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From: the Food and Drink Industry Professional Practices Committee Norway

The effectiveness of the MFU in Norway

Background:

The WHO has published the interim report of the Global Coordination Mechanism (GCM) Working Group on engagement with the private sector on non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The report below is a summary of how the Norwegian industry and retailers in dialogue with Norwegian public authorities on health and children have succeeded in restricting marketing to children of products with a high level of sugar, fat and salt.

In Norway we have a long tradition for strong consumer protection. Forbrukerrådet, The Norwegian Consumer Council was founded in 1953 and Forbrukerombudet, The Consumer Ombudsman in 1973.

They both play an active role in forming policies on legislation and rules on marketing.

Television ads to children was already limited in 1995 and onwards with several rulings in the Marketing Court.

The Norwegian marketing control act was revised in 2009 with a special chapter aimed at stronger protection of children.

The industry made a self regulation on food and drink regarding certain marketing issues back in 2007. The commitments was not followed by sanctions and the regulation was not actively used by all companies.

In 2012 a law proposal was put forward which in effect would have become a marketing ban on products with certain levels of fat, salt or sugar. The industry was strongly opposed the scale and depth of the proposal. In order to ensure responsible marketing, MFU was established in August 2013. The industry worked out the structure and code through close contact the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children. The code and guidance are found here http://www.mfu.as/37532-English.
Low pressure on marketing to children in Norway in 2013:

In autumn 2013 SIFO, the only institute in Norway solely concerned with consumer research, and as such is responsible for developing national expertise in this field, made a report for the ministry of Health: “Unhealthy food advertising to Norwegian children” http://www.sifo.no/files/file79053_oppdragsrapport_5-2013_web.pdf.

The summary of the report states

“There has been an increased focus on society’s responsibility for encouraging healthy lifestyle choices during the last years. One of the debated governmental arrangements is to introduce a restriction on advertisements for unhealthy food and beverage aimed at children and youth. On this backdrop, the aim of this study is to bring forth facts and knowledge on the scope of such advertisements shown on media channels much visited by children and youth. Our mapping shows that children and youth are exposed to far less advertising of unhealthy food and beverage than the media debates make us believe. We screened 9043 TV-ads, and 1968 of these (22 percent) were ads for food and beverage. 375 ads were categorized as unhealthy products, such as sweets, chocolate, biscuits, snacks, ice-cream, mineral water with sugar, fastfood, pizza etc., which means that 19 percent of all food and beverage ads were categorized as “unhealthy”. Four percent of all the advertisements shown on the selected (nine) TV-channels in the period of study, were in the category unhealthy food and beverage. It is worth noting that on the most advertise financed channels visited by children of 3-11 years of age (Disney Channel and Cartoon Network), no ads for food and beverage were shown at all during the period of study. The 30 most read comics and magazines also included very few ads for food and beverage. Of 117 ads, only 2 promoted food and drink. We also found very few ads of food and beverage on the most visited web sites. We found slightly more ads for unhealthy food and drink as introduction to two separate movies on the cinema, than on TV and in magazines/comics and Facebook. In general, many food and beverage ads included elements that may attract children, such as music, figures and animations. However, very few of these may be understood as directly addressing the youngest consumers. As a whole, our mapping shows that the most prominent messages in the present day advertising of food and beverage, are connected to health, soundness and naturalness. Many SIFO studies have shown that these are the quality dimensions most underlined by consumers who buy food and beverage. There has also been a significant increase in the media emphasis of these quality dimensions during the last years.

However, our mapping brings to the forefront a significant amount of advertisements for products and services (for instance DVD’s, TV/films, games), which, combined with the media channels’ advertising for their own products, can be read to promote “sitting”. In addition, the frequent and relatively lasting pauses during and between TV programs, pauses that include advertising, may also increase the time children spend before screens. For instance,
Cartoon Network shows more than 700 advertisements during one day, with pauses and ads every 14th minute. Research (SSB statistics) shows that children and youth use many hours on screen activities. Watching TV was the activity that led to most “sitting-hours”. In average, children and youth watch TV 1.6 hours per day. In addition children use about 0.66 hours daily on the Internet and playing data games. Among the teenagers this increased to 1.89 hours per day. It is also worth noting that international research shows that watching TV not only increase inactivity, but also increase eating of different unhealthy snacks.

