

# **'Adverts, adverts everywhere'**

## ***Young people's perceptions of and exposure to unhealthy food marketing in Scotland***

A report produced by the Scottish Obesity Alliance and the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow

# Reference

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# Authors

Marissa J. Smith<sup>1</sup>, Caroline Vaczy<sup>1</sup>, Ashleigh Kellerman<sup>2</sup>, Lorraine Tulloch<sup>2</sup> and Shona Hilton<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, UK

<sup>2</sup>Scottish Obesity Alliance, c/o Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, UK

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# Foreword

Overweight and obesity have become major health issues in Scotland, negatively impacting on quality of life, affecting productivity and often leading to serious chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. In Scotland, around two-thirds (67%) of all adults were living with overweight, including obesity, in 2022 [1]. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to reduce the rate of childhood obesity to 7%; however, the most recent data indicate that prevalence is 18% amongst Scottish children [1]. This report therefore aims to address young people's perceived exposure to food marketing as well as their views on changing it as a potential avenue to reducing childhood obesity in Scotland.

In our study, young people reported seeing unhealthy food marketing every day and in a wide range of times throughout the day, including when watching TV or browsing social media, walking to or from school or around town, or waiting for a bus. Many young people reported being personally influenced by marketing techniques and other pressures, such as social media influencers and promotions, brightly coloured and attention-catching adverts, and food company branding. Additionally, several young people recognised that some adverts for fast food restaurants were targeted at people their age or younger. The young people we spoke with were predominantly supportive of increasing the representation of 'healthy' foods in advertising, marketing and promotional materials, highlighting that doing so could have the potential to encourage people to purchase healthier foods, thus improving population health.

Obesity in childhood is associated with an increased risk of obesity in adulthood, highlighting the need for early intervention and prevention. More needs to be done to protect young people from ill-health now and later in their adult life, including improving nutrition in early life, and changing the environment to enable people to make healthy food and physical activity choices throughout the life course. As illustrated by our research, the current obesogenic environment makes it difficult for people of all ages to make healthy choices. Urgent action is needed to change the food environment and to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing.

I commend the team for their in-depth exploration of these pressing issues, and the young people for their creativity in capturing their thoughts in a video production. The voices of young people in Scotland need to be heard and can play a vital role in shaping the healthier food environments of the future.

The co-produced youth advocacy video can be accessed here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXgV4T8X7DQ>

**Shona Hilton**

**Professor of Public Health at the University of Glasgow and Chair of the Scottish Obesity Alliance.**



# Key findings

## Young people are exposed to unhealthy food advertising every day.

Young people report being exposed to unhealthy food adverts every day and in numerous locations, including on outdoor billboards, on posters, in shops, and on TV, radio and social media. Many of the physical adverts that young people saw were located near the restaurant they were advertising, tempting people to visit the restaurant or shop being advertised. Many participants also noted that they rarely, if ever, saw marketing for healthy foods.

To combat this, we recommend policies that highlight healthier alternatives in marketing and restrictions on the types of food that can be advertised in physical settings. We also support the immediate implementation of the 9pm TV watershed ban as well as restrictions on online digital marketing.

## Unhealthy food marketing influences young people's choices.

Many young people reported being influenced by food adverts, with several young people stating that they were tempted to visit the food location having seen their advertisement. Marketing techniques such as promotions, brightly coloured adverts, food company branding (e.g., colours, logos and slogans) and use of social media influencers influenced young people's food purchasing choices. Placement and seasonality of food promotions was found to influence young people's choices. Several young people stated that food companies deliberately placed promotions in shop areas where they are most likely to influence people's purchases, and that promotions can encourage people to buy a product they hadn't intended to purchase in the first place.

To reduce young people's exposure to place-based promotions, we recommend that legislation in Scotland includes restricting the placement of unhealthy food promotions in shops and online.

## Young people argue that the amount of unhealthy food advertising should be reduced.

Young people argue restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food are needed. While many young people expressed that no changes should be made to how food is advertised, others argued that reducing the amount of unhealthy food advertising and having equal offers on healthy and unhealthy food would be beneficial to population health.

We recommend designing unhealthy food adverts, promotions, and packaging to be less eye-catching as this influences purchasing choices.

### Food marketing regulations should better protect young people

Young people report seeing unhealthy food adverts **everyday...**



...particularly on billboards, posters, public transport locations and social media



Young people **are influenced** by unhealthy food adverts



According to young people, **unhealthy food** advertising should be **reduced** and **healthy food** advertising should be **increased**



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# 1. Introduction

Our values, preferences and practices relating to diet are shaped by our food environment, which in turn is largely governed by availability and cost [2]. Research has shown that food marketing has a powerful impact on food preferences and consumption patterns [2-4]. Children have been identified as being particularly susceptible to the messaging used in marketing communications [5-7], and it is now widely acknowledged that exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods is a risk factor for the development of childhood obesity [5, 8, 9].

Globally, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has risen dramatically amongst children aged 5–19 years, from 4% in 1975 to 18% in 2016 [10]. In 2022, the WHO estimated that 39 million children globally were living with obesity [11] and it is estimated that by 2025, 167 million people (adults and children) will be susceptible to health problems associated with overweight or obesity [11]. In England, 64% of adults, 41% of children aged 10-11, and 28% of children aged 4-5 are now classified as overweight or living with obesity and rates in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are similar to those in England [12]. Global responses to increasing rates of overweight and obesity and related health conditions have resulted in some countries, including the UK, taking measures to restrict the marketing of certain foods and beverages, specifically those high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) [13]. The latest UK and Scottish Government obesity plans propose multiple measures to reduce consumer exposure to such products, including tackling price and location promotions—for example, ‘buy one get one free’—and limiting children’s exposure to marketing by restricting TV advertisements [14].

The overconsumption of HFSS products has been linked to numerous health problems, including overweight and obesity and the effects of the marketing of HFSS foods on children and young people are particularly well studied [15]. There is debate among researchers, policymakers and industry stakeholders about how best to reduce rates of overweight and obesity and what role food marketing restrictions should play in achieving this goal [16]. Despite numerous calls for action to protect children from the harmful impacts of food marketing, children continue to be exposed to sophisticated and persuasive marketing techniques.

The UK Government have begun implementation of restrictions on location-based promotions in England but indicated an intention to delay price restrictions and marketing regulations. The Scottish Government have the devolved power to progress action on promotions and have indicated their intention to introduce relevant secondary legislation to the Scottish Parliament in 2024.

Given the recent political support for addressing overweight and obesity, as well as the disproportionate effects of food marketing and obesity on young people, it is important to contribute to research that could help shape future policy. Improving understanding of young people’s exposure to food marketing and their views on changing it is vital to protecting their health and that of future generations.

## **2. Research aims and objectives**

### **2.1 Research aims**

The study aimed to use co-production methods to improve understanding of young people's engagement with and perceptions of food marketing in the UK.

We sought to do this through inquiring about the views and insights of a broad mix of young people (aged 11-16) from the central belt of Scotland.

