Governance) goals. Food companies are now judged not only by profits but also by contributions to sustainability and public health (Baum & Kabst, 2014). Trust is defined as the willingness of stakeholders to be vulnerable to an organization's actions, based on perceptions of ability, integrity, and benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995). When accumulated, trust becomes **trust capital**—an intangible resource similar to reputation or social capital (Fombrun, 1996).

**Relevance to HR Marketing:** HR marketing nurtures trust capital by:

1. Aligning EVP with sustainability.
2. Empowering employees to act as **brand ambassadors**.
3. Communicating authenticity in advertising.

Case studies illustrate this:

- **Nestlé’s “Choose Wellness”** initiative engaged employees as ambassadors of nutrition, aligning internal pride with external branding.
- **Tata Consumer Products** emphasized “building a healthier India” through fortified beverages, enhancing both consumer trust and workforce legitimacy.

Trust capital is fragile. Irresponsible child-focused food advertising triggers:

- **Consumer Backlash** (boycotts, criticism).
- **Regulatory Action** (restrictions, fines).
- **Employee Disengagement** (value dissonance).

Once lost, trust capital is difficult and costly to rebuild, as shown in the decades-long reputational damage Nestlé faced after its infant formula controversy. The UN **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) emphasize health (SDG 3) and responsible consumption (SDG 12). Food companies that market junk food to children undermine both goals (United Nations, 2015). Examples of responsible practices include:

- **McDonald’s** reducing sugar and including fruit in Happy Meals.
- **PepsiCo** removing sugary sodas from schools.
- **Nestlé** launching campaigns emphasizing wellness.

Although sometimes criticized as symbolic, these initiatives demonstrate attempts to integrate responsibility with profitability.

HR marketing can ensure that responsible advertising is authentic, not greenwashing. By embedding sustainability into **EVP and internal training**, organizations build consistency between employee values and external campaigns.

## **Challenges**

- **Profit Pressures:** Firms rely on persuasive ads for revenue.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** Especially in emerging economies, weak laws enable exploitative marketing.
- **Greenwashing:** Superficial commitments undermine trust.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

This research draws from four key theories:

1. **Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984):** Organizations must balance interests of children, parents, employees, regulators, and investors.
2. **Social Exchange Theory:** Trust and reciprocity form sustainable relationships; HR marketing nurtures this exchange through ethical advertising.
3. **Employer Branding Theory (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004):** EVP as a projection of organizational values—here reframed around child health and sustainability.
4. **Sustainable HRM Models (Ehnert et al., 2014):** Long-term well-being of employees, society, and the environment integrated into HR marketing.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

- Children are highly susceptible to food advertising, with growing risks from digital and AI-driven ads.
- HR marketing has evolved from employer branding into a broader discipline linking sustainability and workforce engagement.
- Trust capital is a critical asset, operating internally (employee pride) and externally (consumer trust).
- Sustainable food advertising aligns with SDGs and builds trust capital but faces challenges of profit pressures, regulatory gaps, and risks of greenwashing.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study adopts a **qualitative and doctrinal design**. Rather than focusing on numerical correlations, the research emphasizes **interpretive, analytical, and normative insights**. Two complementary strands guide the design:

1. **Doctrinal Analysis:** Examining laws, policies, and judicial precedents governing child-focused advertising.
2. **Thematic Content Analysis:** Systematically coding themes such as *trust capital*, *HR marketing practices*, *sustainability integration*, and *stakeholder alignment* across literature and case studies.

By blending doctrinal and thematic methods, the research captures both **legal-ethical frameworks** and **organizational practices**, producing a holistic view of HR marketing's role in nurturing trust capital.

### **Nature of the Study**

- **Exploratory:** HR marketing in the context of children's food advertising is underexplored. This study seeks to build new conceptual ground.
- **Descriptive:** It documents how organizations currently use HR marketing to balance sustainability, employee engagement, and consumer trust.
- **Analytical:** It evaluates whether these practices genuinely nurture trust capital or merely serve as reputational cover.