One plausible interpretation of the results from our study is to argue that the considerable amount of time used on screen activities (including TV), is a bigger challenge for children and youth’s health than the number of unhealthy advertisements directed at children and youth. In addition, the results may indicate that the relationship between the amount of the concerned public interest of advertising for unhealthy food and beverage and the actual amount of such advertisements are not closely related. First, we actually found very few advertisements for unhealthy food and beverage on the selected, most popular media channels among children and youth. Second, the most prominent message in today’s marketing of food and beverage, was soundness, health and naturalness. To eat healthy food is not only considered sensible, but it is also trendy. The marketers and producers appear to have registered this trend.”

The conclusion expressed from SIFO said that children and youth are exposed to far less advertising for unhealthy food and drink than the public debate on the theme expresses. A very small portion of ads on television, internet, cartoons, magazines and cinema are food and drink related. The advertising message is closer to promoting healthy attitudes on food and meals.

The organisation of MFU – multi stakeholder process:

The MFU was established by Virke, The Enterprise Federation of Norway, NHO, Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise after a consultation period with and consent of the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, the Norwegian Directorate of Health and LO, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions. The MFU is therefore a solution after a multi stakeholder process.

MFU is founded on the following points:

- A debate on diet is of major importance
- Obesity and overweight are serious social problems
- The marketing of specified food and drink products aimed at children is unacceptable.

A united industry of food manufacturers and suppliers has given its backing to
MFU. This scheme had advisory value from 1 August 2013 and came into force on 1 January 2014. It superseded the voluntary Code of 2007. A Code and supplementary Guidance have been established, which, together with a Product List, specify the scope of the scheme covered by MFU. The purpose of the Code is to supplement and amplify the existing legislation and to encourage good and responsible marketing practices. The aim of the Code is to raise the awareness of the business community regarding the challenges of marketing food and drink to children and young people, and to help ensure that this group is shielded from untoward impact by the market. In particular, it is important to avoid marketing which makes it hard for parents and others to give children dietary advice and a healthier diet.

MFU tasks:

- Raising the awareness of the business community regarding the challenges of marketing food and drink to children and young people
- Ensuring compliance with the Code and Guidance which lay down what is considered acceptable marketing
- Monitoring the industry ban on marketing certain types of food and drink to children under 13 years
- Ensuring that everyone is able to complain to MFU about marketing activity which infringes our Code and Guidance
  - Ensuring that the anonymity of complainants is preserved in all further processing.
  - Ensuring that the complaints procedure works well and that responses and resolutions are handled professionally.
  - Ensure that all resolutions under the Code is widely published.
  - Give pre-guidance to companies on future campaigns on a confidential basis.

Results and effects:

Results: The MFU has had 22 complaints from 1.1.2014 until the end of August 2015. Ten of the complaints have been found to be in violence with the Code. Eight complaints are considered to be in accordance with the Code and three of the complaints are considered to be outside the scope of the regulation.

The MFU has made prejudgements on 19 different campaigns from 11 companies in order to be proactive and prevent violations.

As TV and magazines, newspapers have had very few ads targeted towards children prior to
the launch of MFU, no complaints have been filed in these areas (much in line with the SIFO report cited above).

The area that shows most complaints are in store activities and design on display units. The number of complaints are however at a low level.

The distribution on the different complaints are shown below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Activity online</th>
<th>Activity in shop</th>
<th>Design displayunit</th>
<th>Cinema</th>
<th>Added product</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
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<td>4</td>
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**Effects:**

The retailers and the producers/importers have definitely increased their level of awareness on what is considered to be responsible marketing. In-store activation and design on displays have got much attention through MFU decisions and then communication in media. The way most products now are displayed are more cautious and less appealing to children.

The cinema industry has changed their way of selling advertising in order to cope with MFU. This is a direct consequence of MFU interrogation and a complaint to MFU.

The industry are using much energy on their innovation processes to come up with products less high on sugar, salt or fat.