Impact of food marketing on popular children’s websites and food product websites in Australia

Issues related to food marketing to children has been gaining momentum as a potential area for intervention. While previous research on food marketing focused predominantly on TV, the use of non-broadcast media is becoming more common and children are increasingly exposed to a high volume of messages via integrated marketing techniques. Studies have found that the Internet provides opportunities for creative and targeted marketing of unhealthy food to children. The aim of this study was to systematically describe the nature and extent of food marketing on popular children’s websites, based on website traffic data.

Overall, 119 food product websites were analysed and in many instances, they clearly displayed brand logos, product packaging graphics and more. Specifically regarding children’s websites, there were significantly more food references for unhealthy foods compared to healthy foods. Additionally, “advergaming” was available on a majority of websites targeting children and adolescents. Given the Internet’s interactive nature, marketers are becoming more attracted to this medium as a mean to encourage children to engage with food products.