FOOD MARKETING VIA VIDEOGAME LIVESTREAMING PLATFORMS: WHAT IS THE EXTENT, NATURE AND IMPACT ON ADOLESCENTS?

KEY MESSAGE

The issue: Adolescents are exposed to high levels of HFSS food marketing via videogame livestreaming platforms. This marketing is powerful, and is associated with their food-related attitudes, purchasing, and consumption behaviours. It is currently unregulated.

Implications for policymakers: The UK Government proposal for an online ban on HFSS food marketing should include videogame livestreaming platforms. Current definitions and scope are unclear.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media has become an integral part of adolescents’ lives. Mirroring this trend, food and non-alcoholic beverage (hereafter: food) brands increasingly market in popular digital media to maximise their reach with young consumers.

What is a videogame livestreaming platform?

Videogame livestreaming platforms are a growing form of digital media, where individuals can broadcast or watch streamed videogame footage. The top three platforms [market share by hours watched] are Twitch (77%), YouTube Gaming (15%), and Facebook Gaming Live (7%), with a combined 29.5 billion hours watched in 2022 [1].

Are these platforms popular with teenagers?

A large majority of UK adolescents use video-sharing platforms, play videogames online, and watch livestreams (98%, 76% and 73% of 12-15-year-olds respectively [2]). Streamed videogames include those popular with young people, such as Fortnite.

FINDING 1: ADOLESCENTS ARE EXPOSED TO HIGH LEVELS OF HFSS FOOD MARKETING

Methods: A content analysis of food marketing via Fortnite streamers on Twitch using a World Health Organization (WHO) protocol and both the UK and WHO Europe Nutrient Profile Models. Food cues in videos (n = 52, 52h) uploaded to the platform during October 2020 - September 2021 by influencers likely to be popular with adolescents were analysed.

Findings:

- 2.56 food cues per hour. Average duration of each food cue (per hour) = 20 minutes and 25 seconds
- 70.7% of food cues were HFSS. Only 11.3% would be marketed to children
- 62.4% of food cues were for energy drinks
- 80.5% of food cues were branded. 39.1% featured a brand only (no product)
- Only 2.3% of food cues had an advertising disclosure

FINDING 3: THIS FOOD MARKETING IS ASSOCIATED WITH ADOLESCENT EATING BEHAVIOUR

Methods: An online questionnaire was given to adolescents (n = 490, mean age = 16.81, 30.2% female) exploring their recall of food marketing on the top three videogame livestreaming platforms, and relevant behavioural (purchase, consumption) and attitudinal outcomes. The hierarchical relationships between the key variables were explored.

Findings: Recall of HFSS food marketing was associated with more positive attitudes towards HFSS foods, which in turn was associated with greater purchase and consumption of these foods.

“…it should be easy for young people to be healthy, it isn’t. Our world is flooded with junk food, and billions are spent marketing and advertising it to us. This devastating power imbalance between corporates and consumers will continue if no one holds companies to account for the products and practices that damage our health.”

- The young people of Bite Back 2030

REFERENCES


FINDING 2: INFLUENCER AND DIGITAL GAME-BASED FOOD MARKETING ARE POWERFUL

Methods: A systematic review and meta-analysis examining the evidence for a relationship between exposure to digital game-based or influencer food marketing, and food-related (brand awareness, attitudes, preferences, purchase, and consumption) outcomes in young people (<18 years). Twenty-three databases were searched in March 2021. Twenty-two studies met the inclusion criteria.

Findings:

- Twice as likely to prefer and have more positive attitudes towards marketed brand/product
- More likely to consume more (~37 kcal) of a marketed brand/product
- More data needed to draw reliable conclusions for awareness and purchasing outcomes