The methodology follows a **three-step approach**:

#### **Step 1: Doctrinal Analysis**

- **Statutory Frameworks:**
  - *Consumer Protection Act, 2019 (India)* – Provisions on misleading advertisements.
  - *FSSAI Advertising and Claims Regulations, 2018* – Standards for food marketing.
  - *IT Rules, 2021* – Digital advertising governance.
  - *WHO Recommendations (2010, updated 2022)* – Global guidelines on restricting unhealthy food marketing to children.
- **Judicial Precedents:** Cases addressing misleading food advertising, ethical advertising standards, and consumer rights.
- **Corporate Codes of Conduct:** HR policies, employer branding strategies, and organizational sustainability commitments.

#### **Step 2: Thematic Content Analysis**

Using qualitative coding, the research identifies patterns across:

- **Trust Capital Narratives** – Employee trust, consumer trust, stakeholder trust.
- **HR Marketing Practices** – Employer branding, EVP integration, employee advocacy.
- **Sustainability Challenges** – Profit pressures, regulatory gaps, greenwashing risks.

- **Impacts on Children** – Dietary habits, brand loyalty, obesity trends.

This method ensures that trust capital emerges not as an abstract idea, but as a **traceable, coded theme across multiple sources**. Case studies provide concrete illustrations of HR marketing in action. Selected cases include:

- **McDonald's**: Gradual reform of Happy Meals as a response to criticism of child-targeted ads.
- **PepsiCo**: Voluntary removal of full-sugar beverages from schools.
- **Nestlé**: “Choose Wellness” campaign linking employees to nutrition advocacy.
- **Tata Consumer (India)**: Campaigns promoting fortified beverages and health-based branding.

### Sources of Data

- **Statutes and Policies**: Consumer Protection Act, 2019; FSSAI guidelines (2018); IT Rules, 2021; WHO recommendations (2010, 2022).
- **Case Law**: Precedents on misleading advertising and consumer rights.
- **Academic Literature**: Journals in HRM, marketing, sustainability, and law (2002–2025).
- **Industry Reports**: WHO, UNICEF, Obesity Evidence Hub, Deloitte surveys.
- **Media Reports**: Coverage of food advertising controversies in India, UK, US, and Australia.

### Analytical Framework

The research employs **four theoretical models** to interpret findings:

1. **Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984)**: Assesses how HR marketing aligns competing stakeholder interests (children, parents, employees, regulators, investors).
2. **Social Exchange Theory**: Evaluates how responsible advertising fosters trust-based reciprocity between organizations and stakeholders.
3. **Employer Branding Theory (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004)**: Analyzes how embedding responsibility into EVP enhances employee pride and consumer trust.
4. **Sustainable HRM Models (Ehnert et al., 2014)**: Positions HR marketing as part of a long-term sustainability agenda.

### Analysis and Discussion

Children cannot be treated as miniature adults in consumer markets. Developmental psychology (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006) demonstrates that children under 12 often lack the cognitive maturity to distinguish persuasive intent from entertainment. Food companies exploit this vulnerability through mascots, jingles, and celebrity endorsements.

- **Example:** McDonald's *Happy Meal* campaigns linked toys and cartoon characters with meals, embedding food products into children's emotional identity.
- **Result:** Long-term brand loyalty that begins in early childhood.

This practice raises **trust-related ethical concerns**: if trust relies on transparency and fairness, then manipulative advertising undermines the very foundations of trust capital. Television remains a powerful medium in emerging economies like India, where penetration is high and restrictions on child-focused food ads are weak.

- A **2025 multi-country study** reported that **just five minutes of junk food advertising increased children's caloric intake by ~130 calories daily** (The Guardian, 2025).
- In **Australia**, children aged 5–8 saw more than **827 unhealthy food ads annually** (Obesity Evidence Hub, 2024).
- In **Spain**, children from low-income households faced almost **double the exposure** compared to wealthier peers (BMC Public Health, 2023).

### **Implications for trust capital:**

- Parents lose trust when companies exploit children's vulnerabilities.
- Employees may feel ethical dissonance working for firms that prioritize profit over child health.
- Regulators are pressured to impose stricter advertising bans.

