

# Brand website marketing strategies for foods and beverages consumed by children and adolescents in Argentina

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## ABSTRACT

The Internet has allowed the expansion of food and beverage advertising in different media. The objective of this study was to identify the marketing strategies used in brand websites of foods and beverages consumed by children and adolescents, and classify them based on the Food Guidelines for the Argentinean Population.

The foods and beverages most commonly consumed by the child and adolescent population as per the Survey on Nutritional Food Intake of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires were selected. Brand websites were identified; marketing strategies were analyzed and marketed foods and beverages were classified based on the Guidelines.

A total of 80 websites were found; the most common strategies were brand identity, benefits and claims, and links to websites and/or social media. Also, 30% of sites were aimed at children and adolescents, and 75% of marketed foods and beverages corresponded to the group of sweets and fats, including those of low nutritional value.

**Key words:** marketing, websites, foods and beverages, child, adolescent.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Internet has allowed the expansion of promotion and advertisement in different media, including websites, social media platforms, apps, and online games and videos.<sup>1-3</sup> Several studies have demonstrated that foods and beverages advertised in the mass media are high in energy, added sugars, and total fats, and may be one of the factors associated with the increase in childhood overweight and obesity.<sup>4,7</sup> In Argentina, according to the Second National Survey on Nutrition and Health (2018), 20.7% of the 5-17-year-old population is overweight and 20.4%, obese.<sup>8</sup>

The World Health Organization has stated that companies are using the new communication technologies to market foods to children and adolescents in Latin America.<sup>9,10</sup> In recent years, several studies observed the use of specific marketing strategies to target this population in food company websites.<sup>11-13</sup> In this type of media, marketing is defined as a promotional activity characterized by both the use of creative techniques and data analysis of web users so as to maximize impact.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence on this subject is limited in Argentina, as well as in the rest of Latin America.<sup>14</sup> The objective of this study was to identify the marketing strategies used in brand websites of foods and beverages consumed by children and adolescents, and classify them based on the Food Guidelines for the Argentinean Population.

## POPULATION AND METHODS

This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study. The foods and beverages consumed by more than 5% of the 5-17-year-old population according to the Survey on Nutritional Food Intake of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (2011) were selected to guide the search of websites that may include advertising aimed at children and adolescents. This survey had a probability cluster sampling design and included 1987 individuals who underwent a 24-hour recall interview to record food and beverage consumption.

To identify available brands of the foods and beverages selected for analysis, the online

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catalogs of the main supermarket chains of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires were searched and products were ordered by relevance. Foods and beverages that did not have a commercial brand were excluded (Table 1).

For each selected brand, a search was done in Google® using the brand as a key word in order

to check if they had a website; the search was restricted to Argentine websites and excluded corporate websites of food companies. The models developed in other studies<sup>11,12</sup> were adapted to analyze marketing strategies. Strategies were classified into eight categories: i) brand identity; ii) sections and gaming; iii) promotions;

TABLE 1. Analyzed food and beverage categories and number of brands included

Food or beverage	Percentage of consumers*	Number of studied brands
Sunflower oil	76.9	5
Sugar	61.8	3
Eggs	61.3	2
Fluid whole milk	52.6	6
Regular soft drinks	45.6	12
Butter	33.1	3
Noodles	31.8	11
Cocoa powder	30.8	3
Rice	28.2	4
Grated cheese	26.8	3
Canned tomatoes	26.1	5
Chicken	25.4	3
Wheat flour	24.1	3
Powder juice	22.2	3
Fluid reduced-fat milk	23.4	6
Semi-hard cheese	22.8	3
Ham	22.6	5
Soft cheese	20.5	5
Mayonnaise	17.3	5
Sweet cookies	17.1	15
Turnover dough	15.2	2
Apple	14.9	4
Crackers	14.7	9
Diet powder juice	14.1	4
Banana	13.9	3
Filled biscuits	13.5	17
Chocolate cookie sandwich	12.9	13
Mozzarella	11.5	3
Dulce de leche	11.4	5
Flavored waters	11.0	6
Sliced bread	10.5	5
Yogurt	10.1	7
Vienna sausages	8.4	5
Candies	7.5	11
Chocolate	7.5	13
Dairy cream	7.2	4
Cream cheese	6.9	5
Diet soft drinks	6.9	12
Potato chips	6.9	5
Sugary breakfast cereals	6.8	14
Patties	6.7	4
Processed juice	6.2	5
Cereal bars	6.0	4
Assorted sweet cookies	5.6	3
Milk desserts	5.5	6
Olive oil	5.2	8
Chocolate milk	5.0	5
Pre-fried chicken products	5.0	4
Gelatin	5.0	5

\* Data from the Survey on Nutritional Food Intake of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (2011).

iv) characters and celebrities; v) links to websites and/or social media; vi) benefits and claims; vii) registration and downloads, and viii) protection and legal aspects. Strategies were identified on the main page and on those that were within two mouse clicks from that page.