We then aimed to co-produce an animated video with young people to communicate their views on food marketing to other young people and policymakers.

### **2.2 Research questions**

The study addresses three research questions:

1. What are young people's perceptions of the way unhealthy food is advertised currently?
2. How does unhealthy food marketing influence young people's food choices?
3. How should unhealthy food marketing change, according to young people?

## **3. Methods**

The research comprised four stages: workshops, photo elicitation, focus groups and video development. Prior to describing these stages in more depth, we will discuss the purpose of co-production and the recruitment/sampling of the young participants.

### **3.1 Co-production**

Co-production can be defined as a model in which 'researchers, practitioners and the public work together, sharing power and responsibility from the start to the end of the project, including the generation of knowledge' [17, p.4]. Co-producing research with young people means ensuring that their voices are heard and incorporated throughout the project. The process allows for the generation of research that is richer, more relevant, and better tailored to the needs of the target group [18-21].

Children and young people today are already being disproportionately affected by food marketing and obesity [4-9]. They are experts in their own lived experience and are key stakeholders in considering effective policies for their age group. Undertaking a co-production approach allows for the generation of more in-depth understanding of young people's exposure to food marketing and their views on how it should be changed.

### **3.2 Sampling and recruitment of young people**

We purposively sampled young people aged 11-16 from Glasgow and surrounding areas. Purposive sampling was used to recruit a diverse sample of participants in terms of sex and socioeconomic background. Young people were recruited by youth workers in local youth



organisations as well as by contacting schools through an email newsletter. These gatekeepers (youth workers and teachers) distributed information sheets and helped achieve the sampling frame in terms of youth demographics. One of the organisations that helped with participant recruitment worked specifically with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in urban areas. This recruitment strategy resulted in the inclusion of a range of participants from more affluent and more deprived backgrounds.

Invitees who agreed to participate were provided with a participant information sheet, privacy notice and consent form. Prior to the start of the project, participants completed a short anonymous questionnaire about their age, sex, postcode, food and drink consumption and unhealthy food and drink marketing.

### **3.3 Stage 1: Workshops**

The workshop approach allowed for openness through the presence of group members of a similar age and/or from the same organisation (e.g., youth group) but avoided the potentially intimidating aspects of a larger group discussion. The aim of the workshops was to discuss the research with the young people (e.g., the aim of the project), engage in activities about their experiences with food and drink marketing and discuss their ideas for the videos.

Three workshops were conducted between March and April 2023. Workshops included between 10 and 12 participants (a total of 33 participants). Workshops were structured around a series of activities in which participants wrote short responses to questions relating to unhealthy food marketing and video development on sticky notes which they placed in different categories. The workshops were moderated by three researchers who posed questions, ensured all participants were able to participate, and encouraged participants to explain their thoughts and opinions without influence from the researchers. Each workshop lasted two hours. All of the workshops were conducted face-to-face at the school or youth organisation's meeting location. Workshops were not recorded due to their active and interactive nature but the researchers took field notes during the groups and materials produced during workshops were kept for analysis. Each participant was given a £20 shopping voucher as compensation for their time.

### **3.4 Stage 2: Photo elicitation**

Participant-generated photographs are commonly used methodological tools within qualitative research [22, 23], including in studies exploring young people's experiences of social processes and settings, such as family, disability, food, refugee status, and gentrification, among others [24-26]. The value of photo elicitation as an approach includes the provision of rich insights into participants' lived experiences, and the prioritisation of attention to the mundane and everyday, as well as the extraordinary. It has also been found to be an acceptable and accessible method for young participants.

During this second stage of the project, young people were invited to capture 5-10 photos and/or short videos that were meaningful to them as examples of the types of food marketing they see in their daily lives (including on social media). Participants were asked to avoid taking photographs of themselves or other people for privacy reasons, however advertisements that included people were acceptable. The photos taken by the young people were used to stimulate discussion in the subsequent focus group stage of the project. In addition, the photos were used

when developing the storyboard for the video. Photographs were uploaded to a secure file-sharing website hosted by the University of Glasgow. Upon receipt of the photos, participants were given a £20 voucher as compensation for their time. We did not analyse the photos or videos for content but rather relied on the young people's own descriptions of their photos and experiences, which was explored during Stage 4 of the project.

### **3.5 Stage 3: Focus groups**

Six focus groups were conducted between April and May 2022. Focus groups included between three and six participants (a total of 28 participants). Focus group discussions were facilitated to allow the research team to explore participants' opinions and experiences with the marketing of food and beverages. Groups of 3–6 participants were used to facilitate in-depth insights and promote participant interaction. Each participant was given a £20 shopping voucher as compensation for their time.

Focus group discussions were structured around a topic guide and a set of the photos the young people took in Stage 2 of the project. Group discussions were facilitated by one or two members of the research team, who posed questions, ensured all participants were able to participate, and encouraged participants to explain and discuss their responses. Four of the six groups were conducted online using Microsoft Teams and two were conducted face-to-face. In-person focus group discussions were conducted at the youth organisation's building. Group discussions lasted between 48 and 75 minutes. All focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission. The researchers took brief notes during the groups, and one researcher listened back to each group to take more detailed notes and correct transcription.

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were thematically analysed in NVivo, using a coding frame developed iteratively by two members of the research team, structured into themes based on the research questions, with additional themes that emerged inductively from the data. Systematic thematic analysis allowed for both areas of agreement and more marginal perspectives to be captured. See Appendix A for the coding framework.

Quotations from focus group discussions are reproduced throughout the results sections of the report to illustrate analysis points and demonstrate the breadth of participants' perspectives. Quotations are condensed for brevity where this could be done without compromising meaning. To maintain participant anonymity, square brackets have been used to replace identifiable details.

### **3.6 Stage 4: Video production**

The final stage of the project was to co-produce the video itself using the expertise of a video production company (Media Co-Op) and the young people who participated in the first three stages. The research team, media company and young people worked through an iterative process of co-creation to ensure that the video would faithfully reflect the ideas expressed by the young people throughout the project while taking advantage of the media company's experience creating eye-catching videos that communicate important messages.

The media company led workshops with the research team to better understand the aims of the video, the food marketing landscape, and a synthesised summary of the young people's thoughts gathered in the first three stages of the project. The media company also designed

materials to help better understand the young people's vision and preferences for the videos.

The young people were asked about their thoughts regarding video styles during the first set of workshops, as detailed above. We showed the groups five animated videos followed by questions on the style and content of each. Our questions were framed in a 'yes' or 'no' format and we asked participants to move to one side of the room to express their agreement or disagreement with each question before offering more in-depth reasoning behind their preferences. A sub-group of four young people participated in an additional workshop consisting of more specific stylistic questions related to colour schemes, character styles, backgrounds, and story and script development. This step provided vital feedback that helped keep the video from experiencing the pitfalls that can arise in creating a video for a young audience, such as differing sense of humour.

