

Health Communication Literacy Counseling through Health Halo Effect Education in the Formation of Food Product Image in Senior High School Students

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Health Halo Effect, Health Communication, Marketing Communication, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Literation

Received : 16, April

Revised : 18, June

Accepted: 20, August

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ABSTRACT

This community engagement program aimed to improve high school students' awareness of the Halo Effect in marketing communication and encourage critical evaluation of health-related product claims. Before the intervention, 100% of participants perceived the product as healthy milk, while 65% associated it with high calcium content, indicating a strong spontaneous health perception. The intervention introduced the Halo Effect and demonstrated how visual and verbal packaging cues may influence consumer judgments. Following the intervention, participants' responses indicated greater attention to nutritional information, ingredient composition, and product claims when evaluating product healthfulness. Future programs should incorporate structured evaluation instruments to enable quantitative assessment of changes in health communication literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry, especially the food and beverage category, is one of the sectors with a very dynamic level of competition (Chandra et al., 2025). Under these conditions, competitive advantage is no longer determined only by the functional attributes of the product, but also by the company's ability to build brand meaning and association through integrated marketing communication (Fauzan et al., 2023). The development of the concept of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) places communication as a strategic process to build relationships with consumers through consistent messages on various communication channels (Winarko & Husna, 2020), so that brands are not only perceived based on product characteristics, but also based on symbols, experiences, and associations that continue to be strengthened through marketing activities (Hasan et al., 2025). Thus, marketing communication plays an important role in shaping consumers' initial perception before they make a more rational evaluation of a product.

In the FMCG industry, marketing communication increasingly utilizes health cues as part of a brand differentiation strategy (Kurniawan, 2025). The visual use of sports activities, athlete figures, certain packaging colors, as well as terms such as high calcium, energy, source of vitamins, and active lifestyle are forms of symbolic communication that are able to build health associations with a product (Christian et al., 2023; . The strategy is not always intended as an explicit health claim, but it can affect the way consumers interpret a brand (Ardiansyah et al., 2025). Previous research has shown that health messages in food advertising are able to shape adolescents' positive perceptions of the products being promoted, although they do not directly change consumption behavior (Aurick, 2025; Rachel, 2025). These findings confirm that marketing communication has an important contribution in shaping consumers' initial interpretation of a product.

This phenomenon can be explained through Halo Effect Theory, which is cognitive bias when one positive attribute influences the assessment of other attributes that have not been objectively evaluated (Laham & Forgas, 2022; Bin, 2025). In the context of marketing communication, associations with exercise, health, or an active lifestyle can encourage consumers to give a positive evaluation of the overall product. This explains that marketing messages that contain nutritional claims are able to increase the perception of health of a product, especially in individuals with a high level of health consciousness. Conversely, individuals who have better health literacy tend to make more critical evaluations after reading the nutritional value information on the packaging. These results show that consumer perception is the result of an interaction between marketing communication strategies and individual cognitive characteristics (Syauki & Avina, 2020).

These findings are strengthened by research by Stoltze et al. (2021) which shows that claims of nutritional content on packaging are able to produce a health halo effect, which is the tendency of consumers to give a positive assessment of the overall health of the product even though the information is only related to one specific attribute. In fact, this perception also affects the assessment of product quality and purchase intention. These findings indicate that visual and verbal communication elements in packaging have persuasive power that goes beyond their informative function (Gounady & Surianto, 2025; Anto & Siratan, 2026). Therefore, marketing communication not only builds brand awareness, but also forms cognitive constructs that influence the consumer's decision-making process.

In the perspective of health communication, the phenomenon suggests that society needs the ability to not only understand health information, but also evaluate how health messages are constructed through marketing communication (Ulfazika & Saputra, 2026). Health communication literacy includes the ability to obtain, understand, interpret, and evaluate health information so that individuals are able to make decisions based on accountable information (Wicaksono et al., 2025). Strengthening health literacy from school age contributes to the ability to think critically in dealing with various persuasive messages received through the media and social environment. Thus, health communication literacy is one of the important competencies in the digital communication era.

The group of teenagers was chosen as the target of the activity because it is one of the groups with the highest intensity of exposure to marketing communication through social media, digital platforms, and various other forms of visual communication. In this developmental phase, adolescents begin to have independence in determining consumption choices, but the ability to evaluate persuasion strategies used in marketing communication is still developing. Repeated exposure to brand communication has the potential to form preferences and perceptions that persist in the long term if not balanced with critical thinking skills and adequate communication literacy (Kembau et al., 2024; Surianto et al., 2024). Therefore, strengthening health communication literacy in school-age groups is relevant as an effort to build the ability to evaluate marketing messages more reflexively and evidence-based.

