

# The Provocateur



Why the UK ban on high-fat, high-sugar food ads can reshape our bodies **and** our brands

Wavemaker

On 27 July the UK Government unveiled its new obesity strategy. Designed to reduce the growing number of seriously overweight people<sup>1</sup>, the financial impact on the National Health Service, and early deaths, one of the plan's headlines was **a ban on TV ads for high-fat, salt and sugar foods (HFSS) before 9PM**. It also raised the question of a ban on all online advertising for this category.

The reaction was explosive and instant. HFSS brands and broadcasters called it an attack on a weary COVID-hit industry in dire need of advertising, arguing that the law will have devastating effects on them but only marginal effects on health (1.7 calories saved per child at a time when less children are watching linear TV anyway).

For now the ban only affects TV (and potentially online) advertising in the UK. But as most HFSS manufacturers are

global brands, and obesity is a growing issue in many markets, it's not only a sign of things to come but a chance to lead the way.

Because we know that the food environment shapes peoples' often irrational<sup>2</sup> decisions in powerful ways and advertising, especially on TV, is an integral part of that environment.

People make on average 200 food-related decisions a day but recall making less than 10%; TV advertising is likely one of several subconscious influences on the forgotten 90%. In the US, a pre-schooler sees on average 1000 food ads a year, adults 5,500 a year – 95% for HFSS foods<sup>3</sup>. We know that one-off exposure to food ads increases intake by 30-50 calories<sup>4</sup> and the likelihood of a young person being obese doubles when they recall seeing HFSS ads on TV daily.



<sup>1</sup>(67% of men and 60% of women are obese NHS 2020) <sup>2</sup>Kahneman and Novak <sup>3</sup>Tackling Obesity Not Grey <sup>4</sup>Hastings



## In crisis comes creativity

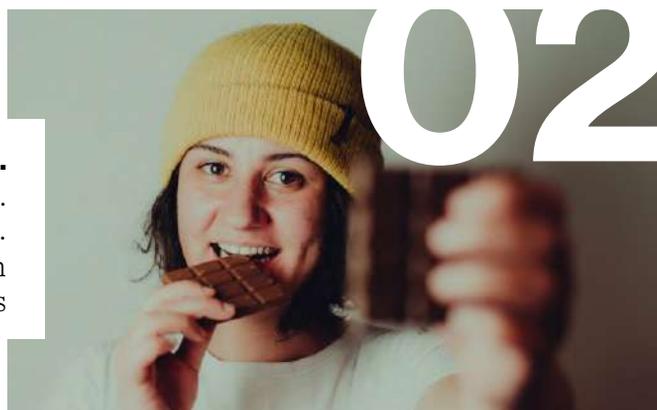
*'Having worked on government behavioural change projects for the past five years, I believe that the new HFSS ad ban is a turning point for brands and broadcasters, a chance to choose the right side in history.'*

But whether you believe in state intervention, whether you believe the ban will have any impact or not, one thing is unarguable. This is an opportunity for brands and broadcasters to get creative. The smart ones will think about how they can help to make us healthier and be active participants in preventing the apocalyptic fate of humankind brilliantly portrayed in Disney's WALL-E.

To do this, HFSS brands must grapple with the tension of promoting healthy living. This could be powerfully disruptive; they could:



**Prioritise sequencing of healthy vs unhealthy staples** in both product quality and advertising to make healthy the default option, not the sad salad going limp in a bag



**Own a moment vs being salient.**

Make that bar truly a treat, not an everyday eat. A Friday for Crunchie. A holiday for Toblerone.

Promote limited (but still joyful) consumption of our favourite snacks

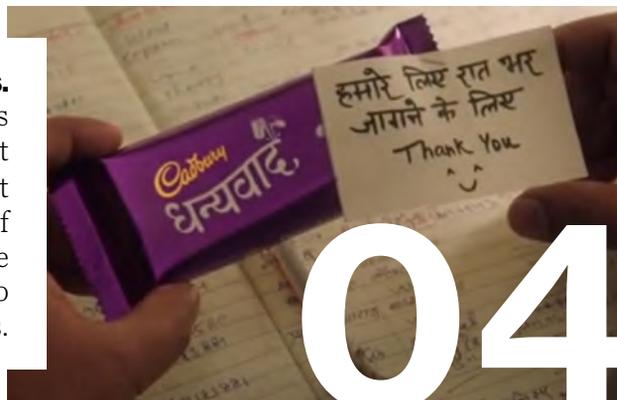


**Reshape the nation quite literally**

by diversifying their core product – an HFSS manufacturer might do more than reformulate but start making non-HFSS products such as Coke Zero

**Use their brand platform in healthier ways.**

A global brand like Cadbury could use its platform of generosity to remind people that eating chocolate as an occasional treat is an act of kindness to oneself – a HFSS version of drink responsibly. Stoking our love for the brand by actively encouraging us to consume it in limited amounts.

