

Blackmail

THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF INQUIRIES INTO
CONSUMER CONCERNS ABOUT THE ETHICS
OF MODERN FOOD PRODUCTION AND ADVERTISING.



Overview

The Co-op is committing itself to a voluntary ban on advertising, during children's TV hours, of all food and drink products high in fat, sugar or salt.

And the Co-op is calling on others in the food chain to follow this lead. At the same time it is campaigning for the Independent Television Commission (ITC) to impose a ban as there are likely to be many dissenters amongst the vested interests of the food industry.

These actions follow the publication of the Co-op Food Crimes Report in May 2000. In it the Co-op committed to a series of inquiries examining the evidence behind public concern about the commercialisation of food and drink. And it agreed to report back on what actions are required to restore public confidence in the food chain.

This first inquiry looks into 'Blackmail' - parental concern about the impact of TV advertising of food and drink products on their children's diets. The findings, published here, form the basis of a submission by the Co-op to the ITC to change the rules governing advertising standards and practice.

The inquiry was conducted against a background of revelations from the Food Standards Agency about a crisis in children's diets, at a time when the ITC is undertaking a major review of its Code of Advertising Standards and Practice, reporting back in October 2000¹.

However, the ITC consultation paper, published in May 2000, is more about the relaxation of advertising restrictions. It makes no mention of the need to review the cumulative effect of food and drink advertising. But the evidence of the Co-op inquiry suggests that, on the contrary, the UK needs tighter controls on advertising to children and that such controls would be welcomed by parents.

Their opinions are also likely to be supported by the incoming Swedish Presidency of the EU, on record as saying it intends to take action against advertising to children. All advertising to children under 12 is banned in Sweden.

The inquiry looks in detail at the food and drink products advertised during children's TV, including their nutritional value.

It also analyses the psychology behind this advertising and how it is crafted to exploit children's vulnerabilities.

The Case for a Ban

Children are fed a continuous diet of TV commercials promoting fatty, sugary and salty products. Indeed, according to independent research carried out on behalf of the Co-op², on some children's TV, up to 99 per cent of food advertised is high in fat, sugar or salt (see Annex One).

A similar report five years ago coincided with the government's Nutrition Task Force asking the ITC to tighten up its Code. However the results of our research clearly demonstrate that it is still not tight enough.

Consumed in moderation, there is no evidence that fatty, sugary and salty foods pose a threat to health. But consumed in high volumes, as increasingly they appear to be, there is mounting evidence of the damaging effect they are having on children's diets.

The most recent of several reports commissioned by the government into children's diets, The National Diet and Nutrition Survey, published by the Food Standards Agency in June³, demonstrates yet again that today's children are becoming 'hooked' on junk food. They eat more of the sort of fatty, sugary and salty foods of which they should be eating less. They eat less of the foods, like fresh fruit and vegetables, of which they should be eating more.

The Co-op consulted child psychologist Dr Aric Sigman⁴. He believes that, contrary to popular opinion, children do not 'naturally' like an unbalanced diet.

If left to their own intuition, they would eat a balanced diet, but they are not left to their own intuition⁵. Advertisements, and especially TV commercials, shape children's perceptions of the product advertised through emotional associations which override intuition. Dr Sigman identifies four fundamental emotional needs or vulnerabilities exploited by TV advertisers, often with advice from other psychologists.

These are:

- **THE NEED FOR NURTURE AND PROTECTION**
- **THE NEED FOR STIMULATION**
- **THE NEED FOR ROLE MODELS**
- **THE NEED FOR PEER GROUP ACCEPTANCE**

Dr Sigman gives examples of the techniques used by advertisers to exploit these needs (see Annex Two).

As children have developed an appetite for products high in fat, sugar and salt, so they have become adept at pestering their parents to buy them. 73 per cent of children say they ask parents to buy what they see advertised - and 52 per cent admit they don't take "no" for an answer (see Annex Three).

