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The majority of food & beverage cues promoted by German-speaking influencers on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are nutritionally poor and not disclosed as advertising

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INTRODUCTION: The promotion of nutritionally poor food and beverages has been shown to affect children's eating preferences and therefore plays a significant role in today's childhood obesity epidemic (1). Little is known about the frequency and content of visual displays of food and beverage products (cues) featured by influencers in the German-speaking region. The objective of this study was to analyse the content of food and beverage cues uploaded in the most widely used social media platforms TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube of German-speaking influencers popular with adolescents.

METHODS: The last 20 videos or posts uploaded on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, before 1 May 2021, by six German-speaking influencers (three female, three male) were analysed. The influencers were selected based on the following criteria: above 100,000 subscribers or followers on all three platforms, popularity in adolescents between 13 and 17 years of age, and German content. The YouTube social media influencer marketing protocol from the WHO Regional Office for Europe (2) was used to assess the prevalence (exposure) and context of the food and beverage cues (power).

RESULTS: A total of 364 videos/posts (22.7 h) were analysed and, of these, 24% contained food or beverage cues (n=409; 1.9 h). In 50% of videos on YouTube, 17% on TikTok, and 7% on Instagram any food or beverage cue was featured and on average 18 products per hour. According to the WHO nutrient profile model, 75% of the cues were not permitted for children's marketing, 17% were permitted and 8% could not be clearly assigned (miscellaneous; Figure 1). Chocolate & sugary confectionery (23%) and ready-made, convenience foods & composite dishes (9%) were the most frequently featured product types. 53% of the products were described and presented positively by the influencers, 42% neutrally and 5% negatively. 73% of the products were consumed by the influencers themselves. In 60% of the videos, the food itself or the branded product was mentioned in the video description. Of those, 19% of the videos mentioned the brand name or company, and 41% mentioned the food itself. In 11% of the videos, the product was disclosed as an advert in the video description and in 3% in the video itself.

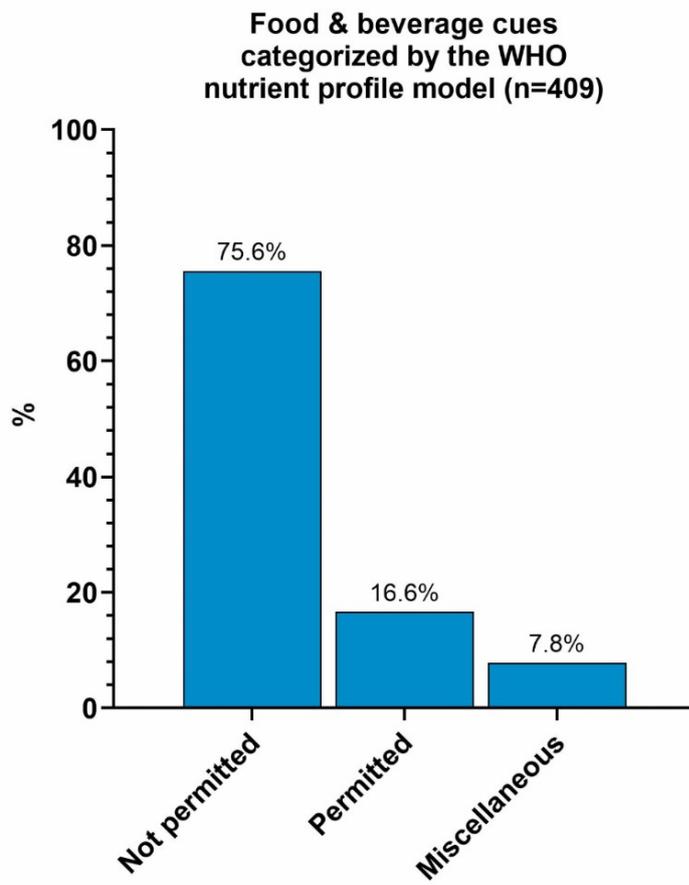
CONCLUSION: This content analysis in the German-speaking region showed that three-quarters of the featured food and beverage cues are not permitted for children's marketing and the majority is not disclosed as advertising in the video itself or in the description. Together with already existing studies from English-speaking regions (3), this analysis delivers further evidence for policies and future effective regulation of influencer marketing.

References:

1. Tatlow-Golden M, et al. *Obes Rev.* 2021 Nov;22 Suppl 6:e13212.
2. WHO Regional Office for Europe. Available from: <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/activities/monitoring-of-marketing-of-unhealthy-products->

to-children-and-adolescents-protocols-and-templates.
3. Coates AE, et al. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2019; 10:2142.

Figure 1



Food & beverage cues categorized by the WHO nutrient profile model