

Pester Power or Parent Power?

webinar
Tuesday 21 July
11–12pm

Hear first hand the findings from research with parents and carers on the use of child-friendly characters on food and drink packaging.



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Agenda

Intro and housekeeping Barbara Crowther, Children's Food Campaign	11:00-11:05
Parent Power or Pester Power? Research findings Beth Bradshaw, Food Active	11:05-11:13
Parents insight Lindsay Stephenson and Miriam Manon	11:13-11:23
Brand mascots and child-friendly characters on food packaging: what does the evidence say? Dr Lauren McGale, De Montfort University	11:23-11:30
Panellist Discussion / Q&A Session Katharine Jenner, Campaign Manager, Action on Sugar Dr Anna Isaacs, Postdoc Fellow, City, University of London Jessica Attard, Portfolio Manager, Guys & St Thomas's Charity	11:30-11:58
Closing remarks	11:58-12:00

Housekeeping

1. Please mute your microphone to minimise noise disruption
2. We will have time for a Q&A session at the end, feel free to pop your question in the chat function during the presentations and we will come to it at the end.
3. Please note we will record this meeting to share afterwards.
4. Tweeting during or after the webinar? Tag us @childrensfood @food_active and use the hashtag **#MakeCartoonsHealthy**

Pester Power or Parent Power?

Research findings

Beth Bradshaw, MSc. ANutr.

Project Officer

Food Active (Health Equalities Group)

Thanks to Barbara Crowther (CFC), Stephanie Kennedy (Sustain), Alex Holt (Food Active) and Chloé Higham-Smith (Food Active)

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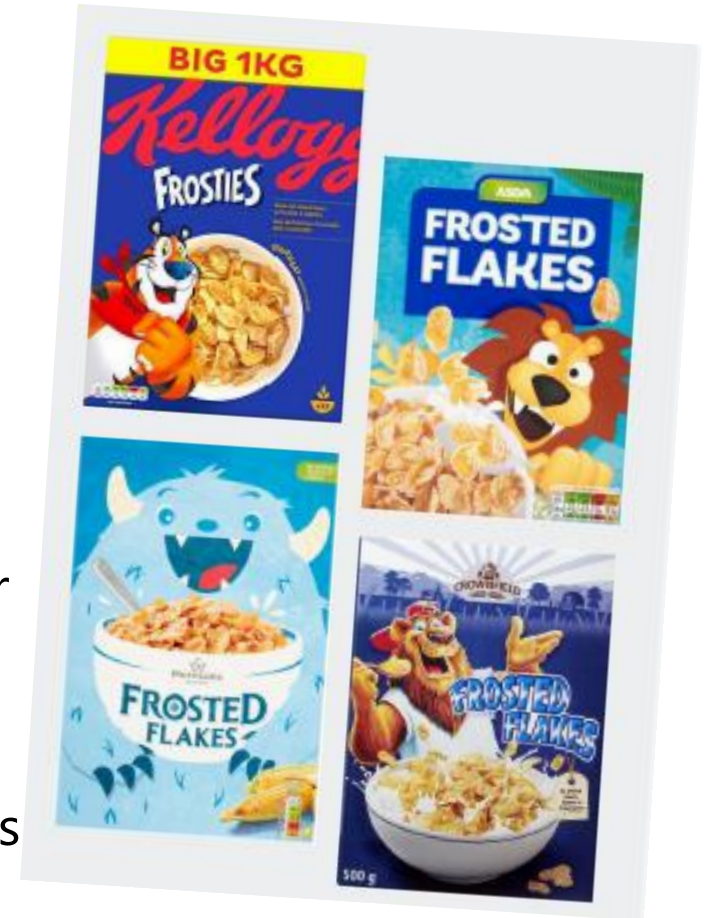


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Why?