After conducting the workshops, photo elicitation, and focus group discussions, the research team worked closely with the media production company to translate the young people's ideas and photos into a script and video storyboard. An additional workshop was then held with four participants from Group 2 with the aim of collecting their feedback and deciding on a final vision for the video. As in the Stage 1 workshops, this session was not recorded but participants' contributions were collected in notes by the research team.

At each stage of production, the video was shared with the research team for edits and approval based on the perspectives expressed in the initial workshops and sub-group workshop with the young people. The final voiceovers were recorded by two young people at the media production company's studio with the joint aims of including young people at all stages of production and creating a video that would appeal to and resonate with a young audience.

## 3.7 Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was granted on 20 December 2022 by the College of Medical Veterinary and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow. The application number was 200220088.

# 4. Results

The results are presented by project stage, beginning with the workshops (4.1), followed by photo elicitation (4.2) and concluding with the focus groups with illustrative quotations (4.3). Quotations related to the co-production of the advocacy video is detailed in Appendix B.

## 4.1 Stage 1: Workshops

Our first engagement with the young people in the study was through in-person workshops. Thirty-three youths aged 12-16 participated in this stage of the study (20 females (61%) and 13 males (39%)). This sample represented a wide diversity in sociodemographic characteristics, based on post codes collected in a pre-workshop questionnaire on demographic information and experiences with food and drink. The age distribution within the sample was weighted slightly more heavily towards 14–15-year-olds, with 14-year-olds making up the largest subgroup (n=14). Table 1 describes the workshop composition by deprivation. Deprivation rank was assigned using the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) [27]. The area-level

deprivation was grouped using a binary deprivation variable (least deprived/most deprived) in which the three most deprived quintiles were grouped into the most deprived category for the Central Belt of Scotland area.

Group	Area	Sex	Age
1	Most deprived (7) Least deprived (5)	Mixed: male (1)/ female (11)	12-16
2	Most deprived (1) Least deprived (10)	Mixed: male (6)/ female (5)	14-16
3	Most deprived (9) Least deprived (1)	Mixed: male (6)/ female (4)	14-15

Table 1: Workshop location, composition and participant details.

The workshop findings are categorised under four headings: exposure to food marketing; effectiveness of food marketing; alternative marketing strategies; and video styles. Illustrative quotations are presented in this section (4.1); however, due to the dynamic of the workshops, we are not able to attribute quotes to specific participants.

### 4.1.1 Perceptions of food and diet

In an effort to allow the young people to use their own definitions of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods rather than concepts imposed by the research team, we first asked them to consider what the terms 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' mean to them, and to think of examples. When asked *"What does the term 'healthy foods' mean to you?"* participants most often mentioned fruits and vegetables as examples. Several participants noted the term "protein" and mentioned "food that has nutritional value." When questioned as to what they meant by this, participants stated they were referring to a range of food including fruits, vegetables and unprocessed foods.

Participants were then asked, *"What does the term 'unhealthy foods' mean to you?"*. Participants often mentioned fast food and fast-food brands. Several participants defined unhealthy foods as those with no or low nutritional value and foods that are high in salt and sugar.

When discussing the terms 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' in relation to food, one participant stated that they disagreed with the binary categorisation of food into these two categories, as well as the moralisation of certain foods or food groups.

*"I think kids shouldn't grow up thinking there are foods they should and shouldn't eat and that food is food."*

Many young people highlighted the negative impacts diet can have on health, such as obesity, heart problems, teeth problems, and eating disorders.

*"Eating foods that have a lot of salt in them can be bad for you, especially for your heart."*

*"Eating unhealthy foods can affect your growth and weight."*

Participants also spoke about the positive impacts of diet such as feeling energised, and improved mental health, and mood.

*"Eating healthy can make you feel better about yourself."*

### 4.1.2 Exposure to food marketing

Participants described seeing unhealthy food adverts often, including on social media platforms, billboards, in shops, on television, at transport facilities (e.g., bus stops, train stations) and from food apps (e.g., apps will send special offers adverts/notifications to the user). In response to the question, *"Where and how often do you see unhealthy food marketing?"* one participant explained that they are exposed to unhealthy food adverts daily.

*"Every single day walking to school, walking the street, EVERYWHERE!"*

When asked *"Where and how often do you see offers for healthy foods?"* participants discussed "hardly ever" seeing offers for healthy foods. Participants mentioned seeing vegan and vegetarian foods being on offer but very rarely saw other foods they considered to be healthy on special offer. Several participants discussed seeing fruit and vegetables being on offer in the summer as well as an association between fresh fruit and warmer weather.

Participants also discussed changes in food advertising, in particular concerning holidays (e.g., Easter and Halloween). Chocolate and sweets were predominately seen at the front of supermarkets during these times.

### 4.1.3 Effectiveness of food marketing

Marketing techniques (e.g., adverts, and social media influencers) did influence many participants' purchases of food, particularly sweets and chocolate, as did the purchasing habits of their friends or family members.

*"If a food is popular online and people I know are buying it I want it more and want to buy it."*

Whereas several participants discussed the influence of social media influencers on their purchases. One participant explained that seeing influencers advertising/marketing other products (e.g., clothing and beauty products) would make them change their purchases but not in relation to food.

Participants also spoke about friends and family recommending food products, stating that if friends and/or family recommended a food product they would be more likely to eat it or try it.

*"I get very influenced by the internet and my friends. If they say it's good, I'll try it."*

*"Peer pressure makes you buy stuff."*

Young people are aware of the effectiveness of food marketing, stating that food companies create these adverts so that consumers buy their products.

*"Advertisements make me hungry."*

Several participants commented on being tempted by promotions (e.g., sales and offers). One participant stated that they can be tempted by promotions but *"manage to hold out to*

temptation."

Some participants indicated that they were not tempted by promotions, stating "[Companies] make you think you are saving money or getting a deal, when you are actually not," and other participants added that "taste and appeal of the food" were more important than the price.

#### 4.1.4 Alternative marketing strategies

Many participants believed that supermarkets, restaurants and takeaways should be required to offer deals/promotions on healthy items. Participants went on to explain that there should be equal offers on healthy and unhealthy food, although some participants said there should be more offers on healthy food compared to unhealthy food.

*"Healthy food should be offered more because unhealthy foods have more of a chance of being bought."*

Several participants discussed this concerning the current 'cost of living' crisis. Participants discussed that going out to a restaurant or getting a takeaway is often seen as a 'treat' and if people/families are on a budget this means they are often forced into picking unhealthy food items which are on offer. If healthy foods were cheaper or the same price as unhealthy foods, participants stated this would 'sway their choices'.

*"It's people's decision and one option shouldn't be more expensive than the other."*

However, several participants stated that supermarkets, restaurants and takeaways should be encouraged to have offers and deals on healthy food, but not forced.

*"Yeah, they [supermarkets, restaurants and takeaways] should be encouraged to have offers on healthy food too but not forced."*

Many participants stated that they would be more inclined to buy healthier foods if there were special offers (e.g., 2-for-1 discounts). However, several participants stated that they would "still go for the unhealthy foods" regardless of if healthy foods were on special offer.