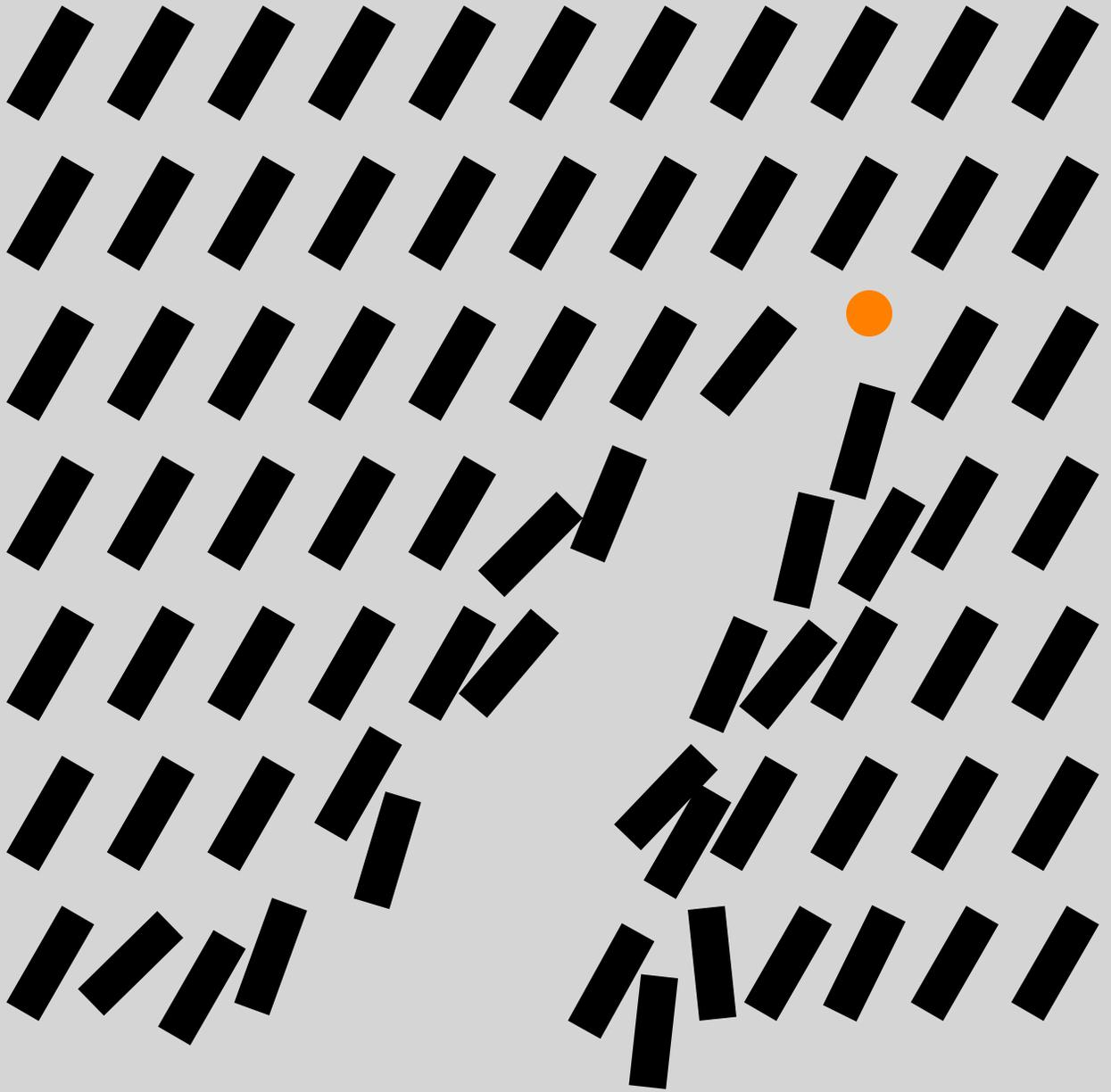


**Broadcasters must innovate by thinking about the space they sell in new ways.**

They could promote healthy living pre-9pm by offering more affordable rates to advertisers with healthy messages, balancing the books by selling 9pm-11pm at a fixed premium rate for advertisers who want this sought-after space.

Broadcasters and brands have been given control of the editing suite at Pixar, re-editing Wall-E, with the chance to save the world from dystopian doom and rewrite a healthier, happier future for us all.





Any questions? We're here to help.  
Please contact

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