### **Pester Power and Household Consumption**

A crucial mechanism linking advertising to behavior is **pester power**—children influencing parents' purchases.

- Research shows that children's requests contribute significantly to household snack and fast-food purchases (Cairns et al., 2013).

- In India, urban families report high levels of child-driven snack consumption (Kaur & Singh, 2021).

### **Trust capital perspective:**

- Parents perceive manipulative advertising as a breach of trust, damaging brand credibility.
- Companies risk **reputation loss** if perceived as aggravating family conflicts.

### **Digital and AI-Driven Food Advertising**

Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok amplify risks. Children view influencers as “friends,” making product endorsements highly persuasive (Montgomery et al., 2023).

Emerging concerns include:

- **Gamification:** Products embedded into online games.
- **Influencer Marketing:** Kids misinterpret endorsements as genuine recommendations.
- **AI Personalization:** Algorithms push targeted ads, intensifying exposure.

### **Trust implications:**

- **Consumers:** Parents demand stricter transparency in influencer promotions.
- **Employees:** Young workforce often questions ethical integrity of stealth advertising.
- **Stakeholders:** Regulators and NGOs challenge AI-driven advertising as manipulative.

### **HR Marketing as a Bridge Between People and Brand**

HR marketing operates at the intersection of internal culture and external communication. Traditionally focused on employer branding, it now builds **trust capital** by aligning employee values with responsible advertising.

- When advertising is manipulative, employees experience **value dissonance**, reducing engagement.
- When advertising reflects responsibility, employees feel pride and advocate for the brand.

**Key insight:** HR marketing transforms employees into **trust multipliers**—their advocacy strengthens consumer trust.

### Embedding Sustainability in the EVP

The **Employee Value Proposition (EVP)** has shifted from salary to values. Surveys (Deloitte, 2024) show that **70% of millennials and Gen Z employees prefer employers who prioritize sustainability.**

For food companies, embedding sustainability in EVP means:

- Limiting junk food promotions to children.
- Training employees on advertising ethics and child psychology.
- Using corporate storytelling to highlight commitments to health.

### Building Trust Capital Through Responsible Advertising

Trust capital functions as **organizational currency**:

- **Consumer Trust:** Parents remain loyal to brands they perceive as acting responsibly.
- **Employee Trust:** Workforce morale improves when internal values align with external messaging.
- **Stakeholder Trust:** Regulators and investors see responsible advertising as risk mitigation.

### Case Studies: Trust Capital in Practice

#### McDonald's

- **Challenge:** Criticism for unhealthy *Happy Meals*.
- **Response:** Reformulated meals, added fruit and milk, communicated reforms globally.
- **Trust Impact:** Partial restoration of parental trust; employees took pride in reforms.

#### PepsiCo

- **Challenge:** Criticism for sugary drinks in schools.
- **Response:** Removed full-sugar sodas from schools, reframed EVP around health.
- **Trust Impact:** Boosted consumer goodwill; reduced regulatory pressure.

## Nestlé

- **Challenge:** Long-standing infant formula scandal damaged reputation.
- **Response:** Introduced *Creating Shared Value (CSV)* and “Choose Wellness” campaigns.
- **Trust Impact:** Employees became nutrition ambassadors; slow but steady reputation rebuild.

## Findings

The research explored how HR marketing can nurture **trust capital** in food advertising directed at child audiences. By integrating doctrinal analysis, thematic coding, and case studies, six broad findings emerged. Together, these findings demonstrate that HR marketing is not a peripheral activity but a **strategic enabler of organizational trust**—internally with employees and externally with consumers, regulators, and investors. **Food Promotion Directly Shapes Children’s Diets and Health** Advertising that exploits children undermines **consumer trust** (parents feel manipulated) and **employee trust** (staff may feel complicit in harming public health). Trust capital erodes rapidly when marketing prioritizes profit over responsibility. **HR Marketing Provides a Framework for Responsible Branding** when HR marketing aligns EVP with responsibility, **internal trust capital grows**. Employees advocate for the brand, enhancing **external trust capital** with consumers and regulators. Once lost, rebuilding trust capital requires years of consistent effort, highlighting the strategic importance of **prevention through HR marketing**. **Stakeholder Alignment is Essential** Food advertising implicates multiple stakeholders—children, parents, employees, regulators, and investors. Misalignment creates contradictions:

Stakeholder alignment through HR marketing builds **holistic trust capital** across groups, preventing reputational fragmentation. The **HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle (HMTCC)** demonstrates how trust grows through a continuous loop: Organizations that fail to overcome these barriers risk **erosion of trust capital**, damaging both consumer loyalty and employee morale.