Interestingly, several participants discussed that mood, taste, and enjoyment of unhealthy foods were contributing factors when purchasing food. Thus, price is not always influential to them when purchasing food.

Participants' views diverged when asked what rules or steps they think should be taken to change the food marketing and promotions they see. Several participants stated that no changes should be made to how food is advertised. Many participants argued that reducing the amount of unhealthy food advertising would be beneficial to population health.

*"Less advertising of unhealthy foods would help decrease temptation and obesity."*

Participants discussed amending the design of unhealthy food adverts, promotions and packaging. Participants discussed changing unhealthy food adverts and packaging to be less eye-catching as this influences purchasing choices.

*“Make adverts and packaging less colourful so people aren’t tempted to buy them.”*

## 4.2 Stage 2: Photo elicitation

Of the 33 participants who took part in the first stage, 32 participants submitted photos. The aim of this stage of the project was for young people to capture photos and/or short videos of food marketing they see in their daily lives. We did not analyse the photos or videos for content but rather used the photos as discussion prompts during the focus group discussions in Stage 3 of the project.

## 4.3 Stage 3: Focus groups

Twenty-eight youths aged 12-16 (16 females (57%) and 12 males (43%)) participated in this stage of the study. The age distribution within the sample was skewed slightly towards 14–15-year-olds, with 14-year-olds making up the largest subgroup (n=12). Table 2 describes the focus group composition.

Group	Area	Sex	Age
1A	Most deprived (2) Least deprived (2)	Female (4)	12-15
1B	Most deprived (1) Least deprived (2)	Female (3)	13-16
2A	Least deprived (5)	Mixed: male (3)/ female (2)	14-16
2B	Most deprived (5) Least deprived (1)	Mixed: male (3)/ female (3)	14-16
3A	Most deprived (5)	Mixed: male (4)/ female (1)	14-15
3B	Most deprived (4) Least deprived (1)	Mixed: male (2)/ female (3)	14-15

Table 2: Focus group location, composition and participant details.

### 4.3.1 Exposure to unhealthy food advertising

Young people discussed being exposed to unhealthy food adverts frequently, in numerous locations, including on outdoor billboards, posters in shops, in shops and on TV and radio.

*“Well, they’re [the adverts] right in your face. Now that I’m thinking about it, you’re just walking along, and it’s like, they’re [the adverts] right there, there’s always at least one, or quite a few I see when I’m out.” (Female, 14)*

*“[I see them] on billboards. On the TV sometimes and at bus stops.” (Male, 14)*





Figure 1: Photo of billboard advertising McDonalds.

*"Yes, I see them every day and just when I'm like out for a walk." (Female, 16)*

*"They have big giant board things and I hear them on the radio." (Male, 14)*



Figure 2: Photo of electronic board advertising McDonalds.

Participants noted that the adverts they see are commonly located near the shop or restaurant they are advertising.

*"Yeah, when you see the adverts, the adverts outside, you're normally, like, near a shop that's got them, that you can go to the place. So, you can just go there, and it's like five minutes." (Male, 14)*



Figure 3: Advert for a hot drink outside of Costa coffee.

*"Yeah, there's like Gregg's right across the road from that [the advert]." (Female, 16)*



*"It's [the advert] like right across the road from a Subway as well." (Female, 15)*



Figure 4: Advert for Subway.

A dialogue between two participants in focus group 2 also highlighted the location of adverts as key:

*P1: That advert is outside the McDonald's. (Female, 12)*

*P2: It's like five seconds away, round the corner. (Female, 16)*



Figure 5: McDonald's advert with McDonalds sign in the background.

Participants frequently discussed seeing food adverts at bus stops.

*"If you drive past bus stops, you can see them all the time. Because there's plenty just about the area." (Female, 13)*



Figure 6: Photo of advert at a bus stop.

*"Yeah, like especially on my walk to school I go past quite a few bus stops and stuff, and there's quite a lot of advertisements and stuff for food." (Female, 15)*



Figure 7: Photo of McDonald advert at a bus stop.

*"It's [adverts] also on a bus stop, so like, many people go to a bus stop, and then they can see it." (Female, 15)*

Several participants reported seeing adverts while on social media platforms. Although few of them shared photos of the adverts they saw on social media, it became clear throughout focus group discussions that this was common.

*"Yeah, like see when I'm on Instagram or something, and I'm just going through stories, sometimes there's [food] adverts between it." (Female, 13)*

*"I mean mostly it's just what I see like walking about. But I do sometimes get like adverts on YouTube and stuff like that." (Female, 16)*



Figure 8: Photo of McDonalds advert seen on YouTube.

One participant described seeing online adverts so quickly and frequently that they often didn't think about what they were seeing.

*"You don't tend to notice that you're actually being shown all these adverts like you're just watching YouTube. You just quickly skip past it. We don't even realize that you just got advertised to." (Female, 14)*

Participants stated that seeing influencers advertising a specific food brand would make them more likely to buy the product, demonstrating the power of trust and loyalty in marketing. McDonald's was often cited in discussions as an example to describe all brands of fast or 'unhealthy' food, as described by the young people.



Figure 9: Photo of an advert at a bus stop which depicts a celebrity drinking Coca Cola.

*"I feel like if an influencer said that McDonald's was really good, I'd probably start going to McDonald's more." (Female, 16)*

*"I think it's because I like the celebrity, and if they're recommending their favourite meal from McDonald's is this. You're like, oh I want to go and see if that could be mine. It's like, you might have something in common with that celebrity or influencer." (Female, 13)*

*"If an influencer said, oh I went to McDonald's and it was so good, then the next day they posted another one, I'd probably be like, I'll go to McDonald's then." (Female, 16)*

*"If I saw them [an influencer] getting this specific meal from McDonald's or Subway or something like, I think I'd be more likely to try that." (Female, 15)*

When discussing why food companies would want to use social media influencers to advertise their products, participants highlighted the popularity of social media and how this would increase the reach of the adverts.

*"If they've [influencers] got a lot of followers, they'll advertise to many people, so many people will go and buy it." (Female, 15)*

*"If they [companies] use influencers, it will make the products like really popular, and it makes them [companies] money." (Male, 14)*

### 4.3.2 Design of adverts

All participants highlighted the design of food adverts, stating that adverts often included vibrant colours that attracted their attention.

*"I think it's like the colours they use, because the advert is, bright yellow, so if you drive past it, it catches your eye straightaway." (Female, 13)*



Figure 10: Photo of brightly coloured McDonalds advert.

*"The colours, if you're, like, walking by, it's eye-catching." (Female, 15)*

*"Probably the KFC one, again. Just because of the white background makes the red pop more, I think, and it makes it stand out more." (Female, 16)*



Figure 11: Photo of brightly coloured KFC advert.

