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A content analysis of ‘Junk food’ content in children’s TV programmes: A comparison of UK broadcast TV and Video-on-demand services

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Objectives: Exposure to HFSS imagery is associated with consumption of foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS), and subsequently *obesity*, among young people. We report and compare the results of two content analyses, one of two popular terrestrial children’s television channels in the UK and the other of a selection of children’s programmes available on video-on-demand (VOD) streaming sites.

Design: Content analysis of three days’ worth of programmes (including advertisements) on two popular children’s television channels broadcast on UK television (CBeebies and Milkshake) as well as a sample of 40 highest rated children’s programmes available on the VOD platforms, Netflix and Amazon Prime, using 1-minute interval coding.

Results: HFSS content was seen in 181 broadcasts (36%) and in 417 intervals (13%) on terrestrial television, ‘Milkshake’ had a significantly higher proportion of programmes/adverts which contained HFSS content than ‘CBeebies’. In VOD platforms, HFSS content was seen in 82 episodes (72% of the total number of episodes), across 459 intervals (19% of the total number of intervals), with no significant difference in the proportion of programmes containing HFSS content between Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates that HFSS content is common in both popular UK children’s television channels and children programmes on VOD services. Since previous research has shown that HFSS content in the media has an effect on HFSS consumption, children’s television programmes broadcast either on TV or VOD services are likely having an effect on HFSS consumption in children and legislative opportunities to prevent this exposure are being missed.

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