Websites were considered aimed at children and adolescents if they used strategies such as animated characters or cartoons, celebrities, games, apps, competitions or events targeted at attracting this audience by appealing to fun, adventure, fantasy, and fashion themes.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE 2. Marketing strategies used in food and beverage websites

	Total websites (n = 80) Number (%)
<b>Brand identity</b>	80 (100)
Presence of brand logo	79 (98.8)
Presence of product package	70 (87.5)
Product as part of the background	60 (75)
Presence of other brand product variants	60 (75)
<b>Benefits and claims</b>	71 (88.8)
Presence of recipes	47 (58.8)
Nutrition information	41 (51.3)
Brand benefit claims	29 (36.3)
Nutrition claims	28 (35)
Healthy eating information	13 (16.3)
Health claims in general	11 (13.8)
<b>Links to websites and/or social media</b>	68 (85)
Link the brand's social media (Facebook and/or Instagram)	65 (81.3)
Presence of social media postings (Facebook and/or Instagram)	16 (20)
Brand television advertisement	11 (13.8)
Link to other company brands	9 (11.3)
Links to other food websites	3 (3.8)
Links to other non-food websites	0 (0)
<b>Protection and legal aspects</b>	46 (57.5)
Legal information	46 (57.5)
Terms of use and cookies	4 (5)
Adult consent	0 (0)
Age block	0 (0)
<b>Registration and downloads</b>	20 (25)
Website membership	13 (16.3)
Online store	7 (8.8)
Apps	2 (2.5)
Unbranded educational material	2 (2.5)
Branded educational material	1 (1.3)
Benefits for members	1 (1.3)
Coloring pictures or images for electronic devices	0 (0)
<b>Characters and celebrities</b>	15 (18.8)
Presence of cartoons	6 (7.5)
Presence of animated characters	5 (6.3)
Presence of famous people or celebrities (television, radio, films, social media, music)	3 (3.8)
Presence of sports figures	1 (1.3)
<b>Sections and gaming</b>	11 (13.8)
Designated section with content for children and adolescents	8 (10)
Games including the brand	5 (6.3)
Designated family section	2 (2.5)
Games that do not promote the brand	0 (0)
<b>Promotions</b>	11 (13.8)
Competitions	7 (8.8)
Giveaways	4 (5)
Fundraiser opportunities	1 (1.3)

Foods and beverages that had a website were classified based on the Guidelines as follows: i) fruits and vegetables; ii) legumes, cereals, potato, bread, and pasta; iii) milk, yogurt, and cheese; iv) meat and eggs; v) oil, tree nuts, and seeds; and vi) sweets and fats.<sup>15</sup> The first five groups provide nutrients, so the recommendation is to consume them on a daily basis. The sweets and fats group includes foods and beverages high in fats, sugars, and salt, so their consumption should be limited.

A Google® form was developed to record data, and a pilot test was done. Data were collected between August and September 2019. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 20 for Windows, was used for the statistical analysis.

### Ethical considerations

All aspects related to the development of this project have been conducted in accordance with valid national and international standards.

### RESULTS

A total of 195 food and beverage brands were selected (Table 1). Of these brands, 41 % (n = 80) had a website; 24 were aimed at children and adolescents.

Among all websites analyzed, brand identity was the most commonly used strategy (100 % of sites); in this category, it was observed that 99 % of sites showed the brand logo and 88 %, the package. Benefits and claims was the second most common strategy (89 %); in this category, the presence of recipes (59 %) and nutrition information (51 %) were the most frequent ones. Links to websites and/or social media were the third most common strategy; in this case, a link to the brand's social media was the most used technique (81 %). In addition, protection and legal aspects was observed in 58 % of websites. Registration and downloads (25 %) and characters and celebrities (19 %) were observed to a lesser extent. The less common strategies were promotions (14 %) and sections and gaming (14 %) (Table 2).

Foods and beverages marketed on websites were classified according to the Guidelines. It was observed that 63 % corresponded to the sweets and fats group, followed by milk, yogurt, and cheese (13 %), legumes, cereals, potatoes, bread, and pasta (10 %), fruits and vegetables (8 %), oil and seeds (5 %), and meat and eggs (1 %). The analysis of the foods and beverages found in the sites aimed at children and adolescents showed

a higher proportion of sweets and fats (75 %); this group included sugar-sweetened beverages, chocolate milk, sweet cookies, confectionery, sugary cereals, milk desserts, and Vienna sausages. This was followed by the milk, yogurt, and cheese group (11 %), then the legumes, cereals, potato, bread, and pasta group (7 %), the oil and seeds group (4 %), and finally, fruits and vegetables (4 %).

### DISCUSSION

In Argentina, the most common strategies were the presence of the brand logo and of the product package. This was consistent with the data provided by Kelly et al., who reviewed 119 Australian food company websites,<sup>11</sup> and with the results of a study that analyzed 70 food and beverage websites from New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> In addition, in Australia, brand benefits and educational material downloads were among the most frequent strategies.<sup>11</sup> The study by Weber et al. found that the most common strategies observed in United States websites were registration and downloads, promotions, gaming, and presence of characters.<sup>13</sup> These strategies were less common in Argentine websites.

The percentage of websites that targeted their strategies at children and adolescents in Argentina was 30 %, similar to the study done in New Zealand, where 34 % of websites were aimed at this audience.<sup>12</sup> In the study by Kelly et al., they accounted for 13 %.<sup>11</sup>

Using the Guidelines to analyze marketed foods and beverages, it was observed that those high in fats, sugars, and salt had a greater presence in websites aimed at children and adolescents. This was consistent with the results of other studies. According to the Ministries of Health of Australia<sup>11</sup> and New Zealand,<sup>12</sup> 61 % and 75 % of products, respectively, corresponded to the unhealthy category.

The main strength of our study is that it provides unprecedented data because it is the first one of this type conducted in Argentina. However, the dynamics of the online world demand the assessment of trends and expand the field of research to other digital media, like social platforms, virtual gaming, and websites frequently used by children and adolescents. A weakness of the study is that, since it was not possible to assess website traffic, it provides no quantitative information to measure actual exposure to food and beverage marketing.

Our society deserves a comprehensive

discussion about the use of marketing strategies aimed at children and adolescents in the online world. This is especially true when the marketed foods and beverages have a low nutritional quality, according to the results of this study.

## CONCLUSION

It was observed that 24 out of the 80 analyzed websites included strategies aimed at attracting children and adolescents and that 7.5 out of 10 marketed foods and beverages were of low nutritional value. ■

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