*"I mean the colours are contrasting so they stand out to passersby." (Female, 16)*

*"It's just because it's quite bold colours compared to like the rest of the shop. So, it [the advert] draws your eye to it." (Male, 14)*

Participants also spoke about the use of colour and size of text on adverts.

*"It's really just how big the words are, and how big the picture of it is, it's nothing to do, really, with colours." (Female, 14)*



Figure 12: Photo of McDonalds advert with large writing.

*“My eye definitely draws to the KFC one, like because of the red, and even the lettuce, I think the lettuce looks a lot greener on that one, than it does on the McDonald's one. And because it's got red writing, it looks more fun, whereas compared to the McDonald's one, it's like, just white, and plain, and black, and like, it's just a burger.” (Female, 14)*



Figure 13: Photo of KFC advert with large red writing.

*“Yeah, because see if you were out with your friends, and you were like, oh that looks quite good, and you are all quite a bit hungry, you'd be like, well we could go here and try this, because it looks good, and it's like, right there.” (Female, 14)*

Several participants highlighted that specific colours, such as red, were ‘more attractive’ and were often used on promotions, special offers and deals.



Figure 14: Photo of brightly coloured Walkers crisps advert.

*"I think it's the red colour that they use for the special offers and special deals.  
Yeah, because red is a very strong and powerful colour." (Male, 14)*

In addition to the use of colour in adverts, participants discussed the inclusion of the price in the adverts. Several participants highlighted that the prices were often low and in eye catching text.

*"It's got like a deal in big letters, like big numbers. You can see that and you could just go in and get it on your walk home from school." (Female, 15)*



Figure 15: Photo of a Subway advert showing the price of the product.



Figure 16: Photo of a KFC advert showing the price of the product.

Several participants added not only did the use of vibrant colours in the advert catch their eye, but it also enticed them to visit the shop, takeaway, or restaurant being advertised.

*"Yeah, if I was driving, it would make me really want to go in and see what*



*there is or to buy one.” (Female, 13)*

*“Like the design of the advert, the food makes you hungry, so you want to go get one.” (Male, 14)*

Participants discussed how seeing adverts influences their choices in the moment, with several participants stating that after seeing the food adverts they immediately went to purchase the product or visit the shop being advertised.

*“I wasn’t planning on getting a McDonald’s, but when I walked past it [the advert], there was a McDonald’s round the corner, and I thought, let’s go and get a McDonald’s.” (Female, 14)*

*“Well, because if I saw an advert, and then I would want to go in and try that, but I would go in and just probably get what I usually get. Like, I would go in and then I’d be like, oh I don’t really want to try that, and just change my mind. Still gets you in though.” (Female, 12)*

Participants recognised that some adverts for fast food restaurants seem to be targeted specifically at people their age or younger.

*“Probably younger people, because when I was, see when I was little, I’d say to my mum, oh there’s a McDonald’s advert, can we go to McDonald’s, and mum would give in and take me, and we’d buy half the menu. But, like, but I think it’s more appealing to younger people.” (Female, 14)*

*“I’ve gone to McDonald’s sometimes, counting up 20 pences, just so I could get a bag of chips or something. I always spend the last penny when I’m trying to get it. If I see an advert like that, I’ll always try and get one after it.” (Female, 14)*

In contrast, some young people felt that adverts for restaurants were targeted at adults.

*“I feel as though the Steakhouse one [reference to restaurant in photo below], it’s more for adults.” (Female, 14)*

*“Yeah, my dad got the Steakhouse one, but I wouldn’t go there.” (Female, 12)*



Figure 17: Photo of an advert for breakfast outside a restaurant.

### 4.3.3 Food promotions

All participants discussed that the purpose of promotions was to “make people buy more of it” and can subsequently influence people’s purchases, including their own.

*“Promotions make you feel like you're getting a good deal if you buy that thing.” (Female, 14)*

*“You're seeing it, and you're thinking, oh it's a deal, like you're saving money on it, so you get it.” (Female, 15)*

*“Yeah, I'd say they [promotions] influences my choices definitely.” (Female, 16)*

*“Absolutely, I usually buy things if there's actually a deal on, so absolutely.” (Male, 15)*

Several participants stated that marketing can influence people to buy a product that they hadn’t intended in purchasing in the first place.

*“Yeah, because if you go into a shop or something and you're like imagine they have something on promotion and you that it's £5 today, you might say I wasn't gonna get it, but now I want to get it because it's cheaper than usual.” (Female, 14)*

*So, people will walk past and think, oh they've got a deal on, I'll go in and get it, even if they don't actually need it.” (Female, 15)*

*“I was like, OK, I'm not, not particularly inclined to go into McDonald's, really, but I mean, if you get a prize of buying a drink or a burger, then why not? It just gives you another reason to go to be honest.” (Female, 16)*



Figure 18: Photo of advert for prizes when purchasing a product at McDonalds.

*“Yeah, it kind of made me want to try it just because like it's a deal and like that kind of makes you want to buy it more.” (Female, 15)*

Interestingly, several participants discussed that promotions could actually cause people to spend more money rather than less, while making them feel like they’ve saved money due to the promotion.



*“If you were planning on going in to get two chocolate bars, then you've saved money. But if you were only planning on getting one, you've technically lost money, because you don't want that second chocolate bar. But you don't tell yourself that when you're buying it.” (Female, 14)*



Figure 19: Photo of promotion for crisps.

*I often like if I'll see something that's got like a good deal on it, I'll want to try it. If I'm in the shops like Morrison's or something and I see something that is two for one or buy one get 1/2 price I'm much more likely to buy it even though like I'm spending more. It's like a bargain for what I'm getting, so I'm always much more likely to buy something if, like I see that there's a deal on or something like that.” (Female, 15)*

*“If you don't really think about it, it does feel like you are saving money. If I go in with £1 and I'm going to spend 50 pence on one chocolate bar, but if I spend, just the extra, and get two chocolate bars.” (Female, 14)*



Figure 20: Photo of promotion for chocolate.

Participants discussed seeing promotions in specific locations in shops, restaurants and supermarkets, where they are most likely to influence people.

*“You see them [promotions] and the end of the aisles and at the tills.” (Female, 16)*



Figure 21: Photo of confectionery promotion at a shop till.

*"Normally, like near the front of the shop, if you just walk in and they'll be like just like a little stand, that's got stuff on it." (Female, 15)*

*"As soon as you walk in, they're right in front of you, your eye goes straight to them. Most of them, they're like at eye level, as well." (Female, 14)*

One participant noted that the strategic placement of advertisements and promotions is so subtle that he hadn't thought about it before taking part in this project.

*"The way they market and promote foods and actually placing it the front to entice you to want to buy it and that's something I never really noticed until I started this." (Male, 15)*

Participants went on to state that the placement of products and promotions has been done deliberately by food companies to influence peoples' purchases.

*"They also like, put stuff right before you like pay. So, when you're going there and you see, something that you might want, you could just buy that as well." (Female, 14)*



Figure 22: Photo of confectionery located near tills.

