Recommendation Extract

Who’s feeding the kids online Digital Food Marketing and Children in Ireland

This study aimed to make essential first steps in identifying the digital food and drink marketing appealing to, or directed at, children and young people in Ireland. It studied (1) websites of top Ireland food and drink retail brands – as reports from other countries indicate these have much content directed at young children – and (2) Facebook brand Pages – as Facebook is a single platform, most popular with children and young people in Ireland, and is a location where advertisers are also very active. Finally, to indicate what information families need, and whether there is a public appetite for regulation of digital food marketing to children, the report also explored (3) parent awareness and views in Ireland of digital food marketing.

Recommendations

This report has found evidence of engaging, entertaining and emotion-focused HFSS ‘stealth’ marketing techniques that appeal to, or are directed at, children and young people on digital media in Ireland. There is consistent evidence that HFSS marketing on TV affects children’s food attitudes and eating; evidence from marketers that digital marketing further amplifies the impact of other existing channels; and evidence that voluntary schemes to restrict food marketing are weaker and less effective than statutory regulation. It is therefore recommended that Ireland’s existing statutory restriction of HFSS broadcast marketing to under-18s be extended to digital marketing.

1. Recognise children’s rights to participations – but also to health and protection.
2. Extend existing regulation for broadcast media to all digital media.
3. Identify international options for ending HFSS food promotion.
5. Disrupt the language of ‘choice’ and ‘responsibility’
6. Prohibit ‘heroes of the young’ from marketing HFSS products
7. Inform young people, parents and policy makers about digital food marketing
8. Consider the potential of ‘social marketing’ for healthier habits
9. Equalise access to information about digital HFSS marketing