- 1/4 of children aged 4-5, and 1/3 of 10-11 year olds are now affected by overweight and obesity in the UK
- The packaging of food acts as one of the most important determinants in a consumer's buying decision process
- Concerns about the use of child-friendly characters on unhealthy food and drink packaging i.e. Frosties' Tony the Tiger
- Previous Parents' Jury surveys on JFM have highlighted use of cartoon characters as highest after TV advertising, in terms of concerns about marketing tactics on unhealthy food for parents
- Lidl, Aldi and Asda have announced they will all remove child-friendly characters from own-brand breakfast cereals.



Methods

- In Summer 2019, Food Active conducted focus groups in Bolton, Halton and Chester. Participants were mainly mothers (n=17) of young children, and two fathers attended to share their views too.
- Using the ideas and concerns raised by the parents in the focus groups and interviews, an online survey was developed and disseminated across the Children's Food Campaign/Sustain network, Parents Jury, social media, Mumsnet and Food Active local authority network.
- Parents and carers with children aged 18 months- 17 yrs old eligible to take part, with a 4 week collection period in November 2019-December 2019 (n=942).



Results

1. Parents and children are guided by different purchasing factors

For parents, price and branding are important factors in their decision-making process.

Conversely, parents thought their child/ren are guided by child-friendly packaging, particularly where high profile, well-recognised characters such as Peppa Pig and Paw Patrol are used.

"She will recognise the characters so she will want to eat it. Her favourite character is on it so she will think, "if he likes it then it must be tasty" or "I want to eat what my favourite hero eats".



Frozen Products
Sweets
Coke
Crisps
Pasta
Frosties
Chocolate
Cereal
Yogurt
Peppa Pig
Biscuits
Spaghetti Shapes

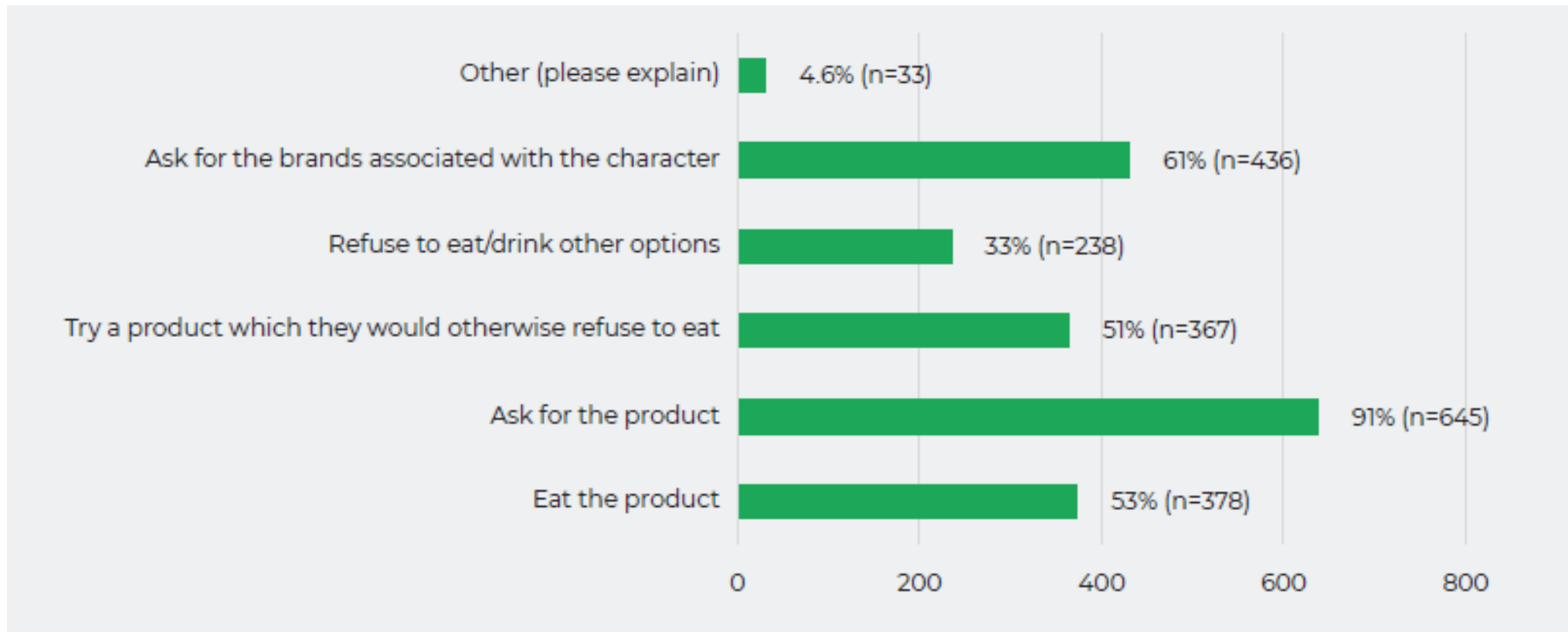
Paw Patrol
Thomas The Tank Engine
Cheese
Baked Beans
Cathedral City
Disney
Kellogg's
Tinned pasta
Cake
Cheese Strings
Sugary Drinks
Ice Lollies
Smoothies
Krispies
Fromage Frais