*"Yeah, I mean when you walk into the shop, the first thing that's set out in front will catch your eye first of course. [...] So, I think a lot of their stuff that they want to promote would be at the front. Just where it's visible and you know for sure people will pass by it to get to where they need to go in the store." (Female, 16)*

Participants highlighted that while there are promotions all year round, they notice a higher

volume of marketing and promotions during specific holidays such as Easter, Halloween and Christmas.

*"Yeah, like with the Easter eggs, they have them at buy two for £5 or something and the mini-eggs can be discounted." (Female, 15)*

*"Christmas, they have a lot of normal food on deals. They know people like to cook at Christmas time for their families, so they'll be like, oh get a bag of chips, but get one for half price. If they only went in for a bag, they'd say, oh but there'll be a lot of us, we'll need to get another one, and get more for it." (Female, 14)*

#### **4.3.4 Food branding**

All participants were able to name various food brands when prompted or when discussing marketing and promotions more generally. Interestingly, most examples given were fast-food brands such as McDonalds, Burger King and KFC. Several participants discussed being able to recognise food brands based on the brand colours and company logo.

*"It's just like, their brand colour. If I saw yellow and red, I would definitely pick McDonald's." (Female, 13)*

*"If you're walking by the logo on something, it just always catches your eye. Because you know the colour. For instance, McDonald's, red and yellow. If something was red and yellow, I'd be like, McDonald's, because you just know it." (Female, 14)*

*"Starbucks, like the mermaid on it, if I saw that, if somebody said, guess the shop, and then said, mermaid, I would go, Starbucks." (Female, 16)*

Participants also discussed the use of catch phrases and slogans, stating if they saw or heard a particular catch phrase, they would know what brand was advertising the associated product.

*"If it had a slogan or something, like that whistle at McDonald's, they have that whistle. If I saw that out, I would go in and be like, oh I want to try that. Also, if I just saw a KFC, Finger Licking Good." (Female, 12)*

*"Although it doesn't say the word, McDonalds on it, you'd know it was McDonald's, because of the Mc in it, like the McSpicy." (Female, 14)*

Participants stated that when making food choices, they regularly show brand loyalty and are influenced by associations with certain brands.

*"Like so I normally would get Pepsi if it was like me choosing, but I do probably prefer Coke, but it's literally just 'cause I'll see Pepsi and it's like brighter colours and it's like a more kind of like an interesting logo I'm more likely to pick that up." (Female, 15)*

*"Like the branding, like if you know of a brand, then you're more likely to buy it because like if you bought it before. Like McDonalds, if they come out with something like a deal, you're more likely to buy it because you already know*

*the like brand.” (Male, 14)*

When discussing why food companies would invest in branding, participants stated that it would make people “*recognise and remember the brand,*” influence people to purchase products from the brand, and increase popularity of the brand, sometimes superseding the need for language to communicate the advert’s message.

*“I feel as though because they [food companies] know it's going to catch people's eye, and they [food companies] know it's going to make a difference. [...] It is an investment, if it gets to people, you'll get it back.” (Female, 14)*

*“I feel if you use a good logo, people will think about it and talk about it. If you see something that sticks out, and then it'll become more popular.” (Female, 16)*

*“The branding colours represent the company. It’s psychology, so that someone being hungry can just think of the brand or see the brand and makes people buy the product. Connects people to buying that product.” (Male, 14)*

*“If you don't, maybe don't speak English or other can't read English, you can still see it OK, I can find this burger for whatever is at McDonald's because you recognise the logo.” (Female, 16)*

#### **4.3.5 Perceptions of how food marketing could be changed**

Participants tended to agree that restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks are needed.

*“I think like less promotions and like advertising of unhealthy stuff would make people like not go and buy them as much because like they're not seeing them.” (Male, 14)*

Participants had various views on how food should be advertised and what should change. Several participants stated that healthy foods should be advertised as often as unhealthy foods as this would encourage people to try healthier options.

*“I feel like it's always unhealthy fast food that you see. If I'd seen an advertisement saying, this is the new healthy burger, a healthier way of living, I would want to try it more than a McDonald's” (Female, 14)*

*“Like, an equal amount of advertising with healthy, and unhealthy foods.” (Female, 14)*

*“It feels like there should be like a wider spread. Not everything has to be healthy, but not everything has to be unhealthy.” (Female 14)*

*“I would think, maybe more like healthier stuff on the billboards. Because, like, if I'm only ever seeing advertisements that are making me hungry to go into fast food places, it's not going to be very good for me. But if something was like, come buy our organic and healthy food I would go buy.” (Female 12)*

*“Yeah, restrictions on unhealthy ones because we've already got the problem of obesity. So, we don't really need to be promoting like £3 crap like, fried chicken.” (Female 14).*

One participant discussed amending the design of adverts to restrict the types of colours and pictures used to be less attention-grabbing.

*“There's always like bright colours that are used, or like eye-catching, none are, like, dark colours. Or, like, smaller pictures, it's always like big, massive pictures.” (Female 15)*

Despite widely shared views that the advertising landscape should change, participants also acknowledged the difficulty in implementing regulations on the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks, stating that fast food places would still sell the food.

*“Also, the feeling that is did happen [restricting advertising on unhealthy foods] fast food locations would start advertising and serving small portions of healthy food so they could get around the advert regulations. So, they would still serve bad food. They would just cover it up with some good food and then when people go check the menu when they go there, they find fast foods and then they'll still make business.” (Male, 14)*

## 5. Strengths and limitations

This study combines primary data from workshops and focus groups with young people to improve understanding of their engagement with and perceptions of food marketing in Scotland.

Consistent with the qualitative design, the sample does not aim to be representative of young people in the UK, as our study focused on young people living in Scotland. However, purposive sampling ensured that the research sample included a diverse range of participants in terms of age, sex, and socioeconomic background. The research sample for the whole project exhibits a balance between these characteristics, such that no one characteristic was overrepresented. Understanding the experiences and perspectives of young people is useful in policy research, as young people have a unique understanding of their own needs and the challenges they and their peers face to live healthier lives [28]. Thus, involving and synthesising the opinions on youths in research is a valuable means of developing policy recommendations that are likely to represent the needs of this population.

The workshop approach allowed for openness through the presence of group members of a similar age and/or from the same organisation (e.g., youth group). Although we did not record the workshops, the activities we facilitated allowed the young people to record their thoughts and opinions on the topic on post-it notes, which we subsequently analysed for recurring themes and standout perspectives. Although this did not allow us to tie individual perspectives to participants' demographic characteristics, it did allow for a useful analysis of group perspectives.

The data were collected in different formats (online and face-to-face), and it is possible that this may have influenced participants' responses. Two in-person workshops and two of the online



focus groups were conducted in a classroom or youth group centre with a teacher or youth worker present. It is possible that the presence of a teacher/youth worker may have influenced some participants' willingness to answer questions or the responses they gave. The group dynamics in workshops and discussion groups may have influenced participants' honesty when answering questions and their responses. Some young people may not have wanted to disagree with their peers, and thus responded in a similar way to the rest of the group.