Based on these conditions, this Community Service activity was carried out in the form of online counseling to 100 high school students by integrating Halo Effect Theory as a conceptual framework to explain how marketing communication shapes the perception of health of a food product. This activity does not aim to assess or judge a particular brand, but rather to improve the ability of participants to understand the process of forming perception through marketing communication strategies. Through the presentation of the Halo Effect concept, case study analysis, and discussion on the importance of verifying information through nutrition labels and product composition, participants are expected to be able to distinguish between images built through marketing activities and verifiable health information. Thus, this activity is expected to contribute to strengthening health communication literacy while improving

adolescents' ability to evaluate marketing communication messages more critically.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

This Community Service activity uses a participatory educational approach that aims to improve health communication literacy through counseling on the formation of health perceptions based on *Halo Effect Theory*. The activity was carried out online using a video conferencing platform and involved 100 high school (SMA) students in Jakarta as participants. All participants participated in a series of activities consisting of pre-assesment, material delivery, interactive discussions, and evaluations. This approach was chosen to create a learning process that is not only oriented to the delivery of information, but also encourages participants to understand critically how marketing communication strategies can shape perceptions of a food product.

The counseling was carried out in four main sessions. The first session discussed the basic concept of *the Halo Effect* as a form of cognitive bias that affects the formation of individual perceptions. The second session explained various examples of the implementation of *the Halo Effect* in daily life to help participants understand the mechanism of perception formation in various communication contexts. The third session linked the concept to marketing communication through a case study of a dairy-based beverage brand disguised as the XYZ brand, which was chosen because it had a strong association with sports activities and an active lifestyle. In this session, it was emphasized that the discussion did not aim to evaluate or judge the quality of a particular product, but rather to explain how marketing communication elements can shape a health image without explicit claims from brands. The fourth session was focused on strengthening health communication literacy through a discussion on the importance of verifying information on nutrition labels, product composition, and claims listed on the packaging before making consumption decisions.

Evaluation of activities was carried out using pre tests and post tests in the form of open-ended questions. *The pre test* asks participants to write down the first impression that appears when hearing the XYZ brand, with participants allowed to give more than one answer. *Pre-test* data were analyzed quantitatively descriptively using frequency distribution to identify participants' initial associations with the brands used as case studies. Furthermore, the post test is given through questions about the actions that need to be taken before consuming a food product. Participants' answers were analyzed using content analysis by grouping responses into main themes that represented changes in understanding after participating in counseling. Comparison of *pre-test* and *post-test results* was used to illustrate the change in participants' mindset as an indicator of increasing health communication literacy after participating in the activity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Activities

Community Service activities were carried out online through a video conferencing platform involving 100 high school (SMA) students as participants. The selection of the online method is based on considerations of the efficiency of the implementation and the ability to reach participants simultaneously without being limited by geographical location. The entire series of activities took place in sync and consisted of openings, material delivery, interactive discussions, and evaluation through pre-tests and post-tests. During the activity, participants were given the opportunity to express their opinions, ask questions, and discuss various examples of marketing communication related to the perception of the health of a product.

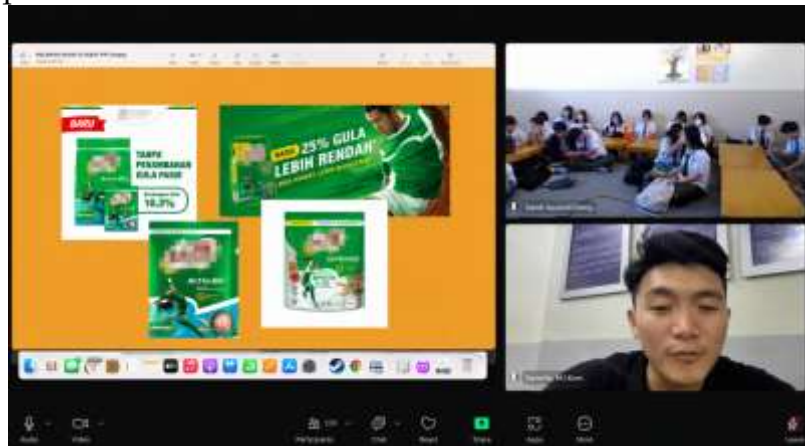


Figure 1. Implementation of Online Marketing Health Communication Counseling Activities to the Participants of the Activity.

Source: Implementation Team Documentation (2026)

The delivery of material was carried out using digital presentation media combined with case study-based discussions so that participants could more easily understand the concepts presented. Speakers facilitate the learning process in an interactive manner by encouraging participants to identify their initial perception of a brand, then discuss how elements of marketing communication, such as packaging design, color use, supportive visuals, and associations with active lifestyles, can shape that perception. This approach allows participants not only to receive the material theoretically, but also to reflect on their experiences as consumers in everyday life.

