

INTRODUCTION

Marketing of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) has been identified as a significant risk factor for childhood obesity and for the development of diet-related non-communicable diseases¹. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been providing guidance to Member States to reduce food marketing pressure on children^{2,3}. Portugal has adopted legislation early 2016 to restrict food marketing to children in a series of platforms, ranging from school premises, to TV channels, Radio stations and Internet. Evaluating and monitoring its implementation is pivotal to ensure that effective action is taken.

OBJECTIVE

- To conduct a pilot study to identify the most frequently used TV channels, radio stations and websites among children;
- To assess the marketing of HFSS foods on TV and Radio using the WHO Regional Office for Europe nutrient profile model⁵.

METHODS

Information on TV channels, radio stations and websites preferences was obtained through a questionnaire applied to 185 children aged 6-10 years old (convenience sample), in a Portuguese municipality – Oeiras, in May 2015. From those results, a pilot study was conducted, using the most popular TV and Radio stations, namely “Disney Channel” and “Rádio Comercial”, respectively. “Disney Channel” was recorded from 07.00h to 22.00h on a weekday of April 2016 and “Rádio Comercial” from 7.00h to 11.00h as well as from 17.00h to 19.00h. The food ads identified were categorized according to the WHO Regional Office for Europe nutrient profile model⁵ either into “permitted” or “not permitted” for the purposes of restricting food marketing to children. The nutrition information was accessed on the websites of the brand/product.



RESULTS

“Disney Channel” (68%) and “Cartoon Network” (53%) were the most viewed TV channels. 38% of children reported not listening to radio or did not answer the question. The most popular radio stations reported by children were “Rádio Comercial” and “RFM”. As for the websites, “YouTube” and the game website “friv.com” were reported as the most used. Although the age limit to sign up for “Facebook” is 13 years old, 9% use it (Table 1).

The pilot study identified 44 ads on “Disney Channel”, 10 (23%) of which were foods and non-alcoholic beverages, **all considered HFSS foods**. On “Rádio Comercial”, 71 ads were found (4 of which were foods - 6%) from 7h to 11h and 57 (4 of which were foods - 14%) from 17h to 19h. Their accordance to the WHO Euro model⁵ is described in the tables 2 and 3.

Table 1 – The most used TV channels, radio stations and websites among children.

| TV channels | % children (n=185) | Radio station | % children (n=185) | Websites | % children (n=185) |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Disney Channel | 68% | Rádio Comercial | 38% | YouTube | 58% |
| Cartoon Network | 53% | RFM | 34% | friv.com | 21% |
| Panda Biggs | 45% | M80 | 15% | Facebook | 9% |
| Nickelodean | 35% | Cidade FM | 8% | Wikipedia | 8% |
| SIC | 28% | Mega HITS | 5% | sapo.pt | 4% |
| Canal Panda | 18% | TSF | 5% | brincar.pt | 3% |
| TVI | 16% | Antena 3 | 4% | Club penguin | 3% |

Table 2 – Food ads on “Disney Channel”, and their classification according to the WHO nutrient profile model.

| Food ads on “Disney Channel” | Number of ads | WHO Euro model |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| Cheese | 7 | Not permitted |
| Quick-service/take-away meal (Happy Meal) | 1 | Not permitted* |
| Chocolate and sugars confectionery, energy bars, and sweet toppings and desserts | 1 | Not permitted |
| Cakes, sweet biscuits and pastries; other sweet bakery wares, and dry mixes for making such | 1 | Not permitted |
| Total | 10 | |

* According to WHO Euro model, “if the marketing is for a restaurant meal, including a quick-service or take-away meal of two or more menu items, all items must individually meet the relevant nutrient criteria”.

Table 3 – Food ads on “Rádio Comercial”, and their classification according to the WHO nutrient profile model.

| Food ads on “Rádio Comercial” | Number of ads | | WHO Euro model |
|--|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| | 7h – 11h | 17h – 19h | |
| Fresh and frozen meat, poultry, fish and similar | 2 | 1 | Permitted |
| Fresh and frozen fruit, vegetables and legumes | 1 | 2 | Permitted |
| Breakfast cereals | 1 | | Not permitted |
| Processed meat, poultry, fish and similar | | 1 | Not permitted |
| Total | 8 | | |

CONCLUSION

Marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages constitutes a great concern, mainly on TV, as it tends to be HFSS foods⁶, which was also confirmed in this pilot study. In fact, all foods advertised on the most popular children’s TV channel “Disney channel” do not conform with the WHO nutrient profile model and would not be permitted according to it. In addition, TV is one of the platforms that children use the most.

Although Portugal has been discussing and highlighting Marketing of HFSS foods to children in the political arena, this research emphasizes how urgent it is to have the Portuguese legislation on food marketing towards children into effect and provides a good starting point for future monitoring. It reinforces the need to study in detail the nature and extent of marketing to children HFSS foods in Portugal, giving special attention to digital platforms.

REFERENCES

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