In independent research, parents tell us they are angry with the marketing muscle that sets their own children against them. Now parents say they have had enough. Three in four (77 per cent) want to see an end to TV advertising which 'blackmails' them into buying fatty and sugary foods (see Annex Four).

The Co-op is not against advertising, on TV or elsewhere. But in the interests of consumers, especially parents and children, we believe - as they do - that this particular advertising must stop.

As a consumer-owned retailer, the Co-op has always been at the forefront of food issues, putting the interests of consumers first and, whenever necessary breaking ranks with the rest of the industry to campaign for changes in the law (see Annex Five).

We do not claim that any individual advertisement runs contrary to the ITC Code, which provides that advertising to children should not denigrate good nutritional practice. **But our findings demonstrate that the combined impact of food and drink advertising during children's TV viewing hours runs counter to both the government's healthy eating guidelines and the spirit of the ITC Code⁶.**

It would be unfair to ban the advertising of any one product high in fat, sugar or salt during these hours. So, we contend, the only fair way forward is to ban the advertising of any and all.

We are therefore calling on the ITC to revise its Code of Practice to ban the advertising, during children's TV hours, of food and drink products high in fat, sugar or salt.

Annexes

4

- 1 TV Dinners**
(Study by Sustain)
- 2 How Advertising Exploits Children**
(Dr Aric Sigman)
- 3 What Children Say**
(Research by NOP/Wardle McLean)
- 4 What Parents Say**
(Research by NOP/Wardle McLean)
- 5 Responsible Retailing and the Co-op**

TV Dinners

What's being served up by the advertisers?

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming was commissioned to conduct a study into TV food and drink commercials targeted at children, with specific attention to:

- Comparison of advertising in children's TV viewing hours with advertising after the nine o'clock watershed aimed at adults
- Nutritional value of food advertised compared with healthy eating guidelines
- Most advertised categories of food and drink products

Their study reveals the radical difference between the types of product advertised at children and those presented to adult viewers. Cakes, biscuits and confectionery, for example, constitute 24 per cent of food advertised on Saturday morning children's TV, 46 per cent on Children's ITV (CITV) and 53 per cent on The Big Breakfast. But on late evening TV, their combined proportion is just 13 per cent.

More alarming is the analysis of the nutritional content of food and drink advertised to children. The overwhelming proportion contains high fat, high sugar or high salt - 99 per cent in the case of Saturday morning children's TV and 95 per cent on CITV.

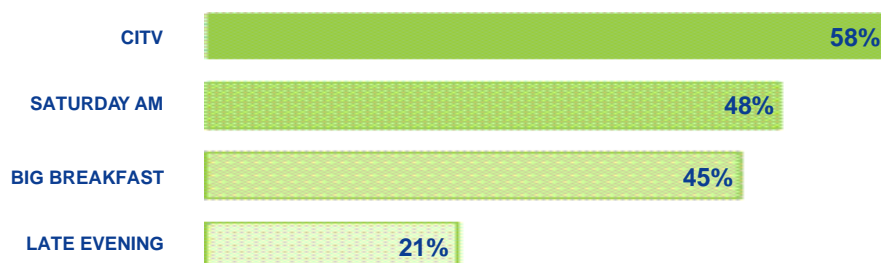
This could hardly contrast more sharply with governmental guidelines on healthy eating.

Sustain concluded that the food and drink which government experts recommend should be consumed most are in fact advertised least - if at all - during children's viewing hours.

Sustain recorded and analysed all TV commercials broadcast in mid-March during the following time periods

ADVERTISING			
CITV	Sat AM TV	Big Breakfast	Late evening
8hrs 45 Mon to Fri 3.20 - 5.05pm	6hrs 30	10hrs Mon to Fri 7 - 9am	12hrs 30 Mon to Fri 9 - 11.30pm