Implementation of Activity Materials

The implementation of counseling is designed using a problem-based learning approach through concept delivery, case studies, and interactive discussions. The material began with the introduction of Halo Effect Theory as a form of cognitive bias that explains the tendency of individuals to generalize to an object based on one attribute that is considered positive. At this stage, participants are given a variety of simple examples in daily life to understand that the formation of perception is not always based on an objective evaluation of information, but is also influenced by experiences, associations, and repeated received communication. This approach is used as a foundation before participants enter the discussion on food product marketing communication.

Furthermore, participants were invited to analyze the implementation of Halo Effect in marketing communication through a case study of a dairy-based beverage brand which in this article is disguised as the XYZ brand. The case study was chosen because the brand has a strong association with sports activities, an active lifestyle, as well as the consistent use of visual communication elements, such as the dominance of certain colors, athlete illustrations, and marketing messages related to physical activity. All materials were delivered by emphasizing that the discussion did not aim to evaluate or judge product quality, but rather to explain how marketing communication strategies are able to form a health image in the minds of consumers even though the brand does not explicitly claim its products as health products. This approach is expected to be able to help participants understand the difference between the perception built through marketing activities and the factual information available on the product packaging.



Figure 2. The Material for the Implementation of Halo Effect In Marketing Communication Uses Case Studies of Disguised Food Brands.

Source: Implementation Team Documentation (2026)

As a strengthening of health communication literacy, participants were then invited to discuss the importance of verifying information before making consumption decisions. The resource person explained that a positive perception of a brand does not always reflect the characteristics of the product as a whole, so consumers need to get used to reading information on nutritional value, ingredient composition, and claims listed on the packaging. The discussion took place interactively through a question and answer session and reflection on the participants' experiences as consumers. Through this approach, participants are expected to not only understand the mechanism of the Halo Effect, but also have the ability to evaluate marketing communication messages more critically and evidence-based, so that consumption decisions are not solely influenced by the brand image that has been formed.

Activity Evaluation Results

Evaluation of activities was carried out through pre test and post test to identify changes in participants' understanding after participating in counseling. In the pre-test, participants were asked to write down the first impression that appeared when they heard the XYZ brand which was used as a case study and has been disguised in this article. The results showed that 100 participants associated the brand as a healthy milk, 65 participants referred to it as a high-calcium product, while others attributed it to chocolate drinks, exercise, and energy boosters. The findings show that the majority of participants have formed a positive perception of the brand before evaluating the nutritional information and claims listed on the packaging. This condition indicates the formation of perceptions influenced by marketing communication through visual elements, brand identity, and associations with healthy lifestyles, as described in the concept of the Halo Effect (Stoltze et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2021).

After participating in counseling, the results of the post test showed a change in the participants' understanding patterns. The majority of respondents stated that before consuming a food product, consumers need to read nutritional value information, check the composition of ingredients, evaluate claims on the packaging, and not immediately consider a product healthy based only on the brand image or communication message displayed. The change in answer shows that counseling has succeeded in improving participants' ability to evaluate marketing communication messages more critically and information-based. These findings are in line with the research of Fernández Escobar et al. (2021) which emphasized that education on food product communication can improve adolescents' ability to interpret marketing messages more rationally, while supporting efforts to strengthen health communication literacy through understanding the mechanism of perception formation in marketing communication.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Community Service activity shows that counseling on the Halo Effect in marketing communication can be an effective approach to improve health communication literacy in high school (SMA) students. Before counseling, most participants tend to build a positive perception of a brand based on the image formed through marketing communication elements, such as visual identity, association with sports activities, and branding. After participating in counseling, participants showed a change in understanding by emphasizing the importance of reading nutritional value information, checking product composition, and evaluating claims on packaging before making consumption decisions. These findings suggest that education on the mechanisms of perception formation can help adolescents distinguish between images built through marketing communication and factual information about a product.

This activity implies that strengthening health communication literacy needs to be integrated into educational programs for the younger generation as an effort to build critical thinking skills towards various marketing messages received every day. In the future, similar activities can be developed through offline counseling, expanding the target of participants from various levels of education, and the use of more comprehensive evaluation instruments to measure changes in health communication literacy quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, the Community Service program not only contributes to the improvement of participants' knowledge, but also supports the formation of more rational and information-based consumption behaviors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expressed his gratitude to the Department of the Center for Research and Community Service (P3M) of Bunda Mulia University for the support provided in the implementation of this Community Service activity. This support is an important part of the implementation of counseling activities and the preparation of scientific outputs from this activity.

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