This study is subject to limitations related to the research design and contextual factors. The qualitative nature of the primary research data is such that the analysis is representative of the depth and diversity of opinion within the research sample, but the research cannot make any predictions about the frequency of specific stances within any wider population.

The specific area of policy on which the research focused is relatively complex, and it became evident during data collection that changing regulations surrounding food advertising and marketing requires a broad range of expertise, including technical knowledge and understanding of what is achievable within the relevant governmental bodies. As such, the participants in this study were young people, and therefore were not able to present comprehensive recommendations for policy. However, their ideas are valuable and offer a starting point for desired changes to the food marketing landscape that could make a difference in their lives and those of their peers.

## **6. Discussion**

This study used co-production methods to explore understanding of young people's (aged 11-16) engagement with and perceptions of food marketing in the UK. Combining analyses of three workshops, photos provided by 32 young people and six focus groups allowed for a rigorous and wide-ranging examination of young people's exposure to, engagement with and perceptions of food marketing and possible alternative marketing strategies that they proposed.

The analysis answered three research questions: what are young people's perceptions of the way unhealthy food is currently advertised?; how does unhealthy food marketing influence young people's food choices?; and how should unhealthy food marketing change, according to young people?

### **6.1 What are young people's perceptions of the way unhealthy food is advertised currently?**

Although young people had varying definitions of what constitutes 'unhealthy food,' several expressed that the marketing of 'unhealthy' foods as they perceived them was pervasive in their everyday lives. Young people reported and documented seeing marketing at various points throughout their daily lives, from watching TV or browsing social media, to walking to school, to walking around town or waiting for a bus. They also reported a variety of marketing mediums, including promotional aisles in supermarkets, outdoor billboards, posters in shops or at bus stops, and TV, radio, and social media adverts. They discussed that many of the physical adverts that they saw were located near the restaurants they were advertising, tempting people to visit the restaurant or shop being advertised. Many participants also noted that they rarely, if ever, saw marketing for healthy foods.

## **6.2 How does unhealthy food marketing influence young people's food choices?**

Many participants reported being personally influenced by marketing techniques and other pressures, such as social media influencers, peer pressure, tempting adverts, promotions such as 2-for-1 deals, brightly coloured and attention-catching adverts, and food company branding. Additionally, some participants recognised that some adverts for fast food restaurants seem to be targeted specifically at people their age or younger.

### **6.2.1 Food advertising**

Several young people reported that food adverts were tempting, and some recounted specific instances where they had seen an advert on the street and subsequently been tempted to go into that restaurant. They mentioned certain aspects of adverts, such as vibrant colours and large text to attract attention, that made them more appealing.

### **6.2.2 Food promotions**

Similar to advertising, many young people mentioned being swayed by sales and offers on certain foods. However, not all young people reported being swayed by promotions, with some claiming that taste and product appeal would be more persuasive to them than price. Interestingly, some described refusing a promotion as a form of resisting temptation.

The young people discussed how promotions can make people feel as though they saved money, even though they recognised that they had actually spent more than they had originally intended. They also discussed the placement and seasonality of promotions. Several believed that food companies deliberately placed promotions in shop areas where they are most likely to influence people's purchases, and that promotions can encourage people to buy a product they hadn't intended to purchase in the first place.

### **6.2.3 Food branding**

Participants reported being swayed by brands and influenced by foods associated with certain brands. Some reported showing brand loyalty even when they preferred a competitor's product. Interestingly, most examples of brands named by the young people were fast-food brands such as McDonald's, Burger King and KFC. Several participants discussed being able to recognise food brands based on the brand colours and company logo. A few also mentioned slogans or catch phrases associated with branding.

## **6.3 How should unhealthy food marketing change, according to young people?**

Participants tended to agree that restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks are needed. Although several participants stated that no changes should be made to how food is advertised, many argued that reducing the amount of unhealthy food advertising would be beneficial to population health. Policy suggestions made by the young people addressed both marketing and promotions.

### 6.3.1 Advertising

Several participants stated that healthy foods should be advertised as often as unhealthy foods as this would encourage people to try healthier options.

Others discussed amending the design of unhealthy food adverts, promotions, and packaging to be less eye-catching as these marketing practices influence purchasing choices. One participant discussed changing the design of adverts to restrict the types of colours and pictures used to be less attention-grabbing.

### 6.3.2 Promotions

Many participants discussed requiring supermarkets, restaurants, and takeaways to offer promotions on healthy items. Participants went on to explain that there should be equal offers on healthy and unhealthy food, although some participants said there should be more offers on healthy food compared to unhealthy food.

Interestingly, several participants discussed promotions in the context of the current 'cost of living' crisis. Participants discussed that going out to a restaurant or getting a takeaway is often seen as a 'treat' and if people or families are on a budget, this means they are often forced into picking unhealthy food items that are on offer. If healthy foods were cheaper or the same price as unhealthy foods, participants stated this would 'sway their choices'.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

Young people are being exposed to marketing of unhealthy food and drink, and many of our participants reported that their food consumption is regularly influenced by several marketing tactics, including adverts, promotions, branding, and influencers. This influence generally encouraged the young people to consume more foods that they considered to be 'unhealthy'. This is especially worrying as the 2022 Scottish Health Survey [1] showed that 18% of children aged 2-15 continue to be at risk of overweight and obesity, despite the Government's goal of reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity by half (to 7%) [29].

We recommend the immediate implementation of policies to reduce young people's exposure to marketing of unhealthy foods.

### 7.1 Advertising

Participants described seeing unhealthy food adverts often, and in many contexts that permeate their daily lives, both in their physical environment and online. Many also mentioned that their consumption was directly influenced by these adverts. For example, many reported choosing to stop by a fast-food restaurant after seeing a nearby advert. In light of these results, it is likely that policy to restrict these kinds of adverts can have a direct impact on young people's consumption.

Policy to address unhealthy food advertising should seek to train the spotlight on healthier alternatives, so that young people can avoid being tempted to unhealthy food consumption.

The young people reported seeing adverts across many different forms of media throughout



their day and recognised that this can influence their choices. This highlights the need for action across all forms of advertising from TV to online and outdoor.

We would recommend that the planned UK wide 9pm TV watershed ban is implemented as soon as possible. In the event of any further delays to this policy implementation the Scottish Government should commit to exploring opportunities to implement it in Scotland [30]. Polling has found that a majority of people in Scotland would support policies like this, with 74% supporting a watershed 9pm ban [31].

We also welcome and support action to restrict online digital marketing [32], to protect young people from this content. Whilst measures are proposed in this area it requires to be implemented and closely monitored to ensure it is effective in reducing young people's exposure. The young people in this study reported seeing adverts online and in social media.

The vast majority of young people in this study reported seeing physical adverts in their local environments, on high streets, in shop windows, and on bus stops. Therefore, we would strongly recommend policies to restrict the types of food that can be advertised in these physical settings. Scottish Government has devolved powers to implement such policy. These measures have widespread support: one poll in Scotland found that 56% favoured banning adverts for unhealthy food in outdoor spaces [33].