Cake Mixes
Nesquick
Frubes
Freddo
Lollipops
Happy Meals
McDonald's
Raisins
Minions
Jelly
Drinks
Heinz
Star Wars
Ice Cream
Coca Cola
Frozen
Rice Krispies
Kinder Eggs
Pasta Shapes

2. There are many types of products which use child-friendly characters on their packaging
(not just cereals!)

Results

3. Child-friendly characters have an impact on children's food/brand preferences and eating habits



4. Parents saw child-friendly characters as a barrier to healthy eating

Two thirds of parents think child-friendly characters on food and drink packaging make it more difficult to feed their children a healthy diet.

— Pester Power or Parent Power? 2020

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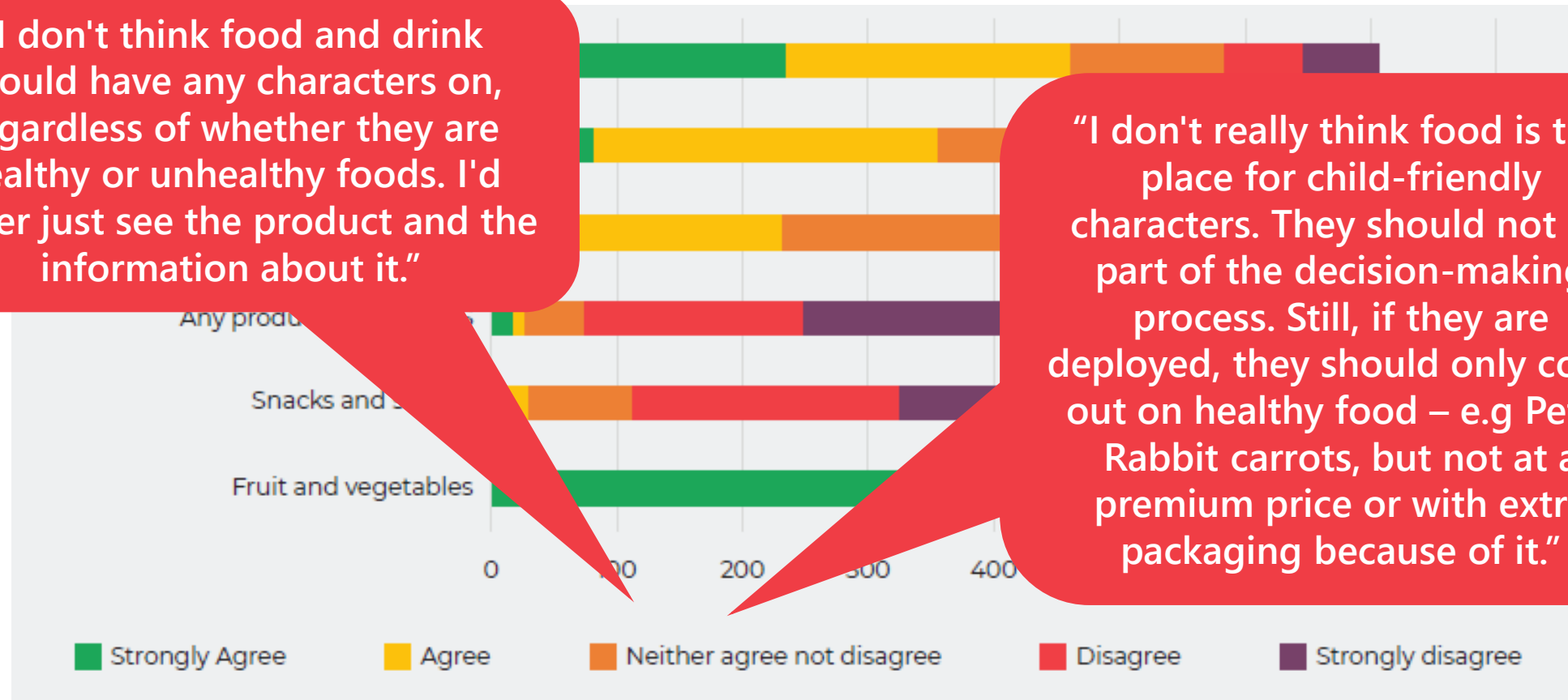
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Results

