

Reducing Digital Marketing of Infant Formulas: Recommendations for Action

This brief highlights four recommendations to reduce harmful digital marketing of infant formulas.

1. DIGITAL PLATFORMS SHOULD PROHIBIT INFANT FORMULA

ADVERTISING: Neither Facebook nor Google address infant formula in their U.S. advertising policies. Both companies prohibit tobacco ads, and Google prohibits child-directed food marketing on its YouTube video platform. These policies parallel the World Health Organization's (WHO) policy frameworks for tobacco control and food and beverage advertising to children. Similarly, the WHO Code for breast-milk substitutes prohibits infant formula marketing. Just like tobacco and food advertising to children, digital platforms should prohibit infant formula advertising.

2. MAKE USER OPTIONS TO LIMIT PARENTING ADS EASY TO UNDERSTAND AND SALIENT: The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recommends that consumers be made aware of their privacy options when they provide personal information on topics like pregnancy and child birth. Facebook and Google currently provide users the option to limit parenting ads. In order to better protect users Facebook, in particular, can:

- a. Restore its "Hide Ad Topics" option to allow users to block all parenting-related ads.
- b. Allow users to prohibit advertiser use of the Facebook profile information category of "Family Members" as is currently allowed for "Relationship Status."
- c. Automatically apply these ad preferences to both Facebook and Instagram.

Both companies should notify users of relevant ad settings when they collect personal information.

3. ENGAGE WITH INFANT FORMULA MANUFACTURERS TO EXTEND THEIR U.K. MARKETING

PROTECTIONS TO THE U.S.: The three main U.S. infant formula manufacturers also operate in the U.K. where they abide by a self-regulatory code prohibiting marketing to the public and product sampling. In keeping with FTC antitrust orders, advocates could facilitate self-regulation in the U.S. by drafting an advertising moratorium and presenting it to individual infant formula manufacturers for adoption.

4. PROMOTE AD BLOCKING TECHNOLOGY: As an interim approach, expectant parents and infant caregivers can be made aware of ad blocking software to limit their exposure to infant formula ads.



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