## 7.2 Promotions

Young people reported that the promotions they encounter focus almost entirely on unhealthy foods. Policy to restrict promotions should aim to put healthy food in the spotlight and ensure that it is more frequently put on offer, ultimately improving its appeal and affordability.

In Scotland, we strongly recommend following through with restrictions on price promotions of unhealthy foods [34] currently being proposed by the Scottish Government. Many young people reported that their purchasing behaviour was influenced by price promotions such as 2-for-1 deals, but that they rarely saw healthy foods placed on offer. They also discussed the importance of such restrictions in a time when cost-of-living means that more and more people struggle to make ends meet, because if only less healthy foods are the cheapest, they may be all some families can afford.

We also recommend that Scotland legislation includes restricting the placement of unhealthy food promotions in shops and online. These policies have popular support: a 2022 survey in Scotland found that 65% of participants supported restricting where unhealthy foods can be displayed in stores [33] and are already in place in England. Location-based promotions were a marketing tactic that young people mentioned and many took photos of – when they were in supermarkets, their attention was caught by promotional stands. Many commented that the stands were in locations that consumers would have to walk past, and believed the stands were strategically placed to lure consumers by temptation and discounts.

## 8. Appendices

### Appendix A: Focus group coding framework

Themes	Subthemes	Description
Celebrities and influencers advertising food	Celebrities and influencers advertising food	Discussions about why celebrities and influencers would want to advertise food products
	Companies using celebrities and influencers	Discussions about why companies use celebrities/influencers to advertise their products
	Inclined to purchase a product	Discussions of whether a product was being advertised/promoted by a celebrity/influencer would influence purchase choices
Food advertising	Design of advert	Discussions of the design of adverts (including colour and text)
	Frequency and location of food adverts	Discussions of where and how often young people see food adverts
	How should food be advertised	Discussions of how food should be advertised
	Influence choice	Discussions of food adverts influencing choices
	Recognition of advertising	Do you think these images are advertising a product
	Recognition of what is being advertised	Discussions of young people being able to recognise advertising
	Social media and food apps	Discussions about food adverts on social media and on food apps
	Successful in selling a product	Discussions of the success of adverts in selling a product
	Target audience	Discussion of who young people think adverts are targeted at
	Types of food advertised	Discussions on the types of food advertised
Food branding	Advertising vs branding	Discussion of advertising and branding
	Influence choice	Discussions of branding influencing choices
	Investment in branding	Discussions of why companies invest time and money on branding
	Purchase of brands	Discussions of loyalty to specific brands
	Recognition of brands	Discussions of how food brands are recognised
Food promotions	Influence choice	Discussions about promotions influencing choices
	Location of promotions	Discussions about where youths see promotions

	Purpose of promotions	Discussion of what the purpose of food promotions is
	Successful in selling a product	Discussion about success of promotions
	Timing of promotions	Discussions about the timing (e.g., time of year) of promotions
Other food related thoughts		Any other food related thoughts

## Appendix B: Video production results

In the workshops held in Stage 1, in addition to asking the 33 young people about their experiences with and views on the marketing of unhealthy commodities, the researchers collected their thoughts and opinions on the appearance and content of advocacy videos similar to the one we planned to produce. Some questions had unanimous or near-unanimous agreement while others resulted in a more even split of opinions. Views also varied widely between workshop groups.

In each of the sessions on video production, conversations centred on video styles, colours, characters, and content, each of which will be further described in this section. Any quotes are taken from the first workshop activity in which participants wrote down their reactions to each video. The second workshop on styles was not recorded and opinions of the participants were noted down by a member of the research team.

### Styles

Some video styles were preferred by those with an interest or connection to them. For example, one video that took on the appearance of a video game was polarising, with young people who enjoy video games voting in favour and those who do not voting against.

*“It’s different and unique, relatable to some”*

*“It makes us interested”*

*“Video games aren’t for everyone”*

*“Don’t like the idea of lives”*

While there was no consensus around specific stylistic preferences, the young people did tend to prefer videos that were clear and simple without being childish.

*“Simple but not too simple”*

*“The animation was simplistic and [...]--- in a non-childish way”*

*“It’s different and more engaging. It is all easy to understand because of its simplicity”*

*“The animation style was aesthetically pleasing in the simplicity”*

*“Too busy/difficult to understand”*

*“NO! It looked bad, too much changing, very confusing, missed the message”*

*“Too much detail not on main focus”*

*“Easy/clear to follow”*

*“Not direct”*

Participants expressed concern as to whether the video would be taken seriously, and wanted to choose a video style that would reflect the seriousness of the topic.

*“Animation was funny looking and wouldn’t be taken seriously”*

*“People wouldn’t take it seriously”*

The young people also tended to prefer videos that would grab and keep people’s attention, engaging them in the video. They did not like videos that seemed ‘boring’.

*“A boring art style”*

*“Made it look more appealing and invested me in what was being discussed”*

*“Didn’t draw your attention”*

*“The animation style created visual interest which made me pay more attention to the video itself”*

*“(AGREED)”*

*“The animations were interesting and engaging”*

## **Colours**

As with animation styles, the young people showed an overall preference for attention-grabbing colours that did not seem too childish. Consequently, they generally did not enjoy muted, dark or pastel colours.

*“Yes, they were eye-catching. When things were bad it was duller. You could tell what was good and bad. There was contrast”*

*“Quite dull, made the teachers look like mean people by using dull colours”*

*“Too dull/pastel colours, needs to be more eye-catching”*

*“They were too basic and dark”*

*“The colours were captivating but too childish”*

*“Colours worked well together and were vibrant”*

The young people were interested in a colour palette that would help communicate the message and tone of the video, and appreciated the example videos that achieved this.

*“The colours were very representative of the tone of the video”*  
*“(AGREED)”*

*“The colours should match the topic”*

*“The colours were simple and didn’t take away from the seriousness of the topic”*

## Content

The content of the video was based on the young people's thoughts and experiences around unhealthy food and drink marketing, which is discussed in the sections above. In regards to the video style as it relates to the content, the participants expressed a preference for clarity and storytelling to convey the emotions and experiences of the characters.

*"Not sure about topic"*

*"It helped represent the struggles those with asthma experience by showing her day-to-day routine"*

*"Showed lots of emotion"*

## Final storyboard workshops

After conducting the workshops, photo elicitation, and focus group discussions, the research team worked closely with the media production company to translate the young people's ideas and photos into a script and video storyboard. An additional workshop was then held with four participants from Group 2 with the aim of collecting their feedback and deciding on a final vision for the video. As in the Stage 1 workshops, this session was not recorded but participants' contributions were collected in notes by the research team.

The media company produced the final video, which was reviewed by the research team and edited based on their feedback. The video was launched on 21st November 2023 in a webinar and can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXgV4T8X7DQ>

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