During this period, food as a percentage of all commercials accounted for

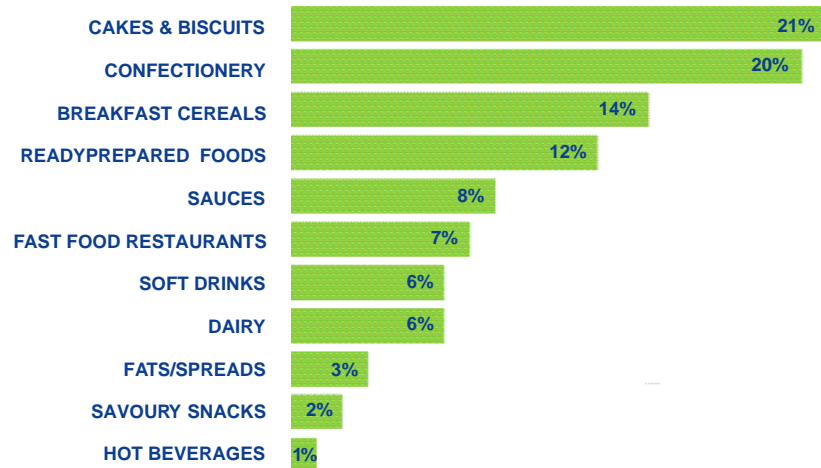


Number of food and drink commercials per hour

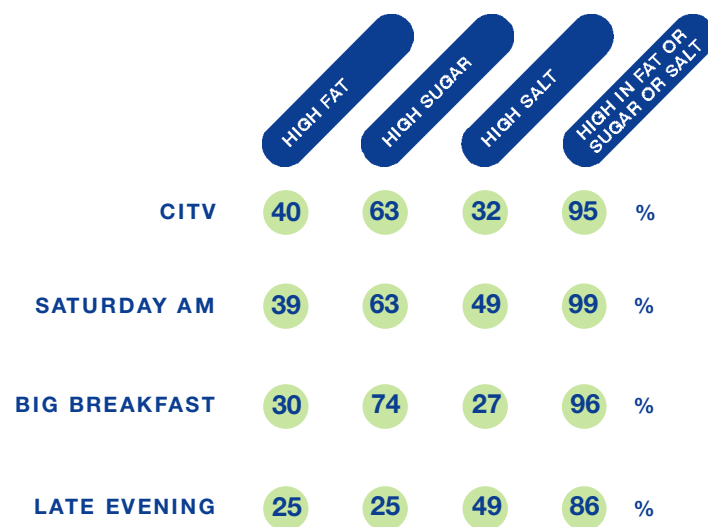


Categories of food and drink products advertised

CITV, SATURDAY AM & BIG BREAKFAST



Nutritional analysis of advertised foods



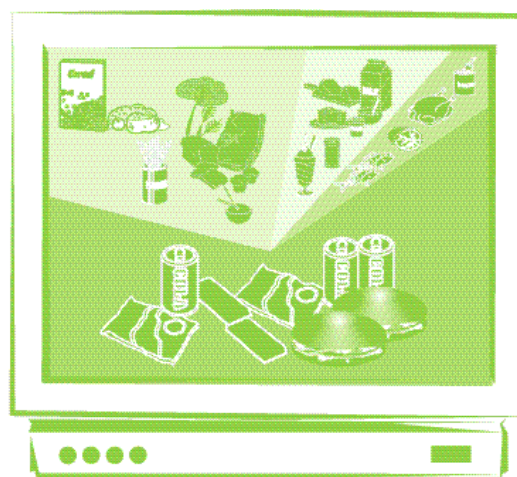
What we should be eating according to the government's National Food Guide



	Bread, other cereals & potatoes	34%
	Fruit & vegetables	33%
	Milk & dairy foods	15%
	Meat, fish & alternatives	12%
	Fatty & sugary foods	7%

What is advertised to children

CITY, SATURDAY AM & BIG BREAKFAST



	Bread, other cereals & potatoes	16%
	Fruit & vegetables	0%
	Milk & dairy foods	10%
	Meat, fish & alternatives	4%
	Fatty & sugary foods	70%

How Advertising Exploits Children

by Dr Aric Sigman

Advertisements directed at children are designed to address a child's basic needs and tendencies - which are still raw and unformed - and to exploit them.