5. Parents felt using these characters on HFSS food and drink was not appropriate – except special occasion products.

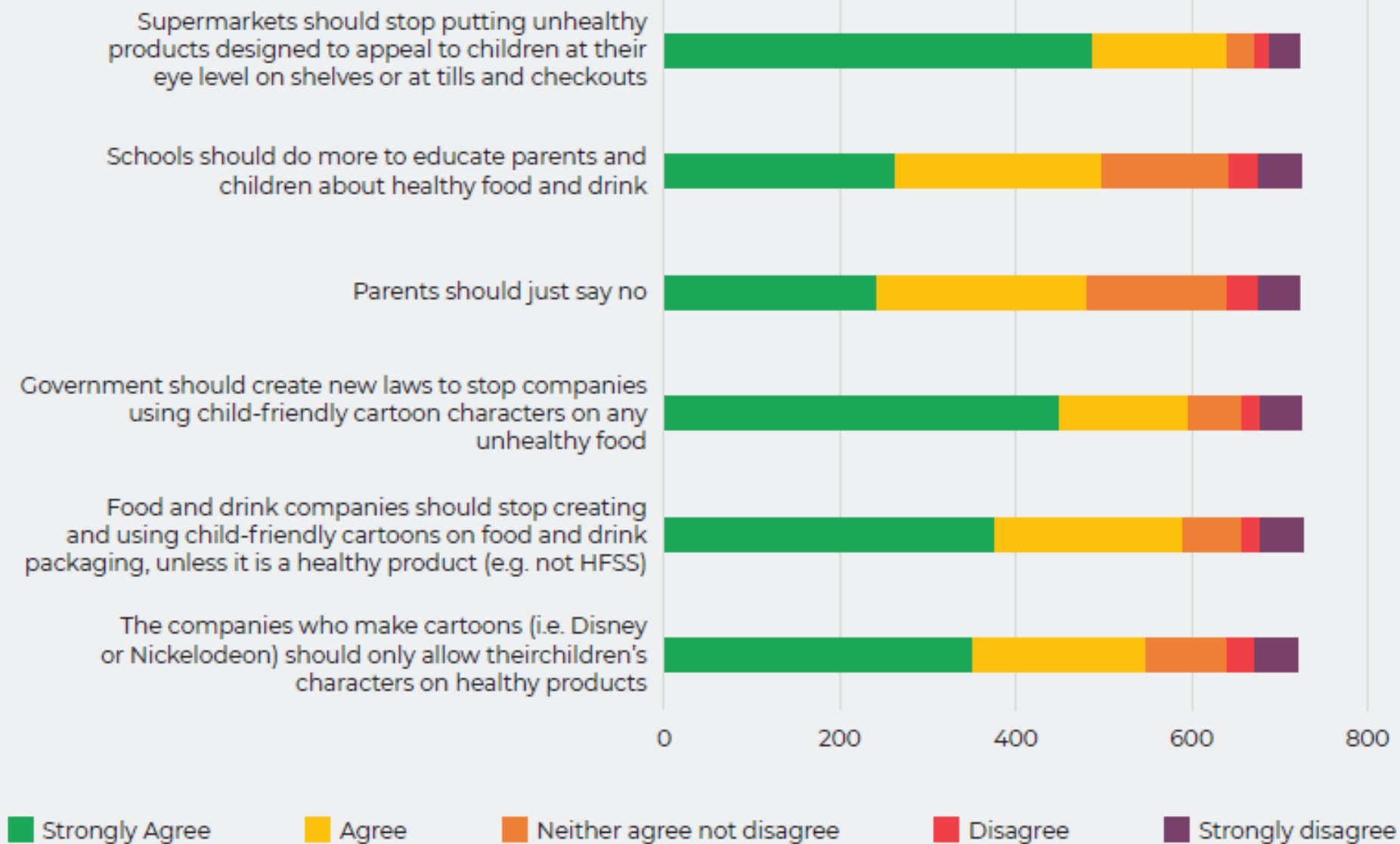
“I don't think food and drink should have any characters on, regardless of whether they are healthy or unhealthy foods. I'd rather just see the product and the information about it.”