1. **Employee Values & Pride** → demand for ethical practices.
2. **Organizational Strategy** → EVP integrates sustainability.
3. **Responsible Advertising** → transparent, health-oriented campaigns.
4. **Consumer Trust** → parents perceive brand authenticity.

5. **Employer Branding** → responsible reputation attracts talent.
6. **Employee Advocacy** → engaged workforce amplifies trust.

**Barriers Threaten the Nurturing of Trust Capital** - Despite its potential, several barriers hinder the integration of HR marketing into responsible food advertising:

- **Profit Pressures:** Companies prioritize short-term revenue from child-targeted ads.
- **Greenwashing Risks:** Token gestures without substantive change erode trust.
- **Global–Local Contradictions:** Brands act responsibly in developed markets but exploit loopholes in emerging economies.
- **Measurement Gaps:** Trust capital and employee pride remain difficult to quantify.

### Implications of Findings

**For Organizations:** Trust capital is not abstract—it is measurable through reputation indices, employee advocacy, and consumer trust surveys. HR marketing should be positioned as a **strategic trust-builder**, not just a support function.

**For Employees:** Embedding sustainability into EVP empowers employees as **change agents**. Employee pride transforms into **trust advocacy**, amplifying corporate credibility.

**For Consumers:** Parents benefit from healthier advertising practices. Children gain protection from manipulative marketing.

**For Policymakers:** Regulations must integrate trust capital metrics into advertising governance. Policymakers should incentivize organizations that adopt HR-driven sustainability frameworks.

### Summary of Findings

1. **Food promotion strongly influences children’s health**, undermining trust when exploitative.
2. **HR marketing is a critical lever** for embedding responsibility into branding.
3. **Trust capital is fragile but strategic**, operating internally and externally.

4. **Stakeholder alignment strengthens trust capital** across employees, consumers, regulators, and investors.
5. The **Trust Capital Cycle** creates a self-reinforcing loop of sustainability and trust.
6. **Barriers such as profit pressures and greenwashing** threaten trust capital, requiring leadership commitment and measurement innovation.

## **Recommendations**

The findings highlight that food advertising targeted at children is not merely a marketing issue; it is a **trust capital challenge** that connects employees, consumers, regulators, and investors. To operationalize insights from the research, this section proposes a series of recommendations across five domains.

**6.2.1 Elevate HR Marketing to a Strategic Function** - Organizations must treat HR marketing not as a support activity but as a **strategic trust-builder**. Executive leadership should integrate HR marketing into corporate strategy, ensuring alignment between internal culture and external advertising.

**6.2.2 Adopt Voluntary Trust Codes for Advertising**- Beyond regulatory compliance, companies should develop voluntary codes that emphasize **trust capital protection**. Responsible advertising must be matched by **substantive product changes**. Reformulating products to reduce sugar, fat, and sodium demonstrates authenticity, preventing accusations of greenwashing. Organizations should track both **internal and external trust capital** through: Regular reporting of trust capital builds transparency and credibility.

### **6.3.1 Embed Trust Capital in the EVP**

The **Employee Value Proposition** should explicitly reference ethical advertising and child well-being. Recruitment materials, onboarding processes, and internal communication must emphasize the organization's commitment to responsible practices.

**6.3.2 Train Employees on Advertising Ethics** This ensures employees are **trust-aware decision-makers**.

HR departments should develop training programs covering:

- Child psychology and susceptibility to persuasion.
- Advertising regulations and ethical standards.
- Sustainability goals (e.g., UN SDGs).

