

20 April 2021

PRESS RELEASE

The CAC warns that minors are overexposed to advertising for foods with a high fat, sugar or salt content carried out by influencers

- **The report, based on 50 videos posted on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Twitch, with 30 million views, shows how the excessive, immoderate consumption of unhealthy products is promoted, associated with a sedentary, screen-based lifestyle**
- **As established by the European Directive, the President of the CAC, Roger Loppacher, urges online platforms to avoid overexposing minors to such advertising, adding that clearer, more demanding regulations are required in this area**
- **In over half the cases (58%), such advertising is not obvious as products are promoted within the discourse of influencers, without any warning regarding its commercial nature**
- **Influencers make publicity go viral by suggesting challenges for young children and teenagers, achieving a massive response**
- **According to data from the Health Survey of Catalonia, 35.6% of children aged 6 to 12 are overweight**

The Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC) has warned that minors are overexposed to the advertising carried out by influencers for foods with a high fat, sugar or salt content, as well as sugared drinks, on video-sharing platforms and other social media sites. According to a report by the CAC, promoting such foods and beverages online can be harmful as it encourages an immoderate consumption of these products, as well as associating this with a sedentary, screen-based lifestyle.

This situation is aggravated by the fact that over half the videos (58%) from the sample analysed contain surreptitious advertising as the influencers include promotional messages within their discourse without indicating its commercial nature.

According to data from the Health Survey of Catalonia (ESCA) 2017-2018, 35.6% of children aged 6 to 12 are overweight, with 25% being overweight and 10% obese. This trend has been increasing since 2017.

As established by the European Directive, the President of the CAC, **Roger Loppacher**, has urged online platforms to avoid overexposing minors to such publicity, adding that clearer, more demanding regulations are required in this area. "Given the increasingly worrying data regarding child obesity, there is widespread consensus in Europe that minors' exposure to this kind of advertising should be reduced. Moreover, as highlighted by the report, the advertising carried out by influencers is massive and, in most cases, surreptitious. Online platforms must adopt appropriate measures to avoid such overexposure and new clear and demanding regulations should be approved to guarantee this."

The report is in line with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (EU Directive 2018/1808), which says that member states must ensure that audiovisual commercial communications by providers under their jurisdiction are easily identifiable. The Directive adds that member states must aim to reduce the exposure of children to audiovisual commercial communications for foods and beverages containing fat, trans-fatty acids, salt or sodium and sugars.

Millions of views by children

The CAC report has been drawn up based on a sample of 50 videos posted on the video-sharing platforms and social media sites of YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and Twitch which contain advertising for such products. The 50 videos analysed received 30 million views and are housed on channels with a total of 127 million followers.

The videos analysed mainly publicise products such as savoury snacks and crisps, mass-produced biscuits and pastries, sweets and energy drinks. In 75% of the cases, the influencer can be seen consuming these products, an action that is accompanied by a **positive message expressing pleasure**. For example:

"Guys, I just got something that's going to blow your minds. Look what I've got here [*shows the little chocolate cakes being promoted*]. Sooo good! The first thing I'm going to do is try this giant [*product name*]. You'll be saying 'what's that, [*influencer's name*]?' It's heaven, my friends, heaven! [*bites into the product and looks pleased*]"

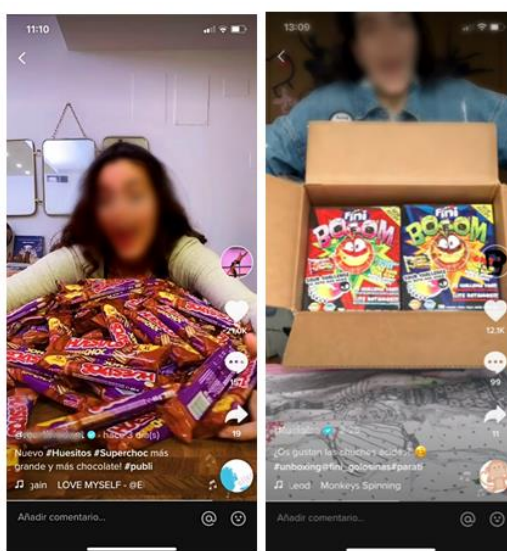
Video no. 40 (TikTok)

Overconsumption and association with sedentary activities

32% of the videos in the sample contain discourse related to foods with a high fat, salt or sugar content that is likely to encourage their **excessive, compulsive or immoderate consumption** by minors. For example:

"I'm going to totally stuff myself with [product name]; first, because I love them and, second, because they've sent me like 800 kilos [...] and I've got to get through them."

Video no. 49 (Twitch)



Moreover, in almost half the videos of the sample (48%) the discourse associates **sedentary activities** with the consumption of unhealthy foods. Specifically, playing video games or watching audiovisual content or sports broadcasts.

In some content of the sample (8%), the commercial discourse **downplays the importance of adopting healthy habits** such as physical exercise or a diet rich in vegetables, which are presented as not very appetising foods compared with processed products. One of the videos, for instance, makes fun of the need to sleep enough, when an influencer drinks from a can of the energy drink being promoted, explaining that she's doing so to prevent tiredness and offset her lack of sleep:

"I'm drinking [product name] because I really need some energy; I'm dying here. I'm really tired, phew!" "I need total energy. I haven't stopped; I've hardly slept at all."

Video no. 46 (Twitch)

Products as substitutes for main meals

Some of the videos analysed, totalling over 2,500,000 views, present the food being promoted, such as crisps, sweets or sugared cereals, as a substitute for a main meal.

In one video, a well-known child influencer sets himself a challenge which consists of only eating foods of a certain colour and bought at a petrol station, for a whole day. Although the mother and father choose some fruits and vegetables as part of their meal, in the case of this child the three main meals are based entirely on unhealthy foods. Specifically, his lunch consists of the crisps being promoted, mass-produced pastries, a bag of savoury snacks and a processed orange juice.



Making publicity go viral through challenges

The study also shows that these products are promoted within the ecosystem of video-sharing platforms and social media sites by encouraging children and teenagers to take on challenges, mainly by recording dance routines or scenes with the products in question.

These challenges have their own hashtag, which allows the huge response to be measured. In the most extreme case, a challenge by a crisp company which invited followers to record a dance routine was viewed 600 million times.

Failure to identify advertising as such

58% of the content analysed did not contain a warning that advertising was present and, when it did, the messages would be difficult for minors to understand or could be easily missed.

The remaining 42% used heterogeneous expressions (“publi”, “sponsor” “patrocini”, “promoció” or thanking the brand in a variety of ways), such expressions often being difficult for minors to understand or easily missed due to their size or how they are presented.

The report was approved by the CAC Plenary held on 14 April 2021.

[The presence of advertising for foods and beverages containing fat, trans-fatty acids, salt and/or sugars in influencer-generated video content](#)

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