Children are exposed to TV commercials during their critical stages of development, a time when parents' efforts to shape their children's tastes and social behaviour is of paramount importance and must predominate.

Advertising therefore disrupts the normal process of child rearing, intervening and subverting a child's needs and desires when they are most vulnerable and pliable. There are now also concerns that the short, high-stimulation nature of TV commercials for children may have permanent effects on their brain development and their attention spans. Some scientists believe that the enormous increase in Attention Deficit Disorder amongst children is the result of this type of televisual stimulation⁷.

There are four vulnerabilities exploited by advertisers

- **THE NEED FOR NURTURE AND PROTECTION**
- **THE NEED FOR STIMULATION**
- **THE NEED FOR ROLE MODELS**
- **THE NEED FOR PEER GROUP ACCEPTANCE**

■ THE NEED FOR NURTURE AND PROTECTION

Children depend on parents to make honourable and protective decisions about their well-being. This is exploited via the association of food and drink with mothers and ‘goodness’:

MOTHER LOVE - A nurturing mother is seen giving her own children the sugary fatty product while mentioning terms such as “vitamins”. The wholesomeness and sanctity of motherhood is used to reassure and persuade children that the sugary or fatty product has the maternal seal of approval.

MOTHER NATURE - A mother nature figure in the forest sneers while tossing her glass of drinking water aside and informs children that water tastes bad, but that this can be cured by adding fruit flavouring and colouring.

■ THE NEED FOR STIMULATION

Children are able to throw themselves wholeheartedly into imagined worlds of fantasy - e.g. the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus. The enduring success of cartoon is proof of this tendency. Advertisers use the child’s imagination to great effect, exploiting his or her need for stimulation:

I’M YOUR FRIEND - The product literally comes alive and speaks to the child, who is impressionable and unable to distinguish easily between an advertisement and a normal cartoon. An adult narrator uses over the top enthusiasm with plenty of connotative meaning to make it all the more authentic and exciting in the mind of the child.

VIRTUAL CELEBRITY - Established cartoon or animation characters that children recognise interact with the product and endorse it. Such characters have great authority and influence in the mind of the child and lend the product tremendous credibility.

■ THE NEED FOR ROLE MODELS

Children are constantly in the process of developing their own identity, values and tastes. Much of this occurs through observing and imitating the role models provided - parents and relatives. However, advertisements now provide alternative role models to influence the child's identity and tastes:

HERO APPEAL - Some adverts take advantage of the tendency to 'hero worship'. A well-known healthy sporting hero is shown to be desperate for, and crazy about, a product that his team's nutritionist is unlikely to recommend. The narrator's voice points out how tall and powerful the champion is and how he loves the product which he is then seen eating. Children are led to believe that the fatty, sugary product is linked to strength, health and winning.

SEX APPEAL - Children are interested in glamorous adult behaviour and learn about 'normal' male/female interaction. With this in mind, advertisers are now using sexual symbolism on screen to intrigue young children.

■ THE NEED FOR PEER GROUP ACCEPTANCE

Being highly susceptible to social influence, children like to conform to what they see as the desirable group norm: especially what is 'cool'. They will change their behaviour, tastes and language to fit in:

STREET CRED - Rapper street culture is used to lend street credibility to products. Suburban girls grasp the product adoringly and exclaim "wicked!", while boys attract their interest through aggressive macho behaviour.

JUNIOR JONESES - Children are always comparing themselves to others and what others have. They often collect things and compete. Adverts focus on free collectable toys ("collect the entire set!") some with scenes of nature and animals as the main focus, as opposed to the fatty, sugary products with additives that are really being advertised.

What Children Say

The Co-op commissioned NOP and Wardle McLean in March 2000 to research children's responses to TV commercials.