“I don't really think food is the place for child-friendly characters. They should not be part of the decision-making process. Still, if they are deployed, they should only come out on healthy food – e.g Peter Rabbit carrots, but not at a premium price or with extra packaging because of it.”



Results

6. Parents want the Government and supermarkets to **take action** on the use of child-friendly characters!



The ethics of marketing to children

"We need to safeguard children from the influence of advertising. Companies should not be profiting from children's health being compromised and damaged for shareholder profits! It's outrageous."

The challenges faced by parents and carers

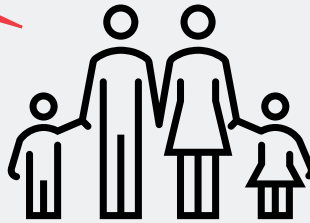
"Parents' job is hard, please do everything to help make it easier to get through the supermarket shop while not giving in to demands for unhealthy foods."

The role of schools

"I am not saying that parents and schools should not have a role but you can't expect they alone take responsibility when the food environment around us is loaded with junk food that clearly appeals to children. It's an everyday fight and it's not fair to put the responsibility onto parents and schools. It's like putting a plaster on the problem when the system is clearly broken."

Government intervention

"Government should play a leading role in legislation against food companies."



The cost of branded child-friendly products

"These food items with characterisation are usually higher priced than the supermarket own brands of the same product. Parents are already having their budget stretched as food costs increase and I think these particular brands are an additional pressure."

The supermarket environment

"The placement of products at child's eye level is irresponsible and places unnecessary pressure on parents and carers."

Conclusions...

This survey was the first of its kind and has collected the views of a range of parents and carers across the UK regarding the use of child-friendly characters on food and drink packaging. Limitations included not being a representative sample.

- **The survey demonstrates that there is a clear and overwhelming agreement from parents that the use of cartoon characters on HFSS food and drinks must end.**
- **Parents accept their responsibility, but want the food and marketing industry and the Government to play their role too.**
- **Parents question whether any foods should be marketed or packaged to appeal to children, except for special occasions.**

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Parent-informed recommendations

Government

- Introduce regulations to restrict supermarket promotions at checkouts, aisle ends and the store entrance.
- Close loopholes in CAP regulations which exempt brand mascots from the rules applying to licensed TV/film characters.
- Use consultations on improving nutritional labelling and packaging information, to examine the evidence and explore policy options for restricting the use of child friendly characters on packaging of HFSS food and drink, especially in early years.

Industry

- All supermarkets plus brand manufacturers to join Aldi, Lidl and Asda in removing all child-friendly cartoon characters from all breakfast cereals, as well as extending the measure to other products cited by parents such as yogurt, ice creams and biscuits.
- Supermarkets should stop putting appealing unhealthy products at children's eye level on shelves, or at tills and checkouts.