### 6.3.3 Promote Employee Advocacy Programs

Employees should be encouraged to act as **trust ambassadors**, sharing sustainability initiatives on social media, participating in community health campaigns, and engaging in industry forums.

### 6.3.4 Align Performance Metrics with Responsibility

Performance reviews should measure contributions not only to sales but also to **trust capital**. For example:

- Rewarding teams that promote responsible campaigns.
- Incentivizing ethical innovation in product design and marketing.

### 6.4.1 Redesign Campaigns Around Transparency

Marketing campaigns must shift from **persuasive manipulation** to **transparent education**. Examples include:

- Highlighting portion control and balanced diets.
- Using relatable narratives (e.g., family health stories) instead of cartoon characters.

### 6.4.2 Co-Create Campaigns with Parents and Children

Involving parents and children in **participatory campaign design** ensures authenticity and strengthens trust. For example, advisory panels of parents can guide creative decisions to avoid manipulative content.

### 6.4.3 Apply Ethical AI in Digital Advertising

With AI-driven personalization dominating digital platforms, marketing teams must adopt **ethical AI guidelines**, such as:

- Preventing hyper-targeting of children.
- Labeling influencer content as advertising.
- Auditing algorithms for fairness and transparency.

### 6.5.1 Strengthen Legal Frameworks

Governments should expand restrictions on child-targeted food ads:

- Ban junk food advertising during children's programming.
- Extend rules to digital platforms and influencers.
- Impose penalties for non-compliance.

### 6.5.2 Incentivize HR-Driven Sustainability

Policymakers can reward companies that nurture trust capital by:

- Offering tax incentives for reformulated healthy products.
- Recognizing responsible advertisers with awards or certifications.
- Including trust capital as part of **ESG reporting frameworks**.

**6.5.3 Mandate Transparency in Advertising Data-** Regulations should require companies to disclose this transparency reinforces trust capital at the policy level.

- The volume of child-targeted ads.
- Nutritional content of advertised products.
- Steps taken to mitigate manipulative practices.

### 6.5.4 Facilitate Multi-Stakeholder Forums

Governments should create forums where companies, parents, NGOs, and HR leaders co-design industry-wide codes of practice. This collaborative model ensures **shared responsibility for trust capital**. Most current work is conceptual. Future studies should empirically measure trust capital using surveys, experiments, and longitudinal studies across diverse populations. Comparative research between developed and emerging economies can reveal how cultural and regulatory contexts shape HR marketing and trust capital. Scholars should continue bridging **HRM, marketing, and public health**,

building models like the **HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle (HMTCC)**. Research should analyze how algorithmic targeting affects children's trust and develop policy guidelines for ethical AI in marketing.

- **Organizations:** Make HR marketing a strategic driver, adopt voluntary codes, invest in healthier products, and measure trust capital.
- **HR Managers:** Embed responsibility in EVP, train employees, promote advocacy, and align performance incentives with trust capital.
- **Marketing Teams:** Redesign campaigns around transparency, involve parents/children, and use ethical AI.
- **Policymakers:** Strengthen laws, incentivize sustainability, mandate transparency, and foster stakeholder collaboration.
- **Academia:** Expand empirical research, explore cultural variations, build interdisciplinary models, and study AI advertising.

## Conclusion

### 7.1 Reaffirming the Research Problem

This study began with a critical observation: children, as vulnerable consumers, are disproportionately affected by food advertising that prioritizes sales over well-being. The rise of **television commercials, digital influencer marketing, and AI-driven personalization** has amplified their exposure to high-calorie, low-nutrient promotions. The consequences are clear—rising childhood obesity, unhealthy eating patterns, and long-term health risks. Yet, while public health research has documented these outcomes, the **organizational dimension** of child-focused advertising has been less explored. By reframing the issue through **HR marketing**, this paper has demonstrated that food advertising is not only a marketing problem but also an **HR and trust capital challenge**.

**7.2 The HR Marketing Perspective** - The analysis revealed that HR marketing extends far beyond recruitment and employer branding. When integrated with sustainability, HR marketing. This perspective underscores that HR marketing is a **strategic enabler of trust capital**, bridging people, reputation, and brand responsibility.