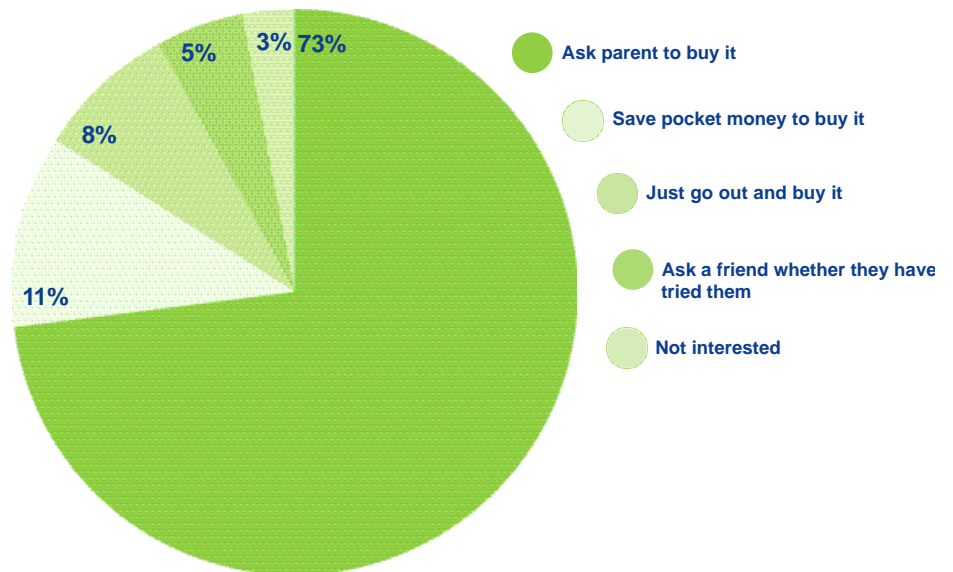
The research found that all children believe advertising is a promise of superior quality. Older children appear to value it highly as a source of information which guides their purchases.

The offer of a collectable was a powerful inducement to seek out the product.

Meanwhile the reality of 'pester power' was outlined in the result that 73 per cent of children asked parents to buy something they had seen on TV - with only two in 10 giving up or doing nothing when confronted with a parental "no".

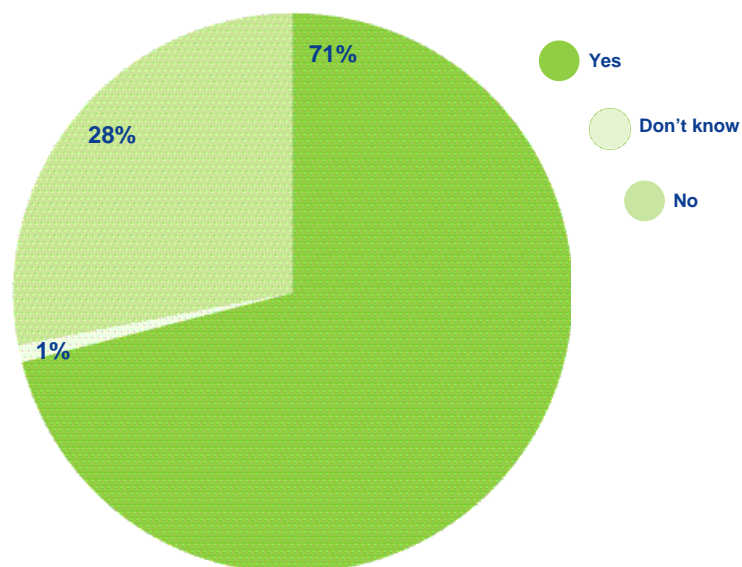
Children's responses to advertising of sweets & crisps