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What do parents have to say?

Lindsey Stephenson, parent of two, North West
Miriam Manon, parent of two, London

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Brand mascots and child-friendly characters on food packaging: *what does the evidence say?*

Dr Lauren McGale

Lecturer in Psychology

De Montfort University, UK

Food marketing to children

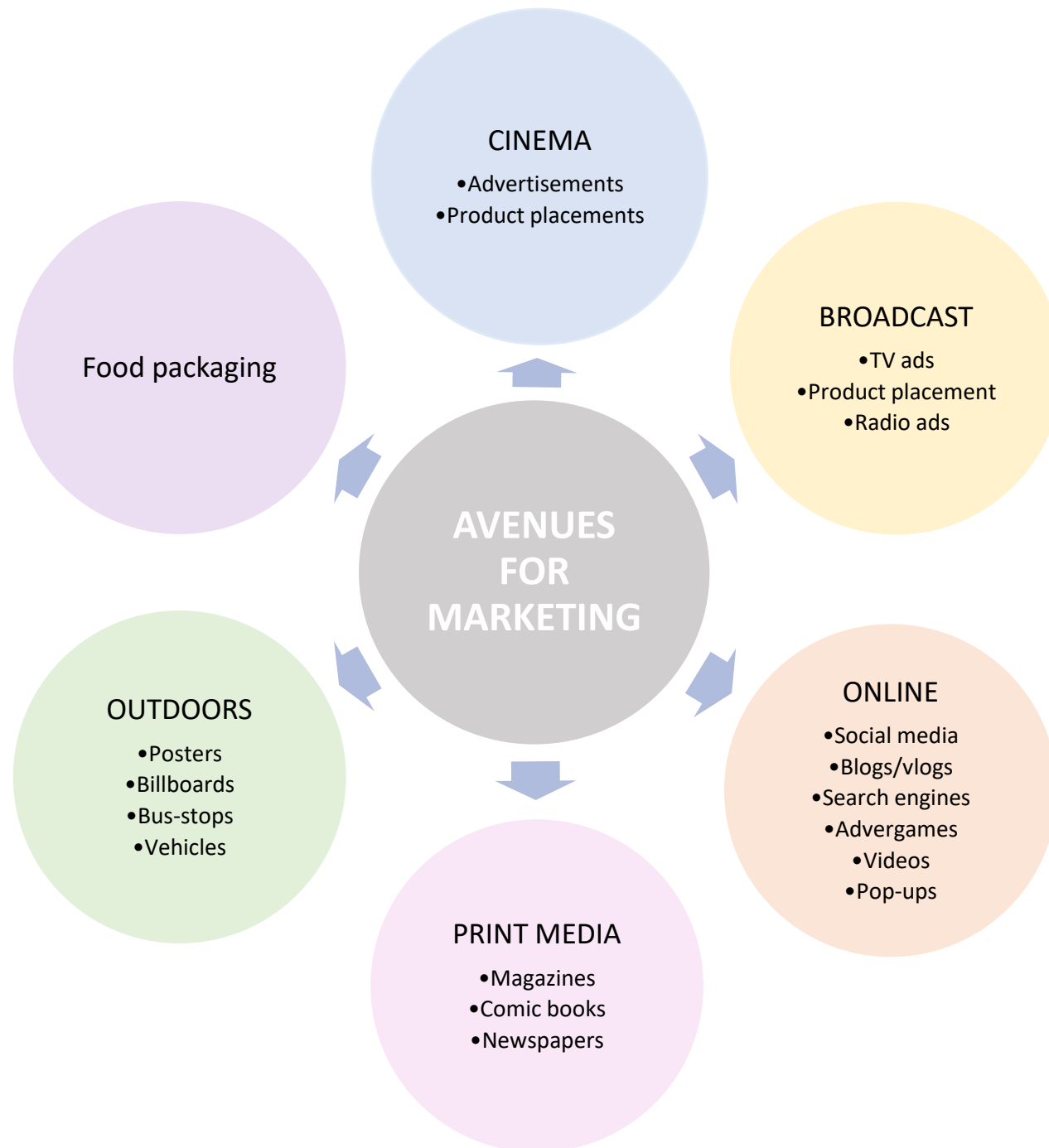
- Why children?
 - Personal spending power (*direct market*)
 - Influence over family shopping (*'pester power'*)
 - Build lifelong behaviours (*future market*)

