News report. Gaps and weaknesses in controls on food and drink marketing to children in the UK

The regulatory landscape in the UK is relatively well-developed regarding the control of food marketing and advertisement to children. However, given the increasing number of marketing platforms, children are constantly exposed to both new and traditional media. In light of this, the UK government commissioned the National Heart Forum to review current controls on food marketing, to include marketing practices, regulations, policies, commitments and proposals in order to identify the gaps and weaknesses.

Through three research tasks, it was identified that children use a mix of media earlier starting at a younger age. Additionally, the analysis of 63 food company websites highlighted that the food marketing industry remains dominated by ‘unhealthy’ products. While the UK has regulations regarding television advertising, these do not apply to radio or on-demand television. This is particularly important to notice given that marketing to children is increasingly delivered across multiple media and consequently regulatory authorities urgently need to adapt with the use of new technologies.