

Project title: ClickBite



**Principal Investigators:** Prof Mimi Tatlow-Golden, Open University and Professor Colette Kelly, University of Galway, Ireland

**Researchers:** Dr Magdalena Muc Da Encarnação, Open University; Dr Elena Vaughan and Ms Olivia Lennox, and Ms Eimer Brown University of Galway, Ireland

**Funder:** Safefood

**Aim and Objectives:**

This project aimed to implement the WHO CLICK Framework to develop a deep, holistic view of food/beverage digital food marketing (DFM) and its regulation on the island of Ireland (Iol), plus a child rights analysis.

The project unveils Iol digital food marketing from the viewpoints of the *targeters* (digital/marketing systems and actors), *targeted* (children and their parents) and *regulators*.

**Design/Methods:**

The project adopted a multi-methods approach, collaborating with teams from Open University, University of Liverpool and Deakin University. The following methods were used as part of several overlapping and inter-connected work packages:

**Desk research:**

A rapid review of the literature on digital food marketing to children.

Two scoping reviews of the literature on: 1) children, young people's and parents' awareness of and attitudes towards DFM; and 2) Screen capture methods for measuring children's exposure to DFM

Analysis of Iol regulations and international child rights.

Digital food advertising activity mapping, Social media campaign analysis and nutrient profiling.

**Empirical research:**

Semi-structured interviews with Advertisers (n=15);

Focus groups with children and adolescents (n=150) and parents (n=49) to identify awareness and attitudes to digital food marketing on the island of Ireland

Screen capture methods to measure Iol children's (n=38) actual digital food marketing exposure

**Public Patient Involvement:**

Seventeen parents and 11 children took part in parent and young people's advisory groups as part of the project. Three meetings were held with both groups over the

lifetime of the project. The groups lent their insight to advise on methods, recruitment and dissemination.

### **Results:**

CLICKBITE, a transdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder, mixed methods study has generated insights across informants, data types, and disciplines to illuminate children's experiences and rights in relation to the complex digital food marketing system.

The final report on the project is currently under review by the funders and specific key findings are embargoed until publication, however key findings may be broadly summarised as follows:

The screen capture study and landscape analysis revealed that children and young people in Ireland are exposed to a relatively significant amount of food advertising on social media.

The nature of marketing online is often ambiguous and easily mis-recognised as organic content 'native' to the platform. Techniques such as 'native' advertising, influencer marketing and user-generated marketing are contributing to the creation of an online advertising eco-system in which advertising exposure is endemic and difficult to separate out from non-commercial content.

Both children and young people have difficulty distinguishing commercial from non-commercial content and likely underestimate the extent to which they are exposed to advertising online.

Parents' are largely unaware of the marketing tactics used online, however many have concerns about the impacts of DFM on their children.

### **Dissemination and Knowledge Translation:**

A final technical report has been submitted to Safefood and is due for publication in 2025.

The scoping review of children, young people's and parents' awareness of and attitudes towards DFM has been accepted for publication in *Health Promotion International*:

**Vaughan, E., Muc, M., Brown, E., Nealon Lennox, O., Kelly, C. & Tatlow-Golden, M. (2024).** A scoping review of children's and parents' attitudes to and awareness of digital food marketing. *Health Promotion International*. (In press).

The scoping review on Screen capture methods for measuring children's exposure to DFM is currently under review.

Ms Eimer Brown presented a poster on the screen capture study at the CMNHS Future Research Day (May 2024).