(Story & French, 2004)

Estimated spend >£143million per year (OHA, 2017)



...BECAUSE IT WORKS!



Persuasive Techniques

For example:

- *Premium offers*
- *Nutrition and health claims*
- *Theme of 'taste'*
- *Emotional appeal of 'fun'*
- *Celebrity endorsements*
- **Promotional characters**

Boylard & Tatlow-Golden (2017)



In 2019, 526 products surveyed had child-friendly characters on packaging, of which **more than half** were HFSS

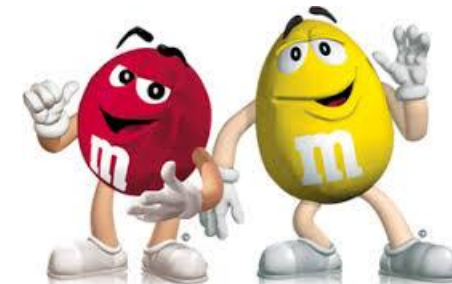
(Action on Sugar/Salt and Children's Food Campaign, 2019)

Promotional characters

Licensed characters



Brand equity characters



Licensed characters – key experimental studies

Roberto et al. (2010)

- Compared matched food pairs, either with or without character
 - Influenced taste preferences
 - Influenced snack choice
 - Strongest effect in **HFSS** snack foods



Smits and Vandebosch (2012)

- Licensed characters produced a greater effect than unknown cartoon characters
 - However, **both** increased appetite and wished for frequency of consumption

Brand equity characters – experimental evidence

- McGale et al. (2016)
- Brand equity characters **also**
 - Influenced taste preferences
 - Influenced snack choice

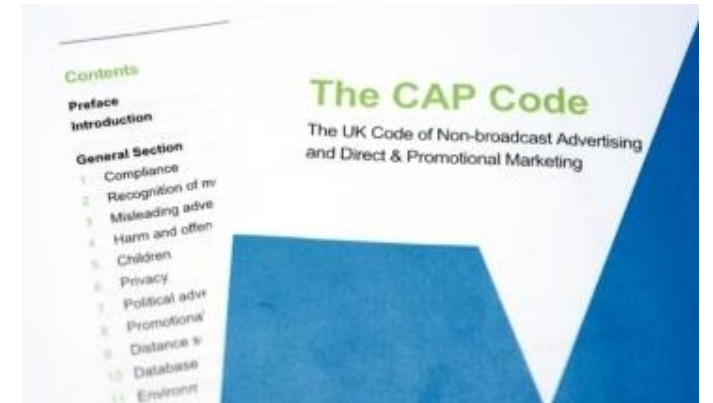
Even on foods they are not normally associated with!



Wealth of further experimental evidence which consistently support these findings.
All promotional characters shown to influence children's eating behaviour, in favour of the products being marketed!

Current UK Regulations

- **The CAP Code (ASA, 2007): Broadcast advertising**
 - Prevents the use of celebrities or licensed characters
 - *With exception of fruit and vegetables (ASA, 2007)*
 - Distinction between licensed and brand equity characters - not evidence based!
 - Too weak - should extend to ALL promotional characters



- **Non-broadcast and online regulations (ASA, 2017)**
 - >25% of audience is children
 - Though welcomed – still not sufficient to protect
- **Food packaging still not regulated!**



Thank you!



Action on Sugar



Action on Salt

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Campaign manager, Action on Sugar/Action on Salt

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GUY'S &
ST THOMAS'
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Q&A Session

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