- Aligns **employee values** with organizational practices.

- Embeds **responsibility** into the Employer Value Proposition (EVP).
- Positions employees as **advocates of trust capital**.
- Connects **internal trust (employees)** with **external trust (consumers, regulators, investors)**.

**7.3.1 Conceptual Contribution-** The paper introduced the **HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle (HMTCC)**, a self-reinforcing framework linking: This cycle demonstrates how trust capital, once nurtured, strengthens itself through alignment between internal culture and external communication

**7.3.2 Theoretical Contribution-** By applying **stakeholder theory, social exchange theory, employer branding theory, and sustainable HRM models**, the study established an interdisciplinary bridge connecting HR, marketing, and public health. Trust capital emerged as the unifying construct across these frameworks.

**7.3.3 Practical Contribution-** Through case studies (McDonald's, PepsiCo, Nestlé, Tata Consumer), the research illustrated how HR marketing strategies can findings provide organizations with a **roadmap for nurturing trust capital** in food advertising

- Rebuild reputations after crises.
- Empower employees as sustainability ambassadors.
- Align product reformulation with advertising responsibility.

#### **7.4 Implications for Practice and Policy**

- **For Organizations:** Trust capital must be treated as a **strategic asset**. Companies that embed sustainability in advertising protect reputation and attract value-driven employees.
- **For Employees:** Alignment with responsible practices enhances pride, retention, and advocacy.
- **For Consumers:** Parents gain reassurance, and children are protected from manipulative marketing.
- **For Policymakers:** HR marketing offers a mechanism to complement regulation with voluntary compliance and stakeholder alignment.

#### **Future Research Avenues:**

1. Developing robust **trust capital metrics**, integrating employee engagement indices and consumer trust surveys.
2. Conducting **cross-cultural empirical studies** to capture global variations in HR marketing and trust.
3. Exploring the **role of AI** in shaping children's food choices and its ethical implications.
4. Examining **policy innovations** that integrate trust capital into ESG and sustainability reporting frameworks.

This paper has argued that **HR marketing is indispensable for nurturing trust capital** in food advertising to children. By embedding responsibility into EVP, aligning stakeholder interests, and adopting the HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle, organizations can an era of heightened scrutiny on advertising ethics and growing demands for corporate accountability, companies that embrace HR-driven trust capital strategies will not only secure competitive advantage but also contribute meaningfully to the well-being of future generations. Trust capital, once nurtured, becomes a **virtuous cycle**—an asset that multiplies through transparency, responsibility, and authentic engagement. It is both a **business imperative and a moral responsibility**. This study has shown that food advertising directed at children is not merely a marketing practice but a profound trust capital challenge, affecting employees, consumers, regulators, and society at large. By reframing the issue through the lens of HR marketing, the research demonstrated that organizational reputation and consumer well-being are inseparably linked to the ability of companies to nurture trust internally and externally. The proposed **HR Marketing Trust Capital Cycle (HMTCC)** illustrates how employee values, organizational strategy, responsible advertising, consumer trust, employer branding, and employee advocacy form a self-reinforcing loop that strengthens trust capital when authentically implemented. Case studies from McDonald's, PepsiCo, Nestlé, and Tata Consumer confirmed that trust, once eroded through manipulative practices, is difficult to rebuild but can be restored through HR-driven reforms that align internal values with external communication. The findings highlight that trust capital is both fragile and strategic—its erosion leads to reputational crises, while its nurturing secures long-term competitiveness. Organizations, employees, and policymakers alike must recognize that responsible advertising is not optional but essential for balancing profitability with ethical responsibility. While challenges remain—such as profit pressures, global–local contradictions, and risks of greenwashing—the integration of HR marketing into corporate strategy offers a path toward sustained trust and stakeholder alignment. Ultimately, nurturing trust capital is both a business imperative and a moral responsibility: companies

that embrace this approach will not only safeguard their reputation and attract value-driven talent but also contribute meaningfully to the health and well-being of future generations.

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