SAMPLE ALLCHILDREN



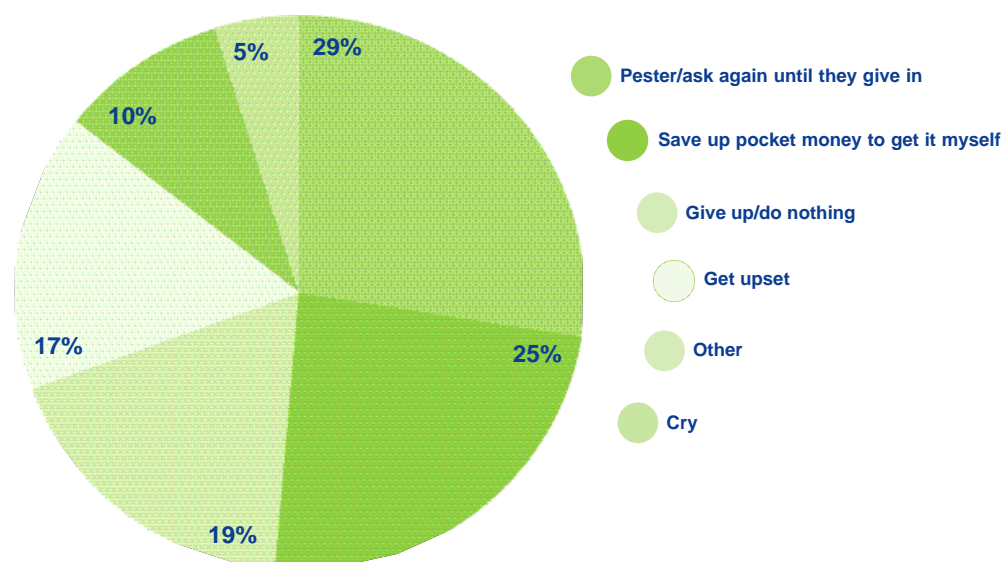
Children who have bought something to get a free gift or collect tokens towards one

SAMPLE ALLCHILDREN



Children's responses to answer "no"

SAMPLE ALLCHILDREN



What Parents Say

The Co-op commissioned NOP and Wardle McLean in March 2000 to research parents' attitudes to TV commercials and how they managed their children's requests for products advertised.

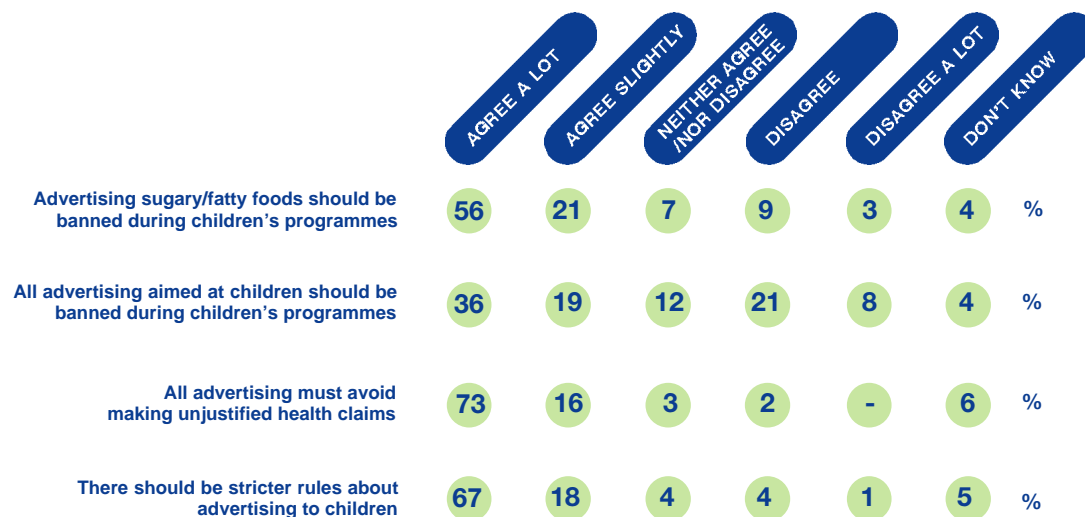
Parents told us they were angry with food and drink advertisers who target their children with sugary and fatty products, fanning the flames of 'pester power', setting child against parent.

More than eight in 10 said they wanted to see tighter controls on advertising to children.

