

# research snapshot

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## Policy to restrict advertising of unhealthy commodities in Bristol, UK: Development and anticipated impacts

### What this research is about

The unhealthy commodity industries include companies making, marketing, and selling tobacco, alcohol, and foods and drinks high in fat, salt, or sugar (HSFF). More recently, they have been expanded to include gambling and payday loans. Outdoor spaces, such as bus stops, are important advertising locations. Marketing to children and youth has been identified as a priority area for policy action. In the UK, the Bristol City Council introduced a new advertisement policy in 2021/2022. The policy restricts advertising of unhealthy commodities across council-owned public spaces. The goal of the current study is to describe the development of the policy and to compare advertising exposure in Bristol to South Gloucestershire.

### What the researchers did

The researchers interviewed 4 stakeholders working in the council, 2 in voluntary sector organizations, and 1 local councilor. All interviewees were involved in the development of the new policy in Bristol. They were asked about the history of the policy, its planning process, the anticipated impacts, and the initial barriers and facilitators to its implementation.

The researchers also collected data through a survey of Bristol and South Gloucestershire residents. The survey asked about seeing advertising of unhealthy commodities in the week prior to completing the survey. It also included questions about the locations of such advertising and the use of such products. There were 2,543 responses, with 1,110 from Bristol and 1,433 from South Gloucestershire.

### What the researchers found

#### *Interview findings*

### What you need to know

A new advertisement policy was introduced in Bristol, UK, in 2021/2022. It prohibits the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and payday loans across council-owned advertising spaces. The researchers interviewed stakeholders who were involved in the development of the policy. They also surveyed residents of Bristol and South Gloucestershire on their exposure to such advertising. It was found that unhealthy product advertisements were more observed by younger people. This was also the case for people living in more deprived areas.

The researchers identified four themes:

- (1) History of the policy: Interviewees reported that such a policy was not in place before. There was a supportive environment for the policy. They also mentioned a commitment from the council to include health into all future policies, as well as a commitment to reduce health inequalities.
- (2) Planning the policy: The policy took 18 months to develop. The first 12 months were used to draft the policy. The last 6 months involved efforts to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the decision-making process. Interviewees thought it was easier to build a case for the policy because of a similar policy of the Transport for London.
- (3) Anticipated impacts: Interviewees believed the main impact would be a decrease in advertising for HSFF products. Some interviewees thought it would reduce health inequalities. Longer-term impacts were expected to include lower levels of obesity, improved population health, and reduced

demand for health and social care. But some interviewees questioned the likely impacts. First, they thought that companies would adapt their advertising. Second, only 30% of advertising spaces were owned by the council.

- (4) Initial barriers and facilitators: Interviewees thought that the culture across the council and in the public was supportive of the policy. One of the barriers was that the council owned only a small part of outdoor advertising spaces in Bristol. Some interviewees mentioned there was a conflict between the policy's objectives and other council objectives to stimulate the economy.

### Survey findings

Of the 2,543 respondents, 59% were females, 89% were of white ethnicity, and 79% were over 45 years old. Respondents in South Gloucestershire were older, more likely to live as couple, more likely to be retired, and less deprived than Bristol respondents. About 74% of Bristol respondents and 61% of South Gloucestershire respondents reported using buses. Most (58%) participants said they saw unhealthy advertising in the week before completing the survey. About 40% reported seeing advertising for HFSS products, 17% for alcoholic drinks, 21% for places selling alcohol, and 28% for gambling. The most common advertising was fast food (34%), sugary drinks (15%) and chocolate and sweets (14%). Yet, 60% reported seeing no HFSS advertising. This pattern was similar for HFSS ads directed at children.

For almost all advertising types, South Gloucestershire respondents reported seeing less ads than Bristol respondents. Younger participants were more likely to see advertising than older respondents. This was particularly true for HFSS products. Male respondents reported seeing slightly more ads than females. White respondents observed slightly less ads than non-white respondents. This pattern was more evident in Bristol than in South Gloucestershire. Respondents living in more deprived areas observed more ads than respondents in less deprived places. Respondents who took the bus more often were more likely to see such ads than those who use the bus less often.

### How you can use this research

This study can be used to better understand the impacts of the new advertisement policy in Bristol.

### About the researchers

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