Three in four (77 per cent) want to see a ban on the advertising of such products to their children.

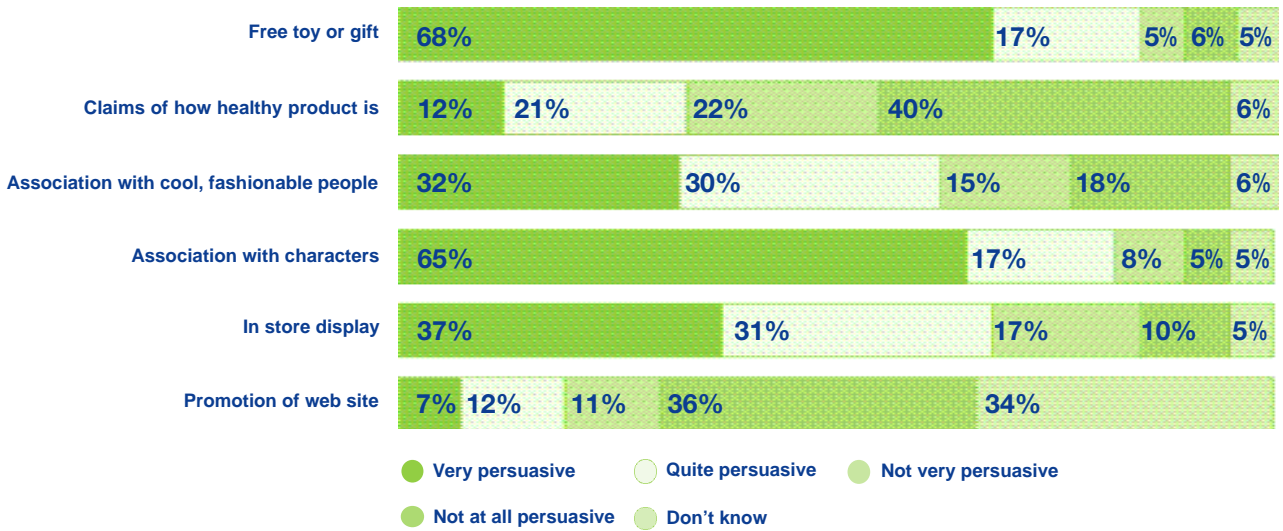
Attitudes towards advertising to children

SAMPLE ALLADULTS



The methods of persuasion

SAMPLE ALLADULTS



“ If we don't get it for them then we are bad, we are cruel, we are the misers. ”

“ I don't want them to hassle me in the supermarkets... I want my children to grow up sensibly and not be led by the advertisers. ”

“ My kids are being teased about what I give them. I give them ordinary things like a ham sandwich. ”

“ If you have a two-year-old lying on the ground and a five-year-old screaming, I just give in, I just want to get out of the shop. ”

“ Looking at the advert, lovely orange juice from sunny Florida. Very good for the kids. It's not. It's squash. ”

Responsible Retailing & the Co-op

The responsible retailing campaign was launched in 1995 after the biggest ever survey of consumer views.

More than 30,000 people responded and the message was clear: shoppers want to make informed purchasing decisions based on concerns about animal welfare, the environment and human rights.

In response the Co-op pledged to give consumers the full facts on products, including details of who makes Co-op Brand products. A Right to Know policy was implemented to provide consumers with the facts they need to make informed purchasing decisions.

The Co-op has a democratic base of individual members. Each member has an individual vote no matter how much money they have invested in the Co-op. They belong to the Co-operative Movement because they believe in a wide range of consumer and social issues. As a unique consumer-owned retailer the Co-op has a duty to serve consumers, not industry or the City.

The Co-op has always been at the forefront of retailing issues, leading industry and interpreting the law in the best interest of the consumer. Among its campaigns are:

- 1995 RESPONSIBLE RETAILING** - A report based on the UK's largest ever independent survey of ethical concerns
- 1995 THE PLATE OF THE NATION** - A report on the national diet
- 1996 ENDING THE PAIN** - Finding a solution to stop animal testing
- 1997 LIE OF THE LABEL** - A report calling for honest labelling
- 1998 JURY'S VERDICT** - Reporting on complaints and adjudications under the Co-op's code of labelling practice
- 1999 BREAKING THE BARRIERS** - Co-operating for social inclusion
- 2000 FOOD CRIMES** - Launching a series of inquiries into the ethics of modern food production

ENDNOTES

1 In a consultation paper, published on 8 May 2000, the ITC initiated a review of its advertising rules, starting with a reassessment of all specific prohibitions set out in its Code of Advertising Standards and Practice. Interested parties were invited to submit evidence by 7 July 2000.

2 Research undertaken by Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming

3 National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Young People Aged 4-18 years, published by the Food Standards Agency on 1 June 2000, was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Department of Health and was undertaken by the Office for National Statistics, Medical Research Council Human Nutrition Research, and the Dental Schools of the Universities of Newcastle upon Tyne and of Birmingham. The survey forms part of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey programme, which gathers information about the dietary habits and nutritional status of the British population.

4 Dr Eric Sigman AFBPS is a Chartered Psychologist and Chartered Biologist. He has headed health education campaigns on behalf of the Department of Health on smoking, depression and suicide risk. He acted as advisor to the Institute of Personnel Management for five years. As a broadcaster, Dr Sigman has worked on children's TV programmes.

He also wrote and presented a Dispatches documentary 'Dying to Diet', which exposed the link between dieting and shorter life spans.

Dr Sigman won The Times Education Supplement Best Non-fiction Award in 1993 for his book Getting Physical, a teenage health guide. The book called into question the methods used to advertise food to children.

5 Evidence from US Federal Government Department of Agriculture Summit on Nutrition and Health, held in Washington DC in June 2000, at which officials suggested a sophisticated marketing counter-attack, pitting commercials promoting the appeal of 'healthy' foods against those showing 'unhealthy' foods.

6 ITC Code of Advertising Standards and Practice Section 36 Food Advertising General Note: Public health policy (for example, 1992 White Paper 'The Health of the Nation') places increasing emphasis on good dietary behaviour as a means for preventing illness and promoting health. Competitive product advertising cannot reasonably be expected to perform the same role as education and public information in promoting a varied and balanced diet. At the same time it is important that such advertising should not undermine progress towards national

dietary improvement by misleading or confusing customers or by setting bad examples, particularly to children. The following rules apply to all advertising for foods and food products and, in the case of advertising addressed to children, are to be interpreted in conjunction with the rules in Appendix 1.

(a) Advertisements must not encourage or condone excessive consumption of any food.

(b) Advertisements must not disparage good dietary practice and any comparisons between foods must not discourage selection of foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables which current generally accepted dietary opinion recommends should form a greater part of average diet.

(c) Advertisements, particularly those addressed to children, must pay regard to consideration of oral health.

7 Dr Jane M Heal in Failure to Connect, 1999, Simon & Schuster, believes that children's attention spans are harmed by multi-media distractions. Studies have found that a reduction in stimulation leads to enhanced creativity, problem solving, alertness and even musical creativity and performance (Atkinson, R. Short-Term Exposure to Rest: Enhancement Performance on a

For further information:

Please write to CWS Ltd, Freepost MR9 473, Manchester M4 8BA, visit our website at www.co-op.co.uk or call us free on 0800 0686727

The Co-op commissioned market research by NOP Consumer who interviewed 1,216 adults (523 of whom were parents) and 293 children under 11 years old. Group discussions were also conducted by Wardle McLean Strategic Research Consultancy with adults (including parents) and children under 11 years old. The research was conducted in February and March 2000.

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming carried out research in mid-March 2000, analysing 272 ads for food and soft drinks shown during 37 hours and 35 minutes of TV. These advertisements were aired during the following times: weekdays 7-9am; 3.20-5.05pm; 9-11